



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

ACADEMY OF YOUNG WRITERS

**High School 404
183, South Street
Brooklyn
NY 11211**

Principal: Carolyn Yaffe

Dates of review: June 1 - 4, 2007

Reviewer: Derek Pattinson

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Academy for Young Writers is a school in its first year that was built in partnership with the Institute of Student Achievement and the Student Press Initiative of Columbia University. Its core purpose is to promote writing and the creative arts that emerge from writing. It has an extensive after school program which help support its key goals.

The school's current enrollment is 107 grade 9 students, with double this number expected in the next school year as the school adds a grade. The population comprises approximately 62% Hispanic students, 29% Black students, 6% White students and very small numbers from other ethnic groups. Special education students account for 6% of the school population and English language learners for 12%. The attendance rate at 88% is below that of similar and City schools.

The school has elected to receive empowerment status. Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. A mutually beneficial partnership with NCREST and The Institute for Student Achievement aids the school in its administration and grading of its periodic assessments.

.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The well-respected principal, ably supported by the assistant principal, has successfully established a secure platform for improvement and innovation.
- Since its opening, the school's focus has been focused successfully on developing a collaborative approach and a culture of accountability.
- Exhibition based learning is effective in establishing positive attitudes among students and developing their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Professional development for all is proving successful in helping the school in its drive to meet its key goals.
- The school is rigorous in its gathering and electronic analysis of a comprehensive range of data to help identify strengths and to target areas for development.
- Staff's aim of bringing learning to life for their students is evident in the successful 'Writer's Unblocked' initiative and through its program of educational visits.
- Advisory and extensive after-school programs are strong features and emphasize students' all round development and the strong growth of the school community.

What the school needs to improve

- Use data analysis more effectively to ensure that the school sets clear, challenging and measurable short and long-term goals and devise systems for the rigorous monitoring and revision of school plans.
- Develop, implement and regularly review ways of involving students more in their own learning, so that they know their goals and what they must do to achieve them.
- Enable teachers to use data effectively to align instruction and differentiate work, especially for high achievers.
- Continue to work on improving attendance and establishing consistent approaches to behavior management.
- Implement a more cohesive approach to supporting English language learners and students who struggle with literacy.
- Create portfolios for work samples that can be used by teachers as a reference of agreed standards for calibrating students' work.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The mission of the Academy of Young Writers is to help students become powerful thinkers and to harness their creativity through writing. Empowerment status has provided the leadership with greater flexibility to design specific paths to success and enabled the school to make an impressive start to its work. This is in no small part due to the strong, and purposeful leadership of its principal, who is ably supported by the acting assistant principal. They have clearly delineated responsibilities and work together effectively as they strive, alongside staff, to turn their key goals into reality. The leadership has already devised systems, procedures and approaches to help realize this vision. As a result, and because of its unified approach and culture of accountability, it has established a firm platform on which to build on the successes already achieved. The school's first published book 'Writers Unblocked', which contains work from every student, provides a testament to the collaborative approaches the school adopts to help it achieve its vision. The school's emphasis on exhibition-based learning is helping to bring instruction to life, develop key skills and knowledge as well as positive attitudes. There is still much to be done, however, especially in setting clear and challenging goals, to which students must have ownership, to help accelerate their learning. The school has already started to plan for the challenges ahead, through the organization of grade teams, as numbers continue to grow and the school considers how to build on the culture it has created. The school has made satisfactory progress in using its partnership with NCREST and the Institute for Student Achievement to implement periodic assessments devised by them to help monitor student progress in mathematics, writing and reading, although at this stage in the school's development, a detailed analysis of assessment outcomes has yet to be undertaken.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

Soon after the school's opening, routines were quickly established to establish very thorough data gathering procedures. Constantly updated data helps to provide an objective understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom and grade level and the performances of different groups, including English language learners and special education students.

The school has developed its own effective systems for gathering, storing and reporting data electronically. Routinely collected data includes, reading, writing and mathematics outcomes of periodic assessments, progress reports designed for the school's approach that are parsed by category, course pass rates, daily attendance data, case conferencing and behavioral information. Because of this unified approach, teachers have much ownership in the creation and use of rubrics against which data is collected. All staff have access to databases to input and update data. They know and use the system the school has designed for tracking student progress towards success in the Living Environment

Regents' examination. Disciplinary and attendance data is analyzed to look for trends and dips and, if required, the school acts rigorously upon its findings, such as when attendance fell significantly in March 2007.

All of this data regularly feeds into staff meetings, cabinet meetings and family conferences, especially for vulnerable students, to enable the school to take corrective action where data shows slippage is occurring. The school is already using data to note gender disparity and the performance of different ethnic groups and is constantly reviewing the picture for each student as new data becomes available.

While the school is not yet able to make comparisons between grades, it has established the structures and the degree of rigor to enable it to do so. Clearly, the school has the capacity and structures established to interrogate data to reveal new patterns, trends and solutions and to compare its performance with that of similar schools.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

At this point in the school's growth, the use of data to plan and set clear, challenging and objectively measurable goals for the school as a whole, for each student, classroom, grade level and academic subject is at an early stage of development. Nevertheless, the school plans and sets goals in a number of areas. For example, goals are set to address specific topics and skills, create more unified expectations, establish individual goals for students from progress reports and family conferences, and from an analysis of attendance data. Teachers have started to set goals to help develop specific skills and habits. Some individual goals, such as "to analyze two pieces of pros" are a little more precise, but timescales to meet such goals, are not rigorous enough to help maximize learning.

Since opening, the school has rightly concentrated on gathering and analyzing relevant data from which to plan and set goals. It has identified appropriate systems for supporting its most needy students and deciding on intervention strategies. Goals have been set following an interpretation of diagnostic data from the Regents' examination. Many school-wide and students' goals, however, are not precise enough nor are they easily measurable to enable teachers to evaluate progress towards their achievement. Furthermore, students do not have much ownership in what they need to do to improve. Students' goals include 'attend school every day' and 'study harder', which they say they have devised themselves. These are clearly not focused or rigorous enough to help maximize learning.

Parents value the principal's work and the support the school gives to their children and have high expectations for them. However, they too are insufficiently involved in the process of goal setting and reviewing, which limits their ability to support their children effectively. Electronic data is scrutinized regularly, and patterns emerging interpreted to consider relevant courses of action. However, there are no formal procedures to ensure that this in-depth scrutiny leads to a unified approach for the setting of challenging goals. This deficiency is, in part, due to the lack of professional development to help teachers become more skilled at using data for goal setting and reviewing.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school has made significant strides in aligning instruction to students’ needs, such as, through its Credit Recovery program, and for ensuring that teachers are accountable for the quality of instruction they provide for their students. It has examined its writing assessment data to overcome identified weaknesses. Electronic analysis of behavior anecdotes has helped inform both interventions with individual students as well as providing the focus for the school-wide advisory program. Data from incoming ninth graders was used to program students into heterogeneous classes and plan small groups for English language arts to take account of students’ overall low performances on admission. The curriculum is clearly aligned closely around the school’s key goals and is designed to emphasize students’ personal development alongside their academic work. Its emphasis on exhibition-based learning is proving effective in establishing positive attitudes and developing students’ knowledge, skills and understanding.

Teachers are thoughtful about using data to align instruction and programming to students’ needs and are clearly focused on individual student behavioral and academic growth. On occasions, however, opportunities for greater differentiation through group work are missed, and as a result, some students are not as actively involved in the lesson as others. The school does not yet have portfolios of students’ work to use as a reference of agreed standards to help calibrate their work. Nor does it have classroom and grade level goals to help provide students with appropriate levels of challenge. Nonetheless, the school provides a lively environment and students feel valued. They feel comfortable about approaching adults about any personal or academic issue that might arise.

In addition to careful scheduling, the school has aligned its budget and staffing very clearly around the needs of its students. For example, students are involved in the process of hiring staff. Attendance is a high priority and is monitored closely and regularly in class and at whole school level. The school has identified that attendance varies significantly and recognizes the need to continue to devise and implement strategies and to work with parents to help improve it.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The committed, effective and well-respected principal works in close partnership with the able acting assistant principal. Together, they have already implemented systems, procedures and approaches to help establish a strong unified culture and facilitate the selection of high quality staff. High quality lesson observation is an integral part of the leadership’s work. The administration understood from the very beginning that building the capacity of the teaching staff and establishing collaborative approaches to evaluating the impact of their work were essential in accelerating learning and raising achievement. As a consequence, professional development has been, and still is, a very high priority of the school’s work. Key areas of focus for professional development include planning engaging scaffolding exhibitions, creating a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning and developing effective partnerships with students and their parents. A mentoring program for

teachers was introduced with a clear purpose and defined parameters to enhance talents and skills and ensure that a collaborative approach was sought as a means of achieving the school's important goals. All initiatives are ongoing and modified as required based on data analysis and observation. Highlighted priorities are immediately acted upon. For example, professional development has been targeted to meet more effectively the needs of English language learners and those who struggle with literacy.

Well-developed systems are applied consistently across most aspects of school life. As a result, the school day runs smoothly. Much has been done to ensure that students behave well because expectations for them are clear, although approaches are not always consistent. Teachers, parents and students consider the principal is strong and focused but very receptive to their needs. Partnerships with academic institutions have proved highly constructive in helping to support the school's work. For example, its partnership with Salesforce has improved teachers' ability to access and use data to benefit their students.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The leadership is constantly seeking to monitor and evaluate its initiatives and develop practices to help ensure that they meet students' needs and help address the school's long-term goals. Data collection is focused on areas where instruction has been designed to address a weakness, such as improving writing skills. Advisory surveys have been conducted to identify how the school needs to adjust curriculum planning and target professional development.

Teachers reflect on their practice against the classroom observation rubric and, at regular meetings, on the quality of policies and documents introduced. The school has begun to create a professional climate where all staff members hold each other responsible for meeting agreed expectations. There is much discussion and reflection on the school's schedules and structures. As a result, a cycle of continuous organizational improvement has been created, which is supported by external groups.

The leadership recognizes, however, that there is not yet a secure structure for setting clear goals or a rigorous system for measuring whether they have been implemented effectively. Although teachers make good use of periodic assessments to align their instruction, they are not yet setting clear and measurable goals for their students, either in the short and long term. Nor are they involving students enough in the process, so they have complete ownership in what they need to do to achieve the next steps in their learning. Discussions among staff do not yet focus sufficiently on setting appropriately challenging instruction for high achieving students or the impact of non-attendance on achievement. Nevertheless, programs and goals are immediately changed if they are deemed not to be effective. The school has made a good start in establishing effective structures against which the work of the school can be measured and evaluated. It has not yet undertaken a rigorous audit to enable it to set, clear, challenging, rigorous and shared goals for next year to enable it to more systematically measure its future achievements.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: ACADEMY FOR YOUNG WRITERS (BDS14K404)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 			X
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.	X		
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.	X		
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2	X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum’s capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school’s high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student’s and group of students’ outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student’s and group of students’ outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student’s and group of students’ outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student’s and group of students’ outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other’s classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.	X		
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan’s interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	