

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Astor Collegiate Academy

High School X299

**925 Astor Avenue
Bronx
NY 10469**

Principal: Sandra Burgos

**Dates of review: February 5, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

The School Context

Astor Collegiate Academy is a high school with 476 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 33% Black, 48% Hispanic, 11% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-14 was 83.6%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core

<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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.	Celebration	Proficient
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	Focus	Developing
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.	Additional Findings	Developing

School Culture

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations.	Additional Findings	Developing

Systems for Improvement

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning.	Additional Findings	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school's curricula are aligned to the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standard and reflect the integration of the instructional shifts across subject areas and grade levels. Teachers plan units of study and lessons that emphasize rigorous habits for diverse learners.

Impact

Learning tasks are designed to promote instructional coherence school wide and address college and career readiness skills for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and administrators have aligned curricula to the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards curricular documents and unit plans reflect the instructional shifts in English and math. Planning documents and units of study include tasks that require students to use evidence from text in their written responses. Additionally, teachers use content rich informational texts in science and social studies to promote rigor and higher order thinking. For example, teachers have created a humanities timeline that aligns standards for reading and writing in English with academic tasks in social studies.
- Teachers have developed narrative and expository rubrics using the Measures of Student Learning argumentative rubric as a guide to support assessment of students' written work. End of unit tasks require students to demonstrate knowledge of content as well as their ability to analyze text and present viable arguments. As a result, the use of evidence to support claims is used in English and social studies across all grades.
- Lesson plans across content areas demonstrate the teachers' plan for students in a variety of modalities. Some teachers use graphic organizers and vocabulary activities to ensure that students have access to complex text. Math teachers use examples and models designed to help students self-assess when working on algebraic solutions, for example, in pairs or individually. In all lesson plans, teachers include questions to probe student thinking and discussion.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Classroom lessons across grades and subject areas are beginning to reflect the school's beliefs that students learn best when they are given opportunities to explore their own thinking through questioning, discussions and writing. Teachers are developing instructional strategies to increase student engagement by incorporating facilitation of higher order tasks and opportunities for student-to-student discourse.

Impact

Inconsistent practices across grades and classrooms lead to uneven levels of engagement and higher order thinking. Academic tasks inconsistently provide access to appropriately challenging work and result in missed opportunities to engage diverse learners including students with disabilities and English language learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration and faculty believe that students learn best when they are engaged in discussion and required to write about their learning. These beliefs are aligned to instructional expectations in the Danielson framework for Teaching in the area of Questioning and Discussion techniques. Across classrooms, some lessons are beginning to reflect the use of higher order questions and structures, such as Socratic seminar, to promote student-to-student discussions. Teachers are incorporating questions into their lessons that require provide textual evidence for their contribution to the discussion.
- Teachers inconsistently use a variety of strategies to encourage students to participate in discussion and cooperative problem solving. For example, in a 9th grade class special education class, students were organized in small groups for collaborative work. Each group conducted research to support their ideas about preserving a community based on their knowledge of consumers and producers in a food chain. Students used PowerPoint technology to highlight their well-organized oral presentations. However, across several lessons, learning activities did not yield higher-order discussions or student work. For example, in a social studies lesson, students reflected briefly on a question posed on the board and used a large portion of the lesson to copy written work onto chart paper, thus limiting discussion and participation of students.
- The practice of student-led Socratic seminar is emerging in English classrooms and social studies as a way of increasing engagement and student discussion. In one lesson the teacher asked students to discuss whether they think people in Iran should adapt to American views and culture. Students initiated discussion by sharing their opinions and backing up their responses with evidence from literature previously reviewed in class. Students, including English language learners, responded to each other and used accountable talk stems to disagree and extend each other's responses thoughtfully. This type of lesson reflects the school's expectations around what learning should look like in all classrooms. As a result, about half of the English and social studies classrooms have conducted at least one Socratic seminar this year.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teachers use a variety of rubrics and assessment methods across grades and subject areas to determine student learning and progress and to determine course grades. Across classrooms, lessons reflect inconsistent use of assessment strategies, including student self-assessment, to check for student understanding of content and concepts.

Impact

Feedback to students about their learning is inconsistently based on rubrics, and students are not always able to use teacher feedback to improve their learning and work products. Uneven assessment practices do not always yield the instructional adjustments necessary to support students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Across departments, assessment tools include common rubrics as well as end of unit tests that mimic the Regents format and are designed to prepare students for the end of course exams. Feedback to students is inconsistent however, ranging from detailed comments from teachers that provide next steps for students to improve their work to numerical grades and check marks that do not always guide students with actionable feedback. Some teachers provide examples and checklists for tasks that allow students to self-assess, such as in math classes where teachers demonstrate solutions and ask students to check their own work against those models.
- Students receive information about grades and credit accumulation and can access information about their progress via an online grading system. Teachers also review summative data such as scholarship results, Regents scores and credit accumulation. However, there is no systematic analysis of interim student data that provides a clear portrait of mastery and progress towards goals.
- Across classrooms teachers inconsistently check for student understanding. Questions in some classrooms lead to student-to-student discussion. As teachers monitor the content of discussions, they confirm student understanding or provide clarification. However, in most lessons observed there were little to no opportunities for student participation and several lessons ended without a clear summary or closing activity to ensure that students met the desired learning goal. Students say that sometimes if they do not understand the lesson, they can meet with a teacher after school or at lunchtime. They indicated that these sessions are very helpful. However, during lessons there are missed opportunities to address student learning needs.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The principal uses the Danielson Framework to guide the content of high expectations for staff and communicates those expectations via the observation process. There are a variety of initiatives and structures to help families to support students as they prepare for post-secondary educational and career experiences.

Impact

The school community is beginning to embrace a focus on core values to help shape the school's culture around college and career readiness and high expectations for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Expectations for professionalism and instructional delivery have been guided by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Observations and feedback to teachers focus mainly on the use of questioning and discussion techniques. By addressing student involvement in learning, teachers and administrators expect to see an increase in students' desire and readiness for higher-level classes based on registration in advanced placement courses, college credit courses and student internships. The need to address student independence and academic perseverance is a result of the analysis of credit accumulation rates, which have been inconsistent and low for the past several years.
- Students and parents state that the staff communicates high expectations about college and career readiness in a variety of ways. Throughout the year parents say there are informational sessions, individual meetings with guidance counselors and parent workshops that inform students and their families about the college application process and opportunities for internships. Parents understand that the expectations of the Common Core Learning Standards require students to work differently as they prepare for college by explaining their thinking and defending their answers to questions. However, parents say that large class-size, especially in math, poses a challenge for teachers in meeting their individual children's needs and supporting them when they need help.
- School leaders and teachers are developing ways to hold themselves accountable for helping students to meet high expectations. For example, in preparation for the expectations of college and career, instruction is increasingly shifting to student-centered lessons across the school. The principal is also in the process of solidifying partnerships with community-based organizations that will provide a wider range of opportunities for student internships connected with college and career interests.
- Students believe that teachers and administrators want them to succeed and graduate. Students receive information about college from the guidance counselor and the school. Most students, however, indicate their motivation and interest in attending college comes from their parents' encouragement.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The majority of teachers participate in structured collaborations designed to strengthen teacher practice. Teacher teams inconsistently engage in inquiry work or analysis of student work and data to monitor student progress towards learning goals.

Impact

Emerging inquiry practices and teacher collaborations are beginning to improve instruction school wide.

Supporting Evidence

- Most teachers meet with department, grade and/or faculty meetings each week. Teams are led by Learning Partners core team members who develop agendas based on department priorities and issues around changes in school culture. The Learning Partners Program has enabled the school to partner with other schools to share best practices and provide school-to-school feedback about strengths and gaps in practice. Teachers state that these collaborations have created opportunities for teachers to discuss instructional strategies and share best practices. Special education teachers, however, are not yet part of the teacher teams engaged in inquiry, which thereby limits opportunities for these teachers to engage in the same level of collaboration with their colleagues.
- One department teacher team observed discussed a variety of topics including new unit maps and a new teacher handbook that will be completed by the end of the school year. Teachers also discussed the various structures that are developing in their classrooms to support the school goal of increasing engagement. Strategies such as think-pair-share, sentence starters and informal conversation are beginning to evolve lessons from traditional teacher-directed lessons to student-centered discussions. Teacher teams are supporting one another in these practices as they endeavor to improve pedagogy school wide.
- There is some evidence that teams of teachers are beginning to analyze teacher practice systematically. For example, one teacher has introduced Socratic seminar structures and provided professional development to her colleagues as this practice supports student engagement goals across grades and content areas. Teachers are expected to implement this structure at least once per semester across all grades. Teachers observe their colleagues during these lessons and focus on the questioning and facilitation strategies utilized for the Socratic seminar. During team meetings teachers give each other feedback and pose questions about how to best implement the structure in their own classes as they strive to strengthen their practice.