



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Astor Collegiate Academy

**High School 299
925 Astor Avenue
Bronx
NY 10469**

Principal: Rose LoBianco

Dates of review: April 29 - 30, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Mak Mitchell

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Astor Collegiate Academy is a high school with 411 students in grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 43% Hispanic, 43% Black, 9% Caucasian, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander 3% and 0.5% American Indian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 56 % and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 83.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 63% eligibility.

The school theme is business and technology, supported by a college prep curriculum in which the students take three years of business and technology electives. The school has strong partnership links with Lehman College. The principal was appointed on July 1, 2007.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal models high expectations for teacher and student performance and establishes effective support structures.
- The school generates frequent data about the progress of students through credit accumulation tracking and Regent exam data.
- Mutual trust and respect are strong between staff and students.
- Case conferences and grade team meetings drive the customized use of data to provide well-aligned instruction to students with greatest needs.
- Professional development is based on a detailed understanding of teacher needs obtained through frequent classroom observation.
- The school has a calm learning environment with a clear discipline code that supports student learning.
- The principal and her team make strategic budgeting, student placement and scheduling decisions aligned with their student achievement goals.
- School attendance and discipline are well monitored and parents are kept well informed.
- The school is well supported through external partnerships.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase student progress by using data from their prior achievement to differentiate and challenge students to make faster progress.
- Establish measurable goals for all staff and individual students aligned to school-wide goals.
- Use data to monitor and evaluate student progress towards a clearly articulated school vision.
- Adopt a coherent curriculum for systemic development of student knowledge and skills.
- Increase opportunities for visitation within and between schools to foster teacher pedagogical understanding.

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 proficient.

A new principal leads the school and she is focusing on new structures and processes to support a more data-driven approach to student learning. Parents and students are attracted to this school because of its successful college prep focus and its supportive, safe culture. Most of the teachers are in their first five years of service, and they have formed a collegial group with a major voice in the reforms at the school.

The principal maintains a proactive instructional presence in the school, while her assistant principal has led various initiatives that have strengthened the data collection and diagnosis capacity of the school. They have established a framework of credit accumulation and Regent exam pass rates that tracks every student's progress towards graduation. Both leaders are advocates for teachers and students, resulting in a school with a collaborative teacher ethos and a respectful, safe student culture. The principal is redefining the vision of the school and the articulation of the business-technology theme.

Teachers contribute to data interventions at the school and they often focus on struggling students through the work of their inquiry team. They are now beginning to address the need for interim goals for all students. The team is focusing on coursework design and a more differentiated delivery model. They are working to make their goal structure more measureable. The school maintains a strong partnership with Lehman College and benefits from its tutoring and free college coursework designed as a performance incentive for Astor Academy students. Students are enthused about these opportunities and a menu of diverse activities for the after school program. Parents appreciate the immediate, specific communications from the school about their children. They feel they have access to and priority with the school principal, the parent coordinator, and the teaching staff.

Since the last Quality Review, the school has appointed English language learner certified teachers, implemented professional development that begins to focus on differentiation of instruction, and instituted a system to track student progress towards graduation. The inquiry team is making good progress in modeling a process to identify and address the needs of students in the lowest third and has plans to engage all teachers in this process. Teachers on the inquiry team generate qualitative data based on rubrics and skill sequences.

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 collects data frequently about the progress of its students so that it has a good understanding of how each one is performing. The school is focusing on reading comprehension across the curriculum and is diagnosing individual student proficiency levels as a basis for grouping students in classes. The school carefully monitors the progress of special education students towards their goals in their individual education plans, and it has a solid grasp of how well English language learners are increasing their English skills. The school has created a framework through which it carefully tracks the credit accumulation and Regents performance of every student. The data is easily accessible to all teachers. Through color-coded graphs and charts, staff can easily discern which requirements have yet to be met and how well each student has achieved. The school disaggregates and graphs subject data by gender, ethnicity, and grade level as a way to identify achievement problems by student group. They have made numerous adjustments to course schedules, class size and groupings of students to address student needs as identified by this data. The school is beginning to initiate comparisons within classes, grades and between schools with similar demographics. The school does not yet evaluate its success and progress overall.

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 proficient.

Teachers use data to understand each student's next learning steps, but this process is not yet consistently applied. Progress made by students over the course of a year is less strong, signaling the need for a more rigorous and accelerated instructional program. The principal established preliminary school-wide goals with input from her staff. These goals are not expressed as measureable school targets, thereby making it difficult to align staff and student goals and to make them achievable.

The teachers do use data to diagnose student learning needs, but the individualized plan is not always made explicit for students through learning goals and targets. Students understand the number and type of credits they need in order to graduate, but they are not clear about what happens next in their learning sequence because they do not set course learning goals. Motivated students are not challenged with differentiated curricula and assignments.

Administrators and teachers study student data, assess student needs and ensure that coursework is responsive and rigorous enough to meet student learning needs at monthly grade level team meetings. These curricular decisions are the beginnings of measureable, actionable goals. The inquiry team collects both qualitative and quantitative data to establish plans of action for struggling students. These plans primarily address learning behavior goals as a means to improving academic achievement. From these, students have learned how to become more disciplined learners and they are showing academic gains. Case conferences currently focus on learning behaviors and grades,

with students setting their learning targets with coaching from teachers. Teachers engage both students and parents in conversations about the high expectations and recommended strategies to assure success. The staff keeps parents apprised of academic performance, student discipline, and attendance issues. The parent coordinator and the principal organize communication to alert parents to problems.

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.

Teachers and administrators hold themselves accountable for the continuous learning of their students. Lessons are generally engaging and motivating with hands-on and team learning often featured. Every lesson is focused by a written aim and objective on the board. At present, differentiation is not consistent. Teachers are working on sharing the ways they differentiate in order to come to a more common understanding of their own best practices. The curriculum is broad, encompassing college prep with business and technology electives. The business and technology theme is not integrated, nor is it clear how it is aligned with the rest of the core curriculum. Since the school’s mission is college prep, it is not clear how these courses prepare students for college. There are an increasing number of electives with some integrated arts; these are slowly marginalizing the business theme. After-school and Saturday activities provide a variety of attractive options including tutoring, athletics, arts, and cultural trips.

The principal and administrative team have created a welcoming environment based on mutual trust. Safety agents wear school tee shirts as opposed to uniforms and they pride themselves on their personal relationships with students. They engage in short, friendly conversations with students during passing times. Students explain that they are more willing to comply with school rules when they are treated with respect. Student suspensions have dropped by a third since these practices were introduced. Absences and tardiness have consequences in a range from after school detention to community service assignments. The assistant principal for security carefully monitors his data and looks for patterns in student infractions that he shares monthly in the cabinet meetings as a means to increase student learning. The principal makes budget, staffing, and scheduling changes strategically, always with a careful eye towards improving student achievement. The reading focus adopted by the inquiry team has been supported with an array of motivating books for students.

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.

The principal and assistant principal of instruction have created an open professional culture. They are both respected instructional leaders. They schedule formal observations with all teachers, with new teachers receiving four observations annually. In addition, many informal visits occur where teachers welcome the suggestions and insights of these seasoned administrators. New teachers are assigned an experienced mentor and given numerous opportunities for internal and external professional development. Teachers express the desire to have more time to do more visitations since those that

they have participated in have been insightful. They are focused on observing successful pedagogical strategies for running differentiated groups and designing multi-level content lessons. Teachers associate with one another to develop themselves professionally and professional development sessions are organized “for teachers by teachers”. A menu of professional development options is available to meet the differentiated needs of this diverse teaching staff.

Safety agents interact with students personally and hold all students to firm discipline and safety expectations. They set an upbeat tone in the building. Incidents that do occur are managed skillfully by the safety team and consequences do not cause students to lose learning time. Support staff provides advising, counseling, and customized tutoring. A social worker adds family outreach. The team is positive, committed, and collaborative. The school enjoys a valuable partnership with nearby Lehman College. They offer free college entry-level courses as incentives to students who meet achievement benchmarks set by Astor Academy. These courses are highly sought after by Astor students and valued by their parents.

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 school has established structures for monitoring student interim progress. Teacher-made classroom rubrics and tracking tools are the most valued data tools at present. The outcomes of periodic assessments are just beginning to drive modifications in teaching and learning processes. Based on graduation tracking data, the school has actively modified schedules, assignments, and placements of students in an attempt to give their students every advantage to succeed. Interim goals and timeframes for teachers and students happen instinctively rather than purposefully. These interim goals are not sufficiently explicit or stated in measureable terms. Students are challenged to take ownership of their credit accumulation, but they are not skilled in setting their own learning goals to achieve graduation.

Teachers have open access to the principal's cabinet. They routinely make suggestions for program improvements and interventions. Once staff consensus is reached in school-wide faculty meetings, the intervention is designed and developed for implementation. Recent program improvements have been targeted at decreasing class size, schedule changes, and student placement to improve student performance on Regents subjects. All such changes are based on a careful analysis of patterns and trends in student data.

The principal is in the process of clarifying her vision for the school, soliciting insights from staff, students, and parents, and integrating her findings into an overall plan.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Astor Collegiate Academy	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 student’s 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