



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

City College Academy of the Arts

Middle School 293

**4600 Broadway
New York
NY 10040**

Principal: Bernadette Drysdale

Dates of review: March 25 - 26, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Peter Lewis

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

City College Academy of the Arts is a secondary school with 240 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 96% Hispanic and 4% of students from other backgrounds. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 95.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 84% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's clarity of vision has established a strongly reflective and collaborative community that is committed to high expectations of students.
- Data is collected and analyzed thoroughly, which informs the planning of effective interventions that ensure that students make good progress.
- There is a very good focus on improving the performance of the lowest achieving students, which has a positive impact on their learning.
- Professional development is well planned and effective, particularly in helping staff to understand and interpret data.
- Good systems and well developed teamwork ensure that the school, although small, runs smoothly.
- A good range of partnerships has been established that make a positive contribution to students' learning and their preparation for college.
- Parents value the information and support provided by that school, and so feel more able to help their children.
- Attendance is high as a result of the good systems that have been established and the high level of motivation promoted across the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Set clear and specific goals for students' learning that are based on their prior achievement rather than on grade or course requirements.
- Ensure that all teachers make use of a full menu of strategies for differentiation in planning lessons that meet all students' needs.
- Improve whole school strategic planning by more precisely identifying success criteria and timescales for implementation.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

City College Academy of the Arts is a school that, in the comparatively short time that it has been in existence, has become popular with its parents and students. It has established good plans for its continued growth, so that students currently in grade 8 feel well supported as they prepare to enter the high school phase of their education in September. Teachers are committed to their students' personal and academic well being, and support them well. Relationships throughout the school are good. These features reflect the very clear vision of the principal, who, while managing the school without the support of an assistant principal, has built a reflective team of support staff and lead teachers. Staff at all levels feel well supported and share the school's plans for development. Students are highly motivated and respond very well to the school's high expectations.

The school has made good progress in addressing the areas identified for improvement in last year's Quality Review. Teachers and school leaders have a good informal understanding of changes that are planned. However, the lack of clear success criteria and timescales for developments hampers the school in monitoring progress in a precise way. The school uses data well to understand the different patterns of student achievement, and makes good use of the information to rapidly address any gaps in their learning. Data is also used to set goals for students but, at present, the school's good understanding of their different starting points is underutilized to inform this process. Focused professional development has ensured that teachers' confidence in planning lessons according to students' different needs has improved, and good quality plans are in place to secure greater consistency in this. The inquiry team has made good progress in analyzing data for its target group of students. A particularly effective practice has been established whereby each member of the team focuses on specific individual students. As a result, the students and their teachers are also involved in the research and its outcomes.

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 the student's progress over time.

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

The school has collected and now makes use of a wide variety of data. A spreadsheet, provided by the school's support organization, enables English language arts and math

data to be recorded and used to supplement the school's other assessment mechanisms. Through this, good comparisons are made between classes and groups and different bands of achievement are clearly indicated. As a result, the school identifies target groups of students accurately and plans interventions effectively. Data is shared with teachers, although the principal acknowledges that the school is still working to ensure greater consistency in the way they use the information to plan lessons. Nonetheless, there is a strong emphasis on data and its interpretation in a range of common planning meetings that has ensured improvement in this, and the school has good plans in place to secure further improvement. At the same time, teachers receive good guidance and support in their planning, which accurately identifies areas in which particular students are achieving at a lower level than their peers. As a result, their progress is enhanced.

In parallel with her own observations, the principal makes good use of data to compare student performance between subjects, classes and grades. Gains and dips in student performance, such as last year's decline in math achievement, are well understood through scale score analysis. The school makes good use of this information to plan improvements such as the increased focus on strand analysis. Good use is made of the City's Acuity data to identify those students whose performance qualifies them for the school's "small group intervention program". The school has reviewed the performance of its small proportion of non-Hispanic students, to compare their achievement with that of the majority of students. Although this analysis has revealed a higher proportion of Black students performing at the lower levels, no action has yet been identified to try to redress the balance.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

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

The school sets challenging goals for its students. While the performance of lower-achieving students is well understood and goals are set in order to raise their performance, the school also has a good understanding of the performance of its higher-achieving students. Benchmark goals are set at an early stage through each year and are used as the basis for tracking gains and dips in achievement as the year progresses. This good use of data, together with the regular meetings that take place between administrators, lead teachers and classroom teachers, ensures the implementation of accurately planned interventions that are specific to the areas of weakness in learning.

Staff have a good understanding of planned changes to the curriculum or to classroom practice. There is a good level of collaboration between staff and school leaders in identifying areas for improvement. Regular discussion includes the review of data and its implication for change, which informs decisions about modifications to the school's work. This ensures that required improvements are accurately identified and, at the same time, that they are also well understood by staff. Changes to the science curriculum, for example, that were introduced following the identification of students' difficulty in completing lab reports have had a positive impact on this, as well as on students' literacy achievement. The lack of clear success criteria and timescales for the implementation of change hampers the school in monitoring progress in a precise way.

Although the school has data that demonstrates the range of different student achievement at the start of each year, it has yet to establish procedures to use this information in setting individualized targets. This makes it difficult for the school to be as precise as it would like to be in understanding whether students are progressing at a faster or slower rate than expected. In contrast, the high quality of small step goals identified through individualized education planning ensures that special education students make rapid gains in their learning. Parents of all students feel fully involved in their children's education and, through regular meetings and reports, have a good understanding of how well they are doing.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

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

The school uses State requirements and student assessment data to plan revisions to its curriculum. Core programs are well aligned and effective support is provided through after school and enrichment programs that are valued by students. Because of these features, their engagement and motivation are high, which is reflected in the school's above average attendance figures. In anticipation of its growth to a grade 6 to 9 school, curriculum development has sensibly focused on preparing grade 8 students for Regents examinations in math and science. Students are particularly proud of the opportunities made available for them to experience college courses first hand. The school's review of its existing curriculum identified the need to secure improvements in both math and science. In both these areas, modifications, such as an increased emphasis on language development and on practical activities in math, have begun to have a positive impact on learning. In planning these initiatives, the school has planned the pace of change carefully to ensure that teachers have the opportunity to develop in a supported way. The school has moved well in beginning to establish links between subjects, such as reading and social studies, or science and music. These links are beginning to be well used to provide extra challenge, particularly for higher-performing students.

The principal is consistent in her high expectations of students and staff. In discussing behavioral or academic issues, for example, teachers say that she will "always ask what we've tried already". In this, as in the regular, achievement-focused discussions, teachers have a high degree of accountability for their students' achievement. Across the school, teachers have responded well to training in using data and, consequently, have moved well in developing strategies of differentiation in their classes. There remains too much inconsistency in this, however, particularly in the degree to which teachers plan different activities to support students of different achievement in reaching the planned objective.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

Although this is a small school, and the principal is not able to share the administrative workload with an assistant principal, her monitoring of classroom practice is well

focused, regular and accurate in its evaluation. As a result, she has a thorough understanding of the features of each teacher's performance and makes good use of this in identifying areas that need to be addressed and in planning for improvement. The principal makes good use of information from observations and the perceptive analysis of data to create individual action plans for teachers. This means that professional development is accurately targeted at addressing individual as well as whole school needs, and its effectiveness is demonstrated by the improvements gained in, for example, teachers' developing understanding of strategies for differentiation.

The school has established good systems to enable best practice to be developed and shared. The appointment of lead teachers, for example, has been well supported by their training in City and school-based assessment strategies, as well as in techniques of modelling lessons and of mentoring other staff. Consequently, in collaboration with the principal, they are seen as knowledgeable professionals whose advice is valued by staff. This has made a significant impact on their effectiveness. As a result, there is a high degree of commitment among staff to securing improvement for students.

The school has built a good range of partnerships that are aimed at securing a wider range of opportunities for its students, particularly in preparation for college and in strengthening the contribution of the visual and performing arts to students' learning. As a result of one of these links, students are excited at the opportunity to perform in concert at Carnegie Hall; as one said, "We don't just sit still and listen in class, here the teachers work hard to make learning fun."

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal and school leaders have a good understanding of student progress by across grades and classes. The school has ensured that its collection, analysis and use of assessment information have developed rapidly. This data is comprehensive, particularly in English language arts and math, and enables a close track to be kept on students' achievement in these areas. At the same time, clear individual plans for special education students, and those with the lowest achievement, ensure that their progress is well understood and interventions put in place rapidly when necessary.

The school accurately identifies strengths and weaknesses in students' learning and, consequently is able to plan accurate interventions to ensure that students remain on track towards their targets. However, the fact that goals are not set against students' different starting points means that progress is measured in relation to grade expectations, rather than different students' potential. Good use is made of both interim testing and strand analysis so that teachers and support staff know where to focus their efforts. Because of regular review and well-focused discussion, the school ensures that modifications to programs or to planning are undertaken rapidly. Through regular planning and development meetings, the principal has ensured that staff have a reasonable understanding of aspects of whole school practice that it plans to develop. While, as a result, the impact of developments is effectively understood, the absence of timeframes for change or clear descriptors of what changed practice will look like makes it difficult for the school to assess the progress it is making.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: City College Academy of the Arts	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X	

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?		X			
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?		X			
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped