

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Acorn Community High School

High School 499

**561 Grand Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11238**

Principal: Andrea Lewis

Dates of review: March 15 - 16, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Cheryll Jones

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Acorn Community High School is a high school with 740 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 82% Black, 14% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 78%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Learning “to better our lives in the future” is a common theme, which guides students’ thinking at Acorn Community High School. The school’s supports its vision to develop the leaders of tomorrow by goals that are concise, focused, and well targeted resulting in improved attendance and a high percentage of college acceptances. School leaders and faculty ably collect, analyze, and interpret a wide range of data enabling administration to effectively monitor and evaluate student progress in all subject areas as evidenced by increased credit accumulation. The data’s appropriate and successful use by the school community and inquiry teams allows for long- and short-term goal setting, especially for professional development, which is purposeful and explicit ensuring an acceleration of student progress. The school community acknowledges however, that it has not sufficiently engaged and informed all families about the expectations to support student learning. The administration is diligent in its use of budget and resources to support school-wide goals and accelerate student progress in positive instructional and achievement gains.

A broad standards-based curriculum effectively supports student needs with particular emphasis on college readiness, minority males, and special education. The quality of differentiation is well embedded in instructional practice and classrooms are well organized and highly reflective of school and department goals. Lessons actively engage students as evidenced by their participation and enthusiasm during classroom visits.

School leaders review student progress periodically resulting in adjustments in school-wide action plans. A review of January regents and Acuity data resulted in adjustments to the curriculum and the use of resources for the spring semester. Although administration carefully monitors and tracks plans and goals, the process for adjustment is inconsistent so students and families cannot contribute to the next learning steps.

Parents feel their children benefit from the “small atmosphere and environment”. However, the school does not maximize current partnerships and activities to promote the social-emotional and academic well-being of the entire student body so not all students feel “a part of the school community”.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's goals are concise, focused, and well targeted with a clear vision for the school's future.
 - o School leaders and faculty have identified and included literacy as a primary goal in the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan and the principal's performance review as a means to improving student achievement. There is a common focus on rigorous analysis and assessment in writing in all classes, which is resulting in an improvement in basic skills as measured by formative and Acuity assessments.
 - o The school's effective analysis of a wide-range data highlighted the need to better prepare its students for college. Advancement Via Individual Determination, a college prep program, and Culturally Responsive Exemplary Site Team, a program for Afro-American males, provides a structured instructional program and social-emotional support to help students. As a result, 16 out of 20 students have gained acceptance into college for September 2010.
- School leaders and faculty expertly collect and interpret a wide range of data so that they confidently and efficiently identify school needs.
 - o Effective use of class item analysis and mock Regents allow teachers and administrators to disaggregate and aggregate data by grade, class, English language learners, special education students, and the lowest third. Students attend three periods of Saturday school and receive a high level of remedial support resulting in an increase in credit accumulation for all grades each marking period.
 - o School leaders and counselors carefully scrutinize data relative to attendance, State and classroom assessments, and report card grades. They identified students performing in the lowest third that were not attending regularly and lacked sufficient credit accumulation to move with their cohort. Weekly meetings with students and monthly meeting with relevant staff provides a high level of tracking of student performance. As a result, students' attendance and achievement are improving.
- Staff and administration work cooperatively and collaboratively in teams using data and a variety of assessments to set short- and long-term goals and aligning professional development supportive of those goals.
 - o Each teacher has an individualized professional development plan that focuses on their instructional needs to improve student achievement as identified through classroom observations. A wide variety of opportunities allows teachers to learn about SMART goals, curriculum mapping, and differentiating instruction in order to address students' needs.
 - o Teachers from other departments observed a teacher of the advanced placement US history course in order to share best practices around the differentiation of instruction. Administrators then monitor teaching to see

that staff incorporate the newly learned strategies into lessons. This is successfully leading to improved teaching practice.

- Well-organized classrooms actively engage students and provide them with highly differentiated instruction.
 - Students in the collaborative team teaching English language arts class work independently completing a writing exercise around body paragraphs in order to prepare for the Regents. Teachers use highly specific comments for each student's work to guide them in their revisions to ensure each student receives well-matched support.
 - A literacy mini- lesson used song lyrics to present images of contrasting ideas to engage students around compare and contrast. Students, highly intrigued by the music, participated in a conversation around "what is and what is not worth fighting for". Students share their thoughts and formally write out their responses also referencing their present reading of *Catcher in the Rye*.
- The administration skillfully uses budget and resources to strengthen school-wide goals and accelerate student progress.
 - Levels 1 and 2 grade 9 students are block programmed with selected teachers who provide them with intensive academic support. Double periods of math and English enable teachers to recommend students needing tutoring and small group instruction. Consequently, students are more successful in improving their academic levels.
 - The principal hired assistant principals, guidance counselors, and math and literacy coaches, who are increasing school capacity to improve attendance, literacy, and math. Because of their efforts, the school is able to identify academic deficiencies quickly and students receive suitable academic and behavioral interventions.
- The school leaders effectively monitor and evaluate interim progress in all subject areas resulting in the periodic adjustment of school-wide goals and action plans.
 - The administration revised the grade 12 English language arts and earth science curriculum and is funding additional after school enrichment programs. This resulted from a mid-year review of achievement, attendance, and behavior data that indicated unsuccessful outcomes for some students and subgroups. Preliminary results show an improvement on classroom exams as well as a more positive learning environment.
 - Three times during the semester, teams and teachers correlate diagnostic data, identify student strengths and weaknesses, and share instructional strategies. The frequency of these meetings allows teachers to share best practices consistently including a refocus of the pre-writing phase of essay development in support of helping students prepare for the Regents. Teachers also share student portfolios showing evidence of major improvements in paragraph writing.
- The school provides a standards-based, broad, and varied curriculum, which it customized and aligned to school goals.

- o The school offers a wide range of classes, including advanced placement, the arts, career technical education and remedial courses, that are effective in engaging students on all academic levels. Students describe a US history class as “the most challenging work” and say that having to study has made them take school and classes more seriously. Although most students agree writing is “hard”, portfolio assessment in additional classes is improving their writing skills.
- o The school prioritizes preparing students for college and therefore partners with College Summit, a nation-wide program for underachieving students. Families and staff agree this rigorous coursework is responsible for the increase in college acceptances and scholarships. The cohort data indicates the highest number of college applications completed and SATs taken as of February 2010. So far, with the assistance of a newly hired college advisor, the school is recording over \$900,000 in scholarships.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen ways in which the school communicates its expectations to students and families so they know and can participate in the next learning steps.
 - o Although teachers regularly send progress report letters to parents, there is no information on what students need to know, how to improve, the next steps and when and how to contact the teacher. As a result, parents are limited in their ability to assist in the learning process and be partners in improving student achievement.
- Promote through current partnerships and activities the social-emotional and academic well-being of all students so they feel an integral part of the school community.
 - o The principal is adept at identifying and enlisting partnerships for the school and has been proactive in enlisting the support of community agencies. However, a majority of the school community does not participate in the activities and workshops. As a result, most students are not receiving the additional support to address their social and emotional needs and some do not feel a part of the school community.
- Refine and expand rubrics to assure school-wide consistency of evaluative practice, peer, and self-assessments so all students are able to articulate and evaluate their progress toward learning goals.
 - o Rubrics and graded work are evident in most classrooms. However, it is not yet evident how this translates into scholarship reports. Furthermore, the school’s introduction of goals for students has only started to allow students to self assess and reflect on their work. Therefore students and their families are not yet able to fully determine their progress and determine the next steps.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Acorn Community High School	△	➤	✓	+
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