

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Academy for Social Action: A College Board School

Middle-High School 367

**509 West 129th Street
Manhattan, NY 10027**

Principal: Rhokeisha Ford

Dates of review: February 6 - 7, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Lynette Lauretig

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school:

Academy for Social Action: A College Board School is a middle-high school with 420 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 63% Black, 35% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 21% 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 87.2%

Overall Evaluation:

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school cultivates a safe and respectful learning environment, which supports teaching and learning. (1.4)
 - The principal adopted the core values of leadership, fellowship, and scholarship, from the former administration and created a rubric focused on these three values, which is used to indicate student progress on practicing respectful routines and rituals. This year, the school's dean established a behavior management discipline policy with a ladder of referral that has the support of the students. Students spoke about currently feeling more comfortable and secure in their own school. They now come to school, focus on their class work, and are more likely to remain after school for tutoring because of the improved school environment.
 - Students are motivated to attend school even when they are experiencing a personal problem because they know they can talk to a teacher or school staff person if they need to during the school day. Turnaround, a partner organization located onsite, also provides support to students around social-emotional learning.
- The principal pro-actively seeks high leverage programs and resources that align with the school's instructional goals and strategically structures time to enable teachers to meet regularly to advance student learning.(1.3)
 - The school's winning of an iLearn grant provided funds for seven SMART Boards, 24 computers, and a wireless infrastructure, crucial to starting a Career and Technology (CTE) Program, allowing for certification in digital media, one of the principal's long-term goals. Two CTE teachers who aligned the curriculum with the school's instructional goals via rigorous performance-based tasks supported the CTE program, which opened with two sections on the tenth and eleventh grade.
 - Teacher grade-level teams meet weekly and use a teacher-made protocol to examine student work. Teachers' schedules also allow for common planning time four times a week where teachers provide each other with constructive feedback on the level of rigor exemplified in their students' performance based assessments. Additionally, teacher leaders who meet with the principal weekly for support and guidance lead all teams.
- A short list of agreed upon goals, based on data, impact instructional decisions and leverage change, resulting in improved and accelerated student learning.(3.1)
 - ASA's goals focus mainly on examining and refining curriculum, assessment, and classroom instruction, in order to improve academic achievement and student progress. This school year as compared to last, more twelfth graders are passing classes and earning more credits. Additionally, the school added four advanced placement classes so students have the opportunity to extend their learning and become college-prep ready.

- The long term, annual, and interim-goals are all aligned to strengthen and support the principal's, teachers', parents', and students' vision of creating a school where students graduate college ready. The principal solicits feedback from the entire school community during the annual goal setting process. Goals are shared at school leadership team meetings and school-wide assemblies. Subsequently, the principal creates a specific role for each group of constituents during the action-planning phase and action plans are continually modified to ensure continued progress toward attainment of school-wide goals. The math department revised the math course sequence for grades 7 through 12. This gave students the opportunity to complete their high school level math courses earlier, thus positioning students to take AP math courses, which completed successfully evidence student achievement and boost students' college acceptance.
- School leaders provide valuable opportunities for teachers to receive feedback and plan next steps with a clear focus on the link between teacher practice and student achievement.(4.1)
 - In the spring of 2010, the principal introduced the entire teaching staff to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, which is used to assess the effectiveness of teacher instruction by observing classes, and looking at student work.
 - For school year 2011, there was a large number of new teachers who came on board, thus impacting the cycle of and the number of needed observations. For the two formal observations conducted by the principal during the course of the school year, she follows a specific group of students during the day and then meets with the teachers for individual feedback sessions. The principal in collaboration with the school's two assistant principals developed an informal observation and feedback template for use by the assistant principals when conducting short frequent observations, thus allowing for the focusing on identified components of the Danielson framework.
- The principal and teacher team leaders communicate high expectations to staff, and provide time for staff training and staff reflection on their achievement, thus allowing for an understanding of their impact on student progress. (3.4)
 - The principal and teacher team leaders analyzed Spring 2010 English language arts item analysis assessment data and as a result found that students were not engaged in meaningful tasks that measured their mastery of content and specific reading skills. Consequently, school administration revised the school-wide instructional focus in the 2011-12 school year, which raised the instructional expectations for all staff. School leaders provided staff with intensive in-house and network training on performance tasks aligned to the CCLS. Students, who are acutely aware of the increased rigor of the performance tasks, are provided with targeted support so they can meet the higher expectations.
 - The school provides all students with guidance/advisement supports so students can meet the high expectations communicated by school leaders and teachers. Grades six through nine have advisory classes three times weekly focused on social-emotional issues that the school's administration have identified as particularly relevant. On the other two days, the agendas for the advisories focus on academic objectives identified by grade teacher team leaders. Additionally, Turnaround Inc., an on-site community-based

organization, partners with the school and provides a student intervention team that specifically addresses the social-emotional and academic needs of individual students. Thus, students continue making progress towards reaching their academic goals.

What the school needs to improve

- Further refine and revise curricula and develop performance tasks that consistently engage and challenge students in order to elevate rigor across all subject areas. (1.1)
 - School leaders are building the capacity of teachers to design rigorous performance tasks and align curricula in math and English language arts to the CCLS. The school recently piloted and continues to use the College-readiness Performance Assessment System to guide teachers' instructional practice through project-based lessons. C-PAS tasks ask students to meaningfully apply knowledge and skills in an authentic context. C-PAS also tests the effectiveness of the CCLS aligned curriculum with a goal to ensure rigorous instruction. However, teacher expertise in the areas cited above is still developing as evidenced by teacher lesson plans that lack alignment. In an ELA class observed, the lesson's objectives and educational activities were far below the classes' grade level and student practice was limited to worksheets with lower order questions. In another classroom, the learning activities were not aligned to the instructional outcomes and did not engage students cognitively. The teacher read a PowerPoint presentation to the class, passed out an article, and asked students to answer the questions at the end of the article. Although students were in groups, there was not enough time allotted for them to engage with each other. Therefore, teachers are missing opportunities to maximize student engagement and leverage the curricular revisions for increased student outcomes.
- Ensure curricula and academic tasks are sufficiently differentiated in order to meet the needs of all learners within the classrooms. (1.2)
 - The principal's strong set of beliefs about how students learn best is also articulated during teacher team meetings, and focus on "student engagement means activities that are purposeful, groups of students talking with each other in classes instead of sitting through a lecture." To support the school's educational philosophy, the principal introduced and provided training on the three strands of the Danielson Framework, i.e., engaging students in learning, using discussions, and assessing for learning. However, not all teachers have been able to make the leap from the school's conceptual philosophy to classroom practice. Some teachers, in both the middle and high school, are using lecture format exclusively and facilitating all questions and answers themselves, making it difficult for students to stay engaged with the lesson content. Thus, teacher pedagogy is still becoming aligned to the curriculum, not yet reflective of the school's philosophy of how students learn best, and hinders differentiating activities.
 - Although some classes evidenced differentiation of content or process through purposeful groupings, the majority of teachers observed, delivered content by using direct instruction to all students. There were no activities or assignments provided for students who completed their work in advance of other students. In another class, it was evident that some students with disabilities did not understand the math content as introduced by the teacher,

but their confusion was not acknowledged and the lesson proceeded. Thus, differentiated lessons are not sufficiently embedded, minimizing student engagement.

- Refine and ensure that teachers make systematic use of assessment data, to create a knowledge base of the performance and progress of individuals and groups of students, to inform instructional decisions. (2.2)
 - Not all teachers in the school are analyzing classroom level data culled from assessments to identify the strengths and needs of relevant student subgroups, thus hindering the suitable adjustment of instructional practices.
 - Some classes show evidence of checks for understanding in the form of exit tickets, however primarily in yes or no answers from the students. Additionally, some teachers' lessons absent the process for checking for student understanding, thus hindering the ability to make timely adjustments to classroom lessons so that student-learning needs are met.
- Expand communication and collaboration with parents to increase their capacity to further their children's progress toward meeting school and class expectations. (2.4)
 - Although the school has an online program (Schedula) housing student data that parents and families can access, not all parents are aware of their children's academic or behavioral goals and growth. Additionally, some families are not aware of the program and those who know of it are not comfortable accessing an online program. Thus, not all families are able to support their children's progress toward meeting school and class expectations. Furthermore, there is limited evidence of students monitoring their own progress, thus impacting them taking ownership of their learning.
- Refine action planning for school's long-term goals by developing interim benchmarks so that teachers, students, and parents are clear about next steps. (5.3)
 - One of the school's long-term goals is to fully implement a school -wide Career and Technical Education program with certification for students in the digital communication career sectors. Although the school has made progress in the beginning stages of planning the program, many students, and some parents, do not understand what a CTE program is and how it can be used as a vehicle for increasing relevance and real application of academic skills. Currently, there is no apparent system in place for measuring progress towards reaching this goal, which in turn restricts identification of improvements in an implementation plan.
 - Another of the school's long-term goals is to partner with CUNY so students can take college level classes. Again, not all members of the school community are aware of this school-wide goal, thus limiting school buy-in towards reaching this goal.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The Academy for Social Action: A College Board 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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