



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Academy of American Studies

High School 575

**28-04 41 Avenue
Queens
NY 11101**

Principal: Ellen Sherman

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Reviewer: John Hudson

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Academy of American Studies is a small high school with approximately 600 students enrolled from grade 9 through grade 12. The school's population comprises about one third Asian background, one third Hispanic, a quarter White and 10% Black students. English is the main language spoken. Four percent of students are English language learners and less than three percent are special education students. The proportion of students with Title 1 eligibility, at 38%, is higher than found in most similar schools but below the average for other City schools. Attendance, at 93%, is well above City and similar school averages.

The school, which opened ten years ago, is located on two sites on opposite sides of a road. Accommodation is evenly divided between the sites, one of which is shared with another high school. The two schools work well together and combine to provide physics and government classes, and a band.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal, who is highly respected by the whole school community, provides excellent leadership.
- The administration and staff hold very high expectations of student academic achievement.
- The principal, who visits classrooms regularly, places a very strong emphasis on continuously improving the qualities of instruction and learning.
- Careful planning, which includes the introduction of a four year program to develop higher order writing skills, ensures students are well prepared for college entry.
- The school makes very good use of available data, much of which is school generated, to set challenging goals and carefully aligned plans to improve achievement.
- The school provides outstanding support for students who are underperforming or at risk of underperforming.
- Very good relationships throughout the school are built upon the high quality of care shown by all members of staff.
- Well planned and interesting lessons and stimulating learning environments promote high levels of student engagement and very good attendance.
- Excellent communications between home and school ensure students are strongly encouraged to succeed.
- The school is characterized by its very positive learning ethos.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend across the school the frequent use made by most some subject areas of carefully focused interim assessments of student achievement to track performance towards regular interim goals.
- Continue to develop the use of self- and peer-evaluation so the range of best practice seen across much of the school is shared.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The school takes great care in its use of data to match programs of work to the needs of students. The school is at a stage in its development when all areas contribute strongly towards students making the best possible progress. Programs are under continuous review and revision in order to meet the changing needs of learners. The school is particularly effective in meeting its target that a very high proportion of students gain entry to college each year. The school places equal emphasis on supporting English language learners, special education students and others at risk of under achievement.

The school's great success is based on the very high expectations of its principal who takes a considerable interest in the development of every student. Students and their parents work together with the school staff to an impressive degree in order to ensure that every student achieves as highly as possible.

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 school gathers detailed data from State and City tests and its own internal assessments to keep the performance of individual students and groups of students under continual review. The principal and her assistant principals scrutinize the data at midterm and end of year to identify students who are performing higher than expectation and those who are at risk of performing below their planned goals. In one subject planning meeting where State test outcomes were reviewed, the data was presented so that the team were able to analyze data for students in each question and know which aspects of learning were not yet mastered. Subject teams use regular assessment processes and sophisticated data analyses to identify areas where students, classrooms and grade levels are achieving at a lower level than expected.

Very regular and detailed tracking of achievement data is used to monitor the progress of English language learners, special education students and other groups the school has identified. These groups include lower level readers, whose progress is closely tracked from entry to the school, and other groups who are at risk of under achievement. The performance of individual ethnic groups is monitored twice yearly. The school has identified writing skills as a particular focus towards the achievement of its goal to ensure every student is well prepared for college entry. The performance of all students and groups is closely tracked in this area of learning.

The principal and senior staff keep a careful regard for student progress over the longer term. The achievement of the school, grade levels and subject departments are compared year by year and the progress of individual students tracked from their entry to the school.

The principal and her staff compare the school's overall performance with named similar schools to ensure academic standards remain high.

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.

Each September, collaborative subject department meetings review the performance of individual students over the previous year, including those entering from other schools, to set subject specific goals for the following year. These goals are reviewed by the principal and her assistant principal to ensure they are in accord with overall school goals, particularly the aim to secure college entry for every student. There is very good practice in some subject areas of setting interim goals over six-weekly marking periods to enable teachers to track performance with a greater degree of precision. Continuous discussion about the achievements of individual students and classrooms supports the school's extensive use of data to keep the progress of every student under regular review.

The school is particularly good at setting goals for and tracking the progress of English language learners, special education learners and those students who have been identified as at risk of not gaining college entry. The progress of these students is discussed regularly at planning meetings and case studies. The widespread use of before school and after school tutoring enables most under achieving students to catch up. The effectiveness of this program and other interventions is monitored carefully. The principal wisely recognizes that the school's greatest challenge is to move the lowest achievers forward.

The school has very high expectations of student achievement and sets its performance benchmark for student achievement at 85% rather than the 65% pass mark. Parents very strongly support these high standards, are kept informed of student progress with a minimum of six report cards each year and have access to their children's progress on the school web site. They find the school and its teachers to be highly accessible and responsive to student needs. Parents also appreciate the great strength of the school's plan to ensure students are confident about their next academic steps. The school requires all ninth graders to take a research and writing class and students are encouraged to continue this program for four years. Parents understand that students' ability to write well structured extended essays is of greatest value to them as they enter college.

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.

All subject departments monitor student performance closely and use achievement data to analyze the effectiveness of curriculum units and lesson plans. Department planning meetings focus on how these plans can be improved to enable students to be successful in State tests. Teachers are engaged in continuing collaborative discussion to ensure students learn and achieve ambitious academic goals.

Staff are aware of the need to modify their planning to accommodate the needs of the highest achieving students and those at risk of not meeting their goals. The principal and her assistant principals formally assess the effectiveness of teachers by regularly analyzing classroom performance data. The quality of lesson planning and differentiated instruction is generally of a good standard. The principal visits classrooms regularly to check how well the curriculum is aligned to meet the needs of learners, and assess the quality of classroom instruction and level of student engagement.

School planning is well developed and the school makes very good use of resources, including staffing resources, to make greatest impact. As a result all students make at least the expected progress but many exceed expectations. The school is very well supported by its parents and the community. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History provides outstanding support to the school.

Scheduling decisions are made on the basis of progress made by individuals and groups. For example, in their review of 2005 – 2006 data teachers identified that special education students were failing the research and writing elective. To correct this situation, a goal was set for 2006 – 2007 to create a creative writing class for special education students.

Staff know their students extremely well and levels of mutual respect are excellent. Students are confident they could approach any member of staff if they have a problem. Lessons are well planned and interesting, classrooms are stimulating learning environments and students work hard to succeed. Students are happy in school and report that they are very pleased to be there. Student attendance is high.

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 principal takes particular care to appoint teachers with an in depth understanding of their subject and very good interpersonal skills, particularly with students. The principal mentors new teachers to improve instructional techniques to the high standard she expects.

Professional development decisions are identified by analyzing student and teacher strengths and weaknesses, as revealed by performance data. The school manages this through systematic use of student performance data derived from State test results and interim, school based assessments. Staff work collaboratively, and by self and peer evaluation, to continuously develop their own skills in the use of data for tracking student performance, analyzing student strengths and weaknesses, and improving their own lesson planning and instructional skills to improve student performance.

There are excellent examples of the effective use of regular assessments to track student progress towards carefully selected interim goals. Some subject departments analyze highly detailed data to help them gain a deep understanding of students' learning. These techniques are of critical importance in tracking students' progress towards high achievement and fine tuning lesson plans accordingly. Through self and peer evaluation, classroom observation and other professional development activities, the school is sharing this knowledge for the benefit of all staff.

The principal is highly visible about the school including in classrooms, where she pays keen attention to the quality of instruction and the maintenance of the highest expectations of student achievement and progress. The principal is very highly regarded by students, staff and parents who feel very well informed and fully involved in the education of their children.

The school makes excellent use of external organizations to enhance student achievement. It has used a Center for the Arts Education grant to infuse arts into the humanities program. Partners this year have included Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Modern Art and WingSpan.

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.

Subject areas set demanding long term goals with many good examples of rigorous and detailed tracking of progress towards school interim goals. Interim and longer term goals and plans are firmly based on the careful analysis of data. Goals are challenging but achievable. Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and subject areas are used to accurately identify what the school does well and which areas are in need of development. The performance of most groups of interest to the school is frequently tracked although ethnic groups are tracked less regularly. Professional development activities are responsive to the identified needs of teachers and learners. Plans and goals are revised continuously to respond rapidly to the ever changing needs of learners.

The Comprehensive Development Plan is a useful working document in developing the school's capacity for improving student achievement. Students, parents and teachers are well informed of plans and goals and of the school's progress towards them. Parents as well as teachers and administration are fully involved in review and revision of current plans and their impact on achievement. The school follows a clearly established cycle of tracking performance, reviewing and revising goals and plans and implementing these revisions in succeeding years.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Academy of American Studies (HS 575)	∅	✓	+
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