

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education High
School**

High School X600

**333 EAST 151ST STREET
Bronx
NY 10451**

Principal: Rene Cassanova

Dates of review: October 18 - 19, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Geri Taylor Brown

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education High School is a High school with 972 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 37% Black, 61% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Asian students and 0% other students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 92% of the students enrolled and girls account for 8%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 76.9%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Student and teacher programs support the school's focus leading to moderate levels of student success. (1.3)
 - In response to low student pass and graduation rate, the school is focused on elevating teacher practice in order to increase student outcomes. To that end, teachers are now scheduled to meet weekly for structured professional collaborations to share teaching strategies and plan instruction. Teachers, particularly at the freshman and sophomore levels, are now beginning to use this opportunity to discuss student outcomes and plan lessons with academic tasks that require more than basic recollection of facts. As a result, there is a slight increase in the levels of student engagement, as evidenced by more students handing in assignments.
 - An assessment of student data showed that 9th graders were not successfully completing course work. One reason noted for the low course completion rate was low daily attendance and cutting. In response to that, school leaders developed a block schedule which increased instruction and minimized the likelihood of cutting. This also allowed for the inclusion of advisory periods for 9th graders, which served as a "home-base" for students. Advisory periods are used to emphasize the importance of attendance, discuss issues and concerns, and share resources with students to support learning. As a result, 9th graders are attending school and classes more, as evidenced by a nearly 10 percent increase in attendance.
- Teams of teachers are developing a practice of using assessments to inform curricular decisions and ongoing adjustments to instruction in order to meet the learning needs of students. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams are beginning to align their classroom-based assessments with each department's academic focus. Members of the Humanities-writing team now use some components of the English language arts Regents rubric on in-class writing assignments. Based on preliminary analysis of the rubric results, Humanities teachers are now beginning to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' understanding and determine the effectiveness of instructional decisions.
 - The use of in-class assessments to evaluate students' understanding of the day's lesson is a practice used by some teachers. In the automotive program, lessons are structured such that students engage in peer discussions guided by teacher prompts. Students work together to solve problems related to the topic and challenge each other to prove that their solution path will yield the desired outcome. During peer conferences and whole group debriefs, the teacher facilitates and guides the learning by asking questions and adding additional information to students' discussions. As a result of this emerging practice, there is now a greater opportunity to understand what students know and don't know based on their learning experiences, thus allowing for adjustments in instruction.
- Students are respectful and eager to learn in this generally calm and orderly environment, which helps support gradual improvements in student outcomes. (1.4)

- In response to survey data on safety and respect, teachers and staff are positioned in the hall to facilitate student movement during the change of class. Teachers and staff intervene by preempting possible hostile situations or use this opportunity to quickly connect and congratulate students who are doing the “right thing.” This has led to close to a 10% drop in school occurrences, as evidenced in the Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS). As a result, there is an improvement in school tone and now students and staff “feel more comfortable and secure in the building.”
- The school has some structures in place to build student involvement in school decisions and address personal needs. In response to student concerns related to poor cafeteria conditions, student government members worked collaboratively with teachers and staff to increase the cleanliness of the cafeteria and acquire “better tables to eat on.” In addition, the school’s sports program provides students with opportunities to explore extra-curricular activities that allow students to develop and build on their talents and skills. These are a few of the structures in place to empower and develop students as active participants in their learning community, thus improving attendance and decreasing in-school infractions.
- Consistent communication of clear expectations to staff and students encourages a focus on improving attendance and academic outcomes. (3.4)
 - “Whatever it takes” is the belief that drives administration’s interaction with staff and families. Administration encourages improvements in staff attendance as a key component of professionalism by discussing and emphasizing the attendance policy at various staff meetings. Teachers and staff with perfect attendance for the month are recognized and celebrated as Staff of the Month. These individuals are provided opportunities to lead professional development opportunities on a variety of topics that are intended to bolster staff morale. Connectedly, ninth grade teachers work to embody the “Whatever it takes” mantra in their supports of the ninth graders. Ninth grade teachers meet daily to plan lessons and discuss coherent ways to communicate expectations such as attendance, grading policy, behavior and class participation with students. In addition, these teachers support their students and colleagues by collaborating on lessons and “sitting-in” on classes to reinforce classroom expectations. These practices support the school’s message that it will do “whatever it takes” to achieve success for students and adults, as evidenced by increases in staff attendance and ninth graders having the highest percentage of class pass rate.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop curricula and academic tasks, aligned to key standards that challenge and promote engagement in order to improve outcomes for all students. (1.1)
 - School leaders have selected “argumentative writing” as an instructional focus in English language arts and History, but have not yet identified key standards for other core subject areas, such as Math and Science. Review of curricula and student work indicate that the selection or development of academic task in English and History does not consistently support the identified key standards in that students are infrequently asked to support their responses, both verbally and in written form. In addition, academic tasks used across subject areas do not ensure rigorous habits or address the special learning needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs). This prevents

all students, including ELLs and SWDs, from engaging in academically challenging curricula that is coherent, thus hindering student achievement.

- Develop teacher knowledge and use of effective instructional strategies that engage all students and improves academic achievement (1.2)
 - The principal believes that students should be actively engaged during instructional time. To that end, teachers ask students questions during whole and, in a few classes, small group instruction. However, the questions and classroom strategies used are generic and class routines do not meet the learning needs of individual or groups of students. In the majority of classroom visited, students were often asked to respond to questions that are at the basic recall level. A few students eagerly raised their hands to participate in lessons while the majority sat quietly unengaged. Teachers typically called only on those students who raised their hands and did not require students to dialogue with each other based on responses. These generic strategies and routines prevent teachers from meeting the academic learning needs of all students, thus resulting in limited participation and thinking.
- Provide guidance and support services to students to ensure academic and personal growth for all students. (4.4)
 - The administration maintains school support personnel on the current budget. However, these staff members have limited and sporadic interaction with students. Students, at this point in the year, have not yet participated in guidance sessions, or met individually with their counselors, to discuss the number of credits they have or which required classes they need to take in order to graduate. Connectedly, students do not yet have a confirmed program. After nearly 30 days of school, some students still remain in academic classes they have already passed, awaiting a program change for placement in appropriate classes. This lack of support for students in understanding where they are on the track to graduation and what they need to do to improve, hinders progress towards postsecondary readiness.
 - The school has partnerships with Lincoln Hospital and the Community Board. These affiliations were established to offer services to families and for the development of internships for students. However, these partnerships have not yet been fully solidified as opportunities to develop and support students academically and socially. Students and families have little knowledge and understanding of the services these organizations provide or the school's intended purpose for partnering with them. As a result, student participation in these programs is low and academic impact is very minimal.
- Develop a coherent process for school improvement that includes building alignment between and tracking of long-and short-term goals in order to make adjustments that lead to students' academic success. (5.3)
 - The school sets academic and organizational goals, on an annual basis, based on Regents exam results. However, annual academic goals are based on current data and do not reflect multi-year trends and patterns in student performance. One of the school's goals is to increase the graduation rate to 65%. In conversation and review of annual planning documents, there was little alignment between the current year's graduation rate goal and previous year's goal. The school's improvement effort is additionally limited as there is no interim goal or established system to ensure that the school is on track to meet its annual goal. This prevents school leaders from understanding the strengths and

weakness of implemented plans and making mid-course adjustments, if needed. As a result, efforts to increase student achievement are regularly not met.

- Establish a structured approach to the teacher evaluation system that directly links improved pedagogy with student success. (4.1)
 - Administration's current teacher development practices include informal and formal classroom observations with some written feedback to teachers regarding a myriad of classroom instructional and organization areas. However, observations are infrequent. Also, focus areas are randomly selected and not anchored to a commonly agreed upon research-based framework for teaching. In addition, teacher feedback does not yet identify strengths and weakness in teacher practice, as evidenced in student data, nor does it articulate instructional next steps. This prevents teachers from leveraging pedagogical strengths to address weaknesses in their teaching practice, thus preventing an increase in student progress.

- Establish regular communications and collaboration with parents to ensure partnership toward improving outcomes for their children. (2.4)
 - Administration and staff have initiated a practice of sending parents progress reports before the official report card. However, there is no process in place to manage the implementation of this initiative. Therefore, not all teachers are following through on this initiative, with only some teachers sending progress reports home. This inconsistent practice prevents parents from knowing how their children are progressing, relative to what is expected of them. As result, they are unable to effectively support their child's learning at home in order to improve outcomes.
 - There are few parents who participate in and attend the School Leadership Team and the Parent Association. At these meetings, parents raise issues and concerns, and school staff informs parents of instructional and organizational decisions. Parents talked at length about their concerns about the school uniform policy but were not part of the school decision to implement the plan. This lack of inclusion impacts parents' ability to partner with school leaders in implementing initiatives in order to achieve student success.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education 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