

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

The Academy of American Studies

High School 575

**28-04 41st Avenue
Queens
NY 11101**

Principal: Ellen Sherman

Dates of review: May 5 - 6, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Philip Composto

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Academy for American Studies is a high school with 689 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 8% Black, 33% Hispanic, 29% White, and 30% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 94.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Academy of American Studies is a positive learning environment with high expectations for students' personal and academic success. As a result, students are interested in their learning and want to succeed. Students are very articulate about their aims and plans to go to college. The principal and assistant principals, through their strong and effective leadership, ensure that the school community shares the clear vision for the future of the school and a spirit of collaboration infuses the staff, students and parents.

The curriculum aligns to State standards and provides opportunities for students to accelerate progress by taking advanced placement and honors courses. In addition, students highly value the arts and extra curriculum programs that the school offers.

Teachers collaboratively and effectively analyze data and use it to identify and monitor student's strengths and areas of challenge. Consequently, teachers use data to plan and consider the differentiation of instruction for students of varying performance levels. While differentiation has been a topic of professional development, its implementation has not been actualized in every classroom.

School leaders and teachers work collaboratively to develop specific and measurable goals to drive improvement in the school. These school improvement goals are clearly communicated and well understood by all members of the school community. However, formalized practices to evaluate the success of improvement plans are not fully embedded across all subjects. This makes it difficult for the school to monitor progress towards its goals. Teachers engage students in reciprocal and ongoing discussions regarding their progress. However, a system to evaluate student work and notebooks and written assignments is not consistent across all grades. Therefore, feedback does not always offer clear next learning steps to guide all students in their learning or fully involve families in improving student outcomes. The literacy coach and outside partners provide professional development to improve instructional practice. However, the absence of a written professional development plan hinders the establishment of coherent school-wide efforts and accurate assessment of on-going capacity building.

The school makes very good use of external partners, particularly, to assist staff, students and their families. The parents are exceptionally loyal supporters of the school, who acknowledge and value the education their children are receiving. Parents feel engaged with their children's education through high levels of communication. One parent stated, "The staff wants you here. They know my child well." Another parent stated, "The teachers make an effort to inform you about your child's progress."

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Parents are key partners in their children's education and are kept well informed of school programs and their children's needs.
 - Parents appreciate that each month they are informed about special events and how they can support their children at home through the school's monthly newsletter. In addition, parents value the Daedalus on-line computer system, which allows them to view their children's progress and communicate with the teachers. Consequently, parents feel well informed about their children's behavior, academic performance, and attendance. Moreover, parents know how to support the high expectations of the school.
 - The school provides a variety of parental involvement activities that fully support parents as key partners in their children's education. The school's website, monthly newsletters and translations, facilitate their participation and involvement in school decision making to accelerate student learning. This results in a shared commitment in accomplishing the school's goals.
- Relationships among students, teachers and school leaders are warm and respectful, resulting in an environment that is conducive to learning and supports the growth of students and adults.
 - Administrators use data effectively from last year's Learning Environment Survey to guide this year's improvements. For example, regular communication through e-mail and "Teacher's Notes" bulletins ensure that all staff members keep abreast of school developments and have the opportunity to communicate with school leaders and other staff.
 - The vast majority of students is interested, consistently engaged in learning, and indicates the desire to succeed. Their collective voice authentically influences school-wide decisions through the School leadership team and the Principal's Consultation Council. One example of this dynamic is that students have begun and sustained a recycling program to support their "going green" vision.
- School leaders and teachers align curricula to key standards and offer a wide range of positive learning experiences that fully engage and support student learning.
 - The school offers a comprehensive and greatly rigorous curriculum, which offers students challenging courses, including advanced placement in calculus, English, and European history; honors classes; journalism; and arts classes in piano, playwriting and acting. Moreover, the school community strongly encourages service learning as a critical component for adolescent development. The school's club activities include The College Discovery Club, Cultural Culinary Club, Debate Team, Eco Club and the National Honor Society. Consequently, a large number of graduating students are well prepared when accepted into college, and in addition, students are highly motivated as they develop strong leadership skills while putting their efforts and energy into good deeds.

- The school collaborates very successfully with community-based organizations to integrate youth development services that support and accelerate students' academic and personal growth.
 - The school's strongest partner is the Gilder Lehman Institute of American History. The Institute provides financial support for extensive trips program and a variety of professional development opportunities, including summer seminars and monthly lectures by prominent historians for both students and staff. The Institute funds a Saturday Academy, providing students with enrichment opportunities in American History. In addition, they have established an American History Research Center, providing students access to primary documents. This support leads to the positive development of student's personal and academic growth.
 - Students and parents are involved in the arts through the theater program. Two showcases are presented annually that parents are invited to attend. In the fall, students from the acting class perform monologues that are written and directed by their peers in the playwriting class. In the spring, parents are invited to a more formal showcase during which the actors' scenes were written and directed by playwrights. Consequently, these experiences boost student's self-esteem and promote their social emotional learning.
- The school diligently uses a data tool to analyze a range of data that informs decisions about groupings of students and facilitates the identification of trends in student achievement.
 - Daedalus is a computer system that assists all constituencies efficiently with data usage. Noteworthy uses of Daedalus for teachers include monitoring report cards and transcripts, tracking attendance, looking at student schedules, writing progress reports, emailing students and parents, and generating letters to parents in their native language. Accordingly, school leaders and teachers use this tool to create clear pictures of groups and individual students and in providing these with lucid next learning steps.
- The school uses effective systems to review and modify curricular, instructional and organizational practices that improve student learning.
 - As a result of an item analysis of the Regents data, the social studies department shifted the American History topics from 11th to the 10th grade, better aligning them to the English curriculum. Consequently, Regents' scores have shown increased student outcomes that exceed the State standard.
 - The English department's collaborative team regularly reviews their curriculum and creates a map aligned to the State Standards. The map includes essential questions, themes, learning goals, skills, assessment and the standards covered by each teacher. Throughout the year, the teacher teams review and revise their maps during monthly departmental meetings. This year, the English department shared their maps with the rest of the staff. As a result, all departments assess and fine-tune curricular and instructional practice on a monthly basis, to meet the needs of all students.

What the school needs to improve

- Create a professional development plan that includes differentiated support and on-going feedback that promotes teachers' continual growth to elevate school-wide instructional practices.
 - The literacy coach provides the primary professional support. 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.
As a result, school-wide instructional practices and capacity building to improve learning is not rigorous.
- Strengthen teacher's responses to all student work to reflect guiding comments and level of performance so that these convey clear next learning steps to students.
 - Student work is available in well-organized notebooks in addition to the project displays throughout the rooms and is used to celebrate students' best efforts and to inform instruction. However, not all student work includes targeting improvements for students to assess their progress across all subjects and grades. As a result, the teachers do not consistently provide students and families with next learning steps to guide improvements in student learning.
- Improve action planning by developing interim goals and benchmarks for all plans so that the school can continually achieve, measure and evaluate student progress.
 - The school uses an annual planning process in which grade teams and individual teachers establish long-term goals for students. Additionally, the school monitors the performance of students at the end of each marking period. However, formalized practices to determine the progress of improvement plans towards interim goals are not fully embedded across all subjects. This limits the school's ability to monitor progress consistently in reaching goals for all student subgroups across all subject areas.
- Increase consistency in differentiating instruction and learning activities based on formative and summative data so that all lessons constantly challenge students at their level and maximize their learning.
 - The school utilizes data to plan lessons and deliver instruction in response to students' performance level or skill mastery, and teachers differentiate instruction in some classes. However, this is not yet an embedded practice across all subjects and grades. As a result, some students, particularly high performers, are not fully challenged, and their individual learning needs are not consistently addressed.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Academy of American Studies	△	▶	✓	+
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