Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2013-2014

Academy of American Studies

30Q575

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Queens
NY 11101

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Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Academy of American Studies is a high school with 810 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 8% Black, 36% Hispanic, 25% White, and 30% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 93.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Instructional coherence across grades and subject areas is reflected in Common Core aligned curricula that emphasize higher order thinking and rigorous tasks for all learners. (1.1)

    - The Academy of American Studies is a flagship school of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, providing students with a rigorous American History four year program. Robust Common Core aligned college-preparatory curricula are developed and coherently linked across all grades and subjects, through this year's instructional focus: writing for argument, using claim, counterclaim, and supporting evidence. A review of curriculum maps across a variety of subjects, indicates coherence in pacing and development of units which include standards, embedded learning goals, skills, assessments, and materials/resources, all anchored by thought-provoking essential questions. Topics are matched with rigorous multi-step tasks, inspiring students to think critically, state a claim, and provide detailed evidence, resulting in high-quality work. Unit performance tasks also challenge students to demonstrate thinking at Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels 3 and 4 to ensure their development of higher order thinking skills. For example, in a Global History's unit plan on medieval Europe, students were asked to respond to, "Should the Medieval Era, commonly referred to as the Middle Ages, be defined as the Dark Ages? If you believe the label does not fit, is there a label better fitting for the Middle Ages?" which required them to write an argumentative essay, drawing evidence across multiple texts. Corresponding lesson plans for this unit not only support content knowledge, but also reinforce skill development matched to Common Core expectations. This is the norm across lesson planning for all subjects. To provide another well-rounded course of study, the school offers a course entitled "Common Core Study Skills for College Preparation". The culminating task in a personal finance unit prioritizes DOK and inquiry through a multi-step assessment that connects learning to real-world applications in managing money. Moreover, essay writing involves complex texts, improving students' preparation for college. This culminates in a course where seniors are asked to prepare a thesis for in-depth research on a topic in American Studies. As a result students are well supported towards college and career readiness, as evidenced by the 87% Post-secondary Enrollment Rate and 96% College Readiness Rate on the most recent Progress Report.

- The principal and faculty establish a culture of high expectations, building strong support for college and career readiness and engaging students and families in partnerships that prepare students for the next level. (3.4)

    - Summer cohort orientations provide the first forum for conveying a culture of high expectations for incoming freshman. Students are encouraged to aim for an Advanced Regents Diploma with an Academy Honors designation, which means completing credits for an advanced diploma, community service and a four year American Studies requirements. A student handbook welcomes students and clearly outlines topics such as community service, dress code, and academic statistics of the National Honor Society so that students understand acceptance criteria and work hard to meet the high expectations for them to achieve membership via outstanding academic performance. Subject

teachers distribute course syllabi which outline rigorous course requirements and grading policies. Several Advanced Placement courses as well as credit bearing college courses are completed by students, giving them an academic edge on college applications. Scheduled teacher office hours and tutoring on Wednesdays combine to provide students with ongoing academic support to help them meet college requirements and thus avoid remediation as a stipulation for acceptance. Furthermore, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History sponsors a Saturday academy enrichment program that builds upon the foundations of American History, which is the passion and reason for student applications to this school. Additionally, there are three guidance counselors that focus on students individually regarding their learning options, monitoring credits and grades earned, and keeping them on track to meet deadlines for all college application components. One counselor is especially focused on special education students to ensure that equivalent expectations for them are monitored and supported throughout their high school experience. As a result, the school has high College Readiness and Postsecondary Enrollment Rates and has been awarded special recognition for its college preparatory course certification which represents a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of course rigor and the relationship to college readiness.

- Parents readily articulate their satisfaction with this school choice and are unified in sharing that the school provides a small, cohesive environment with a legacy of high expectations. They participate in Alumni Day where, according to one parent, student alumni "spoke with conviction" about how the school supported them in owning their educational experiences, thus preparing them well for college. Parents also appreciate that coursework is infused with college-going requirements, such as the senior thesis which is a required one semester twelfth grade course, with an instructional focus on research-based writing and presentation for college preparedness. Additionally, a web-based program provides a digital platform for ongoing communication about topics such as student grades and assignments, and for email correspondence from teachers. One parent shared how she can have, "conversations at the dinner table about topics, for example, in social studies with her child" because of how teachers critique and motivate students to get involved and interested in specific topics. Parents also noted that the longer 79 minutes instructional periods enable students to learn a subject more deeply and that all members of staff are unified in their high expectations for students' success. Furthermore, parents remark that they are kept informed about and assisted in the college awareness and application process and guided in monitoring college readiness indicators, so they are true partners in their children's learning and progress towards career and college readiness goals.

- Relationships among students, teachers and school leaders exemplify mutual respect, resulting in an environment that is highly conducive to learning, thus supporting the academic and personal growth of students. (1.4)

  - The school community is unified in its mission to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all students during their high school years so that they cultivate personal and academic behaviors needed for success in college and beyond. Community service and volunteerism are significant aspects of this preparation so all tenth through twelfth grade students must complete a minimum community service requirement, ranging from 20 to 45 hours. Written essays describing their experiences enable students to reflect on work habits, persistence, organizational skills and self-regulation, as they make valuable

contributions to their community. Furthermore, students are quick to share information about their part in student government and the structure that allows them to provide input in decision-making. For example, the President of the student body and Executive Board members meet a minimum of once per month with school leaders and discussions have resulted in more visible "Student of the Month" and Honor Roll displays, bathroom "upgrades", and displays of inspirational quotes throughout the building. Also, student members assist with the many student committees that focus on specific projects, such as Breast Cancer Walk, fundraising for Muscular Dystrophy and pep rallies. Furthermore, after initiating a petition for a Badminton Club, supported by several student signatures, the students gained the principal's approval to begin the club in the spring. These meaningful opportunities for students to have a strong voice in school decision-making support students' personal and academic growth and result in a cohesive culture of mutual respect and buy-in.

- This is a small school where many of its staff members have multiple roles and responsibilities. Faculty and school leaders are proud that every student in the building is known well and individually supported throughout their high school experience. Three guidance counselors are responsible for cohorts of students for whom they print data reports every five days, in order to monitor discipline, attendance, academic progress, and grade specific deadlines. One guidance counselor who is college advisor, provides extra attention for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to ensure that all avenues for them to be successful are explored, such as alternative placements, GED exams and any special programs. Four part-time deans work hand-in-hand with counselors, assistant principals, and teachers to not only resolve issues, but also to practice prevention. As a result, data from the most recent Progress Report shows that the school has made gains in closing the achievement gap, especially for special education students whose progress is reflected in their four year weighted diploma rate.

- The principal promotes organizational decisions that strategically support focused instructional goals and action plans, through a collaborative model that continuously involves all staff in planning and implementing learning experiences that improve student outcomes. (1.3)

  - The principal has secured numerous partnerships that support the school's goals and long-range action plans, engaging students in diversified learning experiences. For example, the Gilder Institute for American History provides funding for a Saturday enrichment program and trip program to Gettysburg, Washington, D.C. and other notable destinations. The Center for Arts Education offers highly competitive internships for selected students with exceptional skill and interest in the arts. The Public Education Needs Civic Involvement in Learning (PENCIL) partnership with McGraw Hill/Standard&Poors, creates a program that mentors at risk tenth grade girls through their graduation and college admission. The school also partners with LaGuardia Community College, which offers nine credit-bearing courses for students to experience early college work. In addition, student teachers from St. John's University work with targeted students, lowering the teacher-student ratio in classrooms, thus facilitating more individualized support. Furthermore, a new computer room funded by a member of the City Council is used regularly for Journalism and Digital Media and students in all classes in all subjects sign up and rotate in and out to write, do research, and create artistic work. The

successes of these endeavors are evident in the high-quality work that students produce across all content areas.

- In alignment to a Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) goal for all students to increase their college and career awareness skills by June 2014, a college team meets regularly to plan professional development for cohorts of teachers and in-classroom information sessions for students in each grade and for whole grade sessions. English teachers work with the college team to create units that focus on college and career exploration and packets of lesson plans for use in college-dedicated units for each grade. Common planning time is used for accountable collaborations among teachers to share progress and next steps in achieving this student goal. Furthermore, a School Based Option (SBO) resulted in a master schedule that provides for 79 minutes periods for teachers, to ensure academic depth in coursework as well as to facilitate tutoring which is available for students on Wednesdays. Students are invited to tutoring if they are falling behind in their course grades or can "drop by" to request additional academic intervention. One of three guidance counselors is dedicated to ensuring that students with IEPs are particularly monitored and invited to tutoring so that they remain on track in the college application and preparation process. This focus on strategic use of instructional time supports all teachers in improving their instruction as they collaborate to offer students access to interventions and college and career readiness activities which have resulted in the school's steady rise from 55% to 67% in the percentage of Non-Remediation 4 year rate index over the past three years.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen assessment practices to incorporate feedback loops that consistently provide accurate data to staff and students regarding student mastery of learning goals, and result in instructional adjustments that further accelerate learning for all students. (2.2)

  - The school works diligently to align common assessments across students' four year learning experiences, with a focus on American Studies. Beginning in the ninth grade, students face a culminating end of year assessment in the form of a debate and are tracked across the four years to ensure that they build stamina and demonstrate mastery of content, skills and special presentation requirements. This enables faculty to project students' success in developing and presenting a senior thesis as their exit project requirement. In addition, Regents exam pass rates are examined and correlated to course grades and expectations for students' movement from one grade to the next. Periodic assessments are used to isolate gaps in students' learning, leading to instructional adjustments that improve students' performance in the related skill areas. For example, analyses of periodic assessment data showed deficits in students' ability to glean evidence from multiple sources and present a claim and a counter-claim, so this skill became an area of focus in all grades, in preparation for the new Common Core Regents exam. Student work products, including the work of special education students, now demonstrate increased mastery of this skill. Other assessment tools, including rubrics, also provide feedback on student performance. However, a few students were not able to fully articulate understanding of their next steps based on the feedback from the teacher or through a task-specific rubric. Further, in a few cases, feedback was generic and did not contribute to a clear portrait of student mastery, thus limiting student achievement at even higher levels.

- Build on rigorous teaching practices across all subjects and grades to ensure high quality questioning and multiple entry points that consistently provide opportunities for all students to engage in student-led discussions that maximize their thinking. (1.2)

    - In most classrooms, students were observed productively struggling with rigorous, thought-provoking tasks and were provided with scaffolds to assist them in being successful. This was most evident in the Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classrooms. For example, in a ninth grade ICT English class, students were offered different versions of *Macbeth,* including the graphic novel, while others were offered interpretations of the text in writing. Additionally, for their culminating project, student groups planned to present a creative adaptation of a scene from the play and were afforded the opportunity to decide on the roles that each would play, and their responsibilities to the group, leading to their reflections on specific production network questions that identified their individual contributions to the project. In an Integrated Algebra classroom, math tasks were scaffolded and matched to group capability, thus supporting the students in completing rigorous work. In a tenth grade English class several student groups were engaged in a lively discussion as they reflected on a variety of informational text pertaining to either historical, religious, political, or cultural contexts of the Dominican Republic. Multiple activities and organizers elicited verbal and written responses, both collaboratively and individually. However, in a self-contained English as a Second Language class, the lesson on an introduction to poetry was teacher-directed, with a series of low level questions and no visual aids or other prompts to enable all learners to participate fully in the lesson. Students, including three with IEPs, struggled to remember poems that they read and were not offered any focused support to activate schema. Consequently, not all teachers provide high quality supports through effective questioning strategies or extensions into the curricula, therefore, not all learners demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in their work products and ownership of their learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Academy of American Studies	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