Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Astor Collegiate Academy
High school 11X299
925 Astor Ave.
Bronx
NY 10469
Principal: Sandra Burgos

Dates of Review:
May 30, 2017 - May 31, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School


School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td>Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Finding</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td>Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings
High expectations are consistently communicated to staff via the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, through training and ongoing communiqués. The school establishes a culture for learning, communicates expectations to students and families, and keeps them abreast of student progress toward college and career readiness.

Impact
School leaders maintain a system of accountability toward expectations amongst staff and while staff helps families understand student progress toward those expectations and offer ongoing and detailed feedback, and guidance/advisement supports that prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- A majority of students agreed that the school helps prepare them for life after graduation, for college and career through college classes like College Now, Lehman College college seminar, and Advanced Placement (AP). Students and parents agreed that they work closely with counselors and teachers who support their post-secondary plans and give them options. A school-wide goal is for students to apply to City of New York Colleges, even if they choose not to attend, to provide students with an understanding of the application process and if accepted, they can choose to go later. College Now, attendees stated that they receive support regarding college and career research, financial aid, scholarships, and ‘the college experience’.

- Parents and students agree that they use the online grade book program that has parent and student portals to check on student achievement and anecdotes from staff, with translations into Spanish. Parent engagement occurs in several other ways, including contact via phone, email, or in-person meetings. Additionally, parents spoke of the progress reports that they receive calendared in between each report card, to further communicate student progress. A parent stated and others agreed that her daughter checks the online program for assignments. Parents concurred that the school communicates consistently, for both good and ‘bad’ feedback, including contracts to help maintain progress toward goals. Additionally, parents agreed that they are aware of school happenings and events via fliers, emails, and a calendar that provides parents with information about dates and events, in English and Spanish. Students and parents agreed the college counselors and other support staff provide students with support in selecting, applying, and receiving financial aid for college. Additionally, there are also workshops, senior evening presentations, and support for the college application process with fairs, college week, and one-on-one support. Parents agreed that the counselors, parent coordinator, and other support staff have been very helpful.

- Administration provides staff with consistent messages regarding high expectations via weekly meetings, staff handbook, and observational feedback. The instructional focus and Danielson *Framework for Teaching* focus entail engaging students in instruction, using questioning and discussion techniques, and using assessment in instruction. Administration emphasizes the these focus areas in feedback to staff, provides professional development (PD) during weekly staff meetings, and shares the trends and patterns of these expectations observed during classroom visits, and instructional focus areas. To meet expectations, administration uses classroom observations, as a system of accountability, by providing verbal feedback to support teachers in their implementation of curricula and strategies, with a focus on writing strategies, student engagement, and questioning. The cabinet determines areas requiring support through PD to support achievement of schoolwide expectations.
Area of Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Findings**

Although teachers use or create common assessments, rubrics, and grading policies across classrooms aligned to the school's curricula, teachers' assessment practices inconsistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding, student self-assessment, and determining progress toward goals.

**Impact**

Students and teachers receive limited feedback regarding student achievement and teachers inconsistently make effective adjustments to curricula and instruction to meet student-learning needs.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Administration expects that teachers to provide students with the rubric score and then actionable feedback should not be at the end but in the work, for example, "in the margin next to the area that needs support or was an excellent example of what was done well. It should be explained and not just one word." Yet, feedback to students is inconsistently actionable, as feedback on their work products varies from no grade, to a check mark, percentage, letter, number grade, or rubric grade, and often a congratulatory statement such as "Good job!" Although some include feedback on process writing work, and some next steps, this is not consistent across grades and subjects. For example, feedback such as, "Excellent, yet I feel there is something missing. Maybe a bit more needed. Perhaps a comparison between colonialization and education." provides vague next steps. On a student math task, there are comments identifying some questions, "Could you have also used the diameter?" Feedback is often unclear to students, '[The teacher] asked me to state what I learned and I wasn’t sure what the story was mainly about and got an 80 and have ‘improved’ but don’t know where." Across most classrooms, there is little to no actionable feedback to support students to revise and improve their work.

- The expectation is that teachers will check for understanding in multiple ways throughout the lesson, whether using an entrance or exit slip, or listening in on student groups, and asking questions to guide their learning. Although some teachers move from group to group, only one adjustment was made in an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) Algebra class. The co-teachers walked from group to group posing questions such as, “How many methods did you use [to solve this]?" and “Why is this not linear?” This helped students discuss and explain why it was not linear. Yet, this is not the norm across the majority of classrooms. For example, in a special education math class, the task was very complex, the students were frustrated and were not completing it; yet, the teachers did not adjust the task to meet the students’ needs.

- Staff has multiple tools to analyze data including an online grade book that has analysis capabilities. Yet, administration stated that teachers do not use the online grade book for analysis, but for collecting anecdotals regarding such topics as behavior and attendance. There is some evidence of pilot Algebra and Living Environment courses having revised curricula to teach double-blocked classes, whereby students complete the course in one semester and take the January Regents. Teachers provided data that shows for Algebra 67 percent of cohort passed, most students at level 3, and 65 percent passed for Living Environment. Yet, this level of data use is inconsistent. There is a schoolwide assessment timeline with common assessments, summary analysis of the results, and action plan for each assessment. Action plans range from lists of generic instructional strategies and tutoring to practice writing evidence-backed claim statements, and scaffolded proofs. However, there is little to no clear evidence that teachers implemented these action plans to adjust curricula and instruction. Additionally, there was a lack of analysis of Regents data, as it was presented in the Automate The Schools (ATS) Regents exam document status report, which only shows the number of exams scanned and score range; thus, it is also unclear how teachers use data and results of Regents exams to inform instruction and curricula.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings

Collaborative planning ensures the alignment of the curricula to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards while emphasizing challenging tasks that encourage higher-order thinking for all learners.

Impact

Students benefit from access to engaging and rigorous tasks across content areas and grades. Curricula decisions build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use curriculum maps, which guide them in determining when to teach particular topics. Each curriculum map is rooted in college and career readiness skills and knowledge for the Pre-Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), Regents, literacy, and math. The math department has created a condensed version of each curriculum map, calling it the Timeline, which notes the math content, literacy skills, rubric trait, PSAT skills, and assessment. The Timeline also denotes which marking period the topics are to be taught. Teachers also embed the school-wide focus on writing into the curriculum maps and timelines. Curriculum maps across all grades include the instructional shifts, Common Core Learning Standards, enduring understandings and essential questions, learning objectives, lists of strategies and instructional resources, and assessments.

- There is an agreed-upon group of lesson plan components that include, but are not limited to, the instructional objective, Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards, essential questions, aim, do now, motivation, class activity, medial summary, homework, and assessment. The medial summary is a point at which teachers assess students’ progress toward answering the aim. A review of lesson plans, across grades and subjects, shows that most include these agreed-upon lesson plan components that build coherence across subjects.

- To consistently emphasize higher-order thinking skills and to be inclusive of the approximately 29 percent English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, lessons in this school and curriculum maps include rigorous tasks to provide students with opportunities to experience the instructional shifts. Teachers focus on creating activities such as argumentative essay writing with supportive evidence while math and science core classes focus on written responses with supporting data evidence. The medial summary is a time for teachers to use questions or tasks that spiral upwards so that answers require higher-order thinking skills as measured by Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK). For example, in a U.S. History and Government lesson, the questions spiral upwards from a cause and effect level-two question to a contrast level-three question.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and are beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple-entry points into the curricula, student work products, and discussion.

Impact
As defined by the instructional shifts and the Danielson Framework for Teaching, all students including ELLs and students with disabilities, are not yet consistently engaged in high levels of student thinking, participation, and demonstration of higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence
- Staff believes that all students learn best as their interests are addressed, are part of the learning process, and individual learning goals are met. Additionally, staff believes they need to provide differentiation, multiple entry points, choice, and scaffolded questions using DOK hierarchy of rigorous questions to provide opportunities for student-led discussions. To achieve these beliefs, staff is focused upon three areas to support their beliefs: using questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, and using assessment in instruction. Yet, these practices are beginning to be implemented across classrooms.

- In some classes, the level of rigor and questions was evident and provided students with differentiation for multiple entry points into the materials, while in others it was uneven. In a US History class, the teacher posed DOK level three questions to spur students to think deeply. For example, “What do you think would be the best way to achieve equal rights?” Similarly, in an Algebra class, the teacher asked the students to reflect on strategies they could use to solve problems. “How many of you think annotating helps? What does that do to help you?” Students were able to explain how this strategy supported their solutions. In both of these classes, students had multiple entry points into the materials. In the Algebra class, students worked in groups, peer edited, and solved problems using a model. However, in other classes, lower-level DOK questions led students to be unevenly engaged. In a Living Environment science class, the teacher asked a high-level question, but followed with a low-level support, “How does the population grow in ideal conditions? Hypothesize. It starts with the second letter of alphabet.” The same students answered while the remainder of the class waited for the answers to be given. Further, across classrooms, the level of differentiation was inconsistently implemented. Student choice was one method that teachers used to differentiate. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class, students had an option to select a previously analyzed book or play for the final exam and work in small groups to gather information. Yet, when the teacher asked a group to review their answers, the rest of the students continued to do their own work and disengaged from the presentation. In other classes, all students received the same materials without scaffolding or extensions.

- Although discussions are a main area of focus this year, student-to-student discussions were at a lower DOK level. In an Economics class, the teacher posed different DOK level questions to the students, who answered individually, in a teacher-to-student-to-teacher fashion. Although the teacher asked if anyone wanted to add on to a response, students only did this once. In a special education Geometry class, students were grouped together, but were working individually and not speaking with each other. In a US History class, the teacher posted questions and students discussed in their groups until they reached consensus. Although they reported as a whole class, students used minimal text evidence when posing their arguments. Also, in a global issues class, students were in groups to answer an essay question about a geographic feature’s influence on a region. Although many students in groups were participating in discussions, one group was off task, discussing personal issues.
Findings

School leaders support the development of teachers with feedback that captures strengths, challenges, and next steps from frequent cycles of classroom observation and analysis of student work and data, using the Danielson Framework for Teaching.

Impact

Professional learning and observation cycles support the elevation of schoolwide instructional practices and strategies that promote professional growth and reflection. Feedback articulates clear expectations for teacher practice and supports teacher development.

Supporting Evidence

- Using questioning, student discussion and engagement techniques in the classroom, the instructional focus, to promote more student discussion is the focus for administration and staff. Feedback is aligned to the focus and accurately captures strengths and challenges. For example, “As noted in our post-observation conference, there is a need to invigorate your questioning and discussion techniques. You attempted several low-level questions, but student responses were limited to one or a few words.” Additionally, there are concrete next steps and potential methods or ways to implement, along with supporting texts to read or videos to watch. “I suggest that you always use the ACA DOK question stems and incorporate 3-5 specially-designed questions that you will use to diagnose student learning.” Another administrator supports the teacher with a follow-up meeting after the teacher completes the recommendation that the teacher “revisit the book, Teach Like a Champion, chapter 1, page 27.” Through multiple rounds of observations, teachers stated that they receive actionable feedback with clear expectations and that formal observations are followed with more informal visits. In this way, the administration helps coach teachers towards their goals.

- Creating teacher goals is a process completed in concert with the supervising administrator and based on the previous year’s end-of-year observation report, self-reflection, and current year teaching assignment. Additionally, school leaders meet and periodically review teachers’ progress and development a plan for additional supports. School leaders maintain and revisit a record of these plans during cabinet meetings. Examples of these supports include “inter-visitations, video-taped with reflection, and lesson plan study.” Additionally, examples include connections to the schoolwide focus on Danielson Framework for Teaching, in areas of engaging students in instruction, using questioning and discussion techniques, and using assessment in instruction.

- Administration supports the development of teachers as aligned to their needs and the school-level goals. There are frequent cycles of observations in two forms, coaching and formal feedback. After the observation, administration reviews student work and data, collected and observed during the class visit, and notes the quality, quantity, and alignment to the intended outcome as well as next steps. Administration refers to student work and data in both verbal and written feedback to the teacher. Together, staff and administration reflect and discuss the student work and data as well as the next steps. For example, “As noted, students struggled in making their groups self-managed and arriving at a consensus. I suggest that we collaborate in developing a group rubric that students can use to function productively in groups.”
### Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations where the use of an inquiry approach is developing across the teams.

**Impact**

The structured professional collaborations do not yet demonstrate that they are typically resulting in improved teacher practice or progress toward goals for groups of students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers meet in department and grade-inquiry teams, alternating weeks. In March 2017, teachers adopted a new protocol for looking at student work and data. Team members rotate presenting “one piece of work to move that teacher’s practice and the [team] gives the teacher recommendations based on student work.” Teachers self-select the student and level of work, stating, “We focus on one piece instead of many, because we know the student and we can focus on the strategies as a team.” According to the schoolwide inquiry team cycle, the expectation is to “identify targeted groups of students to test out instructional strategies to improve student outcomes.” The schoolwide inquiry team cycle has nine steps including identifying draft goals, develop/select instructional strategy, conduct teacher intervisitation, analyze student work using selected strategy/give teacher feedback, and reflection based on analysis. Yet there is little to no evidence of consistency in using the proposed components of this inquiry team cycle. Although teachers share their agenda or notes with administration, there is little to no evidence demonstrating that staff monitors or has improved students’ growth toward goals or the inquiry work informs instruction and curricula.

- During an observed teacher team meeting, a teacher presented one piece of student work, from a higher-achieving student, of an on-demand ELA short essay. Staff shared many suggestions, and noted which strategies each will use. Although team notes show teachers meet, take attendance, and follow a protocol, the notes on inquiry of student work do not show that teachers are circling back to determine if the changes they made had an impact on student work. There is minimal analyzed assessment data to demonstrate student progress toward goals. For example, there is an example of a summary of the Finite Math baseline assessment results and action plan. The summary notes an area of strength “in attempting to find meaning in the problems and struggled with attempting to find a way to obtain a solution.” The action plan lists instructional strategies such as graphic organizers and “stop, drop and think”, but does not demonstrate when these strategies will be taught or the impact on student growth toward goals from using these strategies.

- For inquiry meetings, teachers use an agenda and many use a note-taker. However, many leave the next steps/differentiating instruction section blank. Others do not revisit suggestions or next steps or set a date to return to the student’s work to determine a change or improvement in teacher practice. A grade eleven-team meeting from March 2017 shows that they were to review the student work analysis but “Due to the student missing class time, there is no current update on student growth.” Instead, the team analyzed another piece of student work, listing the task, assessment, and strengths. Yet, the note-taking form’s spaces for learning needs and next steps for differentiating instruction were blank, indicating there were no next steps to support the student via differentiation or for addressing the student’s needs. Several examples show similar lack of impact on instruction or support of students’ needs. Notes from March 20, 2017, do not show another follow up on the suggestions posed to use sentence starters use visuals in ELA and social studies. Notes often indicate that teachers are working on their inquiry issues, but remain at a surface level without closing the inquiry cycle to determine if any suggested next steps improved student work and teacher practice.