

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Academy for Social Action

Secondary School 367

**509 West 129 Street
Manhattan
NY 10027**

Principal: Rhokeisha Ford

**Dates of review: April 28 - 29, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Anthony R. Lodico**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Academy for Social Action is a secondary school with 309 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 52% Black, 45% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 25% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 75.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Revision and development of curricula, unit plans and pacing calendars ensure alignment with content and Common Core Learning Standards and aids in the promotion of college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
 - School leaders and faculty have systems in place to ensure there is a process for curriculum review and revision, as well as the time for teachers and administrators to analyze the effectiveness of lessons and how the assigned tasks are improving student achievement by cognitively engaging all learners. These systems are an extension of the ongoing work that teachers have been engaged in with task development and alignment to CCLS. For example, in math classes, students are engaged in the tasks of reflective writing and Socratic seminar discussions to demonstrate a depth of understanding about specific topics. Teacher teams meet daily enabling the faculty to deeply entrench themselves into a consistent pattern of analysis, monitoring and revising of their lessons, pacing calendars and units. Teachers shared that as a result of looking at student work and analyses of grades there are modifications made to specific lessons to ensure there is enhanced skill development and/or modifications and development of individualized interventions for individual and cohorts of students. In math, teachers shared how the implementation of puzzle time has created a way for students to articulate and explain the process of solving problems. Another example shared was the use of concept maps and KWL charts to ensure that the diverse learners across classrooms have opportunities to access the curricula and be cognitively engaged. This focused and purposeful work has contributed to the improvement in the four year graduation rate by 22% from 37% in 2012 to 59% in 2013. Furthermore, upon review of student work, modifications in curricula and lessons, as well as the adaptation of strategies for diverse learners have improved supports for English language learners and special education students.
- School leaders, teachers, and staff are committed to fostering a collaborative, safe and respectful learning community that supports the academic, social and emotional needs of all students. (1.4)
 - The principal, faculty and staff have strengthened guidance, student government, and post-secondary supports for all students. All stakeholders are involved in guidance and youth development supports and are working closely with the school's partner, College Bound Initiative (CBI.) In addition, there has been a purposeful and deliberate focus on the ninth grade to ensure that all future cohorts are sure to meet academic success and attain enough credits to be promoted. Purposeful programming, attendance outreach, the ninth grade "credit card wall," and one to one contact with a dean and a counselor have all supported the ninth grade initiative. Furthermore, students shared that there is a notable improvement in school tone and attributed this change to their relationships with teachers, administrators, deans, and counselors. Also mentioned by students and staff is the ladder of referral and the school's mediation program as contributors to the positive school tone. Additionally, attendance outreach includes home visits, phone calls and incentive programs. Students also touted that teachers, counselors, and administrators check in with them regularly to monitor their progress

and success. Students noted the strong support of the college and career guidance office and feel strongly about how they and their families are fully supported through the college selection and application process. Moreover, student leaders meet with the principal regularly and their voice and ideas are incorporated in the development of various school initiatives such as the targeted support initiative or the “Boot Camp Program” (as called by the students), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) preparatory classes, and Saturday school offerings. The collaboration among teachers, administrators, parent leaders, deans, guidance staff, and school partners have resulted in improved youth development support, thus ensuring students’ socio-emotional and academic progress.

- The school's analysis of assessment data across grades and subjects guides curriculum and instructional adjustments aimed at improving outcomes for all learners. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams engage in the practices of looking at student work and development of common assessments, rubrics, and grading policy to provide students with actionable feedback. Analysis of this work enables teachers and leaders to determine trends related to student need and to also discuss the implications for necessary adjustments to curriculum and teaching strategies. Furthermore, the data analyses of the common subject area and performance assessments enable teachers to assess skills and content, thus ensuring interventions are aligned to the academic needs of individual students. Across classrooms, there was evidence of a variety of checks for understanding and formative assessment strategies which were an outgrowth of the inquiry work. For example, the use of various Kagan strategies, exit tickets, quick checks, quizzes and Regents-based assessments were some strategies used to ensure teachers were able to meet student needs by using data to adjust subsequent lessons and/or materials. These decisions to make curricular and instructional adjustments result in targeted supports to meet the needs of all students and improve progress toward grade and content standards.
- Teacher teams meet daily and engage in inquiry work to support the improvement of instructional practice and leadership. (4.2)
 - Teacher team structure and time are designed to maximize opportunities for teachers to increase their capacity to meet student needs. Daily agendas are created by teacher leaders and administrators to further support teacher development aligned with the school's instructional goals. During an English language arts team meeting, teachers described how they used their analysis of student writing to help create a baseline assessment that would be used to determine students' skills. Teachers also stated that this work is closely aligned to the ongoing review, revision and analysis of scope and sequence, pacing guides, and curriculum. Furthermore, teachers of English language arts shared their strong focus on collaboration accentuating student goal setting and clear benchmarks for each grade level to improve academic progress. Teachers also described the implementation of close reading across grade levels as one strategy that resulted from their ongoing meetings and discussions. As a result of the teacher team work there are increasing opportunities for videotaping model lessons, lesson plan study, and sharing best instructional practices. In addition, math and science, teachers engaged in item analysis of marking period examinations and worked to develop specific strategies and

interventions informed by the findings. For example, one team discussed the creation of graphic organizers as an outgrowth of students needing more support in interpreting and reading charts and graphs. The school's commitment to teacher collaboration has bolstered opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective practice, thus improving pedagogy designed to accelerate student outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen school wide instructional practices that align with the school's common belief to ensure academic tasks and lessons consistently engage all learners in higher-order thinking. (1.2)
 - The school leadership and teachers share an articulated common belief that all students must be engaged in rigorous, thoughtful tasks, and work. Kagan structures and strategies are used by teachers to increase active engagement and promote discussion and student to student interactions. Also, Close reading is a school wide initiative this year and is being used across classrooms to strengthen students' ability to take ownership of a text's important ideas. Another expectation is that levels 3 and 4 Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions and tasks should be embedded into performance tasks where students are expected to be making inferences and using textual evidence. Moreover, during classroom visits some lessons incorporated paired or group activities, graphic organizers, and student to student discussion and interactions. There were also a variety of materials used and some instances of complex text and leveled materials. For example in an earth science class, students used a graphic organizer as a scaffold enabling them to enter the task at their skill level. In an English class, students were expected to discuss excerpts from a film and then make inferences. In a math class, students took ownership of tasks and worked to solve problems in groups. Similarly, in another math class students worked in pairs to do a Close reading and solve a word problem. However, in other classrooms visited, teachers did not afford students learning opportunities to participate in high level discussions, or to be challenged in rigorous tasks or problems. Consequently, across the school, not all students consistently engage in high levels of thinking, thereby limiting opportunities for all students to engage in rigorous and challenging learning.
- Deepen the system of aligning observation feedback and professional development with goal setting and action planning to strategically increase professional growth. (4.1)
 - Administrators and staff have embraced the Danielson rubric and observation/feedback process. Teachers used the feedback and discussion points from their individual planning conferences to identify two priority goals that they felt would enhance their practice in domains two and three. Additionally, based on informal and formal classroom visits, as well as the conferences, the administration has identified engagement, questioning, and assessment as areas of high priority and focus. As the year progressed, school leaders saw the need to adjust some of the goals that were set at the beginning of the year, thus shifting to a focus on planning and preparation and designing coherent instruction. School leaders worked individually with teachers and embedded school wide and individual professional development to best meet the needs of all teachers. For example, the modeling of lessons was employed to address teachers' needs, and one to one coaching further enabled teachers to get support in

the area they were struggling with. Feedback given to teachers includes suggestions of strategies that could be employed to increase engagement and references to school wide initiatives. Feedback is given verbally, in writing, and during conferences. A review of the feedback from classroom observations indicates that some teachers receive feedback that clearly captures areas for further improvement that is aligned to the framework. However, some feedback, although connected to the competencies, does not always articulate clear expectations for next steps. Furthermore, feedback that links to professional development and action planning for individuals and groups of teachers is not yet strategic to ensure even higher levels of professional growth and instructional practice.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Academy for Social Action: A College Board School	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	

Instructional Core

To what extent does the school regularly...	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

To what extent does the school...	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

To what extent does the school...	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
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