



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**Accion Academy**

**Middle School X341**

**1825 Prospect Ave  
Bronx  
NY 10457**

**Principal: Victor Frias**

**Date of review: May 20, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

## The School Context

Accion Academy is a middle school with 154 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 25% Black, 69% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 18% English Language Learners and 36% students with disabilities. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 87.9%.

## 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>Well Developed</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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , 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 the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across the vast majority of classrooms, student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

### Impact

Students are cognitively engaged through high-level discussions and critical thinking and demonstrate ownership of their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of classrooms visited reflected the school belief that learning happens best in a print rich environment that provides visual supports, where students explain their thinking and reconcile different perspectives through textual analysis and discussion requiring critical thinking. Posted charts about metacognition and content academic vocabulary were evident in all rooms. Students engaged in reading complex texts using Cornell notes and annotations to comprehend text. Also, students engaged each other in accountable talk that reflected critical thinking skills. For example, in one social studies class, students explored the question “Should the government have the right to take personal property if it helps others?” One student questioned whether or not the land belongs to the government and if they take it back, is it within their rights. Another student challenged this thinking by asking by extension, “If I have a child in this country, does the government own him, too?”
- In an English class, students read various articles on hip-hop music and questioned whether or not hip-hop should be considered literature. The class was divided in their thinking. One student stated that like poetry, hip-hop has lyrics that are stanzas, rhyme schemes, and meter. Another student expanded this idea saying that if hip-hop resembles poetry, then should it not be treated like poetry? The teacher then shifted the conversation to increase the rigor. She asked students to turn and talk about “How do the authors support their claim with reason and evidence?” One student shared, “While I agree with the author’s point of view, I believe that the author’s counterclaim is weak.” She then went on to explain her thinking.
- An English class responded to the question “Should adoption information be kept private or made public?” after reading an article with evidence for and against open adoptions. Students were asked to evaluate evidence presented in the article and determine which side of the argument had stronger supporting evidence. Students annotated their articles collecting their evidence to support their view and discussed their thinking with peers. One student decided to focus on an adopted person’s right to know their medical history, as it was pertinent to their health. Another student stated that that many adopted children struggle psychologically with needing to find their parents and understand their background and while the article did not develop this idea, this was just as powerful a reason.
- In a social studies class, students studied maps to respond to the question “How can we contrast the way geography influences Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece?” One student stated that this allowed for “cultural diffusion.” When asked what that meant, he shared that it was the spread of knowledge between different people.

## Area of Focus

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

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

### Impact

Although students and teachers have actionable feedback regarding student achievement, assessment data does not always offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Thus, even though adjustments are made in curriculum and instruction to meet learning needs, those adjustments are not always targeted to ensure that all students demonstrate Increased mastery.

### Supporting Evidence

- Student work is graded with a level of performance based on a rubric. In addition, a feedback form is stapled to each piece of work where teachers provide comments to reinforce the skill that a student is using correctly and to identify a next step. One feedback form recognized a student's ability to "organize ideas into separate paragraphs", and identified the next step as, "Make sure that you synthesize information from all your articles. For example, you state the problem, but don't explain how too much power in the states and too little power in Congress led to these issues." While forms like this were present in the majority of rooms, there were a few bulletin boards where work had no feedback.
- In addition to data binders observed in every classroom, teachers use GoogleDocs to manage and maintain formative, benchmark, and summative assessment data summarizing progress toward goals. Math teachers completed the second interim assessment in February and identified areas of weakness that needed to be addressed prior to the State math exam, identifying geometry in grade 6 and equations and expression in grades 7 and 8. Teachers identified a series of additional lessons on these standards to be taught weekly leading up to the State exam. Also, teachers administered weekly exams to measure student progress on each standard. A review of these weekly exams showed that students made double-digit gains across all the grades. For example, the percentage of students scoring correctly in geometry rose from 23% to 44% in one exam. Additionally, as the grade 6 teachers analyzed these weekly exams, they realized that students were struggling with word problems and made instructional adjustments to address this as well.
- The school administers three State exam simulations as part of its common assessments and uses this data to adjust instruction. February simulation results showed that while grade 8 students' use of evidence had increased, their performance on questions related to plot development had decreased prompting the humanities teachers to develop an action plan that included revisiting this skill in the next units. A closer review of the grade 6 and grade 8 data, showed that in some classes while one skill improved, performance in several other skills declined. Current practice emphasizes noting patterns, and creating actions plans and a skill of the week. Assessment for learning to establish root causes is not an embedded practice across the school.

## Additional Findings

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

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

### Impact

College and career readiness is promoted through curricular coherence across grades and subjects. All students have access to the curricula and are cognitively engaged.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school uses a variety of Common Core-aligned curriculum such as *Codex* for reading, Teachers College Writing Project for writing and *CMP3* for math. The school has made certain strategic decisions in curriculum such as ensuring that curricula focuses on close reading skills across all subjects and includes student annotation of all text work, specifically the use of Cornell note taking strategies specifically when collecting supporting evidence. The school has also deliberately focused on content vocabulary across all subjects. Units emphasize the use of academic vocabulary both within and out of context with learning that requires students to infer meaning using contextual analysis as well as study of stand-alone vocabulary lists.
- As a result of reviewing June benchmark writing data in English and social studies, teachers observed that students restated questions without answering prompts fully or that they cited evidence, but provided no explanation. This resulted in students receiving partial credit for short response questions. The humanities department adopted a strategy called RADD (Restate, Answer, Detail, Detail) requiring students to restate the question posed and write a response with at least two supporting details. Teachers focused on using the RADD in both English and in social studies during the month of September. October assessment results showed a nearly 100% proficiency rate in students receiving a score of two out of two in their short responses. The strategy was adopted then for use when writing longer essays across content areas.
- Item analysis data verified that students struggled with questions that contained academic vocabulary so the school compiled a list of the high frequency words on assessments such as the vocabulary words “depicts”, “conveys”, and “portrays”, and embedded these words into units across grades and subjects. Additionally units have strategies for teaching context clues, prefixes, suffixes, and cognates for English Language Learners.
- The math baseline assessment revealed that students struggled with equations and expressions across all grades. Teachers analyzed student work and identified skills that related to these topics, as well as other target areas that emerged in analysis. The school realigned the curriculum calendar to cover the topics in depth before the State exam and distributed a pacing calendar with weekly skills that needed to be covered.

<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 the entire staff and provide training. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear, focused, and effective feedback and guidance and advisement supports.

**Impact**

A culture of mutual accountability exists among staff. Students own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

**Supporting Evidence**

- A review of documents shows that teachers participated in a series of professional development sessions over the course of the year that emphasized a school-wide focus on Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, specifically, on designing coherent instruction and engaging students through questions and discussion. Teachers echoed this sharing that one of the foci in their professional development was engagement of students through questioning and the use of evidence in text-based discussions. Teachers also shared various charts that they had created as part of their training on the use of academic vocabulary. A review of lesson plans revealed that the principal provides teachers with feedback on their lesson plans holding them accountable to planning for engagement and rigorous questioning. For example, one observation reinforced the school focus on academic vocabulary commending the teacher’s practice of exposing students to terms, definitions, and examples of the vocabulary in context so that students would be able to “make connections to real life.” In another observation, the principal reinforced the school belief in student conversations when he told a teacher to be sure to include, “student-led questions, and opportunities for multiple entry points for struggling students” in future lessons.
- At a teacher team meeting, teachers shared that their goal is to prepare students for college level work, noting that this school expectation is self-reinforcing. A teacher’s description of expectations demonstrated mutual accountability among staff in that each teacher is responsible for teaching the curriculum and analyzing the data so that there are no gaps in learning when a student goes to another colleague in the next grade.
- At a student meeting, students stated that their goal is to graduate from high school and to attend a senior college and shared that they have been inspired by their opportunities to visit many colleges including Harvard. They stated that they are already working toward college because teachers expect them “to take Cornell notes in class”, “read and annotate complex texts”, “write argumentative essays”, and use “MLA citations in research papers.” An English Language Learner pointed out that they are also acquiring academic language that allows them to have deep knowledge of the content and converse about content. Additionally, students shared that there is a rubric at every table that guides their performance and that extensive teacher feedback helps them to be prepared. They also shared that many times, teachers have given up their lunchtime in order to help a student with applying the feedback they have received. Students expressed that they feel that the teachers have prepared them well.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals. Distributed leadership structures are in place so that teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions.

**Impact**

Teacher collaborations promote school goals and strengthen teacher capacity. Teachers have a voice in decisions that affects student learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- There are two vertical teacher teams at the school. The Humanities team focuses on English and social studies while the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) team focuses on science, math, and technology. A review of teacher team meetings shows that teachers have been focused on developing targeted lessons that focus on a weekly skill. There has also been a focus on embedding academic vocabulary and increasing rigor.
- Teachers been involved in a book study using the book *Questioning for Classroom Discussion*. When asked how this book has impacted their practice, teachers shared that their book study has opened up a conversation about the extent to which lessons actually require students to demonstrate the skill that the lesson is meant to address. One of the items that teachers are working on is creating more intentionality in aligning the task with the skill and having students make that connection.
- At a teacher team meeting, teachers shared that they have been tracking the data closely and opened up their laptops to show the Google Drive where all the data is kept. They shared that in addition to looking at improving the overall instruction of the school, they also meet to look at students who are struggling the most. One teacher stated that there are many students who are still far below standards despite daily instruction. They stated that part of the work that teacher teams do at the school is to identify students for interventions such as pullout, afterschool, and Saturday school. Teachers shared data that showed that there was an unevenness in students making progress despite targeted interventions. Teachers stated that closing the achievement gap was one of the school goals.
- Teachers stated there is a culture that values teacher work at the school and that they have wide latitude to make changes in curriculum, such as creating additional teaching objectives in social studies to ensure greater rigor in the humanities content. They also explained that they decide who will receive interventions and based on data analysis decide on the skills that they will reinforce for the week. One teacher stated that one of the things that he felt students needed was a student library for students to access books for personal enjoyment. This was recommended to the principal who supported teachers. The students were surveyed about the kind of books they liked and those books were purchased. While it is not a full-time library, teachers cover a few periods a week so that students can borrow books to read.