

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**Academy for Social Action: A College Board School**

**Middle-High School 367**

**509 West 129<sup>th</sup> street  
New York  
NY 10027**

**Principal: Crystal Simmons**

**Dates of review: April 12 - 13, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Nancy Birson**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Academy for Social Action is a middle-high school with 396 students from grade 6 through grade 11. The school population comprises 62% Black, 37% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 18% 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 91.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.**

The principal at the Academy for Social Action demonstrates a high level of commitment and dedication to the school. Her work in setting a positive tone is evident as staff and students warmly greet and thank visitors for coming to their school. The school maintains good relationships with parents and they, in turn, give the principal much credit for the atmosphere of cordiality and respect. The principal recognizes the need to address academic issues at the school. Review of data has led her to state that “we are in the intensive care unit” and prompted a change in the school’s support organization. The school has embarked on a variety of change strategies; one being curriculum mapping through an online system. Teachers upload maps and lessons to this computerized program. However, due to its recent implementation, there is still not systematic monitoring, evaluation and review of curriculum plans to ensure the effective implementation of each subject for the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Specific learning objectives are outlined by all teachers in the school-wide expectation for Blackboard Configuration, wherein the learning objective is written in a prescribed manner for students. While this practice engages students, they have yet to understand how these learning objectives apply to their success with the task, or to clear next steps for improvement. The school asks students to set SMART goals, however, these chiefly reflect behavioral goals such as “work hard”, “ask for help” or “work on my short and long response answers to do better on tests”. Feedback from teachers on these goals, when present, is limited to these areas and does not yet identify precise detail so that students know exactly what they need to do next to improve.

The administration expects and stresses that effective teaching requires a variety of teaching methodologies such as whole class teaching, group work and paired work. However, current differentiated teaching procedures and classroom tasks lack alignment with students’ academic needs. Teachers, students, and parents articulate that high achievers assist other students in the course of a lesson which does not serve to take their learning forward quickly enough. Although school goals are in place, present monitoring and evaluation strategies do not yet provide the specific information required to enable administrators and staff to make timely adjustments to curriculum programs, interventions or instructional practices.

The school’s ethos is clearly articulated and is effectively communicated to the school community by means of the school website. Through the online grading system, parents are informed of assignments their children need to complete before the next marking period. Parents appreciate this online communication so they can encourage their child to make up work and track their work with credit accumulation in the high school grades.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal makes informed and effective organizational decisions to support improvements in learning.
  - The school's internal capacity for internet access is compromised as a result of sharing the campus with four other schools. As a result, the principal purchased laptops for every teacher thus ensuring on-demand access to the curriculum mapping website and student data resources such as ARIS and the online grading system.
  - Regularly scheduled grade team meetings provide teachers with time to meet and discuss student outcomes in response to achieving the school's instructional goals. This has resulted in instructional changes in one grade, where students are asked to utilize a 4-part strategic approach when responding to prompts or assignments.
- Parents are key partners in their children's education and are kept well informed of school programs and their children's overall needs.
  - The school's outreach to parents has resulted in the offering of workshops, for example, those geared to college readiness. The online grading program allows parents access to information such as missing assignments and student scores on recent teacher-made assessments in the content areas. Parents are aware of their children's needs and are able to work with their children to make up work and stay on track towards credit accumulation in the high school grades.
- Professional collaboration is a high priority and staff benefit from varied opportunities to share and develop strengths.
  - The school's high priority this year for teacher collaboration has resulted in opportunities to attend professional development around key school goals. This has focused the teacher discussions at inquiry and grade meetings around teacher practice and has promoted growth for staff as individuals and members of the teaching community.
- The school's systems and partnerships are supportive to students and promote their personal growth and academic development.
  - The school's decisions regarding gender-based advisory sessions, and advisory portfolios for all students has led to staff's study of research on college readiness. This study has better prepared teachers to assist students around the indicators for college knowledge as well as hosting monthly trips to colleges and universities. Students speak enthusiastically about their college plans and readily mentor lower grade students.
  - The respectful and collaborative atmosphere that is encouraged by the principal is supported through the school's mentor program and service projects both on and off-site for the community. Parents are especially appreciative of the positive shift in the school culture. They credit the

principal for her “old school values” in setting a tone of mutual respect in the school.

- The principal uses a wide range of data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of organizational decisions, professional development supports and deployment of staff, and makes adjustments as necessary.
  - The administration recognizes the need for focused professional development. The principal aims to maintain a collaborative and reflective culture by providing differentiated learning opportunities that meet the professional needs of teachers. Teacher-led workshops serve as an impetus to teacher involvement in professional development, resulting in distributive leadership.
  - The principal and the core inquiry team utilize learning logs to stay abreast of teacher teams’ priorities and discussions. This has enabled continued collaboration around the school-wide focus of writing across all teams, and the sharing of findings by teams. This has led to replication of promising instructional practices such as “point, evidence, example”, which is a method for elaboration in writing.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Ensure coherence and alignment in the school’s curriculum by emphasizing key state standards to match the needs of students, and to ensure that all students make progress in their learning.
  - The school has newly adopted an online curriculum mapping program that teachers utilize to upload maps, lessons and unit plans. However, key standards are not reviewed, and there is a disconnect between student outcomes and the curriculum. Although the curriculum is individually developed through a variety of sources, the vertical alignment from grade to grade is insufficient, leading to lack of understanding of instructional expectations.
  - Coaches in mathematics and literacy are presently working with teachers on task/rubric/exemplar models in order to emphasize rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills for a variety of learners. The school recognizes this is not fully aligned, especially in the secondary grades, leading to inconsistent application across all grade levels.
- Develop a cohesive system to ensure that all teachers know their individual students’ needs and strengths, on an ongoing basis, to support targeted instruction at the classroom level.
  - Assessments are loosely aligned to the curricula. This leads to comments such as “I’m not sure if these are the standards tied to this unit” or, “students will speak up if they get it and explain to the rest of the class”. As a result, evaluation of the effectiveness of classroom level, curricular and instructional decisions’ is limited. Practices such as re-teaching for whole classes, and expecting students who have mastered the content to help the students who have yet to achieve mastery are fairly consistent across classes. This means that students, particularly the high achievers, are not all progressing as rapidly as they could.

- The school administration has expectations for exit slips and written feedback as part of the school-wide goal for differentiation. These assessments are to inform instruction for upcoming lessons. Many of these assessments are incomplete, some blank, others missing. Lesson planning for targeted, differentiated instruction based on this timely data is not yet embedded practice across the school.
- Provide consistent feedback to students with detailed reasons for their success and clear next steps for improvement to deepen their understanding and achievement of SMART goals.
  - The school's practice of students setting their SMART goals has provided them with insight into understanding their progress towards meeting these goals. However, this practice has yet to include specific academic goals for each content area. As a result, students can not yet articulate their precise next steps for improvement in each subject, and are not provided with teacher feedback about how to move forward consistently in their learning. This means that student ownership of their learning is restricted.
- Refine the collaborative approach to include all subjects to help in setting measurable and differentiated student improvement goals to raise student achievement.
  - The school sets annual goals for student sub-groups. These are recognized by teacher teams and individual teachers; however, interim and differentiated goals are not identified to support these long-term goals. As a result, class profiles and next steps' synopsis sheets generally speak to "more practice and review" rather than providing precise identification of sub-group learning needs. This means that differentiated student grouping and instructional strategy cannot be easily addressed in teachers' planning to meet these needs.
- Refine action planning by developing interim goals and benchmarks for all plans so that progress can be measured, readjustments made and success evaluated.
  - The school has determined the need for improvement and has implemented numerous plans such as professional collaboration on writing, data use and supports for struggling students. Not all plans receive follow-through and interim checks based on short-term goals. The school's focus on writing across the content areas is visually demonstrated in a pie chart outside the general office. The inclusion of writing in a teacher's unit plan is tabulated via the curriculum mapping website. However, interim goals are not yet set for this school-wide goal, resulting in widely varying degrees of implementation across the content areas and a lack of opportunity for administrators to monitor ongoing progress to make timely adjustments.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Academy for Social Action	Δ	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score		X		
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	▷	✓	+
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		
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	▷	✓	+
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		

<b>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.</b>							
<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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>							
		X					
<b>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.</b>							
<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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>							
			X				
<b>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.</b>							
<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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>							
		X					
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>