

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Academy for Environmental Leadership**

**High School K403**

**400 Irving Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11237**

**Principal: ChántAndréa Blissett**

**Date of review: March 18, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Jo Ann Benoit**

## The School Context

The Academy for Environmental Leadership is a high school with 340 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 20% Black, 77% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 33% English language learners and 26% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 81.5%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations. Teachers analyze and support key elements of student and classroom practice and play an integral role in the distributive leadership structures established at the school.

### Impact

There is coherence in the work that is done across grades and subject areas. There are improvements in student outcomes and teacher practice, and teachers make decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet regularly in department and cohort teams, as well as in other collaborative structures facilitated by themselves. There are at least ten committees that teachers' lead, for example, there is an inquiry coordinator who supports the work of the inquiry teams at the school. That position is held by a teacher. Teachers provide professional development to their colleagues and mentor new and struggling teachers. During the teacher interviews, teachers shared how those collaborations and the feedback they've received have helped them be more reflective and effective. One teacher said after listing the professional development sessions he had attended with the English as a Second Language teacher "I have had to think [more] about the ways I present tasks". Another said about the feedback she has received from colleagues "I scaffold too much. I am trying to step back more [to foster more independence in my students]".
- Teachers have a voice at the school and make decisions that affect teaching and learning school-wide. Teachers give feedback to administrators and each other on a regular basis. During staff meetings, there is always time set aside for teachers to fill out a mood meter. Teachers also fill out surveys to share with the administration their preferences as well as the ways in which they can support professional development. Teachers, after student data analysis, have decided to make the school's instructional focus revolve around claim and counterclaim. Ninth, eleventh and twelfth graders focus on writing counterclaims and tenth graders focus on writing claims and providing evidence for them. Teachers have also adapted and developed several documents to help promote coherence, a common language and thus a common understanding of the expectations. Some of the documents are the "Common Terms to Use in Class for Argument Writing", the "Common Reading Protocol" and the "Spotlight Writing Strategy".
- During the twelve grade cohort meeting, teachers were looking at students' writing on whether or not color blindness is a form of racism. Teachers analyzed a struggling student's paper and identified what the student was able to do well and was struggling with. Their next steps were to list the ways in which they could support the student and similar students going forward with citation, the analysis of evidence and understanding events in history that are being cited in the paper.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and create common assessments and rubrics aligned to the curricula, which help determine student progress towards goals.

### Impact

The results of the data analyses from common assessments provide feedback to students and teachers as well as inform teachers' curricular and instructional adjustments. However, the lack of varied classroom assessments impedes teachers from offering meaningful and effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses common assessments to determine student progress. Some of these assessments include the New York Performance Assessments, department created benchmarks, exit tickets, quick writes from EngageNY, the Gates and McGuinness (for vocabulary and reading comprehension), midterms, finals and mock Regents exams. These and other assessments have informed the scaffolds developed and the curricular decisions made by teachers for groups of students who are struggling and students who are meeting and exceeding grade level work
- Every three weeks, the school shares with parents and students qualitative narrative progress reports that explain what students are able to do and what they need to improve on. These give feedback to students and other teachers on student achievement several times a year.
- Students use the mood meter, a template that asks them to circle a color (indicating their mood) and why (they chose it). Students' answers varied and focused on academic as well as behavioral and emotional disposition. However, across classrooms, there was a lack of varied ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment to allow students to be aware of their next incremental learning steps.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core, the instructional shifts and the content standards. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

### Impact

The level of rigor in the curricula helps promote college and career readiness for all students as well as allows all students to have access to the curricula.

### Supporting Evidence

- Based on student data, the school has decided to focus on reading and writing across the content areas. Teachers have adopted and refined protocols to support students with their literacy skills. Students use the Common Reading Protocol to support them in annotating texts and ultimately with reading comprehension. They also use The Spotlight Writing Strategy adapted by teachers from Step Up Writing to support the organization of their writing.
- Curricula and academic tasks are refined and adapted to align to the Common Core, content standards and the instructional shifts. For example, once teachers design or adapt curricula, they use the Rigor Matrix, adopted this year by the staff, to give each other feedback on their work. The Rigor Matrix assesses the level of rigor in English language arts, science and social studies for reading, writing and discussion. In Math, it helps assess the level of rigor for writing, discussion and math reasoning.
- Besides doing work around rigor, teachers work to provide students with access into the curricula. Differentiation is documented for a diversity of learners across lesson and unit plans. Teachers scaffold for the 33% of English language learners and 26% of students with disabilities that exist in their school by offering varied reading level textbooks and texts, showing videos to engage or help build background knowledge, using different types of technology in class such as laptops, smart boards to make learning interactive and by designing project-based activities. Teachers also offer in their plans tiered activities.

**Findings**

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula, reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best and promote rigorous student work products.

**Impact**

Teaching practices reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the school's foci and engage learners in producing work that reflects high levels of thinking and participation.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and engage students in high level work. In an English class, students were working on a mini argument around articles they read that supported or refuted the statement "Al Sharpton is a positive and altruistic advocate and representative for the Black community in the U.S.". In another class, students were debating in their groups whether or not the document they read was less, more or equally reliable than the video they watched on the Japanese Internment and why they thought so.
- Across classrooms, teaching practices reflected the beliefs shared by administrators around how students learn best. The administrators shared that the practices they promote school-wide allow students to work collaboratively and when needed individually, model their work, have choice, engage in discussions and have a role during group work. These practices were observed in several classrooms visited. For example, in math class, students were up on the board sharing their work around modeling linear and exponential functions. Several shared their work with the class and challenged each other's answers. In an elective class, students were working with a partner, sharing their poems, essays and other work to either model for the partner or receive feedback.
- Across classrooms, students were involved in grade level work that is rigorous as well as engaging. In a science class, students were working in groups to collect and analyze data on the seeds they had planted. Different groups planted different things, for example, some students had peas, others flowers and others were looking for their plants' reactions to fertilizers. They were discussing their data with one another as well as with the teacher. In an earth science class, students were studying New York State during prehistoric times. Students designed their projects and the ways they would present them according to the roles they were given: botanist, zoologist, paleontologist or volcanologist and seismologist.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and students and promote a culture for learning that provides supports for all to understand and meet those expectations. Families are kept abreast of student progress and collaborate with the school in ways to support it.

### **Impact**

The support provided to staff, families, and students, involves training for teachers which promotes a culture of mutual accountability, workshops for and meetings with parents, which allow them to be true allies in their children's academic achievement, and a unified set of expectations for students to ensure they are prepared for the next level.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Administrators have high expectations for the staff and provide supports for the implementation of these expectations. Teachers receive the morning memo which delineates daily expectations, bulletin board checklists which lists the criteria for effective bulletin boards and teaching expectations for lesson preparation and lesson implementation. They inform through surveys and feedback forms the professional development plan. They are regularly observed by administrators and their peers and receive formative and evaluative feedback. They use the Tuning protocol to look at student work and bring coherence to their work. They receive and provide professional development as well as develop documents that foster mutual accountability at the school. Teachers use Skedula and Google Docs to share and receive work.
- Communication with parents is consistent and systematic. Parents receive information from the school through phone calls, emails, Skedula or Pupil Path, progress reports, report cards, during parent teacher conferences, award ceremonies, luncheons, on Thursdays (parent engagement day), at parent teacher association (PTA) events and in other ways. Parents are brought in as partners in the planning and preparation for college and careers. Workshops are offered to them as well as meetings set up to go over students' goals, work and next steps and the ways they can support their children.
- The school offers students opportunities to prepare for college and careers. Students take Advanced Placement classes at the school. The numbers have increased 5.2% to 38%. The number of students receiving Advanced Regents diplomas also increased from 2.1% of students in 2013 to 7.3% in 2014 to nearly 10% this year. The percentage of students scoring an 80 or above has increased by 161%. Students take SAT, COMPASS and College Now courses as well.
- Teachers have developed documents and course work to ensure students are prepared for the next level. Teachers developed a document entitled "The Best Way to Succeed in School" which outlines best practices students should follow in order to do well in school as well as the school's grading policy. College prep electives are offered to students and fairs are organized. 10th and 11th graders are starting to work on their college essays.