

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Astor Collegiate Academy

High School 229

**925 Astor Avenue
Bronx
NY 10469**

Principal: Sandra Burgos

Dates of review: February 10 - 11, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Arisleyda A. Ureña

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Astor Collegiate Academy is a high school with 474 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 34% Black, 47% Hispanic, 11% White, and 8% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 84.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers ensure curricula alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) emphasizes rigorous habits to promote college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
 - Curricula artifacts, using the Understanding by Design (UbD) format, include interdisciplinary essential questions, guiding questions, developmental questions, and a culminating writing task, supports the school's efforts in ensuring that curricula is aligned to the CCLS. Developmental questions are used to further connect the rigor of the CCLS to interdisciplinary content and concepts, thus developing students' critical thinking skills. An example from a Spanish class is, "Are our choices decided by birthright, or by how and/or where we are raised?" Similarly, in a curriculum map for an English language arts class examples are, "How does identity influence one's actions? How does perception change with experience?" In a geometry curriculum map, a sample of a developmental question is, "How is visualization essential to the study of geometry?" Thus, the school's uniform approach to curricula design includes interdisciplinary research writing tasks to support the rigor of the CCLS and prepares students to successfully complete Advance Placement (AP) work. As a result, in the past year students who are enrolled in Advance Placement (AP) courses moved from scoring 1 and 2, to scoring 3 and 4, preparing students for the requirements of college and career.
 - Rigorous habits, embedded across curricula in all grades and subjects, provide students, including English language learners and special education students, with opportunities to move their writing abilities from New York State Regent's standard towards the standards of the College Board. Furthermore, thought-provoking essential questioning requires students to think and write critically about the content, theme/topic, and real world connections. For example, in a Living Environment curriculum map, one of the writing tasks was an argumentative essay, and cross-discipline connections included the method of loci for history, and technological research in reproduction methods, thus increasing students' rigorous habits. Moreover, the school also holds English language learners and students with disabilities to the same rigorous standards and design vocabulary supports and specific graphic organizers to ensure that all students are able to demonstrate their thinking and mastery for the content in the culminating performance tasks. As a result, 17 out of 26 special education students, three out six English language learners, and 65% of the total students who took the English language arts Regents in January 2014 passed.
- School administration makes strategic organizational decisions and aligns supports to the school's instructional goals to improve staff and student performance. (1.3)

- To address the school's priority and overarching goal of preparing students to be successful in college and career, the administration allocated funds to hire an additional special education teacher, a community associate, and an additional guidance counselor. Additional resources for after-school academic programs, Pre-Scholastic Achievement Test (P-SAT) and Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) preparatory programs, Regents tutoring, summer school, and per-session for teachers to collaborate in lesson planning, further ensure support for students' academic needs. In addition, the school administration made the decision to hire an additional special education teacher with a math license to further support students' mastery of the CCLS in math. Moreover, the school has two computer laboratories that are used for multiple purposes, including serving as a laboratory for English language learners to work on the Achieve 3000 reading program. A partnership with SOBRO, a community based organization, enables the school to offer both a summer bridge program to incoming ninth graders and an after school academic support to support a successful transition into the high school.
- To support the school's instructional goals, school leadership design the school's program based on observable teachers' strengths, students' needs, grade level needs, and schedule multiple types of meetings. The Astor Council, for example, meets several times during the week to monitor students' progress and, as necessary, additional intervention plans are developed to address students' needs. The school's schedule also affords teachers common preparation and lunch hours for additional meeting time. For example, grade and department teams have scheduled meetings and focus their work on examining content skills, performance tasks, and the CCLS to further support the school's instructional goals. Furthermore, school leadership included additional math classes during the week to ensure that students in need of math academic interventions receive appropriate services. Similarly, additional courses such as global issues, journalism, and the writing workshop are included in students' programs to further support history and writing, thus ensuring academic interventions to support students' academic progress. As a result, teachers and the administration shared that they "are responsible for every individual student's progress and academic success," as evidenced by students' writing work in portfolios and increased passing rate of the United States history Regents exam in January 2014.
- School leadership uses observation data, student work, and focused feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, to communicate expectations and support teacher development. (4.1)
 - Written observation reports give teachers specific feedback on areas of strength and areas in need of improvement, aligned to a specific competency of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, with recommendations for next steps. Recommendations include meeting the administration to discuss specific teaching strategies, and/or schedule one-on-one meeting with coaches from the support network (CFN) to provide professional development on English as a second language (ESL) and Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT). Additionally, the supervisors use ADVANCE observation data, students' performance data, and student work, to develop teacher support groups according to identified

strengths and areas of challenge. As a result, school leaders ensure that all teachers, including those who are new to the profession, receive targeted feedback, mentoring, and appropriate supports in order to hone their instructional practice.

- In the classroom observations reviewed, feedback specifying areas of strengths and those for improvement were given to teachers through the lens of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, across the observations, recommendations given to teachers focused on Danielson's competencies 2 and 3. Some resources referenced in many observation reports as a means to provide further support were ARIS Learn, *Teach Like a Champion*, and *Never Work Harder Than Your Students*. Furthermore, observation reports stated how individual teachers received supports aligning lesson plans to the CCLS, strategies for increasing student engagement, and effective questioning techniques. The administration's strategy to organize three teacher groups to further support teacher development for Domains 2 and 3 affords teachers structured opportunities to improve their instructional practice, thus setting clear expectations for school wide instructional practice. As a result, mid-year ADVANCE data analysis demonstrates increases in teachers scoring at the effective level in Domain 3c, thus increasing practices to foster student engagement across the school.
- Teacher teams consistently analyze data and participate in leadership roles to improve teaching practice, thus supporting students' academic achievement across the school. (4.2)
 - Teacher meetings are used to discuss student work, student data, and curricula. The English department meeting engaged in a discussion about the alignment of the English language arts unit with social studies, concerns with books or curriculum, specific students' issues, and needs of special education students. Teachers agreed that for this upcoming unit of study they have to create additional graphic organizers to support English language learners and special education students. A teacher proceeded by asking for suggestions on how to increase students' engagement for this marking period unit. Teachers recommended to "give students a new book that they have not seen [in the lower grades], books that are useful, and that relate to the theme or topic." Similarly, the eleventh grade inquiry team used a new protocol that focuses on Bloom's Taxonomy to analyze essays and target students' strengths and challenges for successfully completing a writing task for the History Regents. Teachers identified key strategies to further adjust the learning activities and unit plans for the marking period, thus setting parameters to increase students' capacity to achieve CCLS aligned tasks.
 - As a result of professional collaboration between school leaders and teachers, key decisions relative to professional development and teacher initiatives have evolved throughout this school year. The Astor Council engages in facilitating professional development, and supports the school's instructional goals by guiding and leading various teaching initiatives. For example, the team noticed a need to develop more uniformity on the expectations for grading students' writing. Accordingly, the team developed a cross-grade Performance Assessment Common Rubric that allows teachers to give students clear expectations and feedback for improving and evaluating their writing, thus increasing the

calibration for assessing students' writing work. Furthermore, teachers' active participation in school wide instructional initiatives, participation in teacher team meetings, and school committees, increase teachers' leadership skills and support improving student learning across the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen pedagogical practices to provide all students access to the curricula, resulting in increased levels of engagement, thinking and participation. (1.2)
 - The administration and the Astor Council have established norms for classroom instruction that include posting of daily aims, do-now activities, vocabulary activities, essential and guiding questions, lesson summaries, and identifying the CCLS aligned to the lesson. However, although a few teachers attempted to engage students in high-level discussions, the learning activity and the questions posed by teachers did not always cognitively challenge them. For example, in those classrooms visited, where students sat in rows or with a partner, the students had minimal interaction with the teacher asked rapid-fire questions, allowing for one-word responses that dominated class discussions. In some classes, students were sitting in groups and provided with learning tasks that were not sufficiently differentiated or require high levels of thinking, nor were students provided with clear expectations of the required final product. Hence leading to uneven student engagement with students not required to make real world and/or interdisciplinary connections or self-reflect about their learning.
- Refine school practices so that teachers consistently use common assessments and on-going checks for understanding data to adjust instruction leading to meeting all students' learning needs. (2.2)
 - Departmental assessments are common across subject areas and are administered before the Regents to inform academic interventions to further prepare students for the Regents' exams and help them progress towards mastery of the CCLS. Moreover, teachers use an online grading system for students to track their grades and completion of course expectations regarding homework, projects, and test grades. While this structure does enable students to track their academic progress, it does not inform a student of his/her specific academic needs within subjects, thereby hindering efforts to create a clear picture of student progress and important next steps. As a result, students were not able to speak to their academic goals for the school year. Many students said that their "goal is to work harder, study more, and pass the Regents." In addition, although teachers use common rubrics and exit slips to assess students' learning, checks for understanding are inconsistent across classrooms. Some classrooms show evidence of intermediate checks in the form of questions posed to specific students to gauge understanding, while other classrooms only involve surface level questions that hinder teachers' ability to make immediate or timely adjustments to the lessons, therefore hindering the ability to immediately address students' learning needs.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Astor Collegiate Academy					UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score							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	