

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**The Academy of Talented Scholars School**

**20K682**

**50 Avenue P  
Brooklyn  
NY 12204**

**Principal: Josephine Sportello-Guisto**

**Dates of review: February 5, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Karina Costantino**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

20K682 is an elementary school with 296 students from kindergarten through grade 4. The school population comprises 4% Black, 11% Hispanic, 66% White, and 19% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 95.1%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal makes strategic scheduling and hiring decisions, aligned to the school's instructional goals, to support improved student work products. (1.3)
  - The majority of staff at the school is new to The Department of Education (DOE) and the need for differentiated tiered professional development is prioritized by the principal. To that end, the principal developed The Academic Coach/Data Specialist position to provide teachers, not only with professional development, but also to assist and guide teacher teams with interpreting assessments to drive instruction aligned to the schools instructional goals, Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the Chancellor's instructional expectations (CIE). Thus, teachers are able to collaborate on instructional strategies such as effective questions and modeling, to support all students in improving their writing skills. This is evidenced by the coherence in practice seen when visiting classrooms and observed in student work, particularly writing, which incorporates more text based evidence in non fiction writing samples.
  - The principal has structured time for a number of teams to meet, which focus on improving academic outcomes. Teacher teams meet on Thursday afternoon each week and during extended time. In addition, where possible, teachers have common preparation periods where they plan curriculum aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and analyze student work samples. The school has an Autism Spectrum Disorder/Nest School (ASD) team, which meets weekly after school to discuss and inform the academic and social emotional growth for this population. Many of the practices from the school's work with the ASD/Nest students, such as providing strategies for children to independently refocus on tasks, are shared with all teachers and can be evidenced in classrooms school-wide. An example of this is having a student wear headphones to help him focus if he is easily distracted by noise around him. This results in improved instruction for all students which is reflected in student work.
- The school maintains a culture of mutual trust and provides structures that support the needs of all students and adults, in order to increase academic and personal growth in a safe environment. (1.4)
  - The school adopts the Tribes Program which engages all teachers, administrators, students, and families in working together as a learning community that is dedicated to caring, supporting and participating to drive positive expectations for all students. The regular practice of sharing one's thoughts, feelings and ideas during Tribes' activities, along with the frequent opportunity to work in small groups, supports the child and the community in becoming more interdependent. The Enrichment model validates student voice during the student council meetings where students meet monthly with the principal to discuss their concerns and ideas which builds their confidence and independence, positively impacting their ability to succeed individually and collectively.

- On the Learning Environment Survey (LES), 96% of parents indicate that their child has an adult at the school that they trust and can go to for help with any school problem. The school has a Child Study Team, consisting of the guidance counselor, support personnel such as the special needs teacher, speech teacher, classroom teachers and administrators to ensure that appropriate staff provides the necessary supports for all students to reach higher standards, particularly those at risk of retention. This team monitors all sub group data as well as soft data, including attendance, providing the necessary academic, emotional or social support that each child needs on a weekly basis. For example, the team uses a broad range of data to provide classroom teachers with strategies, services and “at risk” interventions for students not meeting grade level proficiency to meet the child’s academic, social and emotional needs. Consequently, parents state that their children are safe and that academic social needs are addressed.
- The school communicates high expectations to all members of the school community that results in improved student outcomes for all learners. (3.4)
  - Students are exposed to real life experiences in a rigorous setting preparing them with college and career readiness skills. For instance, all learners are provided with collaborative opportunities to engage in specialty classes which involve dance, art, music, Music and the Brain, gym and a partnership with TADA (Theater Arts and Dance Academy.) In addition, Ballroom Dancing is offered for 4<sup>th</sup> grade students and Urban Arts for K-2 students. Parents volunteer during the enrichment clusters and bring their area of expertise to the programs. Through a grant, the school has added Story Studio, which is a storytelling and literacy based program to advance proficiency and fluency usage of the English language, develop storytelling skills and increase student performance, especially for English language learners (ELLs). Second and third graders participate in Reach the World (RTW), which is an interactive technology based program that exposes students to geography and volunteer world travelers through an innovative program of online journalism and face to face interactions. Teachers use the enrichment model and skyping, as well as project based learning activities to push the thinking of all students to achieve higher academic outcomes. Feedback is provided to students using rubrics to help them target their next steps. Families are provided with monthly newsletters, Google docs and workshops on the academic expectations of the CCLS and progress reports on students’ progress. Consequently, both students and parents are aware of the expectations for meeting college and career readiness skills.
- The school has an effective and transparent process in place to evaluate school level decisions, in order to increase coherence of practice and policy to improve students’ academic outcomes. (5.1)
  - School leaders constantly monitor teacher and student progress. The principal and 12 month assistant principal created a year long calendar to benchmark teacher and classroom practice four times a year. The administration also monitors curricula and teacher practice through observations, data spread sheets for all assessments, teacher reflection forms, team agendas and minutes, student work and lesson plans. In

addition, all findings and adjustments are shared on Google docs, making them accessible and transparent for the entire staff to view and fully communicate to parents the school's expectations at key designated points during the school year. This overall transparency puts everyone on the same page and leads to increased student performance.

## **What the school needs to improve**

- Expand plans and revise academic tasks so that all students are rigorously and cognitively engaged consistently, at their level of entry to move towards increased academic performance. (1.1)
  - The school's focus is to make progress with their high performing students; however they are just beginning to implement tasks with higher order questioning skills and scaffolding during lessons, in order to push students' critical thinking skills. Teachers are beginning to be trained to further refine best practices during guided reading to accurately capture the challenges for their English language learners and Students with Disabilities (SWD's), enabling them to accurately plan rigorous instruction for this population of students. However, across classrooms rigorous tasks and practices are inconsistent. For example, in some classrooms, teachers do not scaffold questions to address student responses so as to push critical thinking, specifically for subgroups, while in some accelerated classes this practice is in place. As a result, not all students are provided with opportunities that challenge their thinking at their instructional level in order to improve academic performance.
- Provide teachers with common assessments and support to consistently evaluate students' understanding during lessons that informs ongoing adjustments to instruction, for improved progress toward student goals. (2.2)

Teachers are beginning to implement some common assessments to check for student understanding across some classrooms; however this practice is inconsistent across all grades. During classroom discussions, there were uneven levels of student participation among sub-groups of students, thus limiting greater teacher analysis of their comprehension of concepts and content. In addition, not all teachers were proficient with their understanding of guided reading, thereby preventing an honest analysis of student entry points and understanding during the lesson. Consequently, the lack of teacher proficiency in assessing students' comprehension during lessons and the uneven use of common assessments hinders their ability to consistently gather classroom data to inform immediate instructional adjustments, in order to improve all students' progress toward individual goals and achievement.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Academy of Talented Scholars	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<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					
<b>School Culture</b>							
<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			
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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 <b>inquiry approach</b> 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			
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>