

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**It Takes A Village Academy**

**18K563**

**5800 Tilden Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11203**

**Principal: Marina Vinitskaya**

**Dates of review: January 10-11, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Dr. Tarika Barrett**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

It Takes A Village Academy is a high school with 388 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 93% Black, 5% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 42% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 90.5%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is well developed.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Across classrooms, teacher practice reflects a shared notion of the efficacy of differentiated materials, purposeful student groupings and guided practice as key levers for increasing student achievement. (1.2)
  - The school has placed significant emphasis on ensuring that instruction, classroom materials, and student activities are differentiated to provide every student with access to the curriculum. Students engage in targeted skill development through consistent group work such as jigsaws, and the pervasive use of rubrics that allow for a shared understanding of high quality student work products. Classroom visits saw students working collaboratively to identify and share main idea, recognize arguments and counterarguments and use mathematical language to demonstrate an understanding of congruence, among other skills. Students, teachers and school leaders expressed that group work was an important vehicle for increasing academic vocabulary, the quality of student writing and critical thinking. Additionally, refining differentiation practices played a core role in teacher team discussions as the school moved forward with its Common Core Learning Standards pilots in English Language Arts and math. Student participation in learning style inventory activities, coupled with consistent student performance data analysis, allows teachers to develop student goals and shape student groupings that are revisited every two weeks.
  - Students are assigned readings based on skill level. Questions teachers posed in classrooms consistently directed students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate, leading to collaborative student participation at high cognitive levels. In several classrooms, teachers directed students to try their hand at more challenging problems, consistently pushing students to work on more rigorous tasks leading to high pass rates on Regents exams. The 2010-11 pass rate for English Language Arts was 88% with 17% of students receiving scores above 85%. Overall, students graduated at the school at a rate of 91% with 53% of those students being English language learners. In addition, 33% of all diplomas granted were Advanced Regents.
- The principal's strategic allocation of resources maximizes opportunities for deep professional collaboration resulting in elevated teacher practice and increased student support and performance. (1.3)
  - Through the selection of individuals who possess dual-licenses and/or special education extensions, the principal has been able to better meet the learning needs of her large English language learner population. Programmatically, English language learner and special education students typically benefit from having two teachers support them in classroom instruction resulting in high levels of credit accumulation. Additionally, the principal's regular analysis of student data results in structured collaborative time between English as a Second Language and content area teachers, and targeted outside coach support in order to ensure that this instruction is effective. In 2010-11, more than 90% of English language learner students at the school received at least ten credits.

- Scheduling at the school is carefully structured to provide teachers frequent opportunities to collaborate with peers. Common planning happens three times per week at the grade and department levels, facilitating robust work on piloting Common Core Learning Standards tasks and the regular analysis of student performance. The result of these efforts has been improved pedagogy, greater student exposure to informational texts, and regular practice with argumentative writing, with high volume in student writing evident across the school.
- The school has developed highly effective practices that engage families in an ongoing and reciprocal dialogue regarding student performance and high academic expectations, resulting in a shared commitment to student progress. (2.4)
  - Parents were effusive in their praise of the efforts of the leadership team and school staff in fostering a culture characterized by a laser-like focus on college readiness and access. Parents described communication with the school as “constant” and the climate as one defined by “an open door policy.” Reciprocal dialogue with parents via PupilPath (the online communication system the school has established), phone calls, letters and email has resulted in high levels of parent involvement. Approximately 70% of parents use PupilPath. Parent participation at meetings (including curriculum overview and parent-teacher conferences) averaged 67% for the 2011-12 school year. Common Core Learning Standards student performance tasks were communicated to parents during curriculum meetings, one-on-one teacher meetings and through letters sent directly to students’ homes. Furthermore, parents felt that they were acutely aware of students’ academic and behavioral learning needs and next steps through support and access to student data, regular progress reports, and ongoing discussion with classroom teachers; parents have multiple opportunities to work in tandem with school staff to support their children academically.
- A coherent and consistent focus on college and career readiness has shaped short and long-term student achievement goals refined by ongoing data analysis and reflection to maintain their relevance. (3.1)
  - The school’s commitment to ensuring that students are prepared for college and career is evident in school goals and widely understood by students, families and teachers. Having students attain postsecondary readiness is articulated in long-term and annual goals and is communicated in the school’s Comprehensive Education Plan. From 9th grade entrance to the summer bridge program, students begin a program of study that sees them largely completing their required Regents examinations by the 11th grade in order to be eligible for an Advanced Regents Diploma. College Now classes at the school begin in the 9th grade, and students in the 2010-11 graduating cohort, for example, earned between 6 and 15 college credits. Student data is regularly analyzed to inform skill development and acceleration efforts, yielding strong results. Schoolwide, the beginning of a given course is marked by a pre-assessment which then informs short and long-term student goals that are evaluated in two-month benchmark intervals. Students conference with teachers at the beginning of the year and have input in shaping writing and public speaking goals, among others, that are aligned with the school’s overall college and career readiness focus. Further, the school has seen a 98% acceptance rate to college for the 2010-11 graduating class. Students spoke about their 12th grade year as equivalent to the first year of college. One student captured the sentiment of others, describing work as “a step above your level so that college will be manageable.”

- An inquiry approach defines teacher collaboration, resulting in improved teacher practice and distributed leadership. (4.2)
  - Teacher teams have successfully used student work as a lens for making critical decisions about teaching. Teams, using protocols that ground conversation in student data, have relied on evidence of what students are able to do and areas of struggle. The result has been concrete conversations about next instructional moves to support skill development. For example, teachers have identified practices such as selecting a mentor text to support student writing, strategic modeling and strategies for infusing academic vocabulary as possible next teaching moves. Facilitation at teacher team meetings has rotated, allowing every teacher the opportunity to lead the team in a key learning activity. Teams have also been central to decision-making at the school, offering feedback regarding interdisciplinary work that would strengthen students' presentation skills or course offerings that would be both engaging and better aligned to student skill levels. Teachers in teams decided to extend the amount of time for implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards bundles, and embedded other activities based on student mastery levels to ensure adequate differentiation. The impact of these efforts has included marked improvement in the quality of student oral presentations and data-based decisions around student placement in science classes.
- Schoolwide assessment practices demonstrate a commitment to ongoing checks for understanding and the widespread use of rubrics, resulting in transparent and actionable feedback to students. (2.2)
  - The school has developed a coherent approach to the creation and use of classroom-level rubrics. Influences in rubric development included the need to increase literacy levels, especially among English language learner students, content demands, and the rigor of Common Core Learning Standards tasks. Rubrics were used in the creation of classroom-level assignments and informed by student performance data. Teachers met weekly to assess student performance on assignments such as essays and “think-pair-shares,” as well as lexile data from Achieve 3000 in order to refine rubrics for future use. The Springboard curriculum recently launched schoolwide was chosen based on the alignment with Common Core Learning Standards rubrics the school modified. Beyond making adjustments to the rubrics themselves, teachers were able to make strategic decisions about student groupings and academic tasks. Specifically, teachers identify which elements of lessons need to be re-taught and to which students, and adjust lesson pacing and individual support. The result has been a stronger notion of what it means to be proficient for both students and teachers. Students, for example, discussed how rubrics were instrumental in their assessment of their own performance on personal and group oral presentations and on the new Common Core Learning Standards bundle, *The Power of New Media*.
- Frequent cycles of classroom observations, supported by a research-based framework, provide teachers with targeted feedback facilitating a shared language for discussing practice and increasing student learning. (4.1)
  - Through a collaborative approach to supporting the development of effective instruction, school leaders and teachers identified Domains 1e and 3b— Designing Coherent Instruction and Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques respectively— from the Danielson Framework to anchor the initial

cycle of short, frequent classroom observations. Next steps for improvement were differentiated based on teacher, and took the form of verbal and written feedback. Recommendations included intervisitations to specific classrooms, additional training in Quality Teaching for English Learners strategies, and focusing on specific student data to inform the creation of assessments. Further targeted supports were offered to teachers in the form of one-on-one coaching from Australian United States Services in Education consultants, and the identification of appropriate Children's First Network workshops. Teacher goals were revisited and aligned to short-term goals around Common Core Learning Standards task demands, focusing on reading and analyzing informational texts at grade-level complexity, specifically. The result has been changes to the curriculum, student regrouping and stronger alignment in lessons, one to the next. Subsequently, the school has seen an improvement in the overall quality of student writing and increased course pass rates.

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

- Develop protocols to ensure that students engage in activities to extend their individual thinking and student-to-student academic dialogue. (1.1)
  - The school has developed and refined curriculum that is responsive to shifts in student population and academic needs, while achieving alignment to key state standards with thoughtful integration of Common Core Learning Standards tasks. However, activities and tasks across classrooms provided inconsistent opportunities for high-achieving students to use academic language in their classroom conversations with peers limiting the extension of critical thinking skills for students on the path to postsecondary readiness.
- Continue developing structures to regularly assess the effectiveness of the use of resources in response to the learning needs of higher achieving students. (5.1)
  - Careful planning and organization at the school level has resulted in varied and challenging course offerings such as computer engineering, biotechnology, and robotics. School leaders and teachers have also established structures including regular team meetings to evaluate instructional practices specifically connected to the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards tasks. However, the refinement of routines and structures assessing how current curricular and organizational decisions build capacity for supporting higher achieving students was not evident, potentially affecting efforts to have these students obtain greater success.
- Formalize the system for making transparent the evaluation and work of teacher teams to strengthen the development of strategies and the sharing of best practice. (5.4)
  - All teachers are participating in collaborative inquiry at the grade and department level and the work of teacher teams has positively influenced student outcomes. School leaders participate in these teacher team meetings, using these opportunities, along with cabinet meetings, to discuss and evaluate the effectiveness of professional collaboration at the school. The school leadership team also reviews teacher team agendas and meeting outcomes. However, there was insufficient evidence that teacher team effectiveness was analyzed with an understanding of implications for teacher support and leadership development specifically.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: It Takes A Village Academy</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
<b>Overall QR Score</b>				<b>X</b>
<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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				<b>X</b>
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?				<b>X</b>
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?				<b>X</b>
<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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?				<b>X</b>

<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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?				<b>X</b>			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				<b>X</b>			
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?				<b>X</b>			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				<b>X</b>			
<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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			<b>X</b>				
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?				<b>X</b>			
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?				<b>X</b>			
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>