

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Academy for New Americans**

**Middle School Q235  
30-14 30<sup>TH</sup> Street  
Queens, NY  
11102**

**Principal: Betty Cartagena**

**Date of review: January 22, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Joseph O'Brien**

## The School Context

The Academy for New Americans is a middle school with 166 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 1% Black, 61% Hispanic, 13% White, and 25% Asian students. The student body includes 100% English language learners and 0% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 96.0%.

## 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>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson framework for teaching and the instructional shifts. Teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions into the curriculum.

### Impact

All students produce meaningful work products, engage in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher order thinking skills in student work products.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and administrators articulate how beliefs are informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to curricula, and shaped by teacher team and faculty input. For example, English as a second language strategies such as use of meaningful situations, modeling, visuals, tangibles/manipulatives, motivations, turn and talks, jigsaw, and think pair share strategies are embedded in instruction and were seen in use in seven of seven classes.
- Students in flexible groups worked on tiered activities with unique scaffolds and resources in six of seven classes. Teachers provide multiple entry points in lessons and tasks for all learners including English language learners. For example, visual cues, step-by-step directions in different languages, word problems in different languages, and graphic organizers, were seen in seven of seven classes.
- Academic charts and visual infographics adorn classroom walls, windows and doors. Colorful illustrations and visual aids provide support for students learning English. For example, large posters with academic vocabulary words including addition and subtraction written in multiple languages were seen in the majority of classrooms.
- In the majority of classrooms visited, student to student discussions and student participation in collaborative activities were seen. For example, students use discussion prompts to engage in student-to-student discussions. Feedback on student work products provides both praise and descriptive, concrete comments, and in the majority of classrooms, this is in students' native language.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Teachers create and use assessments and rubrics that are aligned with the school's curriculum. The School uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas, but teachers' checks for student understanding are still not evident in the majority of classes.

### Impact

School wide assessments provide actionable feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. The school consistently adjusts curricula and instruction at the teacher team level to meet students' learning needs; however, without checking for student understanding at key intervals of the class, opportunities to assess student comprehension and make in-the-moment adjustments were lost.

### Supporting Evidence

Teacher teams create assessments including tasks, rubrics, checklists and student self-assessments. For example, teacher created Student Interim Reports and Student Progress Reports aligned to Common Core Learning Standards with next steps are administered four times per year (two in the fall/ two in the spring). The teachers also create English Language Placement tests that mimic the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) which provide actionable data for teachers, students, and families.

- Teacher teams and school leaders analyze common assessment data from English language learner periodic assessments, NYSESLAT data, Student Interim Reports and Student Progress Reports to adjust instruction, assessment and focus curricular adaptation and refinement. For example, teachers identified Listening and Speaking as two major areas students need additional support. As a result, teacher teams allocated more time for student presentations and student to student collaboration each day. Student-to-student discussions were seen in four of seven classes.
- Student Initial Reports are prepared for newly enrolled students. Student Progress Reports in core subjects are also completed on a quarterly basis to create academic/social progress data for all newcomer students. These reports are sent home to provide parents and/or legal guardians detailed student progress data. They are signed by the parents and are placed in the students' portfolios. For example, Student Progress Reports for Math revealed students' struggles in multi-step word problems. Teachers adjusted instruction to ensure more time is allocated for student-to-student productive struggle in multi-step word problems across grades. The English as a Second Language team also implements school generated English Language Placement tests in three levels on a quarterly basis. These placement tests provide ongoing data on students' English language level performance in all four language components.
- Teacher checks for student understanding were seen in only three of seven classes, thus teachers lose opportunities to assess "in the moment" student ELL reading comprehension and make suitable adjustments mid-lesson.

## Additional Findings

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

Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills and are planned so that all newcomer English Language Learners (ELLs) have access to the curricula and tasks.

### Impact

The school ensures that curricula and academic tasks are rigorous, accessible for English language learners and refined by teachers based on student assessment data.

### Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum maps and lesson plans are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and note tasks including supporting claims and counterclaims with textual evidence and, multistep word problems. Teacher teams adapt curricular resources from National Geographic, Inside (Level: Newcomers, Level: Fundamentals 1 and Level: Fundamentals 2) and Glencoe CCSS Math.
- Skills and lessons noting ESL strategies including the use of theater games, visual cues, word use in meaningful situations, the acquisition of academic vocabulary, sight words, phonics and reading comprehension skills were emphasized in maps.
- Teacher teams meet to review data and discuss curricular adaptations at least three times per week. For example, teachers analyzed student work data and determined that students struggle with nouns and verbs in English. Teacher teams then adapted curricula to include vocabulary, pictures, visual cues sentence starters and graphic organizers to aid student comprehension.
- Rigorous habits and higher order skills are embedded within curricula and academic tasks coherently across grades and subjects. For example, a balance of fiction and nonfiction texts in literacy and activities leading to the practice of math fluency were seen in maps. Maps contain essential questions, lesson procedures, visual aids, vocabulary, group tasks, evidence of Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DoK) leveled activities and multiple points of entry.

Examples of multiple points of entry were seen in English as a Second Language unit plans/maps. These included scaffolds for questions, graphic organizers, paragraph models, turn and talk, activating prior knowledge, and suggestions for flexible grouping.

- In eighth grade social studies, specific ELL based learning activities, standards and details including inferencing and citing specific textual evidence in supporting conclusions were evident, as were extensions for advanced students including additional writing prompts.

<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 emphasize a culture of learning that communicates high expectations to the school community, provide training and have a system of accountability for those expectations. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations to a path to college and career readiness and successfully partner with families.

### Impact

The school provides a culture of mutual accountability for high expectations and professionalism, instruction, and other elements of the Danielson framework, and successfully partners with families to support student progress toward those expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders create high expectations for all staff, which is evidenced throughout the community through verbal and written structures including, new teacher orientations, ongoing work-shops, staff handbook, and a school website. Student handbooks set clear and rigorous expectations for students, and explain rules and regulations in both English and Spanish.
- The school has clearly defined standards for professional development including professional development plans that incorporate staff input and classroom practices, embedding elements of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, the Professional Learning Team surveys teachers to determine need, interest, and level of satisfaction in professional learning. Teams create the year's professional learning schedule and modify it based on Advance data during the year. Professional learning opportunities thus far include: Danielson 3b: Questioning and Discussion Techniques, 3c: Student Engagement, and 3d: Assessment.
- The school provides ongoing, clear lines of verbal and written communication such as online progress reports, parent/teacher conferences, parent informational sessions and workshops, and student handbook, with families to deepen their understanding of college and career readiness expectations for their children and to empower them to help support their children in meeting or exceeding those expectations. For example, Jupiter online grading system provides online progress reports and real-time updates to all families. Reports are sent home monthly for families who may have limited internet access.
- The parent coordinator in conjunction with 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Leadership provides ongoing workshops for families on a monthly basis. This year, workshops including fostering effective communication skills, anti-bullying strategies, parenting skills, understanding the Common Core Learning Standards, and the importance of attendance are provided. Additionally, the parent coordinator provides three levels of ESL instruction for parents twice per week.
- Families and students noted that school leaders and teachers help families acclimate to American society. For example, parents receive support in obtaining health insurance, and where to address medical needs.

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

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice and key decisions.

### **Impact**

Structured professional collaborations have typically resulted in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for groups of students. Teachers have voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Teacher teams meet at least three times per week to review student data, revise units of study, and design tasks and assessments. For example, assessment data indicated that English language learners struggled with the simplification of complex fractions in multi-step word problems. Teacher teams revised their practice to include more dedicated instruction in multi-step word problems, create scaffolds and graphic organizers and revised curriculum maps.
- Instructional coaches from CITE meet with teacher teams ten times per year to provide professional learning on questioning and discussion techniques, assessment and increasing student engagement. CITE coaches also provide side-by-side coaching for teacher teams.
- The school instructional cabinet (professional development team) consists of five teachers and guidance counselor who meet to discuss professional learning opportunities and design a menu of mutually agreed on topics. Teacher surveys and Advance data inform topics and teachers lead sessions.
- The School's Inquiry team meets with the school leader once a week to review school academics and policy. For example, when teacher leaders from all subject teams shared results from English proficiency assessments, data revealed that English language learner writing skills were low. Teachers suggested adaptations including chunking information and extra practice in solving multi-step math word problems as areas for development. Consequently, teachers are changing their instruction and curriculum to assist English language learners.