

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Academy of Public Relations

Middle School 298

778 Forest Avenue

Bronx

NY 10454

Principal: Amy Andino-Flohr

Dates of review: March 19-20, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Yolanda Torres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Academy of Public Relations is a middle school with 319 students from sixth through grade 8. The school population comprises 24% Black and 76% Hispanic students. The student body includes 33% English language learners and 21% 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 91.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school culture is a safe and cohesive environment where staff, students, and families feel respected and supported. (1.4)
 - The school day starts with students and staff joining in the auditorium for the daily “Press Brief” where administrators and teachers read non-fiction texts out loud in order to ask higher order questions and challenge students’ critical thinking. Students listen carefully to details and engage in discussions that lead to real-world connections. During this time staff members acknowledge and celebrate students’ accomplishments and good deeds by awarding certificates. Students’ names are displayed on the “Wall of Fame” in recognition of their academic achievements. The reinforcement of school rules and regulations are tied in the day’s topic. Students indicate that the motto of the school: “*Aspire. Prepare. Respect.*” affords them the opportunity to be part of a community where “everyone cares” and a place where they have a voice to express themselves in risk-free venues such as forums and Socratic discussions. In classes, students clearly understand the rationale behind the teaching point, the “P4L” (Purpose for Learning) and expected outcomes resulting in collaborative work and group discussions that lead to real-world connections. Students appreciate the fact that teachers give them time to figure out how these lesson components impact on their learning, but most importantly, they are proud of the trust teachers bestow upon them as they take responsibility for their own learning. As a result, students are more responsible for their academic success. The guidance department meets weekly to discuss students that are at-risk regarding attendance as well as with social emotional concerns. Attendance personnel records visitations and targeted interventions for follow-up. Students with perfect attendance receive a variety of incentives from parties and trophies to outdoor camp activities. Individual and small group interventions, such as advisory and mediation, are implemented to ensure that students’ needs are met in a timely and efficient manner. Early meetings with seniors to discuss high school selection are a priority to provide students with a forum to understand the direct alignment between attendance and academic performance resulting in improved attendance average leading to 91% sustainability.
- Organizational decisions and the use of resources are effectively aligned to the school-wide goals as evidenced by the improvement in the delivery of instruction and student work products. (1.3)
 - School leaders make strategic decisions in the use of resources and materials to monitor student progress. This consistent monitoring allows for reinforcement of interventions that result in evidentiary improvement of student work products. The hiring of coaches to improve teacher effectiveness is evident in teacher planning, collaborative meetings and analysis of student work. Team leaders and coaches reflect on their practices by sharing ideas and feedback on how they have grown as a professional learning community as they compare their work from previous school year to present. The time allotted for teachers to

collaboratively meet and plan has afforded them a structured forum to absorb the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards and devise performance tasks that result in challenging students to think critically and speak to the connections they uncover amongst a variety of content areas. As teachers meet, they ensure that instructional decisions around planning units are inclusive across content areas by sharing their products with colleagues and inter-visiting each other for support. This focus results in team and capacity building leading to cohesive lesson planning and more meaningful student work from challenging performance tasks.

- The analysis of the information from curricula-aligned assessments leads to instructional adjustments resulting in targeted academic support for improved student achievement. (2.2)
 - The school-developed pre- and post- benchmarks for each unit provide teachers with useful information on students' knowledge and next steps towards learning. Students submit a final product that is assessed for mastery of subject specific content and skills. Teachers frequently confer with students to hone in on the concepts and/or skills they lack in for improvement. Additionally, during team meetings, teachers analyze student work and identify the trends in student content and skill deficits across curricula. As a result, agreed upon curriculum adjustments are made and targeted instruction is provided to students to make progress toward subject area goals.
 - The use of protocols to evaluate student work such as exit slips are examples of some of the strategies teachers use to check for student understanding. As teachers confer with students during group work, they are able to push students' thinking as evidenced in their discussions and work products. Students indicate that conferring with teachers motivate them to seek ways to improve and achieve their goals resulting in self-checking for understanding. While they acknowledge that the work is harder, they welcome the challenge. As teachers visit and listen in on small group talk and answers to questions posed, they continue to adjust their lessons to better meet students' individual instructional needs.
- Teachers engage in structured and impromptu professional collaborations that build capacity as they facilitate meetings and lend a voice in key decisions that impact on student learning. (4.2)
 - The vast majority of teachers engage in structured meetings where they focus on standards-based protocols to analyze student work. As they share their findings and reach consensus on the trends that contribute to students' learning gaps, they challenge each other and hold candid discussions leading to deep conversations on student learning. Teachers indicate that the driving force of their discussions is to identify evidence of rigor and cognitive engagement. Furthermore, they notice that students persevere in the 'tackling of tasks' and use academic language resulting in improved work products. They assert that these collaborations have contributed to school-wide goals for their professional growth, thus, feeling more confident in making instructional adjustments that positively impact student learning.

- Teachers meet and collaboratively determine next steps to improve student learning. The common language and resourcefulness amongst each other within their teams lead to the development of leaders of leaders. There is an embedded sense of responsibility teachers take towards their learning and professional growth which emanates through their reflective discussions. Teachers find these collaborations as “ridiculously amazing” due to the strides they have achieved, the ability to inter-visit, ‘borrow’ ideas and strategies, and connect with each other. Lastly, they appreciate the fact that the leadership believes in their decision-making abilities. Teams have created and implemented goals regarding curriculum development and teacher practices based on the school-wide goals. As a result, teachers are given frequent opportunities to have a voice in important decisions regarding instruction and student academics.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop curricula and academic tasks that emphasize rigorous habits of thinking across all contents to consistently engage English language learners so that they can demonstrate their thinking. (1.1)
 - Lessons are planned with teaching points and purpose for learning strategies based on the Depth of Knowledge and Bloom’s Taxonomy scaffolds. Students engage and lead Socratic conversations as teachers facilitate the process in order to ensure that all students are cognitively engaged. However, English language learners seem to encounter a language roadblock that adversely impacts on their opportunity to entirely engage in these rich conversations. As a result, not all learners have full access to rigorous tasks that are cognitively engaging, thereby, hampering opportunities to develop higher order skills. The absence of a certified English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher who can provide the needed support to this population as well as professionally develop teachers on using ESL strategies is a hindrance to students’ academic progress. Additionally, teachers use student work vis-à-vis the academic tasks to adjust and refine their lesson delivery. As they revise their lesson pacing based on the prior day’s learning outcomes, teachers resort to a variety of practices to meet students’ areas of difficulty at tackling rigorous tasks. While students with disabilities are making strides leading to evidentiary improvement in the oral demonstration of their thinking process, some ELLs are still at a disadvantage to consistently engage in high order tasks.
- Ensure that the scaffolds and questioning techniques in place provide multiple entry points for English language learners to engage in work and discussions that are appropriately challenging. (1.2)
 - The school’s focus on questioning promotes positive debates, publishing parties and peer assessments providing students with opportunities to engage in discussions that develop academic language. Additionally, strategies such as “wait time” provide students with opportunities to contribute in a risk-free learning environment. Teacher conferences also contribute to student reflection and thinking on their own learning. Although these practices provide students with a variety

of strategies to learn and participate, most teachers lack capacity in strategies that scaffold activities to engage English language learners. During class discussions and student individual and group work, the school's inability to engage all students, specifically this subgroup, in work that appropriately challenges and meets them at their multiple entry points, leads to uneven levels of thinking and student participation.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Academy of Public Relations	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