

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

ACORN Community High School

High School 499

**561 Grand Avenue
Brooklyn
NY11238**

Principal: Andrea Piper

Dates of review: December 9 - 10, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Karen Watts

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

ACORN Community High School is a high school with 623 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school's population comprises 84% Black, 13% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 79.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's curriculum is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), content standards, and rigorous tasks to increase students' thinking skills and preparation for college and careers. (1.1)
 - Teachers create curriculum maps, units, and lesson plans aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the instructional shifts to ensure that students engage in learning that require higher order thinking, thus preparing them for college and career readiness. Moreover, performance tasks include reading complex texts, evidenced based discussion, and argumentative writing coupled with Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels 3 and 4 type questions. For example, in English language arts, the department mapped out a four year progression of portfolio writing tasks which addresses the CCLS and content standards from grades 9 through 12. Furthermore, a review of curriculum artifacts incorporate a range of tasks such as argumentative justification, scene revision using evidence from the text, literary analysis using informational text which informs the critique of a novel, writing for information, completing an asset map as a precursor for research and gathering evidence to increase critical thinking. In addition, narrative writing such as letters from characters, journal entries, blog posts, drama scene and poetry writing is used to deepen students' writing abilities across grades and subjects. For example, in grade 11 learning tasks require students to focus on Regents type synthesis papers, persuasive speeches, position papers, short story writing, resume writing, personal statements, and monologues, thus aligning tasks to meet the rigor of the CCLS and the instructional shifts. Other components of the school's curriculum is to involve students in learning tasks such as using the Cornell Note-taking System for note taking, construct questions, engage in peer-edit activities, use the Writing Process, annotate text, cite evidence, and make connections through real world problem solving. As a result, students solidify their reading skills and produce CCLS aligned writing, thus leading to an increase of students scoring 3 or better on the Advance Placement examinations compared to previous years.
- Teachers focus on writing across classrooms that promote instructional practices, integrate the CCLS, and the instructional shifts to improve students' learning. (1.2)
 - Administrators and teachers believe that students learn best when they are taught strategies which they can apply during learning activities. Therefore, teachers use a variety of instructional strategies such as "Standing by your Quote" which require students to write a question and make a comment or connection to a particular statement in a quote. In addition, across classrooms, the learning strategy of the four corners discussion involves students' responses to a prompt where they have to take a stand of strongly agreeing, disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the concepts or ideas presented in the lesson. Furthermore, students have embraced these instructional strategies as skills to help them grow as independent learners and thinkers. Students also learn how to use graphic organizers to organize their writing assignments, use rubrics to strengthen the 4-part thesis statement, and create essay paragraphs that include a topic sentence with analysis of evidence instead of just summarizing evidence from the text. Additionally, students learned to use a grid and use a critical lens to identify

conflicts, interpret quotes and use reading strategies to deepen their comprehension for interpreting primary source documents in Advance Placement (AP) history classes. Furthermore, in the math classrooms visited, teachers created work stations where students used a worksheet with clear steps to solve various math problems. As a result, these learning strategies and activities abet high levels of students' thinking and participation as evidenced by students' discussions and work products.

- The school leadership promotes a culture of learning that maintains mutual trust and positive attitudes to support the academic and social growth of students. (1.4)
 - There is a strong student government association that gives voice to the student body at the school. Students are comfortable in approaching the principal with requests for programs and events at the school. Starting with the orientation in grade 9, students hear the message about community at the school, what it takes to be a contributing member of the school community, and how they all have to support and hold each other up. Moreover, the Expanded Success initiative provides opportunities for culturally relevant instruction as well as gender empowerment. For example, the principal held a male and a female symposium at the school on different days with one gender at the school while the other gender visited and toured local colleges. In addition, the guidance department works closely with the students to ensure that they attend school on a daily basis, and participate in the tutoring program in preparation for the Regents examinations and graduation requirements. Students are also encouraged to participate in a credit recovery program through iLearn online classes or by attending PM School. Furthermore, all stakeholders at the school are treated with respect and the principal maintains an open door policy to further support students' personal and academic growth. The school's peer mediation and Restorative Justice Programs are used to guide and support students in effective problem solving strategies. Similarly, the school coordinates additional assemblies where students receive Respect for All training, thus providing additional opportunities for students to discuss social issues and how to positively decide on their next steps whenever faced with adversity. Moreover, students shared that they feel comfortable approaching the administration, teachers, and staff members with any concerns. In addition, staff members also take the time to listen to the students, thereby ensuring that students have a person at the school level for support. As a result, these practices bolster the school's goals to succor the growth of students' academic and personal behaviors as evidenced by students' increased academic achievement.
- School leaders use the results from classroom observations and student work to design professional development to support teachers' professional growth. (4.1)
 - The school administration provided professional development opportunities to teachers about the components of the Danielson Framework so that teachers deepen their understanding of the expectations for teaching, become less anxious about the observation process, and showcase their work with supervisors to identify their strengths, challenges, and next steps. In addition, the talent coach worked closely with the administrators to further norm their work around observations and the use of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, administrators divided the caseload and conducted rounds of formal and informal observations with timely and targeted feedback to teachers, and provide professional development for specific groups of teachers that demonstrate a need in a particular area. Furthermore, classroom observations are tailed with coaching sessions and teachers

frequently checking-in to hone in their instructional practices and the observation data trends are used to identify teachers' developmental needs, and to revise and coordinate additional professional development sessions. For example, administrators noted trends in note taking across classrooms and modified their professional development plan, primarily by grade level, to include topics which all teachers struggled with across grades while maintaining the work in the grade teams. As a result, instructional practices remain to demonstrate improvement school-wide as evidenced by the *Advance* observation reports.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the school's resources to include higher education and industry partnerships that provide pathways to college and careers to promote students' postsecondary success. (1.3)
 - The principal has created an eleven-period workday for students and teachers with periods one through nine as the regular school day and periods 10 and 11 as the PM School for physical education and afterschool programs. Teachers have five teaching periods, one prep period, one lunch period, one administrative period and one tutoring period which allow for effective administration of the PM school and improvements in students' learning. The school has partnerships with CityTech and Medgar Evers Colleges that allow students to complete College Now classes. Additionally, the school partners with Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) for a Brooklyn Reads Spoken Word Program with spring and summer internships. The school has a long partnership with Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), a global nonprofit organization that trains teachers in instructional methods to prepare all students for postsecondary success with a focus on students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education so that they successfully complete both high school and college. The school has partnerships with the Justice Resource Center to provide Restorative Justice so that students develop effective strategies for problem solving and positive adjustments to character development. Similarly, a partnership with the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History for the facing history program and the Brooklyn Museum support students' use of the museum for increasing students' learning. The school received Expanded Success Initiative funding for extra curriculum activities and supports for African American and Hispanic male students. The principal also invested in Edmodo which is an online community for teachers and students to communicate and collaborate on projects, and further support the Mouse Squad certification. In addition, the school provides various sports opportunities such as basketball, track, and soccer to increase student engagement and support the school's goals. However, the school does not yet have major courses of study with clear pathways to higher education or industry opportunities to ensure students' post-secondary success.
- Enhance assessment practices and grading policies that closely monitor students' progress and make them aware of their next learning steps to improve academic achievement. (2.2)
 - The school uses the results of assessment to drive instruction. Starting with diagnostics testing at the start of each semester, teachers continuously assess students as units and lessons progress to check for understanding and to provide actionable feedback to students on their learning. They use mid and end unit assessments and semester exams, uniform assessments in science, math and social studies portfolio assessments in English language

arts and social studies, round tables in economics and government and presentations of student work at a Curriculum Fair. Teachers use rubrics to grade students' work and use the information to adjust their lesson plans and instruction to address the academic needs of all learners. However, the assessment systems do not ensure that rubric scores are appropriately converted to grades according to the grading policy and that students are made aware of the next learning steps, thus limiting even more potential to reaching mastery of the learning standards.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: ACORN Community High School	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 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			X				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations?			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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			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