



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Quality Review  
Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning  
2013-2014

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**The Academy of Innovative Technology**

**High School**

**99 Jamaica Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11208**

**Principal: Cynthia Fowlkes**

**Dates of review: February 26 – 27, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen**

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

### **Information about the school**

The Academy of Innovative Technology is a high school with 440 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 44% Black, 46% Hispanic, 2% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 76% of the students enrolled and girls account for 24%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 83.0%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal makes purposeful and strategic organizational decisions aligned to the school's theme and instructional goals that result in meaningful work products and access to college and career readiness for all students. (1.3)
  - The principal has purposefully established and maintained a number of valuable partnerships that provide students with college and career readiness opportunities. The school's advisory board and the organization Reach Out 56 are integral in finding both after school and summer paid internships that are ongoing off-site opportunities for students to gain real world job experience. In addition, these partners connect the school to Princeton University, which sends under graduate students for weeklong residencies designed to support college readiness efforts. Additionally, the principal strategically uses per-session dollars to staff the afterschool math, English, science, and history-tutoring program (MESH Center). To support students in credit recuperation, the school has invested in ilearn, an on-line learning technology. As a result, there has been a 25% increase in credit accumulation as compared to the end of the first semester last year, and over 50 cumulative credits earned by students in the first semester during school year 2013-14.
  - In response to student need, the principal hired two additional special education teachers. This allowed for a higher concentration of integrated co-teaching (ICT) classes on the ninth grade, which is purposeful as the school aspires to have special education programming be less restrictive as students progress toward the twelfth grade. Hiring more English language arts teachers, for a total of six, allowed for one to have a lighter teaching load and serve as a literacy coach. This strategic hiring decision also allowed for the assignment of an English language arts teacher to each content area team to support argumentative writing across the school. Looking at student programs evidenced keen insights into student needs. A high achieving student was scheduled for rigorous classes such as City University of New York (CUNY) Math, Adobe PowerBASIC Library (PBL) & Certification Prep, and Advanced Placement United States History. In contrast, a struggling student had a program that included Regents prep and ilearn courses. The seventh period of every day allocated for professional meetings, provides regularly scheduled time for department or grade team meetings. Thus, staff hold each other accountable for targeted student growth by collaborating and strategizing instructional interventions. This strategic use of resources has resulted in students acquiring skills that promote college and career readiness as evidenced by improved argumentative writing, student programs that lead students toward graduation and in some cases competitive college candidacy, and the opportunity for professional certification in specific technological fields.
- The school's use of curricula aligned assessments and rubrics provide actionable feedback and results in adjustments to curricula and instruction. (2.2)

- Each content area team, both across grades and subject areas, has an assessment plan that captures the type of assessments, nature of tasks, expected outcomes, Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) being assessed, and dates of assessments. The plans are informed by a shared understanding of measuring student learning that was cultivated during a series of *Defining Assessment* workshops facilitated at the beginning of the school year. All plans contain writing tasks, leading to a school-wide emphasis on using and developing shared rubrics, resulting in a coherent assessment practice. Additionally, four classes were observed interpreting, deconstructing, and/or analyzing rubrics that they would use to self-assess their work. Furthermore, although graded student work did not consistently include written feedback in addition to a rubric score, when asked, students were able to refer to the rubrics and identify next steps needed to improve their work based on the score and criteria. English language arts' Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) assessments are used extensively across grade and subject areas to inform targeted instructional adjustments. For example, data from the MoSL informed the need to improve students' ability to write text-based claims. Analysis of student work from the MoSL inspired teachers to focus subsequent lessons on the strategic use of conjunctions to inform elaborations that support claims. The school's commitment to such assessment practices has resulted in strategic instructional adjustments and actionable feedback to students, increasing their ability to master identified skills.
- The school consistently communicates high expectations that result in a professional culture of mutual accountability and a clear path for students toward college and career readiness. (3.4)
  - Students stated that they feel the school pushes them toward college, and many claimed that they are also learning skills that could earn them competitive jobs by the time they graduate. As a National Academy Foundation school, students are exposed to career themed academies, internships, as well as Career Technical Education (CTE) curricula and course credits. One student has already had an internship at Bank of America, helping them to update their website. Another did similar work for the Political Science department at Hunter College. Upon completing specific courses offered at the school, ambitious students can take an online exam that results in becoming certified Adobe Dreamweaver web designers. A student noted that the work experience that he gained through the school coordinated internships have "made me learn how to work in a professional setting." The school's Youth Empowerment Leadership Program (YELP) utilizes a four year vertically aligned academic and personal behavior curriculum. Guidance and support staff work with YELP mentors to provide targeted support to students who are struggling both academically and behaviorally. The eleventh grade year is focused on college and career readiness and the twelfth grade year emphasizes post-secondary readiness. In the spring, eight to ten Princeton University students come to the school for a week to work with approximately 50% of the juniors to support them in PSAT and SAT prep, college research, and personal essays. These same Princeton students return in the fall to work with the same students who are then seniors to help them with applications, college essays, and finalizing their college selections. Parents stated that they are fully informed regarding their children's learning strengths and weaknesses, as the staff is extremely responsive. They are all very excited about the school's Career and

Technology Education program as well as internships that are available. One stated, “My son is doing work in the field that he wants to study. He worked for 45 hours a week over the summer for pay. It’s putting him at a real advantage.” Another stated that, “The school offers real world opportunities. They use what they learn here to apply it out there.” The school’s consistent effort to communicate high expectations has resulted in a culture that is purposefully oriented to prepare students for the next level.

- Teachers’ pedagogical growth is supported through effective feedback that is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, resulting in teachers having clear next steps for improvement. (4.1)
  - The school served as a Teacher Effectiveness pilot site for two years prior to the citywide use of Danielson’s Framework for Teaching. As a result, the vast majority of staff is facile with the professional practices outlined in Danielson. The principal and assistant principal, who organize and track observations using a spreadsheet, divide the staff between them, with the principal focusing on those who are up for tenure. In addition to Advance, which is used to memorialize observations, both leaders use a feedback framework based on work that was developed during the pilot to provide teachers with extensive feedback. A sample of such an observation report contained a comprehensive low inference summary, as well as ratings and analysis, strengths and areas for improvement of practices aligned to Danielson competencies within Domains 1, 2, and 3. The report ended with a section that starts with, “When we observe learning in your classroom next time, our focus will be the following recommendations:” All recommendations categorized by a Danielson competency, included a clear next step. For example, “3c: Engage Students in Learning – Model expectations for group work prior to trying it with a new group, especially when engaging in an activity that is new and not familiar to the students. You can model using the fish bowl technique where you choose students in advance to train as Jigsaw experts.” Teachers noted other means of support and feedback, that include monthly peer observations lead by content team leaders, and beginning, middle, and end-of-year conferences during which scholarship data and student work, observation data, and teacher goals established at the beginning of the year, are used to inform targeted next steps. Such support practices promote professional growth and reflection for teachers, improving teaching and learning in the school.

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

- Ensure that curricula and academic tasks coherently emphasize instructional shifts and cognitive engagement for all students. (1.1)
  - Planning documents show that there is a school wide commitment to embedding CCLS as well as text based argumentative writing skills across the curricula. For example, the ninth grade curricula is focused on counter claim while the tenth grade curricula documents show a focus on using text-based evidence more effectively. Math instruction is informed by the Common Core aligned Accessing Algebra through Inquiry (a2i) curriculum. However, the strategic integration of instructional shifts resulting in coherence within subject areas was not as evident in math planning documents as they were in the other content areas. For example in one math plan, there was a focus on shift four, deep

understanding, as students were asked to read a word problem, then write and solve the inequality with room to show their work. In another math class, of the same course, the plan shows that shift one, focus, was being addressed at a low level, as students were only being asked to graph the slope given a y intercept, and not provided with an opportunity to show their thinking. Although there is a conscious effort to build instructional coherence school wide with literacy, this lack of alignment for all content areas, hinders a unified approach to post-high school readiness across all content areas for all students.

- Current curriculum development practices work to ensure that students with learning challenges have access to CCLS aligned learning experiences. For example, a social studies lesson plan outlined the use of modelling and graphic organizers, while a science lesson showed how students would have access to two versions of a text for independent reading. One version was “untouched” and the other contained underlined words and phrases to support struggling learners in identifying key details in the article. However, there was little evidence of how higher performing students were being pushed across the curricula with any consistency. Consequently, curricula are not being refined to provide higher achieving students with access to more challenging tasks that cognitively engaged them.
- Deepen teaching practices across all classrooms so that they reflect the school’s set of pedagogical beliefs to result in high levels of student thinking and engagement. (1.2)
  - The school’s set of coherent teaching beliefs include using evidence to substantiate a claim and purposeful group. Though most classes evidenced these practices, implementation was not consistent across all classrooms. For example, in a science class, a student supported a claim by starting with, “As stated in the article...” In a social studies class, students worked in pairs to extract evidence from text to support which economic system they preferred. However, in an upper grade writing course, students were engaged in using a rubric to evaluate a college level anchor paper and made claims about where the essay should be scored on the rubric, but text from the essay was never referred to while substantiating their claims. Strategic groups were assigned to develop text-based arguments in a social studies class about the Industrial Revolution, but a math class provided little opportunity for student-to-student interaction as grouping was not effectively used to support instruction. Consequently, although the set of beliefs and practices are present in most classes, they are not yet implemented school wide, resulting in missed opportunities to coherently implement effective Danielson aligned instructional practices that improve student performance.
  - Learning activities observed across classrooms included writing an introduction to an argumentative research paper, extracting evidence from historical text to support the perspective of a character from a specific era, and applying knowledge of a scientific concept to community service. However, these high levels of student thinking and participation were not evident across the vast majority of classes. For example, in a math class, students were observed answering low level questions such as, “What is the y intercept?” and copying information that was provided for them. At one point, a student asked a clarifying question, and the

teacher responded, “Just follow the steps and you’ll be fine.” Such inconsistencies result in uneven levels of student thinking and participation across all classrooms.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Academy of Innovative Technology					UD	D	P	WD
<b>Overall QR Score</b>							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	