

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Aspire Preparatory

Middle School X322

2441 Wallace Avenue

Bronx

NY 10467

Principal: Steven Cobb

Dates of review: December 5 - 6, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Ronald Feinstein

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Aspire Preparatory is a middle school with 396 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 28% Black, 60% Hispanic, 7% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 12% 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 93.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The observation of classroom practice is driven by the adoption of components of a research-based framework that promotes professional growth and has resulted in a clearer instructional focus. (4.1)

School leadership orchestrates a series of short observation cycles through a specific research-based lens and provides prompt feedback and next steps for teachers. In addition, meetings where classroom data and student work are reviewed with groups of teachers highlight areas of strength and need and are incorporated into teacher action plans. This feedback communicates clear “look-fors” that has yielded a clearer school-wide focus on grouping and instructional rigor of tasks and planning.
- Through regular use of a range of relevant data, leaders and faculty have an understanding of performance and progress of individuals and sub-groups which informs instructional and organizational foci. (2.1)
 - The school synthesizes an abundance of summative and school level data to create an overview of strengths and needs. This analysis revealed a need for attention to high leverage standards in literacy, math, science and humanities that prompted revision of curriculum maps to loop those strands across units to reinforce learning.
 - Student performance data, including Performance Series periodic assessment, which is administered three times a year to all students, is aggregated in Google Docs and used by individual and teacher teams to identify areas of focus. This has led to more deliberate flexible grouping creations across classrooms to target high need groups of students by skill and content.
- The school’s internal capacity and external partnerships support students and families in their learning, promote students’ academic and personal growth, and defines a path to post-secondary readiness. (4.4)
 - The Staff Support Team, principal, dean, a guidance counselor and school psychologist provide structures to support staff, including advisories, and provide information that teacher teams find essential for students academic and social emotional growth and defines a path to post-secondary readiness. One impact of this work is the above 90% attendance rate the school has consistently maintained. In addition, results from the Learning Environment Survey show that more than 75% of parents reported that the school has high expectations for their children as well as agree that students are learning what they need for high school and college and career.
 - The school has institutionalized partnerships with Fordham University, Gear-Up and Morningside supporting students with tutoring, peer mediation and providing professional development to guide staff to better

support students as they grow into adults. A neighborhood program through the CBO works with young women to make healthy choices as they come of age and Advance-Up provides necessary supplemental educational services on Saturdays and after-school to a targeted group of students. As a result, parents express satisfaction with the partnerships the school has sought to prepare students for entry into high school.

- School leaders and teams of teachers develop tools to organize and report data trends in student performance in a meaningful and useful way for making school level decisions. (2.3)
 - This year the administration implemented Google Docs along with an electronic grading protocol to aggregate several existing systems into one easily accessible portal that facilitates the identification of students based on instructional needs. This has proved especially useful for identifying groups of students in need of academic intervention as well as those who have fallen short of their goals of achieving higher levels of achievement on State assessments. There are structures in place for teachers to examine this data and they report that they are able to more effectively form flexible groups of students to target during classroom instruction.
- The school community is respectful and safe and as a result students are engaged in learning and appreciative of supports available for personal and academic development. (1.4)
 - The Dean and Guidance work collaboratively with Discipline-specific Teams and Student Advocate to ensure that each student has a formal advisory relationships as well as informal teacher buddying. These structures have resulted in a consistent attendance rate above 90%.
 - Student Ambassadors from each grade meet monthly with the principal as part of a leadership development component of the school's core values. Ambassadors also plan school-wide service programs such as raising money to defeat homelessness and tree planting in the neighborhood. In a partnership with Fordham University, students work as peer-tutors three times a week. As a result, students interviewed stated that "we come here to learn", and that "teachers here, and the programs offered, teach us to be successful".

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that curriculum maps are aligned to appropriate standards and that there is a process in place to support the incorporation of higher order thinking skills so that students experience rigor across classrooms. (1.1)
 - Written curriculum maps are aligned to State standards and the school's identified focused standards from an analysis completed in April. However, the enacted curriculum lacks the higher order thinking necessary to promote post-secondary readiness. Additionally, implemented tasks do not adequately address students with disabilities and ELLs which limits adequate and appropriate opportunities to cognitively engage all learners.

- Promote consistency in differentiated instruction provide challenging tasks to students and develop more effective teacher questioning that extends thinking and provokes discussion to maximize learning. (1.2)
 - Although the administration provides teachers with student performance level data including class pass rates and mid-term results and teachers are prompted to deliver a student-centered instructional model, there is little strategic and guided support to teachers to scaffold and build an understanding of how to use this data to plan effective and challenging targeted instruction. As a result, teaching practices are not targeted to meet the needs of a variety of students, thus limiting levels of engagement and the critical thinking for students.
- Develop a strategic plan that ensures the school's instructional goals are served by all organizational decisions and result in improved instruction and meaningful work products. (1.3)
 - The principal's efforts to support the school's instructional goals include setting up a computer lab for administering Performance Series assessments and dedicated daily common planning time for teachers, as well as mentoring, professional development and extended day. While teachers meet during these designated times to analyze student work, the identification and analysis of this student work to identify effective strategies is inconsistently structured. This reduces the school's ability to develop challenging academic tasks and respond effectively to the academic needs of students.
- Develop a system and structure for identifying the learning needs of all students, including school-identified sub-groups, so that instructional delivery reflects adjustments to curriculum and meets specific learning needs. (2.2)
 - The school leaders have begun to analyze the alignment of curriculum and summative assessments in the service of identifying strengths and needs of all the school's identified sub-groups. However, the school's use of common assessments as well as the data from Performance Series is not specific enough and therefore minimizes teachers' ability to identify effective tasks or teaching strategies to support the needs of different learners. This results in minimizing teaching opportunities for differentiation to increase student outcomes
- Enhance the rigor in setting whole-school, subject, grade, and classroom level goals based on students' current performance and projected learning outcomes. (3.1)
 - School leaders and faculty base their vision for the future of the school on an analysis of summative and interim data, however necessary changes to instruction to match that vision are not yet sufficiently understood, articulated or implemented to narrow the achievement gap and improve student outcomes.
 - The principal and staff develop goals based on current standards and links to CCLS which are communicated to students and their families in a

progress report four times a year. However, effective involvement of the entire school community leaves many parents excluded from school level planning which limits the traction necessary to generate broad support for the school's direction.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Aspire Preparatory	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