Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Academy of American Studies

High School Q575

28-01 41st Avenue
Queens
NY 11101

Principal: William Bassell

Date of review: December 17, 2015
Lead Reviewer: AJ Hepworth

The School Context

Academy of American Studies is a high school with 893 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 29% Asian, 8% Black, 33% Hispanic, and 29% White students. The student body includes 3% English Language Learners and 10% students with disabilities. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 94.1%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Focus**	**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	**Additional Findings**	**Proficient**
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**	**Proficient**
School Culture		
To what extent does the school…	**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**	**Proficient**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Celebration**	**Proficient**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient

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

Impact
Teacher teams work to improve teacher practice and progress towards goals for students and assist in decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams look at groups of students, especially those they have identified in the lowest third, based on skills related to performance tasks, Regents examinations, and other high stakes assessments. Teachers state this is important because they have the same expectations for all students. Teachers also shared that the use of inquiry teams has improved their teacher practice through the introduction of new strategies they created “so kids can tackle” and be “college and career ready.” One such example was observed where a teacher team discussed the lower third students in grade 10 who were “struggling with elaborating in their essays.” Discussion amongst team members revolved around the practices, which have students identify the parts of an essay paragraph, the use of sharing model essays, and the provision of graphic organizers. At the conclusion of the meeting, next steps planned included “chunking the writing” and providing “the rubric from the Regents examinations to make connections and be able to break it down.”

- During review of student work products, staff stated some students who had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and primarily spoke Spanish at home often had a vocabulary barrier. Teachers shared that they have made attempts to establish “tons of connections, but the goal for the student is to write a well-developed counterclaim.” As such, teachers recorded on a “Looking at Student Work” form, the interventions necessary to assist student in their learning inclusive of an annotation key to aid reading, a body paragraph outline, give a review of argumentative strategies, and increase the use of visual cues.

- Through a collaboration with the Office of Teacher Effectiveness, instructional coaches work with teachers to promote leadership and turnkey professional development. The School Leadership Team, which includes staff from all content areas, noted that although schools cannot mandate the use of an online student management system, they are confident that by the years end all remaining staff who currently do not use the system, will have been trained by their colleagues and benefit from the positive impact it makes for gradebook use. Additionally, special education teachers, have turn-keyed workshops on improving comprehension skills while physical education teachers, have presented professional development on formative assessments with their coach.

- Staff implemented a change in their parent teacher conferences recently through discussions, which determined the current model was ineffective. A new model (Kid Talk) was implemented meant to find agreed upon interventions for students struggling academically. Teacher teams and guidance are integral in the new protocol.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact
Coherency and promotion of college and career readiness for all students is practiced inclusive of ensuring a diversity of learners have access to curricula and tasks which are cognitively engaged, however not necessarily for the highest-achieving students.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of various curriculum maps included essential components to ensure the curricula is aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards and identification of the instructional shifts across grades and content areas, including global history, physical education, algebra 2 / trigonometry, pre-calculus, and Advanced Placement European history. Learning goals are stated across all classes as what students will be able to do, Examples include: sketch the graphs of trigonometric functions in math, explain the effects of agriculture on a group of people in social studies, understand the historical circumstances surrounding the outbreak of the witch hysteria and its decline during a unit investigating the Salem Witch trials, and develop and implement a personal fitness plan based on self-assessment and goal setting, and understand physiological changes that result from training in physical education..

- Modifications and accommodations used are a component of the school curriculum maps and lesson plans, however, not all documents included specific modifications and/or accommodations for students, especially those identified as high-achieving. A grade 9 global history early mankind curriculum map, listed modifications that will include, students being given both verbal and visual directions for all work and activity materials will be modified for different reading levels. Physical education sit-up modifications included students who can perform planks, crunches, leg lifts, or bicycles. However, only a lesson plan document for debating United States history included an extension for students to research and write about one cause of the Depression in greater depth, although no further details were included regarding the extension.

- The school reviews curricula to ensure it remains steadfast in pursuit of its initial mission, based on the Gilder Lehrman Institute, “of what it means to be American and tie all aspects of American history across the curriculum.” This is accomplished through the infusion of curricula with American history, as exemplified in English Language Arts reading Mause when studying World War II, reading The Narrative of Fredrick Douglas when conducting research on slavery, using science classes to write proofs written in prose with detailed and specific information, and developing knowledge of the history of sports (basketball and volleyball) to improve their overall knowledge of the games. However, evidence of the school’s mission to infuse aspects of American history was not clearly evident in other curriculums such as mathematics and art. Although examples of student work in art did reflect adherence to using the instructional shifts through asking students to read historical documents (Leonardo Da Vinci paragraph) and write using textual evidence from a passage provided.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching.* Instructional shifts are demonstrated in student work products and discussions.

Impact
Classroom work products and discussions reflect high levels of students thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- The school believes students learn best when they are presented with opportunities to be actively engaged in their learning tasks. In an integrated co-teaching (ICT) class, students were given an opportunity in small groups to write and present a new ending to the play, *The Zoo Story*. Students discussed their roles they will perform, while some who felt uncomfortable in performing, were encouraged to be the narrator. The only criteria established for the assignment according to students, was it must be one page and use the characters from the play. In a college biology class, students worked in small groups to develop class presentations, using various methods of delivery (Power Point, Prezi, poster board), to explain the processes of cellular respiration. All groups were assigned different parts of the process and are expected to present to their peers while "gauging each other's level of understanding." One group working on a Prezi of the Krebs cycle, shared they appreciated the opportunity to collaborate, have choice, and share ideas. Additionally, a grade 9 student was very proud of the experience he had in U.S. History where they had to debate Alexander the Great through analysis of articles and support "which side of the story" was better.

- Small group instruction is present in most classes. In an economics class, students in small groups collected information online using laptops about various countries' demographics, including: size, natural resources, population, Gross Domestic product (GDP), and per capita GDP. Students used this information to compare nations and identify factors contributing to a nation's wealth. The teacher facilitated small group discussions by asking probing questions about the trends they have learned from doing the activity while she moved from group to group. Students had different viewpoints on some topics such as how this information contributes to infant mortality rates and the application of federal funds for education. An English Language Arts class reading The Catcher in the Rye, students worked on a group poster to cite evidence for either Stradlater or Ackley (characters in the novel).

- Students in an algebra 2 / trigonometry class discussed how to apply their knowledge of trigonometric ratios to find secant, cosecant, and cotangent, based on their prior lessons' understanding. Much of the discussion was guided by the teacher through her questioning, although when a student noticed a mistake on the board, he pointed it out and the teacher clarified, rather than seize the moment and allow the students to further explain and show their understanding. In a living environment class a student stated, "if the fish is placed in fresh water, then its ability to survive will decrease." The teacher explained further details to answer the question using some student input and visual images.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals across grades and subject areas with consistent checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact
Teachers adjust the curricula and instruction to meet the needs of all students through the use of assessments and checks for understanding.

Supporting Evidence

- Lesson plan documents and classroom observations, demonstrate the use of checks for understanding through the use of exit tickets and reflection on practice, to adjust instruction in future lessons. In an English Language Arts class, the teacher records how today's lesson will impact the students as they move toward next week's Socratic seminar and their ability to apply the lesson to their own lives. Additionally, performance evaluation worksheets are provided to each student so they can evaluate more group performances independently. The feedback will be shared out to help inform their peer's ability to improve their performance.

- Administration states they "are working to build a culture of self- assessment." They note they currently see students effectively critique their peers, rather than criticize, but notice obstacles in self-assessment and want to create opportunities as early as their freshman year. Currently, self-assessment forms exist in mathematics for students' to look at their own work. The math rubric asks students to identify if they are highly effective, effective, developing, or ineffective in their ability to show evidence, including information and/or calculations, explained thoroughly and convincingly to support a correct answer. The information is used to assess areas of strength and where progress or growth can be made. For creative writing assignments, self-assessment forms have students additionally evaluate a peer and then identify commonalities between the two work products.

- Assessment data is provided to teachers on individual students, especially English Language Learners and students with disabilities. The data includes a brief narrative and a list of instructional benefits for the student. One student, who according to the documents, exhibits poor attention skills and requires prompts in order to initiate and complete tasks and assignments in a timely manner was noted for benefitting from positive reinforcement, praise, outlines for essay writing, frequent check-ins, and steps clearly written as a visual cue. Another student who struggles with vocabulary development and making inferences and drawing conclusions, is noted for benefitting from the use of context clues, sentence starters, and time to process verbal questions. Teachers communicated the assessment data is helpful to them and is used to guide their instruction and allows them to give a "more individual approach" with specific students. Additionally, they shared how during a class experience (today), they will present the information differently tomorrow based on one student's failure to understand.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations for all students.

Impact
Ongoing detailed feedback to students and families helps them understand student progress toward expectations of college and career readiness and supports for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school communicates with families at the September Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting each school year to orient them regarding what their needs are as new parents within the school. Parents spoke very positively when asked about the schools' communication and knowledge of their child's progress. Parents stated the staff is extremely accessible through email, phone and communicate daily by updating the online student management system (Pupil Path). Almost all families shared that they check the grades and messages posted to Pupil Path daily to ensure they are informed of their child's progress. Specifically, a parent with limited English speaking skills shared, she is not a fan of using email because she is "afraid of [her] grammar" so she calls the teacher regularly regarding her special needs child. The mother highlighted, prior to the start of the school year, the special education teacher reached out to her before knowing her child and made the family aware that she would be working closely and ensure success for her child.

- Parents and students all agreed the level of rigor and standards set by the school and its teachers are challenging with clear expectations for them to perform at a high-level. A parent of a special education student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) shared her child struggled with math and was shy, but is on track to graduate on time and feels "at home no matter when she comes here." Another parent of a child with an IEP also was worried the "level of rigor would be too intense" but shared her child "is doing amazing as a freshman" and the teacher has an open door policy and communicates effectively.

- Student work products and rubrics reviewed show evidence of clear expectations and feedback. A Civil War essay rubric states "essays will be read…and evaluated using the following rubric for document-based and thematic essay guidelines." Specific expectations are bulleted for students to know how to score a perfect five on the assignment. Additionally, all students agreed they use rubrics regularly in all classes, "even in gym we measure how fit we are." Another student shared "he learned how to cite and search better" using the rubric and was able to resubmit his assignment for a better grade in Film and Facts.

- The school offers several Advanced Placement classes, including AP Euro, Calculus, Human Geography, English Literature, Spanish, and others. Several students report having more than enough credits to graduate. A parent also shared her other child, who graduated last year, entered college as a sophomore from her credit accumulation.

- Opportunities for all students to travel and visit college campuses occur several times a year and trips abroad occur annually with groups traveling with staff and parents to China, Italy and France.