



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

**Quality Review  
Office of School Quality  
Division of Academics, Performance, and Support  
2013-2014**

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**The Academy of Innovative Learning**

**31R065**

**98 Grant Street  
Staten Island  
NY 10301**

**Principal: Sophie Scamardella**

**Dates of review: December 11-12, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Jessica Jenkins**

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

### **Information about the school**

The Academy of Innovative Learning is an elementary school with 400 students from pre-K through grade 5. The school population comprises 24% Black, 34% Hispanic, 32% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 95%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is well developed.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Teachers and school leaders routinely plan and effectively refine units of study aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in order to ensure student engagement and promote coherence across grades. (1.1)
  - The school utilizes a hybrid approach to curriculum design in each of the content areas, determining curricular choices through collaboration between administration and teacher teams. The school has chosen to supplement and adapt Everyday Math, materials from Engage NY, Exemplars, as well as the creation of interdisciplinary units of study to meet the needs of all students. Units of study incorporate the instructional shifts and Depth of Knowledge (DOK), requiring students to use content vocabulary and engage in regular student discourse promoting rigor. One such second grade interdisciplinary unit of study requires that students create a meaningful persuasive argument and use evidence to justify their argument through non-fiction texts and literature of the time period utilizing multiple Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies. A review of a fifth grade unit of study requires students to explore what led to the rise of the early civilization in the Americas through historical fiction and numerous primary source documents. The unit culminates in an extensive research project, which provides choice for students to represent their learning. Furthermore, to ensure coherence across grades, vertical teacher teams use CCLS aligned rubrics and checklists to assess alignment and evidence of grade-appropriate skills, resulting in strategic coordination of the topics that students study.
  - Teachers and school leaders ensure that all students have access to rigorous academic tasks through regular common planning and weekly data meetings where unit plans are created and refined using classroom level data. These strategic and thoughtful planning sessions provide opportunities for teachers to make instructional changes in order to address the multiple entry points for all learners, including the struggling and highest performing. Flexible groups are then created to meet the needs of those students requiring intervention, as well as those who would benefit from extension activities. During an interdisciplinary unit on explorers, fifth grade teachers used data from a baseline and mid-assessment to disaggregate data for subgroups of students. This resulted in the creation of thematic learning centers, differentiated readings, color-coding, and flexible grouping to ensure access by all students to the unit of study. Consequently, students with disabilities (SWD's) showed an 80% growth on the end of unit assessment.
- Students, parents, and staff appreciate the school's focused efforts on maintaining a supportive, inclusive, and respectful environment that strengthens the development of students' academic, social, and emotional growth. (1.4)
  - The school's shared belief on student success is one in which administration, teachers, and staff focus on the whole child, knowing all students' backgrounds, interests, and level of academic achievement in order to support them appropriately. To develop a collective understanding of the whole child approach, the staff engages in a weekly blog focused on authentic individual student

- scenarios related to addressing learning styles, engagement, and level of challenge. Based on this work, the entire staff is conscientious about addressing the needs of students on an individualized basis through regular meetings with students and parents to review academic progress as well as strategies to address each child's unique needs. As a result, the school's most recent learning environment survey indicates that 98% of parents feel that the school gives their child meaningful assignments and 97% shared that teachers encourage their child not to give up on challenging work. In addition, students communicated numerous examples that highlight the school's focus on impacting personal behaviors, including a compliment box for students to praise each other for demonstration of leadership, as well as ongoing recognition for attendance and displays of kindness, celebrated through weekly and monthly assemblies. Consequently, students report that they feel valued and that they contribute in a productive manner toward creating a positive, welcoming and inclusive school culture, with attendance rates of 96.4%. In one student's words, "Even though we are tiny members of this world, our school makes us feel like we are valued and can do anything."
- The school strategically aligns professional development, family outreach, and student learning experiences to ensure that student success is a collaborative effort. The guidance counselor leads ongoing professional development for parents that is well-attended by the parent community as evidenced by sign-in sheets and the learning environment survey that suggest 95% of families feel the school makes it easy for parents to attend meetings by holding them at different times of the day. Consequently, parents expressed that teachers go to great lengths to ensure that "hard work" is praised over anything else. One parent characterized the school as a "life-saver" where her child's "individual needs are addressed in a safe, non-competitive, nurturing, and respectful way." Other parents stated that the school "will do anything for their children" and that "the administration and guidance counselor knows every child individually". Furthermore, families indicated that administrators and teachers are approachable and that parents are kept abreast of their children's achievements through extensive weekly newsletters, personalized communication via telephone and written formats, as well as numerous, helpful workshops provided by the school counselor. As a result, students expressed it is "safe to take risks", and that teachers go above and beyond to make them feel "nurtured and engaged."
  - The school's deeply reflective use of all resources, are strategically aligned to the school's goals and the implementation of a CCLS aligned curriculum, supporting efforts toward improved student learning. (1.3)
    - Teacher teams are programmed to meet three times a week for collaborative planning, in addition to a weekly inquiry period. Furthermore, every teacher is programmed for an additional data period with administration which is used to; analyze student work using a clearly-defined school-wide rubric, address trends across groups of students, revisit professional goals, and make adjustments to teacher pedagogy that lead to multiple points of access for all students to make progress toward mastery of CCLS. Strategic teaming has resulted in a culture whereby teachers meet before and after school, and during lunch to plan for flexible grouping, share best practices, create meaningful and rigorous tasks, and effectively evaluate student work products in an effort to improve teacher practice and outcomes for all students. Additionally, the instructional coach, special education teachers, and F-status teachers provide additional support that mirror

- the regular classroom lesson with the addition of scaffolds for identified students through small group instruction. As a result of these individualized and small group interventions, all students, including relevant subgroups, are making great strides across content areas. This is evidenced by student work products that are representative of increased proficiency of grades on task-specific rubrics, specific teacher conference notes that address progress toward mastery, and students' self-assessment in English language arts (ELA) and math.
- The principal's thoughtful and strategic decisions to align resources with the needs of the school community include an instructional coach serving in the capacity as a math cluster teacher, and a literacy specialist, as well as F-status teachers who provide math and literacy instruction intervention services to targeted groups of students. After a review of second grade assessment data, the principal strategically placed an F-status math teacher during the math block three days per week, allowing teachers to create flexible and strategic groupings of students based on performance level. Furthermore, the instructional coach works with targeted groups of students throughout the week on close reading strategies and math games to deepen content knowledge and increase exposure to rigorous texts. Consequently, students were able to articulate the benefits of this small group instruction and showcase an in-depth understanding of mathematical understanding. Additionally, the teaming structure across the school contributes to meaningful collaboration and planning sessions that result in rigorous and scaffolded tasks based on assessment data. The second grade team re-wrote an Exemplars task to account for the variability in all learners, as well as make sure that all students can meet the requirements of the task. After the task was administered, the team then analyzed the results using a checklist and determined the necessary pedagogical shifts to ensure mastery by all students, thus holding themselves accountable for their students' progress.
  - Assessment and analysis practices across the school lead to ongoing instructional adjustments so that the needs of all students are met. (2.2)
    - Teachers provide frequent and ongoing feedback to students by emphasizing their progress toward mastery in every unit of study so that students are aware of their performance. Students are able to make improvements in their learning through the use of student-friendly CCLS-aligned rubrics and regular use of post-it notes that provide actionable next steps. As a result, students report that rubrics and consistent feedback from teachers help them improve their skills in analyzing complex text, using textual evidence to support their claims, as well as address all aspects of the task to ensure that it includes all elements of the rubric. Student self-assessment practices across classrooms allow students to reflect on the process and final product, resulting in meaningful edits and ownership of their work. The third grade CCLS have been re-written to reflect student-friendly "I can" statements used as a checklist for students to determine mastery based on a review of actual student work products. Consequently, students were able to articulate the steps they took from beginning to end of a persuasive essay on the topic of school uniforms, including where teacher feedback was incorporated throughout the writing process, as well as which standards were mastered. Furthermore, teachers maintain checklists for each unit of study that are used during daily conferencing that includes all standards related to the task, resulting in modifications to instruction to meet the needs of all students.

- Common math assessments are administered at the beginning and end of each unit of study, and Fountas and Pinnell reading levels are measured four times a year to inform small group targeted instruction. Additionally, the Foundations program is used in the lower grades to provide students with a foundation for reading and spelling using multisensory teaching techniques. After analysis of a baseline assessment in the lower grades, it was noted that decoding was an issue for groups of English language learners (ELLs) and SWD's, prompting the programming of an F-status teacher who provides increased sessions of Foundations. Additionally, student growth is continuously monitored through daily conferencing and homework is differentiated based on the analysis of these conference notes. Furthermore, progress is monitored in weekly data meetings where the team determines which skills need re-teaching. Consequently, all units of study are adjusted regularly to ensure student mastery of unit standards as evidenced by modified curriculum maps inclusive of specific instructional strategies for groups of students.
- School leaders effectively use observation and reflection structures coupled with targeted supports for teacher development to promote professional growth and elevate instructional practices. (4.1)
  - School leaders have established a frequent observation schedule and are in classrooms everyday providing on-the-spot feedback and coaching. A review of observation reports suggest that feedback is aligned to teacher goals and recommendations include a timeline for implementation, as well as meaningful resources to support pedagogy, thus promoting teacher development. Furthermore, observation feedback sessions focus on a careful analysis of student work, resulting in frequent modifications to lesson plans and units of study. Teachers described the administration and instructional coach as “model instructional leaders who provide ongoing support in the classroom through hands-on coaching.” Another teacher described feedback as “inclusive of applicable and timely resources to support implementation of recommendations.” A differentiated professional development plan includes multiple opportunities for inter-visitation of best practices with a detailed focus form that accompanies each inter-visitation, resulting in a deeply reflective culture that promotes professional growth and teacher effectiveness.

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

- Ensure that teaching practices consistently reflect the school's work around student-centered learning and its belief that student learn best through critical thinking so that all learners are challenged to achieve at high levels. (1.2)
  - Across classrooms, including dance and the arts, teachers are engaging students in rigorous tasks with appropriate scaffolds aligned to the CCLS, engaging students in higher order thinking through discussion, close reading, and deep understanding of mathematical concepts. In a kindergarten classroom, students were engaged in a hands-on activity exploring whether various three-dimensional shapes could roll, while engaging in table discussions as to why or why not, thus promoting deep conceptual understanding. In one fifth grade integrated co-teaching class, students engaged in a close reading of a section of *Hatchet* using “think marks,” a school-wide strategy to help students cite evidence, resulting in an in-depth understanding of the reading and meaningful student discourse. However, in other classrooms, the teacher dominated the questioning component, resulting in limited student-to-student discussion, as well as opportunities to extend one another's thinking.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Academy of Innovative Learning	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score				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