Quality Review Report

2018-2019

Veritas Academy

High school 25Q240

35-01 Union Street
Queens
NY 11354

Principal: Cheryl Quatrano

Dates of Review:
November 15, 2018 - November 16, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Carlos Perez

The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Veritas Academy serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school...	**Area**	**Rating**
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels	**Area of Focus**	**Proficient**

School Quality Ratings continued

School Culture

To what extent does the school...	Area	Rating
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults	**Area of Celebration**	**Well Developed**
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**

Systems for Improvement

To what extent does the school...	Area	Rating
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	1.4 Positive Learning Environment	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

There is a theory of action centered on students being the most important part of the school that supports culture-building, discipline, and social emotional learning. There is strategic alignment for professional development (PD), family outreach, and student learning experiences.

Impact

The school environment is safe, inclusive, and meaningfully involves student's voice in the decision-making process, most notably by having students help to create curriculum across the school. Students display effective academic and personal behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- Student voice is embedded throughout the school. Students are part of virtually every decision made in the school, starting with curriculum. Students regularly request and help to write and implement curriculum. For example, the school has a student who is hearing impaired who requested and helped to implement the school's new American Sign Language course and curriculum. In addition, students help staff decide what electives will be taught in the upcoming year. For example, there was so much interest and participation in the schools horticulture club, that students requested that it be an elective this year and helped to create and write the curriculum for the course. A student with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) advocated for herself and requested to take Advance Placement (AP) courses. Her IEP was modified in order to allow this to take place and the student is currently enrolled in AP Psychology where she currently has a class average of 94. During the meeting with students and teachers, both shared how this has led to several other students with disabilities expressing an interest in taking part in AP course and are currently working with their guidance counselor on which AP course would be best for them.

- PD is directly connected to the school's personalized interactive learning system. Teachers attend a week-long training during the month of July that trains and prepares teachers in the implementation and execution of the school's learning system. Additionally, teachers and school leaders have presented on the same subject at a conference in Baltimore, Maryland. Additionally, staff attends monthly trainings in overcoming obstacles which is in line with the social emotional part of the school's personalized interactive learning system. Guidance staff is sent to academic policy and college preparedness trainings that help guidance staff prepare and work effectively with students towards college and careers. Students and their families take their education seriously and start the college process as early as ninth grade. These behaviors have led to the school sending 98 percent of twelfth-grade students to college and the other two percent to career programs or military service.

- All staff believe that safety and inclusivity are the foundation of school culture in the school. Student social emotional well-being is as important as their academic progress. Students feel well supported by their teachers and shared this during the student meetings. Students shared that when they speak, teachers listen. Students also explained how teachers support them in not only their school work, but their personal lives as well. One student shared and all others agreed, "Teachers take the time and come to you and ask you how you are doing. They really care here." One student shared how when she started in the school as a freshman she had just arrived from another country, was scared, and could not speak the language. She explained how all staff made her feel welcomed, supported her and because of this, she is now getting ready to attend college in the fall. Additionally, the school's social emotional inquiry team (SEIT) meets weekly and preventatively to discuss specific students that teachers report after seeing specific behaviors that may require additional intervention strategies.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms teachers use or create rubrics, assessments, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. Across many but not the vast majority of classes, teachers' assessments practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Many but not all teachers provide students with feedback that is actionable and meaningful. Across some classes there were missed opportunities for teachers to make effective instructional adjustments to meet the needs of all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Throughout classrooms visited, teachers used checklists and conferenced with students as they worked. For example, during a tenth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) lesson, as students worked collaboratively in groups the teachers walked around to each group and listened in while taking notes. In addition, the teacher conferenced with students and used a checklist to memorialize student responses. However during an AP ELA class, as students worked on their do now assignment the teacher did not circulate in order to monitor and assess student progress and adjust the lesson should students have any difficulties with the assignment. As a result not all students are aware of their next learning steps. Adjustments to lessons based on student responses during conferencing with teachers was seen across many but not all of the classrooms visited.

- Feedback to students was seen throughout the school and was evident on post it notes, on student work products, on rubrics, and via face-to-face conversations. Feedback to one student's writing piece included praising the student for their high level of organization and having a precise claim with an accurate analysis. Next steps to the student included telling the student to separate their final paragraph and to further analyze their evidence. However, this same next step was given to many of the other students in the same class. As a result, in some cases there are missed opportunities to ensure that feedback to students is meaningful to their specific strengths and weaknesses or that it provides specific guidance that pushes students to their next level. a

- During classrooms visits, many but not all classes used a variety of methods in order to assess student learning. For example, many of the classrooms used a variety of low-level and high-level questioning strategies to gauge student understanding. In addition, during a math lesson the teacher asked for students to raise their hands in order to ensure that all students knew how to create their own LET statement which allows students to identify a variable to represent a specific quantity as in LET A equal the speed of a boat and LET C represent the current. During a college and career readiness lesson, students peer assessed their classmates and offered them constructive feedback on their career PowerPoint presentations. However, during an ELA lesson, the teacher did not use methods to assess the students other than low-level Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* questions based on the materials. During a US history and government class as students worked in groups, the teacher conferenced with students but did not memorialize student responses and as a result made no adjustments to the lesson based on student classroom data. As a result, some students were not aware of their next learning steps and there were missed opportunities to meet the needs of all students.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

All staff members ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (Common Core) and strategically integrate key instructional shifts such as writing across the curriculum. Rigor and higher-order skills are emphasized and embedded throughout.

Impact

Curricular coherence that promotes college and career readiness for all students is seen across all planning documents. Planning ensures that all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, must demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- A common lesson plan template used by all teachers ensures curricular coherence across the vast majority of all planning documents reviewed. All lesson plans have a section that explains the alignment to the Common Core. For example, an AP ELA lesson plan clearly outlined how students would be challenged to work with increasingly complex literary texts. A US history and government lesson plan included key literacy standards such as determining the meaning of words and phrases as pertained directly to the history material. A science lesson plan planned for students to be able to follow precisely a complex multistep procedure in order classify igneous rocks. In addition, all lesson plans coherently evidenced step by step details that included sections for essential understanding, checks for understanding, and the academic vocabulary to be used during the lesson. Planning such as this ensures that there is curricular coherence throughout and supports college and readiness for all students.

- All curricula and academic tasks ensure that there will be high levels of thinking and participation for the lowest third, ELLs, students with disabilities and those students considered to be the highest third. An ELA lesson plan showed areas for grouping based on student skill, small group instruction, and teacher modeling for the class's lowest third. In addition, the lesson plan explained how it would use students considered to be the highest third in order to run small group instruction and student-to-student explanations. An ELA Regents preparation class explained how it would incorporate scaffolds like sentence starters and visual supports along with small and individual instruction to those students who require additional support based on teacher data from ongoing checks for understanding. An algebra lesson plan included task cards differentiated for various levels of difficulty for specific students as well as offering students brainstorming sheets where then can gather and organize their thoughts. Scaffolds such as these ensure that students have tools that will enable them to demonstrate their thinking and engage in all lessons, and were seen throughout the vast majorities of planning documents.

- Writing across the curriculum was seen across all documents reviewed and was a strategic implementation based on student data. Teachers and school leaders explained that data has revealed that students in their school have difficulty developing structured written responses. Thus, interdisciplinary writing responses have been implemented. An AP ELA lesson plan included time for students to construct a written response in order to interpret and translate an excerpt from *Doctor Faustus*. A US history and government plan shows how students will construct large charts that responded to the questions "How do you think Manifest Destiny could affect Native Americans?" and "What do you think was the most pivotal reason for the push forward fulfilling Manifest Destiny?" An algebra lesson plan asked students to construct written responses in order for students to explain their solution within the context of the given word problem. Planning for rigorous activities such as these was coherently seen throughout the vast majority of curricular planning documents reviewed.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the school's beliefs in how student's learn best, most notably through student interest, choice, and discourse.

Impact

Students produce meaningful work products that reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- During an eleventh-grade science lesson students worked in groups and engaged in discussions while attempting to identify and classify igneous rocks. A variety of different rocks were rotated to each groups' table and students identified each rock by examining them visually and with their hands. Students were overheard saying, "I think this is pumice, because remember how the teacher said it was very light?" A second group member stated, "Yeah and the little holes on the rock too." During an eleventh-grade ELA/English as a New Language (ENL) class, students worked collaboratively in order to construct arguments citing real-world and/or literary evidence. During the lesson students used discourse protocol language in order to communicate with group members stating things such as, "People are people from the same planet and should be treated the same" and "So basically you're saying the students should be treated as equals because they are humans?" Students shared that speaking in groups "happens a lot in our school" and that it allows them to learn from their classmates.

- Student work products reviewed exhibited high levels of rigor and student thinking. A tenth-grade self-contained student created a writing piece for a friend-wanted assignment. The student created a wanted poster that helped to teach the students about the concept of positive and healthy friendships. The student's writing was well thought out and structured. Each paragraph included an introductory sentence and the body of each paragraph included the use of descriptive language such as "I would like if my friend was 5ft. 9in. tall or taller. This way I don't have to bend down to see them." In addition the student wrote, "I would like for them to be loyal so I don't have to worry about him or her betraying me." During an eleventh-grade AP ELA lesson, students worked in groups in order to read and analyze sections from Williams Shakespeare's Hamlet. Students compared the unrealistic expectations put on Hamlet by his parents to things that relate to them such as unreasonable expectations of grades. These conversations and other student work products exhibited high levels of student thinking and ownership.

- There is an additional belief that students learn best when given choice throughout their classroom experiences. Many of the student writing samples reviewed gave the students complete autonomy over what to write about. This included summer vacation experiences, most challenging experiences in their lives thus far, and their college application essays. During an AP biology class, students investigated the growth of bacteria by swabbing objects of their choice found throughout the school. Students selected items such as hand rails, the elevator, bathroom door handles, and other items. Students also had the choice to further test their samples in any form they wanted. One group decided to test samples by using and not using hand sanitizer to see if hand sanitizer really did kill bacteria. Practices such as these allow students to engage in rigorous discourse that challenges and pushes them academically.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations connected to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, most notably through regular meetings with school leaders. All staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students.

Impact

Training is provided to all teachers resulting in mutual accountability for all expectations. Staff provide clear, focused, and effective feedback including guidance advisement supports that ensure that all students, including high needs subgroups, own their educational experience.

Supporting Evidence

- All students, including freshman, are setup with an online account to a comprehensive college and career readiness system that is aligned to student strengths, interests, and post-secondary goals. Students can then track their progress through all fours years of high school in order to ensure that they have everything in place to apply to their schools of choice at the end of their junior year. During the meeting with students, freshman shared how they are fully enrolled in the system and can already start to see their progress towards college. In addition, students shared information pertaining to the college and career readiness course that is offered in the school. During a visit to this class, students were in the process of presenting their career projects based on data from the Myers-Briggs career assessment they participated in. Student presentations included evidence of detailed student research for their future career, the amount of education needed, salary projections, and most importantly why this career is most suitable for them.

- All teachers are held to high expectations. For example, there is a learning walkthrough checklist that ensures that teachers are accountable not only for instruction but for the physical environment as well. Teachers are made aware of the instructional non-negotiable's and expectations associated to bulletin boards, student work and the social emotional needs of all students. In addition, teachers are asked to gather feedback from students regularly that reflects their classroom instruction and how students can be supported further. PD supports teacher's progress in meeting expectations as it is designed specifically to meet teacher needs through the direct input of teachers. For example, teachers shared how every Thursday they attend a "Lunch & Learn." One teacher stated, "It allows us to learn from each other and that helps all of the academic expectations throughout the school." Additionally, teachers spoke about the three meetings that take place individually with the school principal. During this meeting, the principal and teacher engage in deep conversations where they share ideas and discuss instruction and curriculum. Teachers explained how the principal connects those conversations to other teachers who may be doing similar things or have the same interests and offers intervisitations to peers as a support. Teachers shared how they are not only held accountable for all expectations, but they also are offered training and support to make sure that they meet all expectations.

- Every student in the school is made aware of their progress through the "In the Green" bulletin board. This board is centrally located in the school and has a complete history of every student assessment and all credits earned per student number. The board informs students if they are missing something and how many credits they need to complete their high school experience. If a student is highlighted as green, this means they are on track and are not missing any required items. If they are yellow, it means they are missing just a few items and require minimal work to get them on track. However, if a student is highlighted as red, they require substantial work to get them back on track. Every student spoken with was able to speak about this board and the value it has as it allows them to get a complete picture of their progress and what they need to graduate. All students, from high need sub groups to the highest achieving students, own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in professional inquiry-based collaborations using the Learning from Student Work protocol. There are distributed leadership structures embedded in the school.

Impact

Teacher's instructional capacity is strengthened and the Common Core is promoted which has resulted in schoolwide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners. Teachers play an integral role in key decisions throughout the school

Supporting Evidence

- Through teacher teams and the various distributed leadership structures found throughout the school, teachers have voice in all of the decisions made schoolwide. For example, last year teacher inquiry found that incoming freshman were not coming into the school sufficiently prepared in math. As a result, this year they incorporated a second math period for mathematics proficiency for all incoming freshman. Additionally, all incoming freshman have an additional period in their schedule as an advisory period to support all of their academic needs. Further supports that have come out of teacher teams are the implementation of an online comprehensive instructional support platform and a Saturday academy in order to further support Regents exam scores.

- The vast majority of teachers engage in structured inquiry-based team meetings both vertically and horizontally during teachers' professional periods, bi-monthly, and afterschool. All meetings are structured around cycles of inquiry yet are flexible to address arising teacher and student needs throughout the year. Through teacher inquiry there have been several instructional adjustments made. For example, this year the school's math team reviewed data from juniors and seniors and found that justification was was a struggle for many students. As a result, justification has become a focus in the lower grades. The special education team developed a "Ring of Strategies" that was seen throughout many of the classrooms visited. The ring includes strategies that teachers can use to help students such as strategies for multiple choice reading comprehension, strategies for developing an argumentative essay, and the three R's for paraphrasing: replace, rearrange, and recheck. Additionally, instructional practices such as turn and talks, Socratic seminars and group/station work are also strategies that have come about as a result of teacher team work and were coherently seen throughout the school. Work such as this has led to successes on Regents exams. For example, recent results show a 91 percent passing rate on the US History Regents with a 86 percent passing rate for students with an IEP's, a 100 percent passing rate on the Physics Regents exam and a 23 percent increase in the passing rate for the Geometry Regents exam compared to last year, up from 29 percent to 52 percent.

- Lead teachers in all content areas ensure that there is instructional and curricular coherence throughout classrooms and content areas. Lead teachers meet with teacher teams and school leaders as a way to ensure that expectations are being disseminated. Teachers use their department leads as a resource and someone who can help them further their pedagogical practice. This is most obvious through the school's selection and presentation of PD. Department leads use staff as a regular resource and foster an atmosphere where teachers are regularly turnkeying PD to their peers. Teachers have taken ownership of PD and develop PD that is directly related to their needs and the needs of their students. Roles such as these are embedded throughout the school and allow teachers to play key roles in the decision-making process.