

Quality Review

Report

2009-2010

Academy for Environmental Leadership

High School 403

400 Irving Avenue

Brooklyn

NY 11237

Principal: Nilda Gomez-Katz

Dates of review: April 13 - 14, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Ainslie Cumberbatch

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Academy for Environmental Leadership is a high school with 372 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 26% Black, 72% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 1% from other ethnic groups. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 81.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Academy for Environmental Leadership is a small, nurturing school with a blossoming culture of respect for all. The school community believes in respecting students as thinkers and cultivating them as independent learners. There is a strong focus on college readiness and the development of leadership skills. Staff focus on four key goals: college readiness, theme integration, writing across the curriculum, and culture building. Through two new honors classes, programs focusing on environmental awareness, the alignment of assessment and grading with key content and skill development, and an emphasis on increased student voice, the school maintains its commitment to sustain a supportive and collaborative community. As a result, students feel energized and prepared for life after high school. They describe the school as “progressing” and “comfortable”. Parents describe the school as “excellent” and consider that it is a privilege to be able to send their child to this school, which is preparing to graduate its first cohort of students this year.

Cohort teams, that include all teachers, participate in meaningful professional collaborations. They focus on uncovering effective instructional strategies by engaging staff in rich conversations around school data and student needs. School teams develop goals and action plans designed to positively affect teaching and learning. Teachers administer various types of assessments regularly and share the results with students and families using progress reports, report cards, and individual conferences. However, at present, the school does not use its database effectively to analyze the impact of interventions for targeted subgroups or track these students’ progress towards meeting their goals. In addition, differentiation of instruction based on available data is inconsistent across classrooms and, as a result, certain groups of students do not always perform at their best.

School leaders make effective organizational decisions, such as the strategic hiring of key staff and the implementation of crucial school initiatives, which positively affect the instructional program. The principal works collaboratively with the school community to regularly evaluate school practices and make necessary adjustments to ensure school success. However, teacher development does not include professional goals that align with school-wide goals and affect student outcomes. The school involves parents in conversations around improving scholarship and student attendance to ensure a smooth pathway to graduation. Parents also participate in school award ceremonies, campus-wide workshops and sit on the school leadership team. However, this engagement does not include opportunities to participate in decisions around teaching and learning.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School administrators make informed and effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school's work to support teaching and learning.
 - The principal hired another guidance counselor to focus on college advisement in response to analysis of college acceptance rates. As a result, there is a strong college advisement program leading to greater awareness of college opportunities, improved quality of college applications, and a widespread focus on college readiness.
 - Cohort teams meet twice a week as part of their professional assignment and have representation from the core content areas, a guidance counselor, and a special education teacher. This representative structure allows staff to collaborate about students in common, share successful strategies, and monitor progress. As a result, teachers assume greater accountability for students, who subsequently perform better, as noted by the improvement in scholarship.
- The principal and staff work as a unified team to create an extremely calm, respectful, and orderly environment for learning to take place.
 - The principal is responsive to student concerns raised through student government meetings, daily feedback from students, and the school's Learning Environment Survey. In response to a proposal by students to implement a uniform policy, the principal agreed to introduce a school shirt with a logo. Students strongly feel that they are a part of the decision-making process and value their relationship with school leaders.
 - Teachers conduct effective advisory sessions using the program, Overcoming Obstacles. Sessions occur two to three times a week and focus on school culture and preparing students to take ownership of their learning. As a result, students state they trust at least one adult in the school, feel encouraged by staff and love that teachers "remember them".
- Professional collaboration is a high priority and faculty profit from varied opportunities to share information and strengthen instruction.
 - The school's use of common planning time allows all teachers to work in cohort teams to support and monitor student progress and deepen their knowledge of practice through collaboration with colleagues across content areas. As a result, teachers say they feel like they belong to a "learning community" and value the opportunity to discuss student needs.
 - Teacher teams meet at least twice weekly to review assessment data, student work, and lesson plans. They engage in focused discussions around teacher practice, curriculum mapping, and the use of available resources. They then develop strategies, such as exit slips, KWL charts and interdisciplinary units that have improved classroom instruction.
- The school has very good communication systems for keeping students and parents fully informed of school activities and student progress.

- School staff engage parents and students in ongoing case conferencing to discuss student needs and identify school supports. The school also provides parents with progress reports six times a year, report cards three times a semester, and workshops on how to support students at home. As a result, parents feel better prepared to respond to their child's needs.
- The school's scheduling of multiple advisory sessions each week facilitates ongoing opportunities for student conferencing to discuss class progress, assessment data, and progress to graduation. Subsequently, are well aware of their individual progress related to passing a course and graduation requirements.
- School staff use collaborative, data-informed processes to plan and set school-wide goals to improve teaching and learning.
 - Collaborative efforts between the school leadership team and cohort teams enable a thorough review of data that results in a thoughtful Comprehensive Educational Plan that focuses the school's work well. Close attention to the key goals of college readiness, theme integration, writing across the curriculum, and culture building promotes better scholarship and staff-student relationships. The use of the Step-Up to Writing program has led to improvement in student writing on recent Regents exams.
 - Item skills analyses from periodic assessments and teacher anecdotes of classroom performance feed the development of school-wide goals, action plans, and implementation strategies. There is consequently transparency across the school and a focus on meeting student needs.
- The principal works collaboratively with staff to regularly evaluate and modify school practices to improve teaching and learning.
 - Cohort teams evaluated student progress data in order to adjust the instructional program. Teams noted a decline in course pass rates, but an increase in student success on Regents exams. As a result, the school revised grading policies to ensure alignment to State standards.
 - Assessment data revealed that ninth and tenth grade English language learners needed increased support. The school purchased the Rosetta Stone program and scheduled students for a ninth period class taught by an English as a second language teacher, supported by a bilingual paraprofessional. Preliminary data reveals an increase in both engagement and scholarship.

What the school needs to improve

- Promote greater consistency in the use of data to differentiate instruction so that all lessons are rigorous and engage students at their current achievement levels.
 - Teachers use team-developed processes to record, collect, and analyze student data to inform teaching and learning. They provide differentiated instruction using a variety of intervention strategies based on student performance. However, the level of differentiation varies across the school. As a result, not every student has their needs met.

- All teachers work in cohort teams to analyze data, develop strategies, and monitor student progress. However, the work of each team has not yet translated into high levels of engagement and rigor in every classroom. In one class, low-level questioning prompted the recall of unrelated facts. Consequently, student performance is inconsistent across the school.
- Create a database to enable staff to analyze the impact of interventions across subgroups over time and track their progress.
 - School staff use a data tool to track student progress to graduation and an individual student tracker to identify trends in student performance and appropriate supports. However, the progress of targeted subgroups does not always get the same attention. Consequently, limited understanding of longitudinal growth and trends for students such as English language learners inhibits timely interventions.
 - Cohort teams use assessment information and authentic student work in identifying instructional and curricular needs. However, although English language learners appear in data sweeps, other key subgroups remain anonymous. As a result, the performance of other potential subgroups does not affect decisions related to curriculum and instruction.
- Extend the level of parent engagement to include consistent opportunities for parents to participate in school decision-making.
 - Parents state that the school's focus is on college readiness and applaud the partnership with Brooklyn College and its focus on attendance. They welcome campus-wide workshops and information about school progress at parents' association meetings. However, most parents are not familiar with school goals and struggle to support the school with these initiatives.
 - Parents serve on the school leadership team and parents' association. The school includes them in decisions related to the dress code and in school activities. However, the school does not consistently engage parents in decisions related to activities connected to teaching and learning or provide supports to enable their active participation.
- Develop professional goals for teachers that align with school-wide goals and affect student achievement positively.
 - School leaders actively monitor the quality of instruction to ensure that it aligns to student needs and is standards-based. However, feedback to staff does not always include specific actions related to professional goals and next steps. As a result, the implementation of instructional strategies varies across the school.
 - School leaders provide a range of supports to teachers that include one-on-one conferencing, collaboration with New Visions and mentors for new teachers. However, school planning does not always include targeted professional development to support individual teachers' understanding and implementation of strategies and curriculum. As a result, not all teachers are adequately prepared to meet specific program goals.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Academy for Environmental Leadership	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		X		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?		X		
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			X	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed