

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Academy for Language and Technology
09X365**

**1700 MACOMBS ROAD
BRONX, NY, 10453**

Principal: ARISLEYDA URENA

**Dates of Review: May 20-21, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Carron Staple**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Academy for Language and Technology is a high school with 336 students from grades 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 1% Black, 99% Hispanic, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 97.0% English Language Learners and 1% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011-2012 was 93.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well-developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty align curricula to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and make purposeful decisions so a diverse group of learners are engaged and prepared for college and careers. (1.1)
 - Curricula across all grades is created in alignment with the CCLS, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) skills and content, and the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE) shifts. This provides each student with the opportunity to engage in a challenging curriculum that supports their deep thinking about what they are learning and leads to meaningful work products that reflect that learning. Teachers utilize an online tool called *Curricuplan* to help plan thematic units to support students in their academic development. As the school is designed for all English language learners (ELL's) who enter the school speaking no English, the mastery of high-level literacy skills is non-negotiable and the school works hard to develop the sophisticated literacy skills and vocabulary that students' need to gain language acquisition, in order to gain a high school diploma and be prepared with college and career readiness skills. The curriculum prioritizes English language arts (ELA) standards that provide students with the capacity to draw inferences from academic texts, synthesize information from various sources and follow complex directions. Every academic discipline has its own set of characteristic literacy practices where students must learn to write well in a variety of genres. Content teachers are patient and supportive as students make their way through complex reading assignments, learn specific vocabulary and compose well-constructed essays. Students receive daily support with decoding and fluency to encourage accountable talk, resulting in them being able to discuss what they have read, written, interpreted and analyzed. ELLs, who are new to the school, have to learn academic content along with skills and concepts across the curriculum, at the same time that they are learning English; therefore the school expertly focuses on cognitive skills, as well as text difficulty to help them meet the challenges of the CCLS. The school's shift to more rigorous texts allows teachers to work with materials that challenge students' intellectual level, by providing many scaffolds so that they can move from a beginning stage of basic fluency, to an instructional and independent stage of application and conceptual understanding. The creation of two Career and Technical Education (CTE) tracks in either Media Communication or Computer Science and Technology are available to all students and their programs are individually created to support their student-chosen tracks. This rigorous and coherent curriculum and lesson planning results in students being able to level the instructional playing field with their English-speaking peers and reap the benefits of being immersed in an inquiry-based college and career track education where they can graduate from the school being CTE endorsed and fully able to demonstrate the higher-order skills they have learned.
- The principal strategically aligns school resources and schedules teacher and student time to support instructional goals, resulting in improved instruction with meaningful student work products. (1.3)
 - The principal allocates funds to purchase a variety of classroom resources such as technology tools and classroom libraries, which are leading to high student achievement, as evidenced by the Progress

Report over the past three years. Common planning time has been successfully incorporated into the daily school schedule for teachers to engage in inquiry work around targeted groups of students, curriculum and assessment development, peer review and content, and grade team work that support the needs of all students, as evidenced in student work products and the school's overall scholarship report, where the majority of students are successfully passing their courses with grades of 75 and above. Students clearly benefit from organizational and budgetary decisions by having the opportunity to take CTE and College Now courses, which immerses them in rigorous and challenging opportunities and provides them with an abundance of college and career readiness skills, such as text based writing. Resources are also used to provide the teachers with Quality Teaching for English Language Learners (QTEL) professional development and training to effectively support ELLs. Online tools such as *Curricuplan* and *Teacherease* are purchased to support curriculum, lesson plan development and up-to-date information on grading and student progress. Additional online tools such as *Halogen* and *StrategicEval* are used by both administrators and teachers to provide timely and relevant feedback about teacher practice and growth which are important elements of the teacher development program. As an i-Learn school that is also CTE approved in computer information systems (CISCO) and media communications, it was important for the principal to purchase a laptop for every student and an i-Pad for every teacher to support their partnerships in technology. Students benefit from hour long classes, literacy institutes on the 9th and 10th grade to immerse students unfamiliar with the English language. AIS classes are embedded within the day for extra support t in helping ELLs achieve their learning goals. Teachers are assigned to grade levels and specific courses based on their strengths and how well they work with specific groups of students in meeting their needs. When hiring new staff, the principal forms a committee of teachers, parents and students who help to interview teaching candidates and provide feedback on their demo lessons. These strategic organizational decisions results in a very structured school that meets the needs of all of its adult and student learners, as evidenced by the 25% increase in students passing the English Regents last year.

- The school provides a warm, engaging, nurturing and highly functioning safe learning environment that fosters a college-going and professional culture, where students are valued and respected. (1.4)
 - Students have full access to partnerships and programs with a multitude of services to support success for all. The school has a strong interdisciplinary pupil personnel team, with high expectations, that regularly meets to discuss student progress. Students are very aware that the teachers, counselors and support staff care about them and are always discussing and planning interventions to support their socio-emotional and academic success. For example, family and individual counseling in English and Spanish is provided in addition to the daily advisory periods where students discuss their personal goals, challenges and accomplishments. Phone calls are made within an hour of school starting each day if students are absent or late, which results in low tardiness and a high attendance rate of 93%. The students spoke about the school being a safe haven amidst a dangerous neighborhood environment and how school leaders and staff "take care of them" and protect them like family, by waiting for them at the bus stop and providing safe passage for them as they walk to the train station. The students and their families expressed how important and beneficial the electronic grading tool *Teacherease* is to them, because it provides them with 24

hour access about grades, assignments due, upcoming events, and the most up-to-date information about individual progress. They discussed being able to talk about their personal concerns and academic goals and how the school staff supports them in achieving their goals by making them consistently reflect on their goal-setting throughout the year and the actions they need to take in order to succeed. When asked about student voice, students expressed being able to ask for special courses, clubs and activities and how their opinions and concerns are always taken into consideration and followed up on. They also expressed being able to go to each and every teacher in the school for advisement and stated that there is so much academic help available before, during and after school, that it is impossible to fail because the school is very supportive and monitors them to ensure that they constantly work towards their goals, improve their grades and achieve. The students also shared that the challenging work and CTE certification courses they are engaged in is preparing them for college and careers, and strongly believe that the CTE track they are currently on and the certification they will receive upon graduation, ensures them a place in the workplace because of the extra skill-based knowledge, which makes them competitive.

- The school creates high quality assessments that provide a clear picture of student needs and facilitate a cycle of analyses that yield effective curricular and instructional adjustments. (2.2)
 - Teachers administer assessments and use rubrics that are aligned to selected State standards, with a focus on ensuring that students can construct viable arguments. They use SAT content and College Board publications, including the SAT writing rubric to design assessments. They have recently incorporated two additional columns entitled: "Use of Evidence" and "APA Citations" to provide added alignment to the Common Core Standards. Through the use of *Compass Odyssey Learning*, a web-based assessment tool, an item analysis of each assessment a student takes is conducted. Each student has access to these assessments, their results and the targeted support they will need to improve their performance. Teachers use this data to assist them with planning instruction, as well as design further assessments and provide feedback to their students. Students use it to perform their own data analysis and construct goals for themselves. Student self-assessments are viewed and used by teachers to create one-to-one differentiated instruction. Student trackers, a key component of *Compass Odyssey Learning* shows student growth over time very similar in how StrategicEval shows growth in teacher practice. Midterms and final assessments mirror the Regents exams with an emphasis on questions that align to the CCLS. Based on all data and assessment information gathered, teachers wrote their very own Regents and SAT prep books to support students' academic needs. Each student receives their own prep book, which they take home for additional support. As a result of additional assessment data such as, do-nows, exit slips, mid-summaries, student classwork, homework, one-to-one conferencing, self-reflection logs and class tests, teachers are aware of the learning needs of their students and use strategies to meet their identified academic needs.
- School leaders use a research-based tool for evaluating teachers, and monitoring growth, with a clear focus on strategic feedback and reflection, resulting in greater instructional practice. (4.1)
 - Administrators regularly conduct frequent cycles of observation on a daily basis, using the research-based Danielson framework as their

guide. Teacher effectiveness is regularly reviewed and tracked to make evaluative decisions about progress and to support teachers with their professional goals developed at the beginning of the school year. A review of student data and the work products they produce is also part of the evaluative system that is tracked by administrators. The scholarship report is used as a measure to discuss teacher performance where students' grades and their progress can be captured from semester to semester. School leaders and instructional peer leader ensure that teacher practice is aligned to the Common Core Standards and the citywide instructional expectations by providing weekly professional development where teachers can reflect on their work to identify areas they wish to continue to grow in and for the purpose of actively participating in their own development. The online tool *Halogen* is directly connected to the Danielson framework and used to provide evaluation feedback and a place for teachers to self-reflect and appraise their practice. *StrategicEval* is another online tool that school leaders use to submit quick and timely feedback after conducting informal observations. Reviews of formal teacher observation reports reflect that suggested administrative feedback on developing students' critical thinking, has been incorporated into lessons, as evidenced by the higher-order questions teachers use to engage students in discussions across classrooms and content areas. In addition, every month teachers engage in peer inter-visitations using the Danielson rubric to focus on the two main instructional domains, which results in teachers being able to provide feedback to one another and share best practices that support student improvement and their professional growth.

What the school needs to improve

- Further strengthen teaching strategies to reflect the school's beliefs around how students with varying abilities and needs learn best, individually and in groups, in order to close the achievement gap. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms, teaching practices are informed by the research-based Danielson framework, to ensure that every student is engaged in rigorous work that is multi-tiered, scaffolded, and appropriately challenging. Every teacher writes lesson plans that incorporate learning targets, literacy strategies, and assessments for learning (AFLs). SMARTboards are utilized by all teachers and contain the daily format for the day that provides students with the aim, learning target for the day, and color-coded "traffic light" assessments that support the varying reading, writing and comprehension levels to aid the school's predominant population of English language learners, who have multiple strengths and challenges. In every classroom "traffic lights" are bolted to the desks, allowing students to immediately show their level of comprehension to the teacher by flipping over the color chart that demonstrates their level of understanding. Teachers assign tasks where students work independently and in purposeful groups to collaborate and support each other. Instruction is facilitated using a Vygostkian method that incorporates students watching the teacher modeling, teachers supporting students, and teachers facilitating student independence. However, teaching strategies do not always provide specific supports aligned to students' varying needs and abilities. Specifically, when instructing the 9th and 10th grade beginners, there is a lack of multiple venues for them to develop language skills when speaking and writing, in order to support effective language proficiency for increased comprehension.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Academy for Language and Technology	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