

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Academy for Conservation and the Environment

High School 637

**6565 Flatlands Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11236**

Principal: Michelle Ashkin

Dates of review: January 11-12, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Kim S. Outerbridge

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Academy for Conservation and the Environment is a high school with 133 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 75% Black, 17% Hispanic, 1% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 84.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The Academy for Conservation and the Environment (ACE) high school is in its second year of development. At full capacity, the school will house students from grades 9 through 12. The principal's strong commitment to building a professional learning community is reflected in the established partnerships and professional literature studied at the school level. The administrative team, along with teachers, has identified process goals to support the development of the school's culture, professional learning experiences, and student support services. The school is working collaboratively to design a curriculum that promotes academic success via habits of mind, as well as social and emotional growth. However, this model is still developing as implementation occurs. Additionally, the school does not yet have clear linkages between observation protocols and targeted improvements for teachers regarding their content and/or pedagogical practices. A newly designed student advisory program enables staff to address effectively the needs of students. School-wide initiatives and partnerships are increasing student support services and parent communication.

Through professional learning experiences, teachers are engaged in understanding the development and use of formative assessments. Baseline data and interim assessment information is regularly captured. This data system allows staff to identify areas of need for whole grades and sub-groups but analysis leading to goal-setting and action planning for targeted groups or individuals is not yet embedded. Additionally, while teacher teams are engaged in a collaborative inquiry process that yields some revision of curriculum, assessments and instructional approaches, the teams are not yet adequately establishing and monitoring progress towards goals or evaluating the success of their efforts.

At present, school-wide goals are verified qualitatively; the lack of quantitative targets and benchmarks hinders the monitoring of outcomes for the school and subgroups of students. This limits the school's ability to make suitable and timely adjustments.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The administrative team, along with teachers, aligns the curriculum to State standards with an emphasis on building critical thinking skills based on the needs of the students.
 - Teachers design thematic units of study embedding essential questions within each module. In classrooms, teachers display inquiry-based questions and objectives in order to promote student thinking. As a result, students are able to articulate class topics and foci. Most classroom teachers pose questions that require students to use higher-order thinking skills. Students speak about teachers helping them to “think outside of the box”. In this way, the school is building capacity while challenging students with multi-layered questions.
 - This year’s focus on school reform, curriculum development, and student achievement lays the foundation for the school’s yearlong study. Extracting key selections from *Habits of Mind* staff engage in text-based discussions with an emphasis on question posing. The administrative team consistently promotes school-wide implementation of this practice. Use of other professional texts, school visitations and school-wide retreats also assist school leaders and staff with identifying instructional strategies in order to stimulate a variety of learners.
- School leaders organize structures that align with overarching school goals so that students’ needs are met.
 - Budgetary allocations include the purchase of support from an outside instructional organization in order to meet the school-wide instructional goals. Equipped with a robust agenda, this partner supports the administrative team and pedagogical staff members to build capacity. This has resulted in regularly scheduled meetings of the principal, coach, and teacher teams, twice weekly. Outcomes include developing effective lesson plans, assessment analysis, and rubric development, all of which align to the school’s goals.
- Staff share and articulate a common vision and work with small groups of students to provide them with academic and social-emotional supports.
 - The advisory program dedicates time for students to develop their character, build relationships with adults and each other, and to hear about overall class performance. Although the advisory program is a new model for the school, students articulate how their academic and personal growth continues to improve and how their relationships with the adults in the building are developing because of the advisory curriculum. Small group interactions give each advisor an opportunity to work with and develop a detailed profile of individual students.
- The school collects and analyzes data relative to student outcomes in order to determine strengths and areas of need.
 - The school analyzes data from a Design Your Own (DYO) model of interim assessments that are aligned to State standards. Staff members meet regularly to review data from baseline assessment and DYO data in writing and math and use strand reports to share results for all students and subgroup populations. As a result, they identified a school-wide focus of note taking and math reasoning. Instructional staff developed teacher-made quizzes and tests that

clearly align to the instructional program and as a result, overall student outcomes show improvements.

- Youth development organizations along with in-house initiatives successfully provide the staff with strategies to broaden relationships with students and families and to support students' needs.
 - o Automated calls, progress reports, report cards, parent-teacher conferences, and an open-door policy provide parents with relevant and up-to-date facts regarding absences, lateness, discipline, and academic outcomes. Parents correspond with the principal and teachers via email and telephone, which allows for direct responses to high-priority inquiries. The school's website also serves as a tool to communicate with all constituent groups. As a result, teachers feel supported and students express improved relationships with their teachers.
 - o Consultants work with teachers and guidance counselors in order to design, assess, and revise internal youth development programs. Teachers collaboratively developed a progressive discipline model that students agree have set up needed rules and regulations that are improving school and classroom tone.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the practice of teachers working together to set goals for students they share, implement classroom strategies, and evaluate their success in improving student achievement.
 - o Teacher teams are gaining fluency in the process of examining student data and work to improve teacher practice. Led by a school leader or outside consultant, teachers use team meetings to interpret data, look at rubrics and authentic student work, and assess student learning. However, similar to the whole staff meetings to case conference on specific students, teams are not yet able to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts and therefore continue a cycle of adjustments to better suit the needs of more learners.
- Refine the systems for using the results of data analysis of relevant subgroup performance and progress so that a focus on learning supplants a focus on student work completion and compliance. .
 - o An array of data is collected and analyzed by the school, especially areas such as English, math, and student behavior and discipline issues. More attention needs to be paid to this data at the classroom level so as to focus all students, including special education students and inconsistent attenders, on the college and career ready aspirations the school has for them.
- Improve staff supervision and support systems so that teachers receive feedback and professional learning opportunities that target their specific areas for development. .
 - o Pedagogical evaluations do not consistently reflect clear linkages between the observation protocol and its use to improve teaching practices. Feedback to individual teachers is not yet targeted as a means to improve their identified area of growth.

- o The school is developing a staff-wide instructional initiative to serve as a foundation for the teaching and learning of higher order thinking skills. However, school leaders and faculty have not yet gone through a cycle in which implementation of specific strategies are tracked and measured, therefore limiting the ability to measure the impact of these efforts.
- Ensure the achievement of short- and long-term goals for targeted groups by including timelines, benchmarks, and measurable indicators.
 - o School-wide goals for student subgroups lack quantitative measures and specificity regarding timelines and benchmarks. As a result, progress monitoring is not a system-wide practice.
 - o Teacher teams may refer to student assessments to identify student performance. However, teams and individual teachers do not articulate a common practice that explains how assessment results are used to set clear goals and plans for next steps for students most in need of additional support.
- Establish a transparent system for measuring progress and making yearlong and year-to year adjustments in school initiatives.
 - o Although the school establishes long- and short-term goals, school-wide action plans do not include interim evaluations of practice as necessary. In conversations with school leaders and staff, it was not apparent that systems for measuring progress towards interim goals or addressing areas for improvement have been developed. This also inhibits the input of school constituents to assist school leaders in identifying practices that need adjustments.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Academy for Conservation and Environment	△	▷	✓	+
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