

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education School

High School 600

333 East 15 Street

Bronx

NY 10451

Principal: René Cassanova

Dates of review: December 1 - 2, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Mick Megee

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education School is a high school with 1183 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 34% Black, 62% Hispanic, 1% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 0.1% English language learners and 0.1% special education students. Boys account for 89% of the students enrolled and girls account for 11%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 74.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 71% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school offers its students a pleasant and peaceful environment for learning, with popular, good quality, specialized hands-on programs within the career and technology classes. Students work hard at subjects they enjoy and consequently make good progress. The administration has developed good practice in collecting and using student information to improve instruction and progress in attendance, English language arts, math and social studies. In these areas, teachers identify underachievement quickly and respond effectively. In other content areas, the use of data is not yet as effective. The school has good systems in place to assist the students who are struggling. English language learners, special education students and those who are struggling benefit considerably from the additional support they receive from counselors and other specialist staff.

The administrators effectively review the performance of teachers through both formal and informal procedures, and help them to develop individual plans for improvement aligned to good professional development. Most teachers are skilful in using data to differentiate their instruction so that every student is suitably challenged. A few teachers are less strong in this area, and the administrators are working hard to bring them up to the level of the best. Staff collaborate well and support each other's work and there is a mutual respect with students. In English language arts, math and social studies staff are making good use of data to check whether any student subgroup is doing less well than others. In other subjects, staff are not yet making this analysis because it is difficult for them to gain easy access to the necessary resources such as computers. This means that they cannot identify clearly why some groups of students are doing less well than expected.

Administrators and faculty are proficient in setting and monitoring goals at all levels in English language arts, math and social studies. In these subjects, students and staff have a clear idea of what next steps they need to take. In other subjects, the setting and reviewing of goals are not as well developed. Parents feel that the school has high expectations of academic and personal success, and they receive a good range of information so that they can assist where possible. The principal has a clear understanding of what needs to be improved. She clearly articulates her vision for the future and has successfully gained the commitment of all the school community in her drive for improvement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school prepares students well for their future through its specialized technical programs.
- There is good use of data to improve students' outcomes in attendance, English language arts, math and social studies.
- The principal's clear vision and accurate self-evaluation ensures that staff, parents and students are committed to the same high educational and personal standards.
- Administrators, faculty and students maintain a respectful and calm collegiate culture throughout the school, which encourages learning.
- The administrators skillfully identify strengths and areas for improvement in teachers' individual practice and put in place a range of very effective professional development.
- The students benefit greatly in their personal and academic lives from the school's arrangements for academic and personal support.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the good work in data collection, utilization and analysis already in place for English language arts, math and social studies to all other subjects.
- Ensure that teachers always match classroom activities to the needs of all the students in the class, so that every student can achieve their potential.
- Ensure that all staff have good access to training and resources in order to improve their skills in utilizing data when planning instruction.
- Gather and make more effective use of information about the relative achievement of the various gender, ethnic and other subgroups in the school.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

In English language arts, math and social studies, staff capture a good range of data that teachers can use to modify their instruction. Teachers make good use of item analysis from formative assessments to uncover which questions students are finding difficult. Instruction then focuses on the problematical areas. In other subjects, the use of data is not so well developed, so that instruction may not be so well matched to learners' needs. Administrators work hard to keep attendance to an acceptable level through gathering information and targeting students who are in the most need of encouragement and support. Teachers at the school have a good understanding of students' individual performance within their own content areas. Staff collect a good range of data on students in grade 9, such as scores in Gateway tests in reading and by reviewing each student's exam history. Elsewhere in the school, staff gather individual student information through teacher-made assessments and by tracking students' Regents scores in order to identify their strengths and where they need extra support. An increasing number of staff are beginning to make good use of technology systems, such as ARIS, to gain greater insight into why some students continue to fail.

There is good gathering and utilization of data in order to chart the progress of special education students and English language learners. Consequently, staff are able to support these students very well and ensure that they improve rapidly. Teachers in English language arts, math and social studies analyze their data well to identify any underachievement within other sub-groups. In other content areas, teachers find it difficult to gain access to computers in order to retrieve sub-group information. This means that teachers are sometimes not aware of how well the different sub-groups are doing, such as girls and boys, and are missing possible opportunities to assist students who make slower progress.

Teachers exchange information about achievement and attendance well with students through regular case conferences. Students find these meetings very useful because they gain a good understanding of what areas need further work. The school disseminates transcripts and report cards to parents and students at the end of each marking period during open school night or at afternoon conferences. Parents receive good, regular information about the progress their children are making. Students meet with guidance counselors at least twice a year to review their transcripts and their progress towards graduation. When students are struggling, they have additional meetings with guidance counselors during lunch periods. Students value these meetings and most get back on track quickly.

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.

In English language arts, math and social studies, teachers make use of the information they have gathered from item analysis, exam results and their own assessments to create individual goals and plans for improvement. When asked, most students can articulate their long-term life goal, such as to pass all their exams or become an electrician, and some students are able to say what their short-term goals are in English language arts and math. Outside of these subjects, students are not as conversant with their short-term goals, so they are not able to identify easily the next steps they have to take in their learning.

Departmental staff and grade staff hold regular discussions and set improvement goals in each content area or grade. There is some goal setting for student subgroups but this is confined to English language arts, math and social studies, where data gathering is more intensive. The school usually reaches decisions collaboratively about whole-school goals following discussions with departmental staff, although this year the tight deadlines for submission meant that there was less consultation than usual. The administrators intend to rectify this during 2009. Most goals are specific and based on previous trends in performance, although one or two are not quite so effectively written. This means that it is difficult to judge success in reaching them. A few of the whole-school goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan are set as program goals rather than as outcomes for learners, although most of these are formulated as a result of the identification of lower than expected performance.

The school conveys high expectations to the parents and to the students, and both groups feel that the school helps them to achieve their aspirations. High expectations are evident in the various displays around the school that celebrate good work and high attendance.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Many of the teachers make good use of the data they receive to individualize instruction and to ensure that they precisely match work to meet the needs of the different levels of achievement within the class. Some teachers have yet to become completely effective in differentiating learning activities. Consequently, in these teachers’ lessons high performing students may find the work too easy and lower performing students may be struggling to keep up. The administrators have accurately identified where practice is less strong and are working hard to bring all teaching up the level of the best.

Many of the students choose to attend the school because of its very effective, specialized curriculum in technical education. When asked what they like best about the school, most students say, “Shop”. Students respond in this way because they find that shop teachers are skilful, the hands-on activities are rewarding and they make good progress. An important indication of the school’s success is the way in which the majority of students leave school to take up a technical career immediately in their chosen area of endeavor. Many parents transfer their children from other schools where

their education has faltered, and are delighted in the way that the school brings them back on track.

To address the needs of more academic students, the school offers college-level courses in calculus, United States history and English. The school recognizes that it does not yet offer extensive opportunities for students to achieve in the arts, although it has had some success in infusing art into the curriculum for building trades.

There is a friendly, respectful and peaceful sense of purpose all around the school, and staff and students get on well with each other. Parents like the insistence on good standards of personal conduct and their wearing of a uniform. Students say that there is little conflict or bullying, and that they always feel secure.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

There is a good formal system for lesson observations which enables the administrators to assess the performance of each teacher and to take remedial action where required. The administrators formally observe teachers two or three times a year, the frequency varying according to their level of experience and skill. In addition, there are numerous informal observations, walkthroughs and intervisitations by administrators and teaching colleagues. Teachers welcome the chance of receiving a constructive critique from their colleagues and the opportunity to observe each other's good practice. More experienced teachers who demonstrate very proficient practice provide demonstration lessons to other teachers and may choose to swap an observation for an intervisitation. Teachers who are new to the profession or to the school say that they find the observations, demonstration lessons and above all the support of their colleagues very helpful in improving their classroom techniques quickly.

Twice a year, every teacher undertakes an annual self-assessment and, together with the outcomes from lesson observations, this forms the basis of an individual performance plan. The plan contains agreed goals and strategies for reaching them. The school is working hard to give teachers skills in handling and analyzing data, particularly through the use of computers. In some departments, for example in math, there has been a good take-up and, as a consequence, instruction is generally well aligned to students' needs. In other departments, lack of resources and, in a few cases, some personal reluctance mean that a few teachers still have some catching up to do. This means that instruction is not so skillfully aligned with students' achievements. The administrators successfully encourage push staff to collaborate and share planning so that they base their instruction on a more complete view of each student. Administrators also push staff to join the inquiry team, whose successful action research is helping to extend good data collection, use and analysis across the school.

As a result of observations and discussions, the administrators have a clear picture of the strengths and areas for improvement in teachers' individual practice. This enables them to put in place a variety of relevant in-house professional development to bring about rapid improvement. In addition, the school offers its staff a good range of opportunities to undertake professional development away from the school. Teachers have attended training at Harvard University, Bronx Community College, and the National College for Teachers of English. Teachers say that they find these opportunities invigorating and that they add much to their own professional repertoire of skills and knowledge.

All students receive effective academic guidance in their time at the school. The school makes good arrangements to support students who are struggling, English language learners and special education students and their families through its own specialist staff such as the psychologist, guidance counselors and nurses. Students say that there are plenty of people to whom they can turn to if they feel troubled or need professional advice. The school makes good use of its partnerships to provide students with valued internships.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.

Faculty and departmental conferences meet every month to review faculty and departmental goals and plans so that any necessary modifications can take place. In English language arts, math and social studies, where the departments have embedded data gathering and goal setting more firmly, there is effective monitoring of progress and revision of plans and goals. Such diligent work has resulted in decreasing the number of failing students. In other subjects, monitoring and revision is not yet so effective because the range of information is less robust and does not yet chart the progress of all student subgroups. The school recognizes that it needs to widen the range of information in some content areas and already has plans for this to happen.

In attendance monitoring, there is good practice in continually testing the water to make sure that there is continual improvement during the year. The school support team meets every week to evaluate students' attendance and to determine the type of support that students will receive. At regular periods, the administrators analyze the past rate of progress and use this as a basis for predicting future rates, and challenging goals for attendance are set accordingly. The guidance team makes good use of the information it receives about students' progress to set programs for academic intervention such as summer school and tutoring services. Although teachers' individual performance plans have final goals set, the administrators do not always use them assiduously as a benchmark for future progress. The administrators cannot then be sure that teachers have completely taken on board the advice and guidance.

The school aligns its professional development well to any identified underachievement among the students. This year administrators are introducing a professional development plan whereby they will be able to check more easily whether the training provided has had a big enough influence in improving achievement.

The principal leads from the front and by example. Her accurate self-evaluation and clear vision ensure that staff, parents and students are committed to a common set of high educational and personal standards and goals.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education School	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>				
	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		X		
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>				
	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X				
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X					
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X				
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed