

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**The Academy of the Arts**

**Elementary School X335**

**888 Rev James A Polite Ave  
Bronx  
NY 10459**

**Principal: Glorimer Lopez**

**Dates of review: March 27, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Buffie Simmons**

## The School Context

The Academy of the Arts is an elementary school with 290 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 30% Black, 67% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-15 was 91.4%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</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>Focus</b>	<b>Developing</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>Additional Findings</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>Proficient</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>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<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 regularly analyze assessment data and student work. Professional collaboration and distributive leadership structures are present and support staff to develop as individuals, leaders and members of the larger community.

### Impact

The work of teacher teams has resulted in improved pedagogy and student progress on assessments. Shared leadership structures build capacity to improve student learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams use a variety of summative and formative data to continuously analyze student work to plan and challenge thinking for English language learners (ELLs), special education students, and high and low achieving students. Based on the results from the state exams, the inquiry focus this year for grade teams is math and English language arts (ELA). Teacher team members identify three to five Level 2 students who are close to becoming Level 3, whom teachers then focus on for the year. Teacher teams analyze various forms of data to create long- and short-term goals for skill mastery for their targeted student population. For example, teachers review Fountas and Pinnell data and students' individualized goals for grade 1 students. A struggling student with a B reading level on their Fountas and Pinnell had a writing goal to be able to write a paragraph and a reading goal to read 26/26 words correctly. The team created an action plan and identified what was taught, next steps and outcome based on data. The teacher used Reading Street, a Common Core-aligned reading curriculum, to discuss story elements and asked the student to respond to literature. As a result of the detailed plan, the student met the reading and writing goal and moved two levels from Level B to Level D.
- By looking at student work to identify student needs, teachers learn strategies from their team members and collaborate to brainstorm ideas that would address the targeted students' needs. For example, one teacher noticed that a student in her inquiry group was having problems in a particular math task. Thanks to strategies suggested by a colleague on the inquiry team, such as underlining mathematical language and introducing the four square methods to extract information and sequentially allow students to explain the process, the teacher implemented the suggested strategies and the struggling student has since shown mastery in this area. These practices have helped to build a reflective, collaborative community that plans cohesively and shares best practices gained from inquiry team work in math and ELA across the school to close student learning gaps.
- During the interview, teachers expressed love for their small school and the collective ownership that is felt by all members of the team. Every teacher on the grade team has a role to create agenda, share best practices gained through inquiry and share with colleagues. Additionally, minutes are taken for each meeting and identified artifacts, such as student work, progress reports, assessments and qualitative teacher feedback, are introduced in order to close the achievement gaps of the targeted students for the inquiry study. This shared leadership has led the staff to establish a school-wide structure of identifying, targeting and assessing students to increase learning outcomes to be used consistently throughout the school.
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## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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### Findings

There is an uneven application of differentiation and instructional strategies to provide appropriately challenging and rigorous learning opportunities that promote high achievement.

### Impact

The delivery of instruction inconsistently employs scaffolds and questioning techniques outlined in the curricula to provide entry points, participation, and discussions that are appropriately challenging for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- A 1<sup>st</sup> grade class visited a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class to strengthen their inquiry skills and participate in the Socratic seminar in order to promote question-driven discussions and active listening skills. Students read an informational text, took notes and gave their responses to student- and teacher-led questions. Although teachers facilitated the discussion, the students' responses were not sufficiently supported by textual evidence.
- In a kindergarten science class, all students received the same activity although some students observed were able to write without scaffolds or be challenged with differentiated extensions. In a grade 2-3 self-contained class, the teacher modeled building words that share a final syllable and then modeled blending the new words. Students were instructed to spell words on their letter tiles. Many students completed the activity effortlessly, while others needed additional guidance. In addition, in some classes observed where students clustered for small group instruction, lessons did not consistently reflect differentiation of modalities or a wide range of learning opportunities, especially for higher functioning students.
- In some classes, students answered teacher-generated questions. In a few classes, students were prompted to turn and talk and teachers pushed students to cite textual evidence. This practice was not consistent across classrooms, thus preventing student engagement in tasks that result in higher level thinking and reaching their potential.
- During a math lesson, students were working on a multiple-choice question based on fractions. Students gathered on the rug while a student wrote his answer on the interactive white board. Although the student explained his thinking, other students on the rug did not have the opportunity to share different strategies and engage in a high level thinking discussion, thus preventing their engagement in tasks that result in higher level thinking and in them reaching their potential.

## Additional Findings

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

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. Higher-order skills are consistently emphasized for all learners across grades and content areas.

### Impact

The engaging, rigorous curricula aligned to the Common Core and the instructional shifts offers meaningful learning experiences to engage all students, which builds coherence and promotes college and career readiness for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses ReadyGEN for the ELA curriculum, supplemented by Foundations, Reading Street, all of which are Common Core Learning Standards-aligned. Reading levels are also determined by Fountas and Pinnell. GO Math! is utilized and supplemented with performance tasks.
- Teachers provide classrooms with challenging learning tasks that requires critical thinking skills. For example, grade 5 students read *Night of the Spadefoot Toads*, *Stone Fox*, *Tuesday of the Other June* and *Hatchet and Shells*. The students then discussed common themes among the books in an essay. Students presented comprehensive analysis of theme and then compared and contrasted the themes in all texts and provided textual evidence to support their findings.
- The social studies and science curricula, often integrated in the ReadyGEN units of study, are both aligned with the New York State Content Standards and the Common Core. The usage of these curricula has resulted in instructional coherence across all subjects and grades. Grade 1 teachers adjusted the ReadyGEN unit focused on students and schools in different countries. Students focused on how the students in other countries learn, what they eat, how they go to school and what they do for fun. Learning about these differences has prompted students and teachers to think about their own lives and how their lives are similar and different. To that end, teachers discussed and modified the task accordingly. Students selected one student from Brazil and wrote a letter about their similarities and differences. Students used graphic organizers, created drafts, edited and completed a checklist before writing their published letter. Students prepared for this activity by reading different excerpts of books from around the world as well as writing emails to their pen pals in Brazil.
- Curriculum maps and pacing calendars with differentiated scaffolds have been adjusted to ensure that content and instruction meet the students' identified needs and increase literacy and math. The school integrated instructional shifts including Opinion/Argumentative and Informational Writing, and Mathematical Problem Solving and Reasoning with constructed responses, explanations and diagrams beginning in kindergarten. Academic tasks with multiple entry points are provided to allow students to work in small groups and display various ways to solve a problem.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics and grading policies that align with the school's curricula. The common assessments are used to determine student progress toward identified goals across grades and subject areas.

### **Impact**

Using data from common assessments and providing actionable feedback to students has led to more targeted activities, adjustments to curricula and instruction, and students' improved performance on common assessments.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The schools' assessments are Common Core-aligned and collected by classroom teachers and school leaders on a regular basis. Benchmark assessments including Fountas and Pinnell, Measures of Student Learning, GO Math! end of unit assessments, Foundations assessments, student work forms and writing assessments, unit assessments and ELA and math simulations. These are used to determine whether students are meeting grade level expectations.
- Tracking of all students' progress enables the principal and assistant principal to observe curriculum adaptations. Teachers use this data to modify lessons plans and student groupings in order to promote student achievement and increased mastery. For example, after analyzing student work, teachers noticed a gap in students' understanding of solving word problems. As a result, teachers engaged in a professional learning cycle entitled *Sharing Best Practices: Scaffolding Techniques for Word Problems*, during which they addressed the math instructional shifts, and specifically focused on Deep Understanding and Application.
- School-wide, teachers use a checklist to take the pulse of learning throughout the day. Teachers use this system for data based decisions, such as how to group students, to ensure all students are set up for success when learning. Additionally, teachers use formal and informal assessments aligned to the curricula to continually monitor student progress. Teachers work together to modify formal assessments provided by the various curricula to ensure alignment to the Common Core and the shifts. In addition teacher teams meet continuously both as part of their inquiry study and to analyze the rigor of performance tasks by reviewing and studying classroom data which include student work products with a particular focus on struggling students. Teachers use data analysis feedback to inform their action plans in order to identify students' strengths and areas of student growth as revealed on the post assessments. Teachers then form groups based on the data. Students are familiar with the language of the checklist and are able to articulate their placement into groups. As such, students are aware of their next learning steps.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The school maintains a supportive learning environment that conveys high expectations to engender accountability for staff, students and families through regular and open communication that positively impacts student achievement.

### Impact

School leaders provide staff with training and have a system of accountability for their high expectations. Clear communication of expectations to parents has led to families helping their children to progress toward those expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school's motto "Hard Work Today...Results Tomorrow" echoes across the community in the writing through documents including the staff handbook, memorandums and staff correspondence. Similarly, the instructional focus resounds in the classrooms and was easily recited by the teachers during the teacher meeting. The teachers also shared that the administrators hold them accountable for their learning own professional learning and increasing students' outcomes. Teachers hold themselves accountable of the school's instructional focus through professional learning activities, such as "Socratic Seminar Series," "Scaffolding Techniques for Word Problems," and "Data Driven Decision Making."
- The school provides clear lines of written and verbal communication via conferences, and parent informational sessions. The school hosted a series of workshops for families such as, "Learning math strategies with your child," "Help your child become a subtraction scholar," "New York State Simulation Test for Grade 4 Parents," "Curriculum Night," and "Connection to the Danielson Framework and Common Core Learning Standards." Parents are invited to attend their children's publishing parties as well. The school community embraces healthy living and literature is promulgated throughout the community. Students participate in various activities around movement, meditation and patience, including a unit on yoga. Additionally, the school infuses writing tasks. For example, students read the passages, "Good Bacteria and Bad Bacteria" and "Walking is the Better Exercise." Students wrote an essay using both informational texts to address staying healthy and reinforcing the Common Core and instructional shifts.
- Parents receive tips from their teachers to help their children improve their academic skills at home via Class Dojo, an online tool that provides a positive feedback platform that connects teachers, parents and students, and progress reports. During meetings, students and parents stated they appreciated the immediate and individualized feedback based on academic and social emotional behavior. The parents shared teachers FaceTime students to assist them with the completion of assignments to support and emphasize a culture of high expectations. During the interviews, some parents shared they moved out of neighborhood but chose to keep their children at the school because of its high expectations. Another parent shared that if students are habitually late; parents are summoned to the principal's office. Similarly, a parent shared their children hold them accountable to get them to school on time. Even though school begins at 8:20 am, children encourage their parents to bring them to school at 7:30 am so they can eat breakfast and interface with peers.