



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**TAG Young Scholars**

**Public School/Middle School 12**

**240 East 109 Street  
New York  
NY 10039**

**Principal: Janette Cesar**

**Dates of review: May 10 - 11, 2007**

**Reviewer: Cheryl Baker**

# 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

TAG Young Scholars is a kindergarten through grade 8 school serving 450 students. There are no English language learners. Four students have special education needs. Fifty-eight percent of students are Black, 33% are Hispanic, 4% are Asian, 3% are White and 2% represent other ethnic backgrounds. The school is not Title I eligible. Attendance averages 94%, which is above that of similar and City schools.

The school was created in 2004 by merging existing elementary and middle schools. As an empowerment school, TAG Young Scholars has 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.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The administration sets a clear vision for high quality instruction targeted at the school's gifted and talented population.
- Collaborative leadership and well-targeted professional development empowers teachers to share the responsibility for the school's continued development and improvement.
- The school is a calm and orderly environment for teaching and learning.
- Parents feel confident that their children are receiving challenging instruction as well as sound emotional and social developmental support.
- Students benefit from a wide array of curricular and extracurricular opportunities for enrichment and academic challenge.
- Students' academic and creative accomplishments are recognized and celebrated through numerous displays, events and ceremonies.
- Students are well known, cared for and supported by their teachers and the administrative staff.
- High expectations for student achievement are conveyed to all members of the school community.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to refine the disaggregation of student achievement data to support the differentiation of instruction with respect to ethnicity and gender.
- Develop strategic plans to support the increasing continuity of the kindergarten through grade eight continuum that specify measurable short and long-range goals, action plans and responsibilities.
- Identify periodic diagnostic assessments appropriate to students' achievement levels, especially at the primary grades.
- Continue to support the vertical alignment of practices through regular cross-grade meetings, intervisitations and the collaborative analysis of student work.
- Explore instructional software and other on-line sources of support for high achieving students as well as for those students needing reinforcement.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The TAG Young Scholars School is focused on providing a challenging academic experience for its high achieving students. Entrance to the school is by application. The creation of the school in 2004 has served to bring greater continuity to the school's mission and instruction especially at the upper grades. The school is becoming astute with respect to the formatting and use of the data it gathers and is beginning to refine its planning practices to structure short-term measures of progress, but has more to do in establishing effective structures for strategic planning. It continues to seek stimulating and enriching intellectual and cultural experiences to broaden the scope of curriculum and instruction. Under the leadership of the current principal the staff and teachers are working together well to continue the school's improvement, particularly in determining an appropriate system of periodic assessments for the younger students.

### 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 proficient.**

The school has created a spreadsheet format for understanding the progress of each student, grade and classroom that is updated as new information becomes available. This spreadsheet contains personal information, data from State tests, commercial assessments and the results of some teacher-made assessments. Data is sorted by student, class and grade and relevant copies are distributed to teachers. The expectation is that teachers will use this information to inform their instruction.

The school does not disaggregate its available data with respect to ethnicity. There are no English language learners. The progress of special education students is monitored appropriately by the guidance counselor. While the student population is approximately 60% female, disaggregation of data by gender has not been undertaken. The school does, however, endeavor to create classes that are broadly representative of all of its groups.

With respect to other categories of interest, the school as a whole is attuned to the particular needs of gifted and talented students who make up the majority of its elementary aged population and, increasingly, its middle school students. The school is sharply focused on maintaining and increasing the percentage of students at levels 3 and 4. Spreadsheet data provides an efficient source of guidance as to each student's progress. Additionally, attendance data has revealed a higher proportion of absences at the upper grades but the exact cause has not been determined. Incident reports reveal few instances of misbehavior and those students who do step out of line receive counseling.

The school is aware of its progress over the three years of its existence as a united kindergarten through grade 8 program. Comparisons among other schools for gifted and talented youth are routine. The school also focuses on comparing the achievement of its

elementary students with that of its middle school students. Comparisons among classes, grades and progress in academic subjects are routine. Comparisons of student progress inform grouping and ranking for intervention or recognition.

**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 proficient.**

The school utilizes the school leadership team to create its annual Comprehensive Education Plan. Appropriate data and survey analysis inform annual goals and targets for improvement. The plan is available to staff and parents but is not widely disseminated. While the plan generally addresses steps to be taken, action plans, timelines and incremental measures of success are not sufficiently specific.

Plans for the advisory groups held at the middle school level identify lessons for social and emotional growth. Curriculum plans identify monthly topical coverage by academic subject area but do not specify key assessments of students’ knowledge and skill levels. When State scores and teachers’ pre-instructional assessments identified widespread deficits in 8thgrade students’ knowledge, staff reorganized the curriculum to accelerate the progress of those students. At risk students receive academic interventions after school, during lunch time tutoring and through the extended day program. They are grouped according to their identified needs and their progress is tracked by the pupil personnel team. In support of high achieving students, Regents preparation is provided as well as preparation for high school entrance examinations. The school is mindful of the need to provide broad and challenging supports for academically gifted students so that they do not become bored.

Students and their parents together hold high expectations for overall achievement and they appreciate that the school sets a high bar. Parents and students know that the expectation is achievement at 80% or above in all aspects of schooling. Strong open communication between home and school is routine. Parents are welcome at the school and attend the many celebrations of student work that occur throughout the school year. They receive phone, e-mail and written communication from teachers, administration and guidance personnel.

Overall, the thrust for annual gains in student performance as reflected by State test scores drives the collective activity of administrators, teachers, parents and students all of whom are ambitious for success.

**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 well developed.**

In accordance with a school that serves high achieving students, the curriculum exceeds the expectations inherent in the mandated curriculum. It is supplemented by activities and materials that reinforce State standards with challenging and creative lessons and units. For example, the science curriculum includes monthly investigations at the Museum of

Natural History. Students travel to the locations they study in social studies such as Philadelphia, Boston and Salem, Massachusetts. Participation in the Model U.N. Simulation provides challenging research, presentation and writing expectations for students. Students read with understanding literature often found in a high school curriculum. Students often have the opportunity to display their very high quality accomplishments at, for instance, science and literacy fairs and through concerts and publications. Teachers plan varied classroom activities and students are frequently allowed choice with respect to their participation in group activities. Acceleration is a common form of differentiation but the school has not taken the preferred learning styles of boys and girls or different ethnic groups into account.

Students enjoy learning and feel well supported and encouraged in their schooling by their teachers and their principal. They feel cared for by the adults and share their personal needs with their teachers and advisors. They find the range of curricular and extracurricular field trips and activities to be challenging, engaging and exciting. They like coming to school and most stay well after the regular school day has ended. The school has a rigorous system of home contacts with respect to student absence that includes removal to the student's zoned school if the school's expectations are not met.

Teachers are held to high expectations for improving instruction and raising student achievement by the principal through classroom observations and reviews of students' work. Decisions regarding changes in staffing, especially at the higher grades, reflected student achievement data as did the decision to hire a dean and a mathematics coach. Student achievement data was used to group students for further support and time for these interventions was increased and science laboratory time was increased to support students' preparation for Regents examinations. Broadly, the need to address the students' thirst for knowledge and new experience informed the development of specialty classes such as enrichment, Spanish and instructional technology.

**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.**

Criteria for candidates applying to teach at the school include knowledge of gifted education, balanced literacy and the enrichment model, a strong work ethic, facility with planning and a successful demonstration of instructional skills. While some candidates possess a working knowledge of the analysis and use of data, it is not yet a requirement for hire. New teachers are appointed a mentor and all teachers receive good instructional and professional development support from the principal, assistant principal, coaches and lead teachers. In addition, in-class coaching professional development takes place at weekly grade meetings on topics identified through teachers' self assessments and staffed charged with implementing the curriculum and analyzing student performance. This practice supports strong grade level congruence and collaboration. Additionally, teachers attend workshops and conferences germane to gifted education, instructional content and pedagogy. The actions and decisions emerging from grade conferences are reflected upon and inform the activities of faculty conferences. Cross grade meetings further support whole school collaboration as the continuity of focus and practice is solidified across the kindergarten through grade 8 continuum. Teachers feel empowered to contribute to the leadership of the school. For example, middle school teachers took it upon themselves to draft a guide for improved climate and instruction at the upper grades which was subsequently embraced by the administration.

The principal and assistant principal conduct formal observations as a team and provide appropriate and informative feedback to teachers. Learning walks, undertaken periodically throughout the school year, have established needs for improvements in planning, classroom management and the delivery of instruction. Model classrooms are also identified so that teachers can observe and learn from one another.

The principal is respected for her clear vision of effective instruction for gifted students. The school community expresses confidence in her leadership. She and the assistant principal demonstrate strong organizational skills that result in school procedures that are clearly communicated and almost always followed and create an supportive learning environment.

The school's unique student body is well supported in its academic, creative and athletic growth through relationships with New York's premier museums, cultural institutions and universities that provide curricular enrichment and support, academic enrichment and tutoring, and a broad range of experiential learning. Students' athletic talents are well supported through access to teams and sports at Randall's Island.

**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 school's primary guidance, the Comprehensive Education Plan, is annual in nature and, thus, is not specific with respect to frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress. Similarly, other plans such as those guiding instruction, the advisory classes and the plan for the middle school tend to identify targets or identify actions but lack specificity regarding interim goals or diagnostic measures of success. Nonetheless, the school is generally responsive to data indicating flexible realignment of practices and resources. For example, literature with themes that appeal to pre-adolescent males were added to the repertoire to foster their continued interest in reading. The classics were infused into the curriculum to increase rigor and support cultural literacy.

At the level of the classroom, the school's spreadsheet of collated student achievement data has proved to be an important source for measuring student progress relative to interventions. For instance, members of the pupil personnel team can easily review recent student data to judge their progress related to academic interventions. Classroom teachers quickly assess their students' success in reaching secure goals in, for example, mathematics to measure progress and plan for regrouping for future instruction.

The use of the school's identified periodic assessment, the Princeton Review, has proven to be only sporadically informative as the timeliness of results and the relative misalignment with State standards limited its diagnostic usefulness. At the primary level, State assessments of students' growth in reading comprehension are not broadly useful as the vast majority of students read far above grade level and easily master these assessments. The school looks forward to identifying or designing periodic diagnostic assessments that better match the profile of their high achieving students.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: TAG Young Scholars PS/MS 12</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	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"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	