

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

The Academy of Talented Scholars

20K682

**50 Avenue P
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Josephine Sportella-Giusto

Dates of review: March 28 – 29, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Karina Costantino

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

20K682 is an elementary school with 232 students from kindergarten through grade 3. The school population comprises 2% Black, 11% Hispanic, 67% White, and 20% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English Language Learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 96%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's exceptionally strong and coherent curriculum across grades and subjects aligns to key State and Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), cognitively engaging all learners and closing the achievement gap. (1.1)
 - The CCLS are a guiding force as the school plans for rigorous curricula resulting in learning that meets and exceeds the standards as evidenced by student work products. Universal Design for Learning is used by the school as a framework that helps teachers turn the challenges posed by high learning standards and increasing learner diversity into opportunities to maximize learning for every student across grades. Every teacher in the building is applying this systemic approach to setting instructional goals, choosing and creating flexible materials and media and assessing students accurately allowing all students in all subgroups the opportunity to flourish. Through the use of high level content vocabulary applied to informational reading and writing, academic tasks emphasize rigorous habits creating a challenging environment for all students.
 - All students participate in small self-selected interest-based enrichment clusters that mirror the CCLS standards targeted by the school, the focus of which is informational reading and writing. The impact of the enrichment clusters is evidenced by the sophistication and rigor of the student work products. These projects incorporate higher level content area vocabulary instruction and the use of it through writing while engaging students in interest and project based learning environments. Throughout all classes in the school, including the Autism Spectrum Disorders Nest program, all children learn the same content and attend enrichment clusters of their choice. This provides all subgroups with immediate application of the skills they learn in the classroom to real life situations.
- Effectively differentiated teacher pedagogy provides all students access and entry to the curriculum, resulting in high levels of thinking and learning as evidenced by student discussion and work across the school (1.2)
 - Lessons across the school promote higher level thinking through questioning strategies and building content specific, high level vocabulary both of which are the school's focus for teacher practice. Teacher collaborate with the core inquiry team members, consisting of ESL teachers and Nest teachers in designing lessons that provide the students with multiple entry points, supports and extensions into the curriculum as evidenced by high level, accountable discussion and student work across the classrooms.
 - Using student exemplars during their lessons, all teachers create their own rubrics with students through extensive questioning and discussions about what constitutes a Level 4 student work across content areas. Teachers act as facilitators, as students review their own work and the work of their peers. These pedagogical moves result in rich text based discussion around student work products and promote self directed,

reflective thinking and learning across classrooms, pushing students to constantly improve their work to meet and exceed the targeted standards.

- The school makes strategic organizational decisions well aligned with the school's focus resulting in increased student achievement. (1.3)
 - As the founding leader of the school, the principal lead the process of growing the school one grade at a year. The school only has four grades which provide a limited budget with which to manage all the necessary components to run a successful school. Through her creativity and resourcefulness the principal has implemented and taken a number of steps to close that gap. She has an aspiring principal candidate who currently plays the role of the data Specialist and assists teachers with data collection and analysis where needed while taking on administrative duties as part of her apprenticeship. The principal has also hired teacher assistants for each classroom who participate in all professional development sessions with the teachers, providing her with a teacher pool from which to hire new teachers who have been nurtured and trained to reflect the school's vision. The principal's vision to have 80% of her students at levels 3 & 4 in ELA and Math is strengthened by teaching assistants in every classroom, providing small group instruction for sub-groups. This results in providing students with a targeted differentiated instruction targeting their specific needs.
 - The principal has structured time during and after school weekly for team and grade meetings. The entire teacher team meets every Thursday after school as a result of a school based agreement. As a result of these meetings, there is complete alignment across grades of the CCSS in grades K-3. Weekly lesson plans are submitted and individual teacher feedback is given to each teacher by the coaches and principal to make sure plans reflect rigorous learning activities and projects aligned to school curricula.
- Teacher teams utilize tools that are curriculum aligned, with ongoing assessment practices and checks for understanding to inform and adjust instructional practices for increased student outcomes. (2.2)
 - As a new and growing school, the administration and staff recognized the need to expand their data collection systems. New data came from the math curriculum, Math in Focus and the school also collaborated in year two with Teacher's College, becoming a Reading and Writing Project school. This immediately expanded their data collection in reading and math. Data is additionally collected from ATS, ARIS, SESIS, Acuity, TC Assessment Pro, and the NYSESLAT (New York State English as a Second Language Assessment. Standards based social studies and science assessments, conference notes and anecdotal records are also utilized as part of the data collection. These assessments, not only provide the school with a clear picture of strengths, trends and areas of need, but also inform instruction in each of the content areas across grades. For example, during grade level planning time, teachers look at all the formative data collected to enhance the level of rigor when creating the curriculum maps.

- Teachers in each classroom use a protocol with the children called the parking lot. Midway during the lesson the children indicate questions they may have and place them on an experience chart prominently placed in each classroom. This enables the teacher to get immediate feedback of where students may experience difficulty and address student understanding during the lesson, individually or in a small group. These instructional changes during the lesson result in increased student understanding as evidenced by the level of the students work products that meet and exceed the standards.
- The school promotes professional growth through the observation of teacher practice and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate instructional practices throughout the school. (4.1)
 - Beginning in September, the principal discussed individual goals with teachers and professional development throughout the year supports these goals. The principal and her cabinet developed a template for snapshot informal observations that are conducted daily. Utilizing the Charlotte Danielson framework, teachers receive immediate feedback, through a conversation on the day of the observation. This results in a transparent plan of support and follow up observations to assess the effectiveness of the support and the implementation of next steps, through the analysis of student work. Teachers feel supported by the principal which is indicated on the Learning Environment Survey where 100% of the teachers feel the principal gives them regular and helpful feedback, creating a positive learning environment conducive to professional growth and improvements to teaching and learning for teachers, as well as, students.
- School Leaders consistently communicate high expectations parents and students, creating an environment of mutual accountability for success. (3.4)
 - Beginning with the Tribes process, parents are an integral part of its philosophy and practice along with their children and school staff, the five agreements of the Tribes philosophy. This character development program holds students and their parents accountable for doing their personal best in academics, attendance and social responsibility. In addition, the parents on the School Leadership Team play an active role in making school decisions and the minutes from those meetings are posted on the school's website. Staff communicates with parents by email and parents share that teachers are accessible and always willing to make them partners in their child's education. Each grade has a webpage, where teachers post weekly newsletters, homework, updates and reminders, in addition to enrichment and re- teach websites. This newsletter also goes home weekly for every grade. Additionally, there are many opportunities for parents through the Partners as Parents program to be involved in literacy education through Dr.Seuss/ Read across America Day, workshops to inform parents about CCLS, just-right reading levels, and supporting struggling readers. The school recently sponsored an extensive workshop preparing the parents on how to help prepare their children for the state exams, since this is the first year the school has a testing grade. These efforts result in enabling parents to play a meaningful role in their children's education, as evidenced by the 100% the school received on the Learning Environment Survey in the category "I feel welcome in my child's school."

- Teacher teams collaboratively set data based, differentiated classrooms and student goals that improve classroom practices and increase student outcomes. (3.2)
 - The core inquiry team at the school has been at the forefront of the performance task initiative and consists of the grade leaders and data specialist who analyze student work and develop rubrics to better understand student progress. Teams then, set differentiated learning goals and develop strategies for helping students achieve those goals. At their meetings all data collected is shared and turned keyed to their specific grades during common grade planning time. In addition, the child study team closely monitors the school's subgroup data and provides the classroom teachers with the information they need to set realistic, rigorous goals for their students. The Autism Spectrum Disorder/Nest Team also works collaboratively to make sure that each ASD/Nest student is working toward meeting and exceeding the CCLS in their individual goals. Many of the strategies developed within the goal setting process are shared and implemented school wide, resulting in improved teaching practices and increased outcomes as evidenced by the percentage of progress made on all assessments for general education students, ELLs and special needs students.

What the school needs to improve

- Embedd the distributive leadership structures so that all teachers play an integral role in key decisions that effect student learning across the school. (4.2)
 - Although a vast majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations in teams and distributive leadership structures are in place throughout the school, not all teachers are actively engaged in making key decisions that affect student learning across the school. For instance, teachers who attend staff development or develop best practices do not always share or turnkey their expertise. This minimizes opportunities for shared improvements to teacher practice for all teachers.
- Increase the transparency of system for measuring progress toward interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time for maximized staff ownership. (5.3)
 - Although the school leaders and teachers have systems for measuring progress towards toward interim goals and identifying areas of need and making revisions to plans and goals, these processes are not currently transparent and inclusive in a way that allows for sharing with the entire staff. In the absence of increased transparency and inclusiveness, the collective efforts to improve instructional practices and large scale ownership of school wide goals are minimized.
- Leverage systems used to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher teams towards strategic leadership development across teams for increased distributive leadership practices. (5.4)

- School leaders and faculty have systems to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of teacher teams engaged in collaboration and make improvements over the year to support this work, however evaluation of team effectiveness have yet to focus on using teacher teams as an integral part of the school decision making processes. Consequently, distributive leadership opportunities are not fully leveraged for development of teacher leadership.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: P.S. 682	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