

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**The Academy for Excellence Through the Arts**

**Early Childhood School 303**

**108-55 69<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Queens  
NY 11375**

**Principal: Barbara Leto**

**Dates of review: January 29 - 30, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Sheila S.- Gorski**

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

### **Information about the school**

The Academy for Excellence through the Arts is an early childhood school with 211 students from pre kindergarten through grade 3. The school population comprises 1% Black, 18% Hispanic, 56% White, and 22% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 97.1%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is well developed.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Across the school instructional coherence emphasizes key standards and instructional shifts strategically planned around rigorous interdisciplinary thematic units that promote all learners' higher order thinking. (1.1)
  - The school continuously focuses decision-making on curriculum that is aligned to key standards, thus assuring all students are prepared to demonstrate content acquisition and application of skills taught in all disciplinary areas and across the grades. Teachers comprehensibly align units of study to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and instructional shifts, embedding cognitive processes that ground deep thinking. Plans include a section, Big Ideas/Enduring Understandings designed to ensure that students acquire informational knowledge specific to nonfiction text features needed to understand text-demanding books so students have opportunities to acquire strong work habits and organizational skills needed for college and career readiness.
  - In a six week, grade one literacy unit study, Exploration of Informational Texts, with a task related to Animal Experts, teachers planned anticipatory sets to assess student readiness by engaging students in shared reading of a big-book informational text. The plans include independent student work using graphic organizers so students take observational notes of non-fiction features, such as photographs and bold printed words, and what they learned through the reading. Daily checks via careful design of questions are built into the task. Teacher observations of student participation and cumulative work products, lead to ongoing accountability of learning. A performance task that culminates the study requires students to choose an informational text of an animal, research it, and exhibit the ability to use nonfiction texts to write a book about that animal. Each page of the non-fiction book requiring a draft, revisions, and editing, engages students in the writing process. Additionally, students access safe internet sites to obtain resources and references during independent work time. Students across grades self-regulate throughout each unit and teachers use student work products to improve curricula and tasks. These rigorous practices in all content areas support all students, including relevant subgroups, in student collaboration and cognitive engagement as evidenced by mid-year reading proficiency levels for grade one showing 88% of the students at or above grade level.
- The school is committed to strong instructional practices that foster higher order thinking, participation, and student ownership of the learning. (1.2 )
  - Teacher teams believe that all students academically flourish when afforded a nurturing, rich environment where students explore, create, and engage in project-based and hands-on learning experiences. Coupled with choices as learning pathways, students showcase their learning across classrooms and grades. Teacher practices, projects, materials, and routines, are strategically designed around learning styles, interests, areas of student strengths, and individual goals. Moreover, these supports

are informed by the Danielson Teaching Framework, with specific domains at the forefront of discourse, such as coherent instruction, discussion, and questioning techniques, and evaluation and assessment in instruction. This being the case, teachers design lessons around the Five Forever Factors, broad concepts that capture a topic through geography/climate, economic organization, political structure, science/technology, and social/culture, so teachers and students dissect a topic and create deep meaningful experiences. Teachers use model texts to illustrate factors in a clear manner. Titles include *Yertle the Turtle*, *Tar Beach*, *Too Many Tamales*, *The Kweeks of Kiikatumdee*, and a host of Shel Silverstein poetry. Grades 2 and 3 engaged in a unit of study on the Harlem Renaissance involving students in several aspects of New York history, the music, dance, artwork, and cultural venues of this important period. Scaffolds linked to this unit include, discussion of artwork, trips to the Apollo Theatre, paired texts, chunking thoughts, and use of graphic organizers specific to the unit study. Multiple points of access ease comprehension through tiered vocabulary, graphic organizers for note-taking, checklists, time-on-task timers, and relevant infusion of technology-based elements of modern society. Accordingly, all learners shared opportunities and choices to engage in higher-order thinking and produce meaningful work.

- Students demonstrate knowledge through identification of portrait details, analysis of lyrics, and composition of musical period pieces. A Renaissance unit of study culminates with a “Rent Party” mirroring the parties of the 1920’s and 1930’s. This event becomes a living museum for families to witness students’ academic gains throughout the course of the lessons. Similar challenging tasks across grades provide opportunities for all students to engage in anchor standards for writing and emphasizing research to build and present knowledge at higher levels of thinking and understanding, evidencing student ownership of their learning. Supporting reading proficiency data denotes 100% of grade 2 students and 93% of grade 3 students are at levels 2-4, thus far.
- Teachers engage in the process of designing common assessments and rubrics that align to curricula and use data results to inform instructional adjustments. (2.2)
  - Traveling portfolios comprise cumulative student work, grading protocols, and assessments, and move with students from year-to-year so teachers are informed of student strengths and needs and align baseline assessments in English language arts and math to formulate student goals. Teachers use formative assessments such as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Fountas & Pinnell (F&P) on-going running records to monitor student ability to understand challenging text and assess their readability. Additionally, one school goal, to ensure that the majority of third grade students make significant advancements in reading, fluency, and comprehension, led vertical teams to design unit aligned assessments and teacher/student rubrics across the grades. Teachers use independent reading/writing and content area rubrics to both assess students performance and tasks, and to allow students to self-assess their comprehension, book choices, work time, text features, research, and editing. Thus, progress and grading is transparent and presents a clear portrayal of student achievement.

- Instructional adjustments to align curricula to key standards have been carried on from school year 2010, with progress monitoring to inform changes. Revisions guide instruction in reading for information, paraphrasing, and citing from complex texts. Teachers gather data from various student work products to evaluate student progress so that instructional adjustments are reliable and based on student needs. Students use reflection sheets and peer rubrics to examine, understand the work, and self-assess. Students in need of additional support are assigned to an extended day program, where services include one-to-one tutoring and/or small group work. Students academically at-risk attend the Breakfast Club where instruction is tailored to student needs. Teachers continuously create student goals to inform students of next steps so all students, including relevant subgroups, know the expectations, resulting in academic progress as documented in bulletin board displays and traveling portfolios.
- The school's vision is promulgated in a set of clear and directed goals that reflect improved teacher development that is closing the achievement gap. (3.1)
  - The school's premise to deepen the work in all content areas and bring instruction further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning is strongly supported by school constituents as documented in the collaboratively designed Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) and other school plans. All classroom teachers are skillful as leadership states, "...in the application of technology by designing learning environments which enhance the use of information technology with the intent to allow students to meet high academic standards using SMARTboards." The school regards best teaching practices as those reflected daily with appropriate blends of technology-integrated lessons. A Resolution-A grant allocation supported the launch of this goal that has resulted in authentic performance in the application of technology. Students interactively engage in math practice via the SMART board for hands-on experiences, thus engaging in kinesthetic opportunities for students who learn interactively and prefer visual support. This learning also facilitates comprehension and encourages personal-behavior growth and confidence in students' use of technology to leverage their achievement.
  - In line with the school's goal setting, teachers continue to strengthen knowledge of SMARTboard technology and inter-class teachers observe SMARTboard lessons as part of a lunch and learn technology series, and professional development afforded through the Office of Instructional Technology provides further support. The school technology team and administration conduct instructional walkthroughs to give teachers reliable feedback. All students including relevant subgroups show deep understanding and ability to manage math concepts through the interactive use of SMARTboards and small whiteboards at their desks. Learning has resulted in improved teacher practice as documented in teacher observations and efforts to close the achievement gap, evidenced in the Singapore math program's most recent assessments of concepts in the areas of position, multiplication, and division, showing that 75 of 125 students assessed are making significant improvements relative to grade level expectations for those concepts.

- Teacher teams methodically analyze data of student groups and make decisions that influence student learning across the school. (4.2)
  - Teacher teams take the lead, analyzing the school's item-analysis to jumpstart vertical planning so that noted learning gaps are attended to systematically. A Teachers College baseline assessment administered assures that goals designed for student groups and classroom practices are aligned to student needs. Ongoing data analyses are at the heart of instructional adjustments, informing flexible groups focusing on reading, for information, paraphrasing, and citing from complex texts. Teacher teams across grades share their best strategies to influence the learning across the school. Short-term group cycles and assessments keep student-learning fluid and focused. While speaking to students, they expressed knowledge of rubric language for each task and how they use it to ensure they think about their needs and what the teacher expects them to learn. The English as a second language teacher has taken the role of data specialist and is also a principal intern at the school, and numerous teachers have taken on leading roles in technology and aligning curricula to key standards while also furthering scholastics in administration. These reciprocal, devolving responsibilities between leadership, teachers, and students, contribute to strong leadership skills where teachers positively shape instruction and student achievement as evidenced in the most recent reading proficiency levels that show 75% of the students are at or above grade level.

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

- Build on existing systems to communicate to families the school's expectations and enhance their understanding linked to a path for college and career readiness to effectively support their children's progress in meeting expectations. (3.4)
  - School leaders and faculty consistently inform stakeholders, and encourage a culture that helps students understand the school's high expectations via clear feedback. Students use checklists and rubrics to plan the next point for learning. The school is dedicated to building a strong home/school connection so that students are supported by their teachers, parents/caregivers, and friends. The principal offers monthly parent workshops, "On stage with Ms. Leto" addressing school initiatives and student progress. Workshops include reading levels and how parents may help at home. Strategies like daily home read-alouds with questions, letter-sound connections, and reading left to right are also provided. Families state their input in school goals and support of school's expectations. They host fund raising events for school initiatives. Conversely, parents express the need to further understand how to support young children in college and career readiness whose ages range five to eight. Although school efforts encourage parent support in Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and Citywide expectations (CIE), and have strong communication procedures in place, parents articulate a need for specific workshops to increase their knowledge relative to their children's academic progress and college and career readiness, to promote an even greater successful partnership that supports student achievement around all identified expectations.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Academy for Excellence through the Arts	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>							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed