



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Grover Cleveland High School

High School 485

**21-27 Himrod Street
Ridgewood
Queens
NY 11385**

Principal: Dominick Scarola

**Dates of review: May 1 - 3, 2007
Reviewers: Joy Stopher/Barry King**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Grover Cleveland High School is a comprehensive high school with 2950 students enrolled in grades 9 through 12. The school serves its neighborhood community in the Ridgewood area of Queens. There is a diverse cultural mix of students made up of 61.4% Hispanic, 27.2% White, 7.4% Asian and others and 4.1% Black. Students who have recently arrived in the country come mainly from Ecuador, Poland and the Dominican Republic. Over 20% of the school population are English language learners and 6% are special education students. The school does not receive Title 1 funding. Attendance, at around 80% is generally the same as that found in similar schools but is slightly below the average for City schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides strong, determined leadership and has brought about significant improvements since his appointment.
- High expectations are evident throughout the school.
- There is an extensive program of after school activities and tutoring.
- Staff are committed to the school and collegiality and collaboration are commonplace.
- The school provides very good academic and personal support for students.
- There is a strong commitment to the analysis and use of data to improve student performance.
- The school is an exceptionally orderly community with procedures understood by all.
- Resources are used well to create a pleasant and efficient learning environment.
- Scheduling is very effective in matching the curriculum to the needs of the students.
- Relationships between adults and students are excellent.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop further strategies to improve attendance.
- Continue to improve the differentiation of instruction so that all students are fully engaged in lessons.
- Explore ways to find more time for professional development to build the capacity for improvement.
- Improve school planning so that it is rigorous, systematic and provides long-term strategic direction.
- Share goals and plans more widely to continue to improve the consistency of practice across the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Grover Cleveland High is a school which functions very effectively as a community. Relationships are excellent, students and staff value each other and there is a high degree of collegiality and collaboration. This has contributed to the creation of a very effective environment for learning and one which is beginning to show improvement in student performance. There is a determination to meet the needs of all students academically, personally and socially. There is a rich program of after school clubs and activities together with an extensive tutoring program. The principal was appointed six years ago and has a clear vision for the school. He has high expectations for all. His personal belief in the use of data to improve performance has been a catalyst. He is also innovative in his approach to scheduling and the curriculum and has gained the respect of the school community. Increased safety, discipline and the creation of an attractive learning environment have laid the foundations for the future of the school. Teachers feel empowered to make decisions and to try new techniques. Inevitably, changes have happened faster in some areas than others and there is a drive to ensure consistency across the school. Assistant principals are developing in their roles and providing increasingly effective support for their departments. Thought is now being given to longer term planning and ways in which to raise achievement and improve attendance further. There is a good capacity and willingness to effect change.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The principal, in his own words, is 'technologically and data savvy'. This leadership has fostered a strong commitment to the analysis and use of data to improve student performance. The analysis of data begins before students start in ninth grade using the High School Admission Process data. The results are used to inform the organization of different programs and classes according to ability and previous achievement. This data is further analyzed and modifications made as more information becomes available. Data is analyzed not only at student, class and grade level but also by comparing departmental performance at scholarship level, for example. This is broken down by individual classes and teachers and used to identify areas for improvement. New York English as a Second Language Achievement Test data is analyzed by the English as a second language teacher to measure student performance and the analysis is given to English language arts teachers to inform their instruction. Data is well-used to monitor the performance and progress of special education students and members of different ethnic groups. Automate the Schools data is used to help review cohort data and plan interventions for students who are deficient in No Child Left Behind mandates, for example.

Not only does the school use a range of data to compare itself with other schools and its own past performance, it has developed a wide range of data to help teachers have a better understanding of the needs of their students. This has contributed to the raising of achievement. Gates-MacGinitie reading assessment is used in ninth and tenth grade and has resulted in teachers having a much better understanding of the comprehension abilities of their students, although this is recognized to be very time-consuming. The school is very successful in gathering the data it needs to help it plan for further improvement. Data is not currently analyzed by gender although the information is readily available to do so.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The level of collaboration and collegiality amongst all staff is very strong and acknowledged by all members of the community. Many departments and individual teachers make very good use of data to set targets and make plans for improvement. At the moment this is not fully consistent throughout the school and steps are being taken to ensure that this happens. The use of data to set goals and plan for improvement in English language arts and mathematics is particularly strong. A further strength is the school’s recognition of the need to work across subjects and the interdisciplinary collaboration that is resulting from this. This means that teachers are able to set goals which focus on meeting the needs of students holistically. Students in greatest need of improvement are very well supported and much effort goes into ensuring they make progress. On entry to the school, students are placed in classes that accommodate their needs with different programs based on the analysis of data. The use of English language arts ‘Ramp-up’ and the ninth and tenth grade ‘Writer’s Workshop classes have resulted in significant gains in reading scores, for example. Students new to the school receive a very informative brochure written by the principal which has on its opening page ‘the faculty and staff of Grover Cleveland expect you to meet high academic and behavioral standards’. These high expectations are evident throughout the school. The principal meets with freshmen and guidance counselors visit each class to reinforce these expectations. Parents receive a wide range of information about their child’s performance and progress and what needs to happen to improve this. They receive regular progress letters a few weeks before report cards are given so they know how to encourage their child to improve. The school works very hard to engage parents in their children’s education but not all parents share the goal of improving student performance nor understand the need to make sure their children attend school regularly. Goals and plans for improving student performance are a high priority for staff, students and partners.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Students rightly identify that the range of programs, after school activities and tutoring support which is available to them is a major strength of the school. The curriculum is

effective in supporting students of all abilities. Although the school is exempt from the mandated curriculum it implements many of the requirements, the 'Ramp-up' program for example. The English language arts program, Writer's Workshop and the mathematics program, based on 'Lesson Lab', have both been designated as a regional model. Curriculum maps and pacing calendars are also used effectively. A wide range of electives are offered and the music and sports provision is strong. Much effective work has been done recently to develop the curriculum through interdisciplinary linkage. The result of data analysis is used as a basis for discussion with teachers and to hold them to account for their students' performance. Teachers and departments regard this as a positive process which enables them to improve practice. Scheduling is very effective in matching the curriculum to the needs of the students and also in providing differentiated teaching groups in ninth grade. However, differentiation within individual classrooms is not as well developed and the school recognizes to improve this and make it consistent throughout the school. Recent emphasis has been placed on understanding different teaching and learning styles and students reported that they had seen a marked improvement in teaching, the vast majority of which keeps them fully engaged and interested in their learning. Where teaching is less effective it tends to be over didactic and lacking in relevance to the students.

Resources are very well used to support the improvement of student performance. Examples of this can be seen in the very pleasant learning environment, furniture which has been chosen to support interactive group work and in a teacher's comment that 'everything I need is going to work'. Staffing decisions are equally effective. The school provides very good academic and personal support for students and the relationships between adults and students are excellent. All members of the community commented positively about this and the students are very appreciative of the dedication of their teachers and guidance counselors. Student attendance is generally average when compared to other schools and there are procedures in place to trigger interventions. However, all members of the school community rightly see attendance as a key barrier to improving student performance. They are determined to find other strategies, through a more detailed analysis of data for example, to raise attendance.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The assistant principals are very active in the hiring of staff for their departments and have rigorous recruitment procedures. They are very appreciative of the trust the principal places in their decision-making. The school seeks to appoint staff with strong academic backgrounds who are effective in maintaining discipline, able to use data and technology and are willing to learn and be flexible. Most of all 'they have to like kids'. Links with student colleges have been beneficial in this respect. Good use has been made of the time available to target professional development towards improving the quality of teaching and learning based on the needs determined through the analysis of data. An example of this is the way that departments have focused on comprehension and literacy across the school. Many senior staff are actively involved in regional and organizational meetings and are acknowledged as 'best practitioners' by colleagues outside the school. The school has recognized the need to find more time for focused professional development. This is particularly the case in terms of building capacity and ensuring for example, that the assistant principals continue to develop their leadership skills. The principal and assistant

principals regularly observe teaching, formally and informally. Teachers view this as a non-threatening and supportive process enabling them to improve their teaching and student outcomes. Intervisitation and the sharing of best practice are constant activities. Teachers praise the collegiality amongst the staff which enables them to seek help, advice and support. This culture has enabled the school to make good progress and improve student performance. Planning and evaluation is carried out in departmental teams as well by the cabinet. The school is working to make this even more effective so that there is a greater consistency across the school. The principal is held in high regard amongst all sections of the school community. His strong and visionary leadership is seen as having had a dramatic impact on the school's performance. His emphasis on safety, discipline and the creation of an orderly community are at the heart of this. Procedures and systems are well defined and understood by all. He has a clear vision for the future of the school and a determination to ensure its success.

The school has an extensive range of partnerships with fourteen different organizations which are used to support academic goals including four post-secondary institutions. The school's work with the National Academy Foundation, for example, gives students the opportunity to learn about technology through courses in school, at local colleges and during summer internships. Students from Grover Cleveland have been very successful in obtaining college scholarships.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal and the school leadership team compile the school's Comprehensive Education Plan using goals derived from data, regional requirements and discussion with the assistant principals. The assistant principals input into this process and then use it as a basis to set departmental goals. These include yearly and interim goals. The Comprehensive Education Plan is seen as a 'living document' in which amendments are made when new data becomes available. Teachers are very aware of departmental goals and how these are to be measured but do not yet have a 'whole school' view, nor indeed are they aware of the Comprehensive Education Plan per se. Good use is made of the comparison of student progress at whole school, departmental class and individual levels to measure the success of interventions and various programs to support student outcomes. This is effective at a whole school level but there are inconsistencies elsewhere. The school is very flexible in its response, as evidenced by the response to the data generated from the Gates-MacGinitie analysis. This is a good example of how resources and practices were re-aligned to improve student outcomes.

The school's flexibility and willingness to respond to new information is evident. However, current planning is restricted to the annual process related to the Comprehensive Education Plan. The principal is clear as to where the school needs to move in the longer term and has recognized the need to put rigorous systems and strategies in place to ensure this happens. The collaborative team work amongst staff and the strong leadership of the principal means there is a good capacity to effect change.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Grover Cleveland High School (High School 485)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 			X
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	