

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Aspirations Diploma Plus

High School 646

**1495 Herkimer Street
Brooklyn
NY 11233**

Principal: Matt Molloy

Dates of review: December 7 - 8, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Veronica Yurcik

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Aspirations Diploma Plus is a high school with 271 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 79% Black, 21% Hispanic, and less than 1% White and American Indian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 62.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

Aspirations Diploma Plus, a transfer high school serving over-age and under credited students, opened last year in a renovated factory building that it shares with another high school. Supported by its community-based partner, The Child Center of New York, Aspirations effectively conveys expectations and influences its students to recognize their potential and to work towards graduation and college. Students voice deep appreciation for the school's caring staff and acknowledge that the schools' strong expectations enable them to change their behavior and achieve academically. As one student describes, "This is the window that you open to let the fresh air in." Students credit the school with thinking "outside the box" and are grateful for community internships, health services, and academic support offered through the school's successful collaboration with community-based partners to promote their social-emotional and academic well-being.

The staff analyze trimester data thoughtfully to place students in classes well matched to their abilities so as to maximize success. Teachers work diligently to align curriculum with key standards to ensure that students learn skills necessary for academic achievement. They carefully monitor student progress through standards-based tracking tools and strategically adjust teaching in subsequent units to support skills that need further reinforcement.

The school focuses on building community, integrating thinking skills into the curriculum and analyzing data to inform instruction. However, it does not have a written action plan delineating long-term and interim academic benchmark goals or a professional development plan. This negatively affects the establishment of coherent school-wide efforts and accurate assessment of on-going capacity building. Lack of common periodic assessments limits the school's ability to identify common trends across subjects and sub-groups. Structures to disaggregate data are not sufficient to provide a clear picture of longitudinal progress. Thus, key information for identifying students' needs and for assessing the effectiveness of classroom, curricular and organizational decisions is not always accessible. Frequently, scheduled professional periods enable teacher teams to study and improve their craft, but expectations for meetings are not well defined and teachers do not receive adequate support in inquiry and data analysis skills. Teachers do acknowledge that the principal has empowered them by placing "a tremendous amount of faith" in them. They state that this year's emphasis on pedagogy and close tracking of students has made a positive difference in their teaching.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Purposeful decisions to infuse thinking skills within instruction and align curriculum to key standards help ensure that students have access to a differentiated curriculum that engages and challenges them.
 - Teachers attentively assess students' abilities and strategically plan instruction to ensure that students learn key skills for success on Regents exams, resulting in increased pass rates.
 - Advanced and remedial courses successfully engage students by meeting their specific needs. Students describe an advanced geometry course as "hard" and express pride in mastering the challenging curriculum. Students who find math challenging have experienced success after taking a basic math-reasoning course.
- The school communicates clear expectations that result in students and their families developing positive attitudes and making personal investments in themselves and their school.
 - Teachers engage students effectively and promote accountability through explicit communication. Detailed course outlines elaborating specific academic and behavioral expectations set standards for performance. Students say that their teachers let them know what they need to do to succeed academically and that they "inspire" them. They state that their principal helps them realize they can have a better life.
 - Frequent interaction between the school, students, and parents successfully reinforces expectations. Students express appreciation that teachers make themselves available during lunch and non-school hours; that staff members call them directly when they are absent; and that teachers listen to them and change instruction when they do not understand. Parents indicate that counselors and teachers maintain weekly contact and seek their input in helping their children.
- The school collaborates very successfully with community-based organizations to integrate youth development services that support and accelerate students' academic and personal growth.
 - Semi-weekly advisories run by community-based advocate counselors, teamed with school staff, influence students positively. Students state that "advisory is fun," that meetings "broaden their horizons," and help them understand "what to improve." As a result, they are more confident and motivated to succeed academically.
 - The principal is proactive and effectively establishes liaisons to support students' physical, mental, and social-emotional welfare. Students receive free confidential health screening and care, and participate in after-school recreation activities to earn needed physical education credits. Students with children take advantage of an on-site day care center and benefit from school supported parent-child trips.

- Administrators and teachers evaluate instructional and organizational decisions thoughtfully, making adjustments in response to student learning needs as a result.
 - The principal hired an outside consultant since each advisory group's independent decision-making was not contributing to school-wide coherence. New protocols resulted in improved student behavior, and the principal describes "a complete turn-around in school culture."
 - Teachers retool subject-specific tracking tools skillfully, aligning them to key standards. As a result, they now make informed decisions as to what skills need reinforcement in future instructional units and what units need revised teaching methodology.
- The principal makes positive organizational decisions that support school initiatives.
 - Administration and teachers review student data at the end of each trimester to place students in new classes by skill level rather than by earned grades alone, thereby maximizing chances for student success.
 - The school purchased Power Schools software so that advocate counselors have ready access to student attendance and scholastic data to support students' academic achievement.

What the school needs to improve

- Consistently examine student achievement data to identify trends and sub-group needs in order to apply strategic curricular and instructional adjustments across classrooms.
 - Teachers analyze results of exams, diagnostic assessments, and projects to determine instructional objectives, but do not analyze authentic work samples. This limits in-depth understanding of strengths and specific sub-skill needs, compromising the potential implementation of targeted strategies across content areas.
 - The school does not administer the Department of Education periodic assessments. The lack of common assessments prevents accurate identification of trends and sub-group needs to determine strategic, differentiated interventions school-wide.
- Engage in long-term planning and develop focused goals, within specific action plans, so that the school community fully understands and supports interim and long-term goals and the systems for measuring progress.
 - Teachers identify community building, thinking skills, and data analysis as important school priorities. However, the school does not have a Comprehensive Educational Plan. Therefore, there are no clearly delineated on-going plans for academic, professional, or community outreach to establish coherent effort and concurrent measurement of success.

- The administration does not post attendance goals or track school-wide attendance figures as a motivational tool. Attendance rates do not indicate any significant improvement from last year.
- Create a professional development plan that includes differentiated support and on-going feedback to promote teachers' continual growth to elevate school-wide instructional practices.
 - Teachers rely on consultant coaches periodic feedback to evaluate their skills. Since there is no formal professional development plan, emerging needs take precedence over the school's core thinking skills initiative and weaken the development of a strong, common, instructional focus school-wide. A consultant literacy coach provides the primary professional support. However, since the major learning sessions occur after school, not all teachers are able to participate and benefit.
 - The principal assigns teachers as mentor partners but does not outline written expectations or supervise mentor relationships resulting in uneven implementation and accountability. This weakens the potential positive impact on instruction and the accurate identification of professional learning needs.
- Ensure that structures are in place to evaluate effectiveness of data organization and sharing to increase school-wide coherence of practices.
 - The school collects a variety of information but does not have sufficient systems to make data easily accessible. Thus, limited understanding of longitudinal growth and trends interferes with timely intervention. For example, disaggregated Regents results indicate performance within exam sections, but there is no quick way to compare students' growth over time or identify school-wide academic trends.
 - The school switched software in order to create a more detailed progress report that includes attendance and next learning steps. However, this year's progress report remains unchanged and includes nothing apart from grades.
- Support and monitor teacher teams to ensure that structured collaboration and inquiry work result in shared leadership and the implementation of instructional adjustments aimed at improving learning outcomes.
 - Daily scheduled teacher professional periods have no set meeting protocols, attendance, or reporting requirements. While teachers do use the time to consult with colleagues across subject areas, the lack of formal training and structure lessens teachers' accountability and opportunities for professional growth.
 - The school's newly formed inquiry team is not receiving training in inquiry or in the use of data tools such as ARIS to help them begin their inquiry study effectively. As a result, their study topic focuses on demographic and socio-economic issues instead of assessment, student work, and instruction.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Aspirations Diploma Plus 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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed