

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Aspirations Diploma Plus High School
High school 646**

**1495 HERKIMER STREET
BROOKLYN
NY 11233**

Principal: Shermila Bharat

**Dates of review: April 25 - 26, 2012
Lead Reviewer: Sarah E. Goodman**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Aspirations Diploma Plus High School is a High school with 258 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 76% Black, 22% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 57%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- In partnership with the on-site community based organization, the school provides students with a range of support services and real world learning opportunities to prepare them for life after graduation. (4.4)
 - In conjunction with their partner organization, Child Center of New York, each student receives a youth advocate who builds a relationship with the family, meets with the student individually at least twice a month, and follows that student through their time at Aspirations. The advocates have been trained by the principal to understand student transcripts and work in conjunction with the school's administration, attendance teacher, classroom teachers, and parent coordinator, to follow up daily on any issue standing in the way of moving students towards graduation. Award ceremonies bring together the students, faculty, Child Center staff, and parents. Hallway displays for attendance and scholarship publically recognize the progress students are making. All of these efforts build a culture that puts academic success at the center of the school. Consequently, all members of the school community work cohesively to support students socially, emotionally, and academically.
 - The Child Center has an internship coordinator who creates paid experiences in- and out-of-school referred to as jobs by the students. Students have to meet certain attendance requirements to take part in the internships, which take place at diverse locations including day care centers, beauty salons, and jobs within the school building. These on-going incentives motivate students to come to school with greater regularity and punctuality.
- The principal makes strategic organizational decisions to utilize budget, space, and staff resources to support the school's academic goals. (1.3)
 - The principal's focus on space provides suitable offices for the administrative team and parent coordinator. The hiring of additional staff addresses security, counseling, and academic needs of students. Technology, present in every classroom is frequently utilized in lessons to connect students to current events, and visuals support and engage students in interactive learning opportunities. A new technology lab, set to open before the end of the school year, will allow students to self-pace themselves as they work on programs for targeted skills. Additional funds were utilized to develop an afternoon and Saturday school program that has led to increasing credit accumulation and higher pass rates for January Regents' scores for participating students. Consultants hired to work directly with teachers on individual planning and instructional needs have helped in developing tasks and assessments that integrate the Common Core Learning Standards. Additionally, in response to student requests for better food options throughout the day, the principal utilizes additional funds to create a family atmosphere during and after the school day by offering snacks to students and sponsoring events like the Thanksgiving potluck dinner that brings parents, students, and faculty together in large numbers.
- The school community utilizes a range of data and resources to support youth development and create a safe atmosphere conducive to learning. (1.4)

- After reviewing incident reports and records, school leaders identified that most student conflicts began in the halls and carried over into the classrooms. In an effort to keep learning time protected, all staff play a role in maintaining the sacredness of class time by never pulling students from class for meetings. Hall monitors are constantly present to ensure students only travel with a pass and to support a teacher should there be a possible conflict. Students stated that the staff are “on top” of everything all the time, leading to consistently calm and respectful classroom environments with limited incidences school wide during this school year.
- Many of the students said that the “teachers are always here for me” and “help me with whatever I need.” Student opinions are also valued and student representatives participate regularly on the school leadership team to review the school instructional, attendance, and learning environment goals for the year and the actions needed to reach them. The school is in the beginning phases of creating a full-scale representative student government that will continue the work in place, thus placing a value on incorporating student voice in the school’s culture.
- The principal has a collaborative, data-driven vision for the future of the school that guides planning steps to promote student achievement. (3.1)
 - The principal, newly appointed at the beginning of this school year, brings her extensive professional development and school support experience to her role as school leader. Building from a “theory of action” based around individualized supports for students the principal began her work examining whatever data was available; including Regents’ scores, scholarship reports, individual student transcripts, the Progress Report, and the prior Quality Review reports, to align all of her action plans. Building upon positive structures and approaches, she worked with her administrative team, superintendant, network, teachers, parents, and students to think through what the school had in place, needed to change, and the most effective path forward. Decisions included the use of resources to support professional development, efficient placement of newly hired staff, and addressing programming concerns. In the process, the principal has built trust in her vision and faith throughout the school community that they will be able to achieve success by meeting the needs of the students.
- The faculty provides students and families with a range of structures to understand the expectations and supports available to meet graduation requirements. (2.4)
 - An on-line grading system, that is in its beginning phase, is used by all teachers to provide students and parents with an on-going way to check on the status of assignment completion, test scores, and behavior. This new system, alongside on-going parent meetings, work to ensure that the expectations and next steps needed for academic success are clear to students and their families.

What the school needs to improve

- Utilize key standards to guide the development of a rigorous curriculum that will prepare students for post secondary readiness. (1.1)
 - Each content area teacher is expected to plan a benchmark activity for students during every marking period that range in format and may include multiple-choice tests in math, creative writing projects, the creation of three-dimensional art pieces, or a project on the crusaders. Teachers are beginning to incorporate these projects into curriculum maps that integrate State standards and those of

the Common Core. In addition, several faculty members at Aspirations are beginning to utilize learning targets to focus lesson planning and assessments at the school. However, the quality of the support activities, materials, and other resources teachers integrated into their daily lesson plans and project plans varies across departments and teachers, thus limiting the ability to help students master skills and lead to student work that is consistently approaching grade level.

- Build on student participation in classrooms to support each student with an individualized educational experience that develops their cognitive abilities. (1.2)
 - The school faculty is unified around a belief that students learn best when they are engaged in a lesson that includes guided instruction followed by independent or group work with individualized supports. In many of the classes observed, teachers planned for extensive time for students to practice the focused skills of the day and allowed students to choose to work alone or with a partner. In these classes, the teachers rotated around the room and offered additional clarification and guidance to students who were struggling or offered additional work to students that were able to move on. Other teachers utilized a range of instructional materials including technology, graphic organizers, highlighters, and printed texts, or other visuals to engage different learning styles and needs. However, these practices of differentiated supports were not consistently present across classrooms limiting the ability to meet the learning needs of all students.
 - In all observed classrooms, the majority of students were participating in the lesson. Activities included working with math manipulatives, creating a poster on the causes of World War I, learning the rules of floor hockey, discussing a novel, or examining the properties of minerals. In some classrooms, students are asked to analyze and synthesize information verbally or in written work. However, some classrooms focused primarily on recall questions or demanded that students only respond in sentence fragments hindering the development of thinking skills needed for post secondary readiness and effective cognitive thinking.
- Develop school wide assessment systems that allow individual and teams of teachers to track student progress and provide information that can inform instructional strategies and guide students in promoting their learning. (2.2)
 - Some teachers at the school utilize rubrics linked to key standards, though these rubrics are not consistent across departments or grade levels. In addition, some departments and individual teachers do an item analysis of Regents' results or other assessments, and some teacher teams are beginning to examine the results from a performance series assessment. However, teams of teachers do not yet have a way to gather, analyze, plan, and adjust curriculum based on a common assessment system limiting the effectiveness of teacher teams to work together to understand and address the needs of students and sub-groups of students.
 - Teachers primarily utilize informal conferences with students during independent work time to check for their understanding in their classrooms. Students know that they can turn to teachers in class, at lunch, or afterschool, for any additional help they may need. While some teachers provide students with checklists, rubrics, or extensive comments during the drafting process, the opportunities for student self-assessment and the quality of teacher feedback is inconsistent across the school, restricting the ability of teachers to best convey to the students what is needed next for them to progress.

- Incorporate professional goal setting into the classroom observation process to provide targeted feedback to teachers that sets clear expectations for effective teacher practice. (4.1)
 - o The principal and assistant principal have developed an open and trusting relationship with their staff that includes the creation of frequent cycles of formal and informal observations that consistently highlight strong teacher practices and next steps for the individual. These observations, along with a review of student work and assessment data, inform professional development with particular attention and mentoring structures in place for untenured teachers and those new to the school. However, observations, intervisitations, and professional development plans are not yet connected to professional goals tied to a research based teacher effectiveness framework, thus minimizing the ability of school leaders to unify instructional practices.
- Monitor leadership development within teacher team structures to support professional collaborations that focus on the on-going improvement of student learning throughout the school. (5.4)
 - o School leaders consistently look at scholarship reports, Regents' scores, and student work products, to inform professional development, hiring needs, and supports. However, the administration does not yet have a system in place to evaluate and strategically support teacher team leaders. As a result, teacher teams do not have systematic structures for facilitation and lack uniform effective protocols for looking at student work and data to guide quality curriculum, assessment, and teaching practices.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Aspirations Diploma Plus High School	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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	
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 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?		X		
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?		X		
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?		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>	UD	D	P	WD
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, 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?				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>	UD	D	P	WD
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?		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		

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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