



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Acorn Community HighSchool

High School 499

**561 Grand Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11238**

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Reviewer: Alan Geller

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Acorn Community High School is located in Brooklyn and serves 700 students in grades 9 through 12. The school population is comprised of 81.7% Black, 16.3% Hispanics, 1% Asian, and 1% White. At 3%, the proportion of English language learners is smaller than in similar and City schools. At 17%, there are more special education students than typically found in similar and City schools. They are served in self-contained or collaborative team teaching classes.

Attendance is approximately 80% which is slightly above similar schools but below that of City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding.

The school is one of three developed by the Acorn organization with a college bound focus. The school was recently selected as one of six high schools that “Beat the Odds” in closing the achievement gap.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a well respected by the entire school community and has created a culture of learning for all students.
- Performance data is used to track student progress, to inform instructional programs and to establish challenging goals for all students.
- School-wide budgeting, scheduling and staffing are aligned to meet the needs of all students based upon the results of the data.
- There is a mutual respect between the staff and the students, resulting in classrooms that actively engage the students in learning.
- The workshop model is evidenced in all classrooms providing opportunities for teachers to work with students in small groups while increasing student interaction.
- The parents are very pleased with the professional manner of the staff towards their children and participate in decision making activities.
- School procedures are clearly communicated and monitored resulting in a safe school that operates efficiently.
- The school sets high expectations and students are committed to achieving at a high level.
- The principal empowers the staff to work collaboratively at grade and subject area meetings to plan and revise goals to meet the needs of all students.
- The professional development plan provides opportunities for all teachers to work closely together in study groups to improve school-wide instructional strategies.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop training opportunities to help staff to further differentiate instruction for all students.
- Further develop the tracking of data by formalizing the school's plan to conduct record keeping procedures for the full range of individual student's needs.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The Acorn school is an effective school with high expectations for all students. The principal and the instructional team lead a dedicated faculty who are focused on raising the levels of achievement of all students. The trends in graduation and passing regents exams are rising. The teachers meet regularly to review instructional practices, revising them when necessary to reach the school's goals. Data are utilized well to monitor the progress of students and depending upon the results, students are provided with intervention activities or advanced placement classes to meet their skill levels. Professional development is based upon the needs of the students and teachers. Teachers have been working in study groups to look at their practices and to develop better instructional strategies.

Students regularly receive feedback on their work and are expected to take ownership for their achievement as they progress in their grades. There is a major focus on graduating students into post secondary education and this is on an upward trend. Students take college courses in a neighboring school of higher learning and this further motivates students to achieve this goal.

The parents are a valued part of the school. They are pleased with the orderliness of the school and the challenge of instructional programs.

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 collection and analyzing of data is conducted on a regular basis. The information is used to plan properly instructional programs for new entrants to the school as well as students already enrolled. Students are scheduled to take advanced placement classes or additional reading and mathematics courses based upon their achievement levels and needs. The school leaders and staff use their time wisely to review student progress and to plan programs to meet student needs. Additional work to further develop the use of data to note the full range of individual student's needs is currently under scrutiny.

The school has begun to conference with individual students as a means to acquire detailed information about each student. The school looks at its ethnic groups. It has determined that its 9th grade African-American male students needed additional support and so it formed a special class to meet their needs. A collaborative team teaching class was developed for special education students which guarantee that they are instructed by subject area specialists to drive improvement in the learning process. English language learners are supported by additional class time.

The school looks at and compares the improvement rates of students in all grades on a regular basis making sure to prescribe additional class time for students who are not achieving as expected. All 9th grade students take a diagnostic exam to determine their reading and mathematics needs and receive intervention activities to develop these skills. The school reviews its own data to determine progress within subject areas for individual students, classes and grades and for student's in particular ethnic groups. It compares itself to other Acorn sites to evaluate how well it is performing in comparison with other schools.

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 well developed.

Goal setting begins prior to and during the school year by conducting school-wide retreats to review and revise instructional programs and strategies. The school leaders then conduct grade and subject area meetings to formulate goals. This collaborative process is followed up with ongoing sessions whereby teachers constantly reflect on their strategies to reach their goals. The teachers have a detailed knowledge of their students which is further developed throughout each semester. Teachers have begun to conference with students as a means of noting goal achievement. The school has developed good practices to provide feedback to students about their performance on particular pieces of work. This process is ongoing and is improving.

Students who need extra help are quickly identified and an intervention activity is prescribed. Groups of students who are not working on grade level are immediately identified for intervention support. The progress of these students is monitored closely and the amount of support reviewed throughout the year and adjusted if necessary. Benchmarks in reading and mathematics have been determined for all students setting one set of parameters that signal a request for a program of intervention. Subsequent small group instruction in reading, mathematics and writing further support student needs.

The students know that the school has set high expectations for them which results in a heightened sense of commitment to achievement and in preparing for the next level. Parents are pleased with the challenges established by the school in planning school programs and see the positive changes in the way the children react to school. The school has created a structure to enable students to improve their levels of achievement while developing positive attitudes towards school work, resulting in a sense of commitment to continuing their academic pursuits in a post secondary school.

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 well developed.

The school has a mandated curriculum which was rewritten to infuse reading skill development into the core subject areas. Assessment data informs staff of achievement which is derived from uniform teacher exams as well as from looking at student work

samples. An academy provides support for a program for 9th grade male students and technology programs which are career oriented. A comprehensive school reform grant has been used to develop study groups for all teachers to reflect and improve upon classroom instructional practices. This has had positive impact effect on the strategies utilized in classes and high level of engaged learners in each classroom. The workshop model is the approach to learning followed in all classrooms which allows teachers to work with small groups of students and affords students ample opportunities to interact with their classmates.

A greater consistency in providing differentiated instruction in all classes is presently under consideration. The teachers have developed uniform full period subject area exams that provide a picture on a regular basis of achievement. An item analysis of each exam is developed and is used as a means for revising plans and re-teaching problem areas.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling are aligned fully and planned to minimize the ratio of students to teachers and to maximize instructional time. One result of this plan is an upward trend in graduation rates and regents exam scores.

There is a mutual respect between the teachers and the students which accounts for a positive learning environment, where students work hard to achieve. Students know that they can receive support, help and advice from many staff members and will often seek out the principal for guidance.

Attendance data is monitored on a daily basis and is a high priority of the school. Students know the importance of good attendance and are motivated to attend as a result of the incentives offered, the challenging activities provided and the positive school culture.

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.

A school committee selects staff based upon their subject area knowledge as noted in a demonstration lesson and their determination to utilize data to support students. A final determinant for all candidates is the ability to work collaboratively as a team member to constantly improve instructional practices. Wise choices have been made resulting in a positive and forward thinking school culture.

The professional development plan is based upon an ongoing commitment to improving student achievement and increasing the number of college bound students. A comprehensive school reform grant to improve instructional practices is carried out by a contracted vendor to identify school needs. As a result, the school has established study groups to improve individual practices and planning which is impacting positively on subject area programs. At this time, these practices are a regular part of the professional development plan and the intention is that they will continue to be used in the future.

The principal frequently visits classrooms and teachers accept the suggestions that are offered. Teachers feel that the principal is a knowledgeable and respected leader and they can learn from her expertise. Opportunities to visit classrooms to observe instructional strategies are a part of the learning process for teachers.

Teachers attend on a regular basis grade and subject area meetings where they evaluate the data and, jointly with the school leaders, make decisions that impact programs. Lead teachers of grades and subject areas are part of cabinet meetings that serve to discuss concerns and agree on next steps. Visits to other schools to observe their instructional plans are made as a means to compare and learn different alternative methods.

As a result of the positive culture, clearly communicated procedures and the careful monitoring by the staff, the school runs very smoothly. Students understand the importance of taking responsibility for their actions, knowing it creates a place where students can enjoy learning.

Partnerships contribute positively towards the school's goals. Funding from the Acorn organization provides after school programs for students in need of academic support. Medgar Evers College supports students by enrolling them in after school college level courses which provides a positive incentive to continue their education to the next level.

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 well developed.

The Comprehensive Education Plan is used throughout the school year to check goal achievement. The entire faculty is initially involved in a discussion concerning the data prior to involving school leaders, grade teams and subject area teachers in adding more detail. Scholarship reports are reviewed as a means of identifying student, class and grade performance. Teams of teachers and school leaders work collaboratively to enhance strategies to reach goals. Strategies are revised and interventions are employed for students in greatest need. Intervention plans are changed depending upon the progress of students as noted in the performance data. Unit exams, which are uniformly planned by each subject area, provide meaningful data that allow teachers and school leaders to compare results of classes and subject area teachers during the year. An item analysis affords staff the opportunity to clearly detail areas of weakness and strength of the students. The analysis of data is carried out on a monthly basis allowing for ongoing revision and change of plans and activities.

Structures are in place to allow for an easy change in school practices. These work due to the collaborative manner of the school leaders and the teaching staff. Cabinet meetings, grade meetings and department meetings are used well to discuss school achievement and revise plans as a result. These structures are flexible enough to allow for an ease in adjusting activities to reach the goals. Due to the development of these structures and the use of data, instructional and educational trends have improved. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and what it needs to do next to engender further improvement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Acorn Community High School (HS499)	∅	✓	+
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