

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Hillside Arts and Letters Academy

High School Q325

**167-01 Gothic Drive
Jamaica
NY 11432**

Principal: Matthew C. Ritter

Dates of review: March 4-5, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Juan Mendez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Hillside Arts and Letters Academy consists of 328 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 40% Black, 24% Hispanic, 4% White, and 26% Asian students. The student body includes 11.6% English language learners and 10.1% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 88.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers effectively align curricula to key standards and offer a wide range of learning experiences that engage students and support their learning. (1.1)
 - School wide implementation of performance tasks aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), sets the foundation for the school's curricular development. The school's curriculum centers on providing extra attention to student with disabilities (SWDs), and focuses on the instructional shift in English language arts (ELA) that engages students in rich and rigorous evidence-based conversations about text. Teachers use a rubric developed by Bank Street Graduate School of Education to guide the cohesion of its instructional units. This school wide effort has resulted in an array of performance tasks which that have been effortlessly integrated into both curriculum maps and instructional units in order to prepare all students with college and career readiness skills.
 - Team leaders engage teachers in the analysis of student work during structured teacher team meetings to see that students remain engaged. Team leaders steer grade level student work analysis protocols through the use of checklists. Agendas from these meetings detail accumulated expectations and provide clarity for teachers during the curriculum planning and revision process. One teacher commented on the refinement of student tasks as a, "Reinforcement of strategies that pushed students up." These ongoing meetings have allowed for fruitful professional dialogue around student work.
- Teaching practices across the school reflect a common belief about student learning and consistently provide purposeful supports to meet varied student needs. (1.2)
 - Teachers conduct lessons replete with activities that require students to write from sources in order to substantiate their responses with evidentiary information. This approach is coupled with the central belief in the importance of using critical thinking questions to cognitively engage students. The Danielson Framework provides teachers with a growing sense of pedagogical automaticity that allows for frequent checks for understanding and prompt adjustments where necessary. Several social studies classrooms were visited where students interpreted quotes, made predictions, and evaluated information presented in an assortment of documents. Across classrooms, teachers collectively emphasized the school's CEP goal of increased college-preparatory literacy skills. This focus on literacy preparedness across subjects is validated by the 72% passing rate on the Global History and Geography Regents examination.
 - The school promotes scholarship through routines that encourage active learning experiences. For example, one living environment class allowed students to synthesize material gathered from charts using an inquiry approach that sought to answer the question posed in the aim: "How do our bodies maintain stable glucose levels?" Aside from striving to make learning fun, many teachers incorporated purposeful supports to elicit

higher-order thinking such as, annotation, accountable talk, and advanced graphic organizers. The principal commented on a recent school “scaffolding retreat” that occurred in February 2013, which allowed staff to become more deeply immersed in strategies to address its subgroup population of English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs). This inclination to provide multiple entry points has led the school to a 75% passing rate on the English Comprehensive Regents examination.

- The school uses its resources effectively to build teacher capacity and improve instruction as evidenced by increased student engagement in academic tasks. (1.3)
 - School leaders have found a myriad of ways to carefully align resources to support the school’s instructional goals. Partnerships with St. Mary’s Hospital allow students in living environment classes to explore perplexing afflictions to the human condition while writing reports. Students enthusiastically insist that “Teachers listen to our ideas. I proposed a debate team. We will be competing next month!” Additionally, the school’s use of iZone 360 has perpetuated an extensive partnership with New Tech Network, which deploys individuals who visit and study the school to determine crucial competencies for the school to focus on moving students forward. The committee evaluates school space, budget, and student work products to provide options for school leaders so that vital organizational decisions can be made. This encompasses addressing the school’s long term action plan that centers on a more personalized and project-based curriculum. The school has integrated the high-tech learning management system, *Echo*, which allows students and parents to track academic progress. As a result, the school has produced an incomparable level of transparency that allows its use of technology and resources to address both short-term and long-term instructional goals.
 - Student interventions to support ELLs and SWDs have been largely successful due to the school’s advisory initiative, a program meant to offer a high level of social and emotional support for students. The decision to institute the advisory program was prompted by the principal’s wish to avert academic issues not only with subgroups but also with the vast majority of incoming students who were scoring below grade level on middle school proficiency assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and math. This advisory program is spearheaded by several summer advisory workshops prior to the start of the school year. In these workshops, student data is used to make curricular planning decisions. Once the advisory curriculum is established for the school year, advisors and teachers gravitate towards showcasing student work products in a variety of forums. This heightened level of collaboration has resulted in school-embedded capacity building that positively impacts the school culture and makes all stakeholders equally responsible for attaining crucial academic goals.
- Teachers benefit from an observation process that is grounded in the Danielson Framework and allows for the implementation of effective instructional techniques. (4.1)

- The principal firmly believes that classroom observation reports “improve teacher effectiveness by developing a system of support which includes frequent mini-observations and feedback that is aligned with a research based framework for teaching,” and the principal is familiar with this as a CEP goal. Each teacher receives a minimum of 2-3 snapshots per week with accompanying feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework toward their next steps. After each observation, specific feedback is tailored to the individual needs of the teachers as well as instructional goals for the school. In post-observations, student performance data is also used to gauge progress. For example, feedback guides teachers on developing critical thinking questions, text based evidence in student writing, as well as increased student participation and checks for student understanding. The result of these ongoing observations and feedback is substantiated by the individualized professional development spoken of by the teachers interviewed, who report that the frequent feedback supports their professional growth to improve student work.
- The school uses the Danielson Framework to provide classroom feedback to teachers. School leaders maintain logs of assistance for all teachers to support their individual progress in meeting school goals. We were presented with evidence of these logs, which contain columns that feature needs assessments, action plans, and evaluations of progress. This detailed documentation highlights the customized professional development and close monitoring of teacher’s goals by school leaders. As revealed in the Learning Environment Survey Report, 100% of teachers agree that “School Leaders Place a High Priority on the Quality of Teaching.” The result is a strengthened community of professionals who value the small, yet necessary changes in teacher practice that result in undeniable growth.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the use of assessment results to monitor student progress and inform curricular and instructional adjustments with clear next learning steps to improve student outcomes. (2.2)
 - Teachers are in the process of designing performance based learning (PBL) units that integrate rubrics to be used school-wide. While the school has goals that address “increased performance of the lowest third subgroup school-wide,” the impact of these newly minted assessments is minimal. This is evidenced in the decreased percentage of students in the school's lowest third earning ten or more credits in their first year. Teachers are now incorporating alternate assessments that differentiate for students with high needs using a variety of learning modalities. Additionally, while the school has common assessments to monitor student progress, ongoing classroom checks for student understanding is not consistent across classrooms and the school has not developed an effective way to increase the mastery rate of students toward their goals. The principal points out that “Teachers are engaged in a process of reflection on how student sub groups perform on a given task.” However, this process is gradual in its transference from thought to practical instructional strategies that address critical learning needs. This is evidenced in some discrepancies between scholarship reports and Regents passing percentages in all subjects.

- Further develop teacher teams' collaboration for evaluating student work, planning and sharing best practices in order to meet college readiness expectations across subject area for all students. (4.2)
 - Although the majority of teachers are engaged in teacher team meetings, the emphasis on college readiness expectations varies greatly among subject areas. The school has performed well in ELA and social studies, and distributed leadership structures allow teachers to largely impact classroom practice. For example, several teachers have asked for additional projects for students, such as one that uses Storybook software to narrate man's plight in Ancient China. However, several students agreed when one student commented on the re-teaching of skills that are not adequately learned the first time: "Teachers could give us more challenging work. If we get things over and over again, it becomes boring." Although a large percentage of students were able to meet proficiency levels on classroom assessments in Integrated Algebra I, these students are not being appropriately challenged with advanced tasks to ensure mastery, as evidenced in math data. Overall, nearly 90% of students have not reached the college readiness threshold on combined mathematics Regents examinations. Consequently, the lack of challenging tasks to support college readiness skills across all subject areas hinders students' academic growth.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name : Hillside Arts and Letters Academy	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