

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Astor Collegiate Academy

High School X299

925 Astor Avenue

Bronx

NY 10469

Principal: Sandra Burgos

Dates of review: December 1 - 2, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Michael L. Schurek

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Astor Collegiate Academy is a high school with 485 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 40% Black, 42% Hispanic, 12% White, 5% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 85.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has established systems for monitoring teaching practice with a clear focus on improving instructional practices to increase student achievement. (4.1)
 - Administrators conduct daily walkthroughs that enable them to visit each teacher weekly utilizing iPads to quickly provide teachers with feedback and next steps based on an established teacher effectiveness framework. This feedback yields performance ratings in focused competency areas linked to low inference evidence and specific suggestions to improve effectiveness. These procedures have improved classroom management where needed and all classrooms use cooperative learning techniques to improve student engagement. In addition, teachers use these comments to formulate professional goals and conduct intervisitations utilizing the same framework tools to improve pedagogy in a supportive and collaborative fashion.
 - Student work and data is scrutinized as part of the learning walk process to ensure improved student outcomes. As a result, English language arts student work contains multiple genres utilizing the writing process to refine work quality and many teachers routinely use exit slips and student reflections to monitor learning. Both of the above practices maintain teachers' professional growth by providing ongoing opportunities to differentiate support such as help with lesson planning, targeted intervisitations and teaming.
- The principal, staff and school community work as a unified team to instill structures to create a calm, respectful and orderly environment. (1.4)
 - School Survey results have prompted the school to emphasize character education and socialization through its Positive Behavior in School (PBIS) program. Students assist administrators by conducting conflict resolution services after school to improve behavior and classroom management. As a result, recent data collected from in house school surveys indicate improved feedback in the areas of safety and respect from students, teachers and parents regarding the school environment.
 - Students have a voice in school-level decisions through the school leadership team, student council, leadership class electives and service to the PBIS team. Their input has enabled the school to add an Opening Act theater program and contributed to the creation of a new student and staff handbook, thereby improving community morale, promoting ownership and establishing clear expectations for all stakeholders.
- The school has effective communication systems for keeping parents informed of school activities and their child's progress to increase parental involvement in student learning. (2.4)
 - Workshops are conducted through a specialized school grant that provides parents the ability to use ARIS Parent Link and Acuity to

understand their children's performance levels. In addition, many teachers use an online grading system that provides students and families' access from home and shares academic support links and blogs for discussion. As a result, a high percentage of parents use these tools to monitor their child's progress.

- The school has a fully staffed school leadership team and two Parent Associations; grades 9 through 11 and a separate grade 12. These two groups were formed through input from the parents to focus on the college application process. Surveys are regularly conducted by the school to augment parent involvement and have resulted in both evening and Saturday meetings, thereby increasing parental participation.
- The newly-appointed principal has created a learning environment that is focused on student outcomes with a vision to accelerate learning. (3.1)
 - School action plans and goals are based on current student performance analysis and are used to make organizational and instructional adjustments. For instance, to improve Global Studies Regents' pass rates, English and Social Studies departments conduct joint meetings to develop strategies to improve student writing for expository, critical and persuasive essays. In addition, 9th grade music and art teachers reinforce Global History content in their courses to help students retain concepts, yielding higher scholarship reports.
 - The principal has established the Astor Council consisting of administrators, lead teachers and staff members from every department and specialization to serve as the centerpiece of the school's planning processes. The members of this council interact with teacher, parent and student teams to assess needs and establish goals and action plans effectively involving all constituents as evidenced by articulated support and alignment. A main role of this team is to align curricula to the common core learning standards to improve literacy, yielding improved academic scores as evidenced by overall scholarship report results.
- The school's systems and partnerships support students and their families in continual learning and promote students' personal growth and development to increase academic achievement. (4.4)
 - Three different outside agencies support students by providing SAT/PSAT preparation, senior trips, college credits through Saturday classes at Lehman College and after-school, push-in tutoring, and academic clubs. In addition, guidance department personnel refer students and families to community-based organizations to receive services they require that are outside of their purview. These affiliations help to build students' self esteem and have contributed to addressing students' academic needs, therefore working towards closing the school's achievement gap.
 - Guidance counselors regularly present to each grade and together with teachers track credit accumulation for each student to ensure that they have the support they need to graduate. Students articulate this support as evidenced by the remark, "The teachers have our backs", when referring to the ongoing tutoring and attention provided by teachers to

keep them on track to graduate. As a result, credit accumulation data, mock Regents' results and scholarship reports indicate an increase of 12th graders on track for graduation.

What the school needs to improve

- Augment coherence and alignment in the school's curriculum to design common core aligned literacy and math units of study that scaffold to support a variety of student learners. (1.1)
 - The Astor Council team members are working through grade and department teacher teams to revise the curriculum to reflect Common Core Learning Standards, vocabulary and literacy as instructional priorities across grades and curricula. This focus is evident in some persuasive essay work and math reasoning writing. However, teachers are not yet familiar with the task bundles, impeding teacher teams' abilities to plan the design of curriculum embedded tasks. In addition, not all classes provide rigorous tasks and processes that accommodate student subgroup needs, limiting the ability to meet annual yearly progress targets for these students.
- Promote greater consistency in differentiated instruction based on data so that lesson planning reflects purposeful groupings, students are challenged, and questioning extends thinking to maximize student learning. (1.2)
 - While many classrooms have students arranged in groups or pairs, students are not purposefully situated in groups or with tasks that are strategic in nature to meet students' identified needs to advance their learning. Instead, students are expected to perform the same tasks using the same materials and processes in many classrooms, hindering efforts to provide effective multiple entry points for student learners of varied abilities across the school.
 - Questioning techniques and routines vary across classrooms. Some teachers use questioning to push student thinking and design rigorous activities that require high levels of student thinking and interaction, while other classes are teacher directed and rely on lower-level recall questioning. For example, one math class required students to work in heterogeneous groups to solve, plot and present solutions to rigorous and differentiated quadratic inequality graphing problems while in another math class students took turns identifying the missing side of a right triangle using the Pythagorean theory for an extended period of time. These inconsistent practices lead to inadequate levels of student engagement and omit potential opportunities to challenge student learning.
- Expand strategic planning to ensure that teachers receive suitable support from the school's specialists that improve pedagogy and meet students' learning needs so that rigorous student work products are generated. (1.3)
 - Teacher teams are scheduled to meet as grade teams and department teams each week and target specific groups of students. For example, a 12th grade team focuses on students who need to pass one to two

Regents to graduate causing teachers and students to set goals to ensure graduation. Teams are beginning to discuss the types of student work they will examine and the need to establish common assessments. The present lack of these structures limits teams' abilities to adjust instructional practices so that students engage in ongoing rigorous work processes.

- The school has expanded its use of technology and purchased specialized tutoring programs to meet students' needs. However, some students are unable to share or describe authentic challenging work products they have generated, contributing to a decline in social studies Regents' pass rates.
- Deepen the use of rubrics and assessments by aligning them across the school to provide self-assessment opportunities and next steps for students while enabling teachers to vertically align expectations across grades. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams are just beginning the process of discussing the need for common assessments to measure the efficacy of instructional decisions. Most teachers use rubrics of varying forms to guide student work. However, these tools are not used by all teachers to indicate next steps for students to improve work quality and all students do not use rubrics to self-assess their work. In addition, not all rubrics indicate assessment performance levels, limiting the scaffolding of expectations within each level to ensure student work shows rigor and is comprehensive.
- Refine action planning by linking interim goals to targeted benchmarks at specific intervals so that school, team and teacher action plans can be monitored to expedite revisions and maximize impact. (5.3)
 - School action plans list intervals and instruments of periodic review, but do not include projected gains for each interim measure of progress. Grade teacher teams set goals for targeted students based on school goals while department teacher teams focus on Regents' pass rates and scholarship report data to support school objectives. However, interim assessment results are not measured against specific benchmarks of expected achievement. The lack of these structures hampers the school's capacity to determine the effectiveness of their actions to make timely adjustments that further improve outcomes. Without embedded opportunities to establish an ongoing monitoring system that connects student success or lack thereof to interim assessment performance, the school's ability to align planning from one year to the next is limited.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Astor Collegiate Academy	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