

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Cultural Academy for the Arts & Sciences

High School 629

**5800 Tilden Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Diane Varano

Dates of review: November 16-17, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Kathleen Tuttle

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Cultural Academy for the Arts & Sciences is a high school with students from grade nine through grade ten. The school population comprises 82% Black, 15% Hispanic, 0.6% White, and 1.3% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 87%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal has created a professional learning community built on personalization for the students and adults which has created a respectful climate of mutual respect and trust, resulting in an all-inclusive supportive environment. Students are actively engaged in their learning, demonstrating a strong desire to succeed. The use of teacher and student time is clearly aligned to the school's instructional goals, as evidenced by the "Bright Promise" intervention program and weekly common planning time for teacher teams. This program is designed to help students with credit recovery so they will stay on track to graduate.

Professional development has led to distributive leadership among the staff as they engage in peer coaching to strengthen curriculum and lesson planning. All students take the "Kaleidoscope Learning Survey", which is designed to help teachers personalize the learning for students and reflects the school's belief about how people learn best. As yet, teachers have not realized the full potential of this survey by using it consistently to drive the development of academic education plans for students and the differentiation of instruction.

The principal is a strong, visionary leader. To realize her view of a school "where every student can have a program that meets their needs", she has established ongoing systems for monitoring teacher practice with a clear focus on improving instruction. Teachers receive extensive verbal and written feedback to support and develop best practice. Students are happy and engaged in their learning.

All teachers are involved in collaborative inquiry and these teams have multiple opportunities to effect changes in the school curriculum. Teacher leaders, who are building leadership capacity throughout the school, direct the teams. School-wide implementation of the vocabulary building strategy has increased students' awareness that they must increase their vocabulary to support their writing. However, student goal setting for targeted students has not reached consistency. Students are unclear of their next steps and ways to improve their work.

The school meets weekly to discuss multiple sources of data and student progress. Parents receive a report every three weeks that keeps them informed of student progress. However, the school does not communicate the school goals, course content, or provide workshops for parents to help them support their child's academic achievement further.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has created a supportive environment built on the foundation of personalization which is fostering a climate of mutual respect and trust.
 - The Learning Environment Survey and a survey conducted in the current fall show that 81% of students are comfortable in asking teachers for extra help. One student offered the remark, “I love my school, because the people are like parents, teachers are 100% supportive.”
 - The principal’s vision of “equal access for all students” is prevalent in all of her interactions with students and adults. Professional development is focused on teachers’ personalization of the learning for students to support high achievement. The good attendance rate and the large percentage of students attaining 10+ credits in their freshman year indicate students are invested in their education.
- The principal and staff make good use of school resources and work collaboratively to result in effective decision-making for teaching and learning.
 - The Bright Promise program supports students twice a week in areas of need that are determined by progress reports and report card cycles. Students at the higher end of the achievement range have an opportunity to be involved in a magazine distributed by the schools’ National Educational Partner (NEP).
 - “New Opportunities” has been developed to assist students with credit recovery. Both of these programs are considered to have contributed to the 83% score for students earning 10+ credits in the 1st year on the Progress Report.
- The school’s professional development plan includes multiple opportunities for teachers to develop their leadership qualities.
 - Knowing each child and personalizing the learning for students and adults drives the professional development at the school. The NEP spends one week a month at the school working with teachers around the use of the learning-styles survey each teacher and child takes when they enter the school. One math teacher explained, “The ‘Kaleidoscope Profile’ completely changed the way I approach my lessons.”
 - The administration and the teachers know each student by name, their personal backgrounds and the status of their academic progress. Students are happy and engaged in their learning. One student said, “I am a kinesthetic learner so my favorite class is math where we learn math by acting it out and drawing it.”
- The school has established effective systems for monitoring teaching practice with a clear focus on improving instructional practices.
 - The principal is a strong instructional leader who provides differentiated support for staff based on teachers’ next steps from formal and informal observations. Teachers are provided with an extensive feedback sheet,

based on classroom observations and personal goals. Informal observations follow up the next steps indicated in the post observation. One second-year teacher commented that during her first year of teaching the principal carved out an hour of her schedule weekly, to help her plan her lessons and discuss effective teaching strategies.

- Teachers attribute the collaborative planning and working relationships present in the school to the flexibility and willingness of the staff to participate in peer coaching. This is demonstrated by the English and math departments working together to plan integrated curriculum units of study, including peer feedback.
- Teachers across the school participate in collaborative inquiry and view this practice as integral to raising student achievement.
 - The school is working on a system-wide academic educational plan for each student. The “Bright Promise” classes support the Regents in the areas of mathematics, science and United States history. The school mathematics score of 77% passing was above the City horizon and 64% of students passed the history Regents.
 - Last year’s inquiry study, around vocabulary building, has influenced this year’s school focus on writing. During conversations with students, most expressed the goal of building their vocabulary to improve the details in their writing. Teachers of all content areas embed vocabulary building into their lesson plans, as a result of the inquiry work.
- Formative and informal information is analyzed weekly to identify trends in student progress and performance to inform the curriculum and instruction.
 - Within a six-week period, students receive a progress report half way through the cycle. The frequent reporting system keeps students and parents informed of how students are doing in their classes. Contact is made with parents by phone and invitation to come to school for a conference to discuss their child’s achievement.
 - The school meets weekly to review student work and discuss student needs. Decisions are made to change a student’s “Bright Promise” class, based on data. During these weekly meetings, student intervention plans are made and revised according to the data.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine action planning by developing long- and short-term academic goals so that each student’s progress can be measured, adjusted and success evaluated.
 - Currently there is no formal structure to set student goals and benchmarks with which to measure progress over time. Although adjustments are made along the way, by reviewing scholarship reports, there is no formal tracking system to discover trends within subgroups or establish performance indicators in need of improvement.
 - School leaders are still developing annual goal setting and evaluation processes. Presently, there are no benchmarks set during the year to check for progress on school goals. Without the interim indicators, it

makes it difficult to accurately alter the curriculum to match student progress.

- Improve the consistency of differentiation of instruction to meet students' needs and provide the appropriate challenge for all students at all achievement levels.
 - The learning-style profile indicates that 70% of the students are kinesthetic learners. The school currently lacks consistency in using the student surveys and profiles as a means to differentiate instruction for students.
 - Most lessons observed had one entry point for students, regardless of their need for differentiation. Presently, there are few content-area materials to support learners of varying ability. There is an inconsistency in student tasks designed towards the critical thinking levels of Blooms Taxonomy with many lesson tasks demanding only literal recall of information.
- Expand communication with parents to increase their capacity to assist in their child's learning and to enable them to track progress towards attaining goals.
 - Parents are not aware of school or student goals. The parent survey and the parent meeting indicated that parents would like to know what the content of their child's courses involve and what the class expectations are. Parents have yet to be introduced to ARIS parent link, leaving them with no independent way to track student progress or attendance over time.
 - Students report a reliance on teachers to know how they are doing in a subject area. Although some classes have designed rubrics, students have not yet made the correlation that rubrics are a tool for self-reflection. While students state it is important to do well in school, there is currently inconsistent emphasis on self-reflection.
- Establish consistency, and include students, in learning goals that are understood, explicit with next steps, and shared with parents.
 - While parents are in complete support of the school, they report wanting to be participants in the school decision-making. The lack of a parent coordinator leaves a void in leadership for family involvement including providing learning opportunities to prepare parents to support students with their schoolwork.
 - Teachers' written responses to student work do not reflect guiding comments and clear next steps. This has resulted in students' inability to articulate what they need to do to improve their work.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences	△	▷	✓	+
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