

# Quality Review Report 2013-2014

**Academy for Conservation**

**and the Environment**

**18K637**

**6565 Flatlands Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11236**

**Principal: Eugene Mazzola**

**Dates of review: April 2 - 3, 2014**

**Lead Reviewer: Aimee Horowitz**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Academy for Conservation and the Environment is a high school with 280 students from ninth through grade 12. The school population comprises 85% Black, 8% Hispanic, 2% White, 3% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 63% of the students enrolled and girls account for 37%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 82.2%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal's strategic scheduling, hiring, and key partnership decisions are well aligned to the school's goals as evidenced by growth in adult and student learning. (1.3)
  - Based on a comprehensive data analysis and evaluation of teacher practice, the principal and staff prioritized key areas for improvement: instruction and assessment, making learning relevant to students' lives, embedding college readiness skills that support the school's goals of improving pedagogy, increasing credit accumulation to promote Regents passing, college readiness, and increased graduation rates. Hence, the principal strategically allocated resources for a lead teacher, a coach, and two additional special education teachers, created a professional development partnership with Creative Classroom Solutions, doubled the number of site licenses for Apex to support students who are credit deficient, and created a partnership with Cornell University and the Environmental Study Center for student internships. Creative Classroom Solutions, the lead teacher, and coaches provide both whole staff professional development and individual coaching with a focus on improving teacher practice in three areas: questioning and discussion, incorporating formative assessment into instruction, and increasing student engagement while aligning instruction to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Observations evidence that teachers incorporate varied and multiple "on the spot instructional adjustments," use data to inform planning, employ strategies to engage students in discussion, and create rigorous tasks. The Cornell University partnership provides students internships where they are growing vegetables and herbs hydroponically, and using mineral nutrient solutions, in water, without soil. Through their corresponding internship seminar students create business plans to sell hydroponically grown foods, which they present to a panel. As a result, 100% of internship students are earning credit; 90% of cohort "Q" students in the lowest third earned 5+ credits during the first semester and are on track to earn 10+ credits this year; 82% of students enrolled in Apex earned credit, and the percentage of cohort "P" students earning 5+ credits during first semester increased 30% since fall of 2010.
  - The reconfigured school day provides extended time for teacher meetings while also providing students opportunities for internships, double block classes to support their achievement, and tutoring and skills based classes during and after school. Teacher team work is aligned to the school's goals: curriculum and task design and instruction and achievement. Content teams refine CCLS aligned courses to strategically integrate the instructional shifts, increase coherence, and promote college and career readiness. Using student work samples and a protocol, the math team analyzed an integrated algebra performance task to assess implementation of the instructional shifts, whether it could be revised to implement more shifts, how they could modify it for students with disabilities, and how they could alter it to increase vertical coherence. Using a Kid Talk protocol grade teams analyze student work devising and revising strategies to implement across the grade and for particular

subgroups to improve student achievement. The 9<sup>th</sup> grade team implemented Humanities/Writing and Math/Problem Solving checklists and rubrics students use to assess organization and completion of their work. As a result of the new schedule, all teachers have been provided feedback on curriculum, all courses have been revised to increase rigor, for example, there is increased rigor in argumentative writing tasks; students' use of relevant and meaningful evidence to support claims has increased; and fall semester credit accumulation has increased for all cohorts.

- The principal fosters professional growth by ensuring frequent observation and feedback, collegial support, and strategic professional development resulting in improved instruction across the school. (4.1)
  - The principal and assistant principal conduct frequent and focused observations that provide teachers actionable feedback via the Danielson Framework for Teaching. To support implementing next steps, the lead teacher, coaches, the assistant principal, and Creative Classroom Solutions provide teachers with individualized support. Further, the lead teacher supports new teachers through group and individual coaching, inter-visitation, modeling, and by providing them resources. Together the teachers identify and address challenges and support one another in implementing feedback. Additionally, using a teacher designed protocol for recording low inference observations, teachers facilitate and conduct learning rounds focused on incorporation of the school's instructional focus in lessons and debrief with the teacher observed. Since December, 2013 there has been a 70% increase in critical thinking and problem solving observed during learning rounds. Teachers articulate that due to the Danielson Framework for Teaching aligned professional development, observations, and feedback, there is coherence between the professional goals they set and the specific recommendations they receive for next steps. Accordingly, teachers share a common understanding of engaging, rigorous instruction that is translated into elevated practice as they progress towards meeting targeted goals for professional growth aligned to school wide goals around improving teacher practice. As a result, observations evidence improved teaching practice in questioning and discussion from a cycle 1 average of 2.27 to a cycle 5 average of 2.42; engagement increased from 2.05 in cycle 1 to 2.53 in cycle 5; and assessment increased from 2.05 in cycle 1 to 2.42 in cycle 5.
- Strong professional collaborations across grades and disciplines enable teachers to reflect on student work, improve instruction, and develop leadership skills to improve student achievement. (4.2)
  - Teacher led content and grade teams meet weekly. Grade teams use a 'Kid Talk' protocol to analyze student work and design interventions to improve student achievement for students they have in common. As teachers assess the success of these strategies, they decide how to alter them or whether to implement them across the curriculum. For example, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade team has implemented the four square strategy to aid students in organizing their writing while the 11<sup>th</sup> grade team has created a protocol to aid students in using evidence to support claims. Each teacher is involved in creating and revising CCLS aligned performance based and literacy tasks to improve student writing. Consequently, as

evidenced by the school wide argumentative writing rubric, across the school the quantity and quality of student analytical and argumentative writing across disciplines has increased.

- Teacher leadership is highly valued and embedded in the school culture such that teachers created the school's vision of how students learn best, the instructional focus, and core beliefs. Professional development is driven by feedback from the instructional cabinet, comprised of the school administration, the lead teacher, and teacher content leaders, based on feedback from teacher led learning rounds and observations. Feedback from learning rounds drive teachers' work in content teams to create content specific rigorous learning experiences aligned to the instructional focus. As a result of distributive leadership, the UFT representative and teachers state the school is built on a shared vision and that every member of the community has a vested interest in everyone succeeding and in moving the school forward. Teachers state that they are constantly involved in designing key initiatives that impact student learning.
- Use of common assessments, tasks, and on-going checks for understanding, and feedback on student achievement facilitates adjustments to curriculum and instruction to improve outcomes for all students. (2.2)
  - The instructional cabinet and teacher teams analyze formative assessment data, performance tasks, scholarship reports, Regents item analysis, student progress reports, and student work to track progress and ascertain curricula and instructional adjustments needed. Based on students' performance, curriculum units and tasks are revised; new teaching strategies are implemented; and assessments and policies are modified ensuring that the needs of all students are met. To build stamina and increase students' success on Regents exams, the school modified its assessment schedule and implemented uniform three hour mid-term and final exams and revamped its advisory course to include projects with an emphasis on issues in global history, supporting students in literacy and writing in social studies. As a result, Global History final exam passing percentages increased 5% from midterm percentages. This is coupled with increases in overall scores and in stamina in essay writing as evidenced by greater exam completion rates and increased essay scores.
  - Teachers regular use of checks for understanding, compiled in a teacher created "Go-To" menu of options, including think pair share, response cards, thumbs up/down, mini white boards, clickers, conferencing, checklists tracking students as they work independently and in groups, and exit tickets enables teachers to understand when and for whom re-teaching is necessary, address misconceptions so that they effectively meet students' learning needs, and assess progress towards outcomes. Students use rubrics and checklists to peer edit and to assess their own work and reflect on their learning, ensuring that they are aware of strengths, areas in need of improvement, and progress towards proficiency. Students state that explicit feedback from teachers during and upon completion of writing and presentation tasks enables them to improve their work because they understand with specificity the next steps to improve their performance.

## What the school needs to improve

- Further refine curricula and tasks and align curricula across content areas so that all students, including those who are high performing, are cognitively engaged, challenged, and required to demonstrate their thinking. (1.1)
  - While some departments plan CCLS aligned units of study incorporating the instructional shifts and literacy standards with a focus on reading of text, using textual evidence, and argumentative writing, this is not yet consistent across all disciplines. Unit plans provide guidance leading teachers to plan learning activities that include multiple access points for students with disabilities, English language and struggling learners through scaffolding texts, using graphic organizers, vocabulary building, flexible groupings, and student choice. However, across disciplines unit plans and academic tasks do not yet incorporate school wide protocols to improve student engagement with rigorous text and are not yet consistently designed with extensions to cognitively engage and extend the learning of the school's highest achieving students, thus limiting their ability to demonstrate critical thinking and achieve their potential. Through analysis of student work and data, content and grade teams are building curriculum coherence. Teachers continue creating scaffolded curriculum and courses that provide students with the skills and content necessary for post-secondary success. As this is not yet consistently occurring across all disciplines, students in every class are not always engaged in tasks that promote college and career readiness.
- Ensure that teaching practices consistently provide all students with opportunities to engage in critical thinking and discussions so that all learners are challenged to think and achieve at high levels. (1.2)
  - Instruction is aligned to a common set of beliefs about how students learn best informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, the instructional shifts, and the school's core values with an emphasis on productive engagement through critical thinking and problem solving. For example, in some classes observed students annotated text, indicating that their teacher taught them to do so to improve their understanding of the text. However, this is not a school wide practice and there is no common protocol for students to use. Since not all teachers consistently use the same protocols and strategies across the curriculum and subject areas to provide students access to challenging tasks, high levels of engagement for some students is limited.
  - All teachers use activities to connect learning to students' lives and engage students in collaborative learning using flexible groupings. In integrated co-teaching classes teachers consistently use station teaching, alternative teaching and parallel teaching while all teachers use myriad strategies such as Four Square and other graphic organizers, readings in students' native languages, and checklists to provide students multiple entry points and engage all students in challenging tasks, particularly writing. Students are engaged in higher order thinking through tasks calling for evidence and analysis from text to develop and support claims and refute counterclaims. A student stated, "Teachers here taught me how to write using evidence. This was a crucial turning point in my academic life." However, teachers do not consistently maximize student

learning by having students formulate their own questions, by engaging them in evidence based discussions and by providing higher achieving students extensions to deepen their learning and stretch their thinking.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Academy for Conservation and the Environment	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			X				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<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				
<b>School Culture</b>							
<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				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed