

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Academy of Finance and Enterprise

High School 264

**30-20 Thomson Avenue
Queens
NY 11101**

Principal: Gilberto Vega

Dates of review: December 3 - 4, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Mick Megee

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Academy of Finance and Enterprise is a high school with 388 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 12% Black, 56% Hispanic, 15% White, and 16% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 92.8%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 58% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

This school is committed to getting the very best out of students in their personal achievements and in academic success, particularly in its specialized area of finance and enterprise. It is a school that strives to keep every student sharply focused on identifying and attaining their own goals. The key to the success of the school is in the principal's sparkingly clear vision for the future, which by discussion, consensus and modeling, he skillfully transmits to staff, students and parents. Consequently, everyone in the school feels that they are personally contributing to building the school.

Shared commitment and identity give this school a calm, industrious and professional feel, with everyone's eye on the same, ever higher goals. Students and staff respect and trust one another. Students feel secure and cared for. Those students who are struggling are reassured that the school will quickly identify and address their needs. The administrators make sure that English language learners and special education students receive the specialist attention they require.

The administrators support the staff well through a good system of lesson observation and professional development. The administrators ensure that all staff in every content area have at their fingertips a full range of information on the performance and progress of individuals and groups of students. They have set up effective systems for setting and reviewing goals at all levels within the school. All staff are working hard to increase their own skills in translating this information into improved classroom practice. Most staff have already reached mastery but there are still a few staff who are not yet as adept, for example in setting effective, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-related (SMART) goals or in differentiating their instruction. This means that there may be just a few students who are not yet achieving their full potential. Through its external networks, the school provides students with fantastic opportunities to visit prominent universities, to undertake paid internships in the corporate sector and to assist the community.

Expectations of great success prevail throughout the school and in the students' homes. Parents are amazed at the levels of social maturity, drive and professionalism that their children adopt. Their raised expectations mean that they would like to see an even wider range of programs at the school in physical education and the arts, which are currently restricted through space and budget limitations. Unsurprisingly, they especially want to emphasize the school's own identity through having their own sports teams.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides the school with exceptionally skilled leadership, inspiration and vision, which brings out the very best in the faculty and students.
- Staff collect and utilize student data to set goals very well across the curriculum to support students' learning.
- All members of the school community expect great things of each other and of themselves and this is effectively communicated to students' families.
- The positive climate of mutual respect and trust means that everyone feels closely connected and works hard to achieve their best.
- School leaders and staff collaborate very well to provide effective support to all students and particularly to English language learners, special education students and those who are struggling .
- The school provides exceptionally high quality programs especially in its specialized areas of finance and enterprise.
- The school prepares the students very well for their future through the sharp focus on independent learning and the excellent use of its external partnerships.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide further opportunities for students to achieve in physical educational and the Arts.
- Ensure that all teachers match the activities and strategies in lessons to the different needs and performance levels of every student in their classes.
- Ensure that goals are always "SMART" so that the school can more easily evaluate the effectiveness of its actions.

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 school is well developed.

The school collects and analyzes a good range of information across all the core subject areas. The range of information includes students' levels of success in achieving previous goals, biographical data, formative classroom assessments and summative test results. Students speak very well about the widespread use of portfolios, which have many purposes. Teachers use them to chart progress, document conferences and to record performance. Students frequently refer to them with great pride and use them as a tool for self-assessment and reflection, for college interviews, and as a reference for future employers or colleges to see their organizational skills, experience and training. The school provides students and staff with weekly reports on attendance in order to highlight growing improvement or any minor regression.

Teachers share, organize and analyze student information during faculty, department and professional weekly meetings. The administrators provide the staff with regular opportunities for common planning to review data and to make key decisions about instruction particularly where this involves team teaching or interdisciplinary lessons.

Students are required to assess their own performance at the end of each marking period when they meet with their teachers during advisory conferences, and then set their own goals for achievement. This gives them a clear idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do next. The school pays close attention to the performance of its various subgroups, for example English language learners and special education students. There are tight systems for gathering the very detailed background and performance data required which ensures that the progress of any underachieving group is as rapid as possible. Staff go the extra mile where necessary to physically retrieve essential information from far-flung offices, if this is what it takes to ensure that the proper support is in place.

Families are very pleased with the constant flow of information between school and home, through, for example, case conferences, guidance reviews, open school week, and telephone conversations with individual teachers. The administrators leave no stone unturned to maintain open communication pathways. For example, they make the school information easier to understand by translating it into other languages, such as Spanish and Bengali, and by setting up well-attended workshops on how to interpret the information, so that they assist their children in their schoolwork more easily.

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 school is well developed.

The school plans and sets goals across all the core subjects based on thorough, systematic discussions between administration, faculty, students and their families. Students set their own individual personal and academic goals during the regular monthly advisory meetings, taking due account of guidance from their teachers. These meetings are valuable in allowing them to take an objective look back at achievement, and to look forward to the next steps. Parents receive a copy of the outcomes from the meeting and the parent coordinator gives them timely guidance on how to interpret the goals, read transcripts and give assistance.

At the beginning of each marking period, each teacher receives a dataset for the students in their classes, including information about the progress of the various subgroups. Teachers then skillfully analyze this information and set learning goals for all the classes and groups, with a special focus on any group or individual who they feel is doing less well than expected. In collaboration with their colleagues, staff set departmental or grade-level goals, and these then inform whole-school goals which appear in the Comprehensive Educational Plan. This methodical and rational approach to goal setting means that all staff in the school contribute to the effective drive for improvement. Although the procedures for goal setting are tight, not all the staff are equally skilful at ensuring that goals are SMART. This makes it more difficult to evaluate precisely how much progress the school has made.

Parents, students and faculty are correct in their view that the school sets very high expectations for everybody to perform to their very best. This is borne out by the good progress most students make. Students are expected to dress smartly at all times. One parent said that when her son leaves for school in the morning, “He looks smarter than my husband.” Students appear very comfortable when introducing themselves to visitors and speak articulately and enthusiastically about what they have achieved. As a consequence of all the school does, students at all times demonstrate high degrees of professionalism, courtesy and social warmth.

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 school is well developed.

The school provides a high quality, cutting-edge program that prepares the students well for their future especially within its specialized area of finance and enterprise. The school motivates students to, “shoot for the stars” in the words of one parent. Students participate enthusiastically in building virtual businesses in which they manage virtual budgets, and develop entrepreneurial skills in a risk-free environment. Through the Virtual Enterprises International, they participate in competitions, international trade shows and travel to other countries, such as Austria, to meet and discuss common issues with fellow business students.

A particularly popular and effective part of the curriculum is the extensive range of job-shadowing opportunities, paid and unpaid internships, and community service programs. These give students excellent opportunities to experience real-life challenges and to develop the skills they will need in the future. The school arranges regular trips to high caliber colleges and universities such as Syracuse and Harvard to attend workshops and orientations. Such events give students a clear understanding of what standards they need to reach in their academic courses. As a reflection of its high aspirations, the school provides the students with a good range of advanced placement and college courses.

Within this generally very positive picture, there is a little room for improvement. The facilities for physical education are cramped, and the variety of physical activities on offer is somewhat limited. Because they identify so closely with the school, it is to be applauded that students want to have their own teams, not the current ones shared with other schools. The school has a popular ballroom dancing class, and there are a number of well-attended clubs such as the journalism club and the cooking club. However, budget restrictions have meant that programs for art and music, although meeting the minimum requirements, are not yet extensive.

Most teachers use data to organize their classrooms in a way that enables them to address the specific needs of the different groups within the class. In a few classes, however, teachers are not quite so skilled in ensuring that high performing students are constantly challenged, or that low performing students are not left behind. Nevertheless, there is a very positive climate for learning in every classroom, with close, good-humored relationships and a strong ethic of industriousness and respect. Students and teachers say they feel “very connected” to one another in their joint and successful pursuit of excellence. There is very little conflict of any sort, and behavior management is hardly ever required.

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 school is well developed.

The school supports the staff well by providing accurate, regular feedback on each teacher’s performance and by putting in place the professional development required to update skills and knowledge effectively. The school requires each teacher to assess their own practice, and to write their own goals for development in an individual improvement plan. The administrators ensure that teachers’ goals and their professional development are congruent with the goals set for departments, grades and for the whole school, and therefore maximize their effectiveness.

Teachers work exceedingly well together as a team and there is a very evident supportive camaraderie. Teachers welcome the insight of their colleagues because enables them to improve their own practice, and new teachers speak highly of the way in which much-needed support is freely given. Intervisitations are a frequent and valued feature of school-life. The close working relationship between the administrators and faculty ensures that there is a shared approach, which addresses identified weaknesses or underachievement.

The principal ensures that there is strong student governance so that students hold a significant stake in the development of the school by the way in which they influence

decisions. The school makes very good use of its partnerships, such as those with the National Academy Foundation and the Citigroup, to the benefit of the students and staff. These partnerships result in valuable opportunities for students to be mentors, receive paid internships in the corporate sector, and to take free college-level courses. The popular ballroom dancing classes are a result of the strong relationship with the Filipino American Human Services.

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 school is well developed.

The school has developed very good procedures that enable administrators and faculty to effectively chart the progress that it is making towards achieving its goals at all levels. The benchmarking systems comprehensively cover goals for individual staff and students, classes, subgroups, grades, departments and all core subject areas. The principal publishes an annual roadmap that allows the staff to visualize the timelines, strategies and resources required for the school to accomplish its whole school goals.

The school analyzes both hard and soft data at regular points throughout the year and checks that it remains on track, through meetings of the various constituencies within the school, such as departmental staff or the inquiry team. The inquiry team is very effective in suggesting different strategies to address any goals that are proving problematical. There is good flexibility within the system so it can adapt practices swiftly in order to bring about improvement. An example of this is the way in which the school addressed the issues of a small group of students who were having minor behavioral difficulties in class and whose work was suffering. The school's psychologist assessed the students and found that a number were suffering from depression. Staff and parents attended workshops and training on how to detect depression, and staff modified their classroom strategies, which successfully brought the students back on track.

The principal provides the school with a high quality of leadership that is both inspirational and aspirational. His demeanor, drive and enthusiasm are the key reasons why the school is as successful as it is. He successfully generates mutual trust through having a crystal-clear sense of purpose, being honest, showing passion and encouraging others to share his vision and following his lead. Staff, students and parents all speak warmly of the way in which the principal is utterly committed to doing the best for the students, and for getting the very best out of everyone within range. As one parent rightly said, "This school is a gem."

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Academy of Finance and Enterprise	△	▶	✓	+
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>	△	▶	✓	+
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>	△	▶	✓	+
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>	△	▶	✓	+			
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>	△	▶	✓	+			
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>	△	▶	✓	+			
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							
△	Underdeveloped	▶	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed