

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences

High School K629

5800 Tilden Avenue

Brooklyn

NY 11203

Diane Varano

Dates of review: February 13-14, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences (CAAS) is a high school with 305 students from grade nine through grade twelve. The school population comprises 87% Black, 11% Hispanic, 1.3% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 86.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school community is unified in their efforts to maintain a safe and respectful culture where students are cared for and take enormous pride in their school, and are motivated learners. (1.4)
 - The school culture reflects a respectful tone among students, faculty, and family. Students all spoke to the faculty's "friendliness," and to how their teachers made time for them in class and after school to encourage academic persistence. For example, one student spoke about his teacher sat with him to review missteps on an exam, while another of shared how his teacher pushed him to grow his confidence in math by repeating to him, "you can do it" enough times so that I started to believe it." This changed his perception of himself as a weak math student and had a positive impact on his performance in class. A representative of the newly established Student Council said that students had initiated a "Respect for All" campaign that is displayed in the hallways. Parents say the principal is always available to them, and that teachers really care for their children in the face of personal challenges. Such actions reflect the school's respect for student voice and attention to student needs, resulting in students who are motivated to learn and take pride in their school.
 - Several adults in the school track student attendance and support students with social-emotional and academic challenges. Parents shared their appreciation for the Parent Coordinator who bridges the gap between school and home by informing parents how to use TeacherEase to monitor their children's progress. The attendance team works to bring students who are not attending classes back to school, and they make home visits are made when needed. In addition, the social worker meets with students individually, which is having a positive impact on attendance, punctuality and personal behavior as evidenced in notes that indicate gains made by individual students. As a result of these actions, Online Occurrence Reporting System data shows consistently low suspension rates and attendance data has improved for targeted students, thereby increasing students' opportunities for academic success increase.
- School leaders make organizational decisions that are beginning to support school goals and efforts to increase instructional capacity. (1.3)
 - The school has several programs that develop teachers' capacity and support students in growing their college readiness. As a National Educator Program (NEP) lab site, the school has access to many services and partnerships that support its efforts to improve instruction and promote teacher leadership. First, the NEP coach meets weekly with faculty to develop teacher capacity in alignment to NEPs stated goal for "80% of professional development to be conducted by the staff themselves, demonstrating mastery of Key #1: Faculty Ownership" from the "Five Keys to Successful Career Academies." Second, NEP coordinates a teacher exchange program, the "Sister School Initiative" where CAAS teachers visit and learn from teachers at Gulf Shores High School, share curricula ideas, and are visited in return. Third, in partnership with Brooklyn College (TRiO), students attend college information sessions and fairs, and ongoing

SAT preparatory courses. In addition, the College Advocates and Mentors Program (CAM) matches each senior with a Colorado State University mentor who shares experiences and readies seniors for the rigors of college curricula. These ongoing alliances support the school's instructional goals to integrate the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) into curricula across disciplines, and result in a focus on academic vocabulary across content area classrooms and students highlighting and writing responses to more difficult texts to support their learning, as evidenced in a review of student work.

- The principal recognizes that a number of CAAS students face academic challenges, and the data specialist identified the lowest third students across grades. This resulted in programming students into “Bright Promises” classrooms where they receive ongoing academic support. In addition, advisory classes have been repurposed to provide academic intervention. Both classes are embedded into the school day, but there are also after school classes available for additional content-specific support. Several students spoke to how readily they attend and how much they appreciate the opportunity. This supports the school towards meeting the needs of all students in order to develop a system that holds adults accountable for a specific cohort of students and their progress.
- The school's emerging approach to form effective teacher team collaborations is beginning to support school goals and promote teacher leadership capacity. (4.2)
 - Both grade and content area teams meet regularly to hold professional conversations regarding instructional practice and student progress. Lead teachers take ownership of the process, produce agendas, and consider the school's instructional focus around the chosen key CCLS which are, by grade: 9th Grade Academy: drawing conclusions based on evidence; 10th Grade Academy: reading complex texts and note taking; 11th Grade Academy: the debate process; 12th Grade Academy: college-level research and writing). In the 9th grade team meeting, teachers brainstormed ideas for an interdisciplinary project regarding the concept of “tyranny” to be implemented in the spring. The math team shared their success in using data from last year's assessments to propose that the school rethink the sequence of math courses. This resulted in entering ninth grade students placed in either one or two-year Algebra courses after a review of baseline assessment results and students' eighth grade scores. Students with scores exceeding 75 are programmed for a one-year Algebra course with “Bright Promises” support as needed. Trigonometry replaces geometry in the sequence so that students can apply and expand upon what they learn in algebra. The team shares that it is “getting students used to vocabulary as part of the math classroom culture” and aiming to “reduce content from twelve [focus areas in a lesson] to seven” in order to delve more deeply into conceptual thinking. The stated expectation is that these decisions will result in increased scholarship and a deeper grasp of content for students, and teachers feeling empowered to make instructional decisions that have direct impact on improved academic performance.

What the school needs to improve

- Analyze and adjust curricula using student work and data to inform alignment to key standards and to engage all students in learning that requires all students to acquire higher order skills and demonstrate their thinking (1.1)
 - Many curricula plans identify CCLS in reading, writing, and mathematics in order to begin the process of introducing more rigorous learning expectations in classrooms and to encourage critical thinking. The actual tasks, however, do not consistently align to this level of rigor. For example, in one unit the chosen standard included expects that students will “determine two or more themes ... in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account,” yet the lesson tasks ask students to create a poster to identify one theme using evidence from the text to support this choice, and to find evidence that helps to predict the play’s potential plotline. In one classroom, students viewed a variety of political cartoons that exemplified cultural stereotyping, something students might deeply understand from experiences in and out of school. Yet the task that followed was to practice interpreting a political cartoon with a set of short answer questions from a past Regents examination without any discussion about what they learned about stereotyping. In addition, tasks were not consistently modified to meet the needs of diverse learners nor were there consistent evidence of teachers using student work data from units to modify tasks for students with different learning styles or abilities. This lessens the potential for students to gain mastery of higher-level skills and to engage in rigorous habits of mind that will ready them for college and career.

- Establish consistency in teaching practice across classrooms to reflect a coherent set of beliefs about teaching and learning so that all students demonstrate higher order thinking skills across the curricula. (1.2)
 - Teachers are working to include tasks that will engage their students. Such tasks included noting how medieval and renaissance artwork differ, making personal meaning of Machiavellian quotes, using post its to locate text quotes to answer the aim, viewing film clips to see a range of debaters’ craft, and citing “strong mathematical evidence” to determine which of two salary offers would yield the most money. Across classrooms students engaged in like tasks and worked independently or in partnerships that were offered as a choice. There was less evidence of scaffolds in place for students who might perform well with such support, extensions tasks for high performing students, or tasks that provide opportunities for students to engage in discourse with each other (although one student did attempt to prompt a discussion when he questioned the ambiguity of a debater’s claim). Teachers asked many of the questions and summarized responses, and students responded chorally or to the teacher. Consequently, students are not being pushed to justify responses, to weigh in on peer’s assertions, or to demonstrate critical thinking on in-class work products. This lessens opportunities for students to share their understandings with each other, to engage in rigorous habits of mind, and for teachers to determine what students know and are able to do as a result of teaching and learning. (a,c)

- Ensure consistent use of varied ongoing assessment practices and timely analysis of student work to make effective instructional and curricular adjustments at the team and classroom level for increased student progress. (2.2)

- The school implements several standardized assessments including Acuity and Slosson, and teachers across disciplines implement their own content-specific assessments to ascertain how well students understand unit material covered. The Kaleidoscope Profile and student-generated Academic Education Plans (AEP) help teachers to determine student interests and challenges. However, there is no consistent system in place for using common baseline and benchmark assessments to target students' specific skill-based academic goals of students in order to monitor progress over time, or for individual teachers and teacher teams to make effective adjustments to curricula based on ongoing data analysis. This impedes school efforts to effectively meet the needs of all students.
- In several classrooms teachers moved from table to table checking in with students during independent work time. Teachers asked students questions, engaged student queries, and in one history classroom the teacher asked students to fill out an exit slip to check for understanding. In addition, in two Integrated Collaborative Team Teaching (ICT) classrooms, a teacher worked one-on-one with students who appeared to be stuck, or were struggling to begin a task. However, less evident were teachers checking in with students to get a sense of what they understood during lesson discussions or teacher explanations that might lead to a necessary adjustment to the lesson. This makes the learning objectives less transparent to students who might not express confusion so readily, and limits the teacher's opportunity to adjust the plan so that more students gain master of content and skill.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Cultural Academy for the Arts and Sciences	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?		X					
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?		X					
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?		X					
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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					
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed