Quality Review Report

2018-2019

Academy of Arts and Letters
K-8 13K492
225 Adelphi Street
Brooklyn
NY 11205

Principal: John Oreilly

Dates of Review:
November 29, 2018 - November 30, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Edward Hazen
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

Academy of Arts and Letters serves students in grade K through grade 8. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></th>
<th><strong>Area</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rating</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<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>Area of Focus</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>Proficient</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>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
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## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<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, Well Developed</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>Additional Finding, Well Developed</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<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, Proficient</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, Proficient</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, Well Developed</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>Area of Celebration, Well Developed</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, Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

### 4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development

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<th>Quality Indicator</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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#### Findings

Teacher teams use common planning time to analyze student data and engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations, embedding the Common Core Learning Standards into lesson plans and units of study.

#### Impact

Lower grades and departmental teams’ use of a structured protocol to systematically analyze data and student work products has resulted in coherent implementation of the Common Core and instructional shifts, leading to strengthened teacher instructional capacity and improved student achievement.

#### Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of teachers engage in inquiry-based work via grade-level and departmental vertical team professional learning groups. Teacher teams use a structured Problem of Practice protocol to review student work and analyze assessment data. This results in shared curricular and lesson plan improvements, aligned to the schoolwide goal of differentiating instruction to provide tiered interventions to students performing below benchmark on grade level diagnostic assessments or enrichment to students at or above benchmark. Teachers collaborate to create rigorous units of study that have students engage in purposeful academic tasks and authentic discussion, emphasizing high levels of thinking to promote college and career readiness. The vertical teams identify gaps in student achievement and engage in inquiry work to examine the impact of specific instructional strategies on improving student work products and achievement. After changes have been made to units of study and strategies have been integrated into classroom practice, teams assess which strategies had a positive impact on student learning. Strategies effective at addressing a deficit are then shared across grades and disciplines, and teachers are encouraged to observe a colleague’s lesson so that they can mirror the practice, resulting in schoolwide instructional coherence. For example, to address a gap in students’ spelling and phonics development, one team included word studies for students and revised assessments to monitor students’ progress toward mastering phonemes with greater frequency.

- Teachers report that common collaboration time has resulted in improvements in pedagogy and has enhanced professional practices across grades and subjects, as they have time to share specific instructional strategies and practices that can improve student engagement. Teachers reported analyzing conference notes, benchmark and grade-level assessments, and informal assessments, such as entry and exit tickets, to determine if students were able use sufficient supporting textual evidence when writing an argument or engaging in peer discussions. Scaffolds and supports for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) have resulted in increased use of academic language and accountable talk, as evidenced by conference notes. Consequently, the progress toward the schoolwide goal of engaging all students in high levels of discourse has led to improved writing in all grades and classes. This was evidenced by the school’s overall ELA proficiency rate of 72 percent in 2018, as compared to 52 percent Citywide.

- Teacher teams meet regularly to analyze assessment data from a variety of sources, including New York State exams. School leaders and teachers also administer to students Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) and Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) reading assessments, in addition to mid- and end-of-unit assessments to provide teacher teams with baseline data to inform changes to curricula and instruction. These data are used to create instructional groups and provide targeted interventions for struggling students. These practices resulted in an increase in the number of students meeting or exceeding proficiency on the State math assessment, from 46 percent in 2017 to 58 percent in 2018, which is 7 percentage points higher than the Citywide average.
Findings

The school leaders and faculty ensure alignment to the Common Core through the integration of the instructional shifts across grades and subjects, with an emphasis on implementing culturally responsive curricula. Rigorous academic tasks are planned to engage students in challenging academic and metacognitive tasks, leading to improved work products.

Impact

The curricula and academic tasks build coherence across subjects and grades and support college and career readiness for students, including those with diverse learning needs. However, the vast majority of teachers have yet to strategically plan engaging, higher-level cognitive tasks for all students, including the highest-achieving students.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricula indicates evidence of teacher teamwork to integrate the Common Core and instructional shifts in English Language Arts (ELA), math, social studies, and science. Across disciplines and grade levels, students are required to develop claims and counterclaims and cite sufficient supporting textual evidence to justify arguments or defend stances on social issues. Teachers also plan themed interdisciplinary units of study incorporating science and social studies content standards and current social justice issues, such as racial inequality, allowing students to engage in inquiry-based discussions and write from sources to make arguments while promoting the use of Tier 3 vocabulary. A review of lesson plans indicate that teachers use Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DoK) to measure the level of their questions and encourage the use of academic language to make students’ thinking visible when capturing evidence in their notes.

- Staff members work weekly in collaborative teams to review and revise curriculum maps, unit plans, and lesson plans to ensure accessibility for all students. Teachers analyze student work samples and assessment data, including DRP and F&P results, mid- and end-of-unit tests, and running-records results, to refine curricula, to include supports such as scaffolds, and to differentiate tasks. The school leaders meet with teacher leaders bi-weekly to determine the impact of the grade-level and vertical teamwork, such as the inclusion of multiple entry points into lessons, extension activities for higher performing students, and the use of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) model when planning lessons. A vertical math team was observed analyzing an assessment to identify common misconceptions or gaps in learning. The team noted students in the primary grades experienced difficulty in doubling numbers and decided to examine the math curricula in the lower grades to determine if too much emphasis was placed on skip counting rather than teaching strategies to help students double numbers accurately.

- A review of meeting minutes and agendas indicates that grade and content team meetings focus on creating student-centered lessons providing whole-class and individualized supports, allowing multiple access points lessons through differentiation of tasks. Teachers use data to create action plans for students who struggle and revisit interventions put in place to assess students’ progress toward proficiency. Team analysis of instructional practices often results in shifts in pedagogy and an increased awareness of student misconceptions. Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) teacher teams meet to plan lessons based on student needs, ensuring multiple entry points, scaffolding, and differentiation using the UDL model. However, a review of lesson plans indicated that UDL is not yet consistently used by all teachers to purposefully differentiate their instruction so that all students, including ELLs and the highest-achieving students, are challenged metacognitely.
Additional Finding

**Quality Indicator:** 1.2 Pedagogy

**Rating:** Proficient

Findings

Teaching practices are aligned to the school’s belief that students learn best through participation in authentic meaningful tasks and discussions that are differentiated to provide access for all learners. Teachers consistently utilize strategies such as the student-centered learning and discussions to promote high levels of thinking and engagement for a diversity of learners.

Impact

Across grades and content areas, teaching practices consistently reflect school-identified best practices and provide students with challenging learning tasks that require them to use critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving. Tasks encourage inquiry, collaboration, and ownership among students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across grade levels and disciplines, teaching practices align with the school’s articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best as identified in the school’s mission statement: students are expected to demonstrate their learning through discourse and meaningful work products. The instructional teams identified a student-centered reciprocal teaching model to ensure that students have a voice through meaningful group discussions. This model allows teachers to monitor student discussions and differentiate instruction to address individualized learning styles, needs, and modalities. These practices were observed in many classrooms visited, with students accessing scaffolds such as discussion prompts, sentence frames, manipulatives, graphic organizers, and visuals to make thinking visible. However, these practices were not prevalent across the vast majority of classrooms visited. In some instances, instruction was not differentiated to allow multiple entry points into the lesson, and there were no scaffolds or specialized instructional strategies for students with disabilities and top achieving students.

- In some classes, students were provided with scaffolds and supports such as prompts and graphic organizers. Small-group instruction and differentiated problem sets engaged students, including students with disabilities, in challenging academic tasks. To begin an ICT humanities class, the teachers shared the essential question with the class, which also served as the learning objective. Students were prompted to debate whether “money can buy happiness” with their groups by citing specific textual evidence from articles they had read on materialism and social justice. Since students were in leveled groups, had articles at their Lexile levels, and were given differentiated graphic organizers, all students were able to participate in the group debate. However, this structure was not observed in all classes. In another ICT humanities lesson, students were asked to debate whether an author was perpetuating stereotypes in a Socratic seminar setting. Expected learning outcomes were identical for all students, and all students were provided with the same materials for the task. Thus, there were no multiple entry points into the lesson or scaffolds to support varied learning abilities. In the absence of these, some students did not partake in the discussion or wrote limited reactions to other students’ responses. Since the facilitator relied on volunteer students to carry the debate, it was not possible to determine if all students had met the learning target for the lesson.

- The level of structured group work that holds students individually accountable for contributing to the work of the cooperative learning groups varied across classrooms. In a science lesson, students were given a map of the Pacific Rim denoting fault lines and were asked to work in small groups and use a “see, think, wonder” protocol to make predictions about where earthquakes were likely to occur. Most students were able to make accurate predictions, with some students making a connection to the Ring of Fire. However, not all students participated equally, and some students were observed not actively listening to the group discussion.
Findings
The vast majority of teachers use or create assessments and rubrics that align to the curricula and offer a portrait of student progress toward mastery. Teachers use analyses of assessment data to monitor student progress, make instructional decisions, and adjust curricula and academic tasks.

Impact
Teachers' use of common rubrics and assessments provides actionable and meaningful feedback to students and teachers. Teachers make informed adjustments to curriculum and instruction, improving the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency on the State ELA and math assessments.

Supporting Evidence

- The vast majority of teachers use assessments aligned to the Common Core and the schoolwide curricula which provide timely and accurate data on student progress that teachers use to make instructional decisions. The lower-grades team (teachers in kindergarten through third grade) meets regularly to ensure that assessments are aligned to the curricula and are effective in monitoring student progress. Prior to the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, the team met to analyze data from State tests and end-of-unit and benchmark assessments from Expeditionary Learning, the formal math program, for alignment and efficacy in providing information for teachers' instructional decisions. As a result, the team made adjustments to the curricula and the timeliness of the assessments to ensure that students would have the opportunity to reach mastery in multiplying. Similarly, teachers at all grade levels disaggregate data by ability range and assign students to ability-level groups that provide actionable and meaningful feedback to teachers regarding student progress toward mastery in math, ELA, science and humanities.

- Teachers use a variety of assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward mastery of skills and standards across grades and subjects. Tracked data help teachers identify students who are performing at, below, and above grade level, and develop interventions that accelerate learning for all students. Grade level teams analyze DRP, F&P, and teacher-made benchmark assessment data to determine instructional groupings and provide students with leveled materials within their zones of proximal development. This also allows teachers to plan Tier I interventions provided via small group instruction with the classroom teacher. Likewise, purposeful decisions are made to utilize diagnostic and benchmark assessments approximately every six weeks to determine the effectiveness of the dedicated reading intervention services. Data are used to determine reading groups and the targeted instruction students will receive during the reading intervention instructional block. This resulted in growth of seven points on the DRP by the end of the 2017-2018 school year, three points higher than the expected growth.

- Assessment results are used to adjust curricula and plan scaffolds and activities that support all learners, including ELLs and student with disabilities. Teachers’ analysis of math data led to the decision to collaboratively adopt the Math Investigations curricula and make revisions to support the diversity of learners at each grade level. A fourth through eighth grade math team was observed analyzing students’ responses on a math assessment to identify patterns and trends in student work as well as next steps for instruction. In order to have students become numerate by the end of third grade, the team decided that the primary level curricula would have to be revised to purposely embed into units of study strategies for students to adopt, such as using arrays and base tens, to help them become proficient in doubling numbers in their heads. These practices resulted in a 12 percentage point increase in the overall number of students meeting or exceeding proficiency on the State math assessment, from 46 percent in 2017 to 58 percent in 2018.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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Findings

The principal and faculty consistently communicate high expectations to students and their families through workshops, coaching sessions, and other family engagement events. A culture for learning is maintained that promotes student ownership of their learning.

Impact

Systems of accountability for students and partnerships with families ensure that all students, including students with disabilities, are aware of their progress toward college and career readiness. Strong parent participation in the learning of their children results in all students being prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leaders and staff communicate high expectations about college and career readiness and partner with families to ensure that all students are challenged to meet or exceed those expectations. The principal and staff host workshops to engage parents in discussions about curricula, pedagogy, and preparation for the next level, with an emphasis on linking the rigor of the curricula and the schoolwide expectations to college and career readiness. Staff provide coaching sessions for parents on strategies to use at home to involve them in the learning of their children and ensure that they are aware of the expected grade level outcomes. The expectation is for all students to achieve at or above proficiency on the school’s benchmark tests and the State math and ELA assessments by the end of the school year. Similarly, students in grades three through eight must participate in hour-long roundtable presentations in January and June in which they exhibit each semester’s learning from math, science, and humanities to their family members.

- There is a strong, active partnership between the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the school leaders and faculty. The PTA partners with the school to create a shared vision of a diverse school, assisting in enacting the school’s Diversity Plan. For example, parents have volunteered to facilitate after-school racial equity sessions for school and community members. Likewise, the School Leadership Team works with parents to identify prioritized student needs and implement programs to support student progress toward increasing achievement and promoting social/emotional growth. Some outcomes of their work are morning meetings, which kick off each school day with announcements, celebrations, and showcases of student projects, and end-of-day restorative circles, which present opportunities for students to reflect on the day and share thoughts, shout-outs, or concerns with one another in a supportive, non-judgmental setting. A review of correspondence from the school indicates that parents are routinely invited to learn how to support their students’ reading, writing, and math progress at home during the school’s family engagement events. Parents reported that these events have provided them with the skills necessary to assist their children with Common Core math problems at home.

- Students reported that they are aware of the school’s expectations to prepare all students for the secondary level and colleges and careers. The school’s online systems allow students to monitor their progress on a daily basis toward meeting the expected grade level outcomes and receive timely updates and notifications from the school. Students reported that the morning meetings and end-of-day circles serve as daily reminders of the expectations for their classes and of the school. Students also stated that the support they receive through guidance and advisory helps them focus on meeting expectations and applying to middle or high schools, thus adequately preparing them for the next level. Parents noted that their children are showing ownership of their next-level readiness by being thoughtful about applying what they have learned to their work, particularly when preparing for their roundtable exhibitions, rigorous culminating academic tasks in each class in which all students must participate.
### Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
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#### Findings

School leaders support the professional growth of teachers by using strategic cycles of observation that provide meaningful feedback with actionable next steps for improvement and identify professional development (PD) needs to continue to build teacher capacity.

#### Impact

An effective observation cycle using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and collegial support from teacher peers, including through intervisitation, results in elevated schoolwide instructional practices that promote professional growth, reflection, and improved pedagogy.

#### Supporting Evidence

- The school leaders have an effective observation cycle in place to support the PD of teachers and to provide actionable feedback on instructional practices via frequent classroom observations and follow-up collegial conversations. School leaders frequently analyze learning-walk notes, teacher observation data, and student data to determine progress towards meeting the schoolwide instructional goals, making adjustments accordingly to ensure alignment to the instructional foci. For example, the school leadership team provided professional learning sessions on initiatives such as the responsive classroom, explicit phonics instruction, Socratic seminars, the *Words Their Way* program, and reciprocal teaching. Similarly, teachers new to the profession or school or those requiring additional professional learning on specific practices receive targeted support from the administrative team and lead teachers prior to follow-up observations to provide them with ample time to reflect on their practice and make adjustments for improvement. Teachers reported that this structure has resulted in improvements in their professional practice and has helped them align their learning goals and practices to the instructional foci of the school.

- Teachers report that the structured observation and inquiry work cycles have resulted in a supportive culture that has improved professional practice. This process includes bi-weekly teamwork focused on improving pedagogy via classroom intervisitation and meaningful feedback on formal and informal observations by school leaders and teacher peers. For instance, an example of actionable feedback from one observation report was, “a see/think/wonder or a KWL chart used in the table discussion would have allowed for more students to share their thoughts.” Teachers further reported that collegial feedback from intervisitations has strengthened their pedagogy and helped them implement strategies to support schoolwide goals, such as increasing student engagement through the use of student-centered dialogue. As a result, the math inquiry team made math talks a primary area of focus for improvement.

- School leaders’ instructional expectations are clearly articulated through a variety of means, including daily emails so teachers can align personal and school professional goals. Teachers report that one of these expectations is for strategic use of protocols to analyze student data and work products during collaborative planning. Teachers participate in professional learning and work with teams via biweekly, collaborative inquiry groups, resulting in teachers and instructional leaders reflecting on pedagogy and partnering to meet shared goals. These learning cycles lead to a PD plan that identifies gaps in instruction and provides support to strengthen teachers’ ability to close the gaps. For example, analysis of observation data by school leaders and feedback from teacher intervisitation identified a schoolwide need for student-centered academic tasks that promote high levels of thinking and discourse. Thus, common practices and protocols such as Socratic seminars and fishbowls were added to address this need, and additional professional learning opportunities and support from school leaders were provided to teachers in improving their practices in these areas.