

The Young Women's Leadership School

**The Young Women's Leadership School
105 East 106th Street
Manhattan
NY 10029**

principal: Kathleen Ponze

Dates of review: May 24 – 26, 2006

**Reviewer: Joanne Harvey
Cambridge Education**

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

Content Of The Report

Part 1: The School Context

Background information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

What is the school's overall performance

How well does it meet New York City's evaluation criteria

Other key observations

Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

The Young Women's Leadership School is a well established single gender secondary school located in East Harlem. There are 399 students on roll in 7th through 12th grades. All students are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Just less than two thirds of students are Hispanic, just over one third are Black and a very small percentage from South East Asia. Three students are at the early stages of learning English. Two thirds of students Title 1 Eligible and a very high percentage qualify for reduced meals. Most students enter the school with broadly expected levels of achievement for this age.

The school was the first of its kind to be opened in 30 years. It was started in 1996 by a renowned NYC philanthropist to promote the highest levels of academic achievement and personal development. It expects and achieves acceptance for all its seniors on to college courses. It continues to be supported by The Young Women's Leadership Foundation. The school has received rewards for its outstanding achievements including a 'high performing/gap closing' award, a 'Breakthrough High School' award and a commendation for its outstanding science and music programs. The success of the school has inspired further 'sister' schools to be opened in New York and beyond. Students are proud to wear their uniform and be identified with their school community.

The school is housed in the top five floors of a converted office building but it has outgrown its existing space and this sets limitations on the further expansion of the innovative work it plans with its students, their families and the local community.

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- This is a well-developed and very effective school in which students, many of whom face significant challenges in their personal lives, make good progress. They are carefully nurtured and become well rounded and confident young women well equipped to become 'leaders of the future'.
- The leadership and management of the school are extremely effective.
- There is a strong shared culture.
- The school's curriculum is developed carefully to focus closely on the needs of its students.
- Students are enthused, focused and interested in their studies.
- Students have access to an excellent range of curriculum enrichment activities.
- Quality experiences of the visual and performing arts promote students' joy in participating in performance, as well as their confidence and self-esteem.
- Aspirations and expectations are raised by exposure to positive, successful and eminent female role models.
- A very impressive range of partnerships with other agencies considerably extends the range, depth and challenge of students' experiences.
- An able college advisor is very effective in helping students understand that attending college is an expectation and reality for all.
- Teaching is good and promotes learning successfully.
- Professional development opportunities for staff are focused on school priorities.
- Teachers know their students well through a good range of formative and summative assessments.
- Committed staff offers their students seemingly endless opportunities to reinforce and deepen their knowledge and understanding and extend their studies after school.
- The school makes outstanding provision for students' personal, social and emotional development.
- The school's programs for college readiness and internship are well structured and matched to students individual needs.
- The school has high expectations of how students will conduct themselves ensuring that they behave well and work hard.
- The school reflects on its work well, its self-evaluation is accurate and it takes appropriate action to address areas that need improving
- Excellent positive and supportive relationships are forged with all members of the school community
- Effective management, maintenance and use of the building ensures a delightful learning environment
- The school is particularly successful in its proactive approach to securing additional funding to further enhance students' learning experiences

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the range and quality of the data collected and analyzed to allow a clearer picture of the value the school is adding to each student from entry to the school and ongoing through their time at the school. This will give further clarity to target setting for individual and school improvement and ensure regular accurate checks to monitor progress towards them. Support will be required in acquiring the tools and skills to achieve this goal.
- Further develop the involvement of students in evaluating their own progress towards their targets and therefore their awareness of what they need to do to move forward in their learning.
- Continue to implement work to increase the participation of family and community members in the life of the school. An essential aid to this would be help with the acquisition of additional space given that which is currently available is fully utilized.

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed and very effective school

This is a well-developed and very effective school in which students, many of whom face significant challenges in their personal lives, make good progress. They are carefully nurtured and become well rounded and confident young women well equipped to become 'leaders of the future'.

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

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is overall well-developed

Teachers know their students well through a good range of formative and summative assessments. As a result interventions are effective in helping students realize their potential. The school collects a great deal of data relating to individual students' progress and attainment and uses it effectively to identify students' specific needs, track their progress over time and identify curricular areas that need further attention. For example, because data has been clearly set out to monitor performance across classes and within grades the school is quickly able to spot potential underperformance of students in individual teacher's classes due to weaknesses in teaching, and the principal can demonstrate that she takes quick and effective action to remedy this. The analysis of data to identify trends in performance across subjects and grades has allowed staff to identify weaknesses in curriculum provision, make the necessary modifications and track the resulting improvements. Teachers grade almost daily, either formally or informally and are engaged in ongoing discussions with other staff and students about the next steps of students' learning. They use performance based assessment, student transcripts, standardized test scores, incident rates, graduation rates, course pass rates, surveys and attendance figures. Formal assessments are timetabled and ongoing. Furthermore committed staff then offers their students seemingly endless opportunities to reinforce and deepen their knowledge and understanding and extend their studies after school. School summative data shows year-to-year maintenance and improvement in standards. The school was able to demonstrate through two contrasting case studies presented to the reviewer, the success of interventions over time. The reviewer was then able to confirm the success of interventions through discussions with students themselves.

Though assessment is already a strength in the school, because of the school's culture of continual self-reflection and desire for improvement, the school is looking for additional and smarter ways to generate and use data more effectively. Analysis needs to become more sophisticated to include ways to capture incremental steps of progress, and therefore value added, particularly for the least and most able. The school needs to establish a system for capturing baseline assessment data for all students immediately on entry to enable progress and value added to be measured in an ongoing and meaningful way throughout their time at the school. This will give further clarity to target setting for individual and school improvement with a sufficient level of challenge for all and allow

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

regular and accurate checks to monitor progress towards targets. This system should then move beyond individual student progress to looking at comparative progress of groups of pupils and cohorts in different classes and cohort trends over time. Support will be required in acquiring the tools and skills to achieve this goal. There is also a desire to calibrate across schools in order for a shared understanding of what constitutes good teaching, learning, standards and progress.

Quality Statement 2: 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 well-developed

Most students arrive with levels of attainment similar to that which is expected for their age, though a significant number arrive with attainment below average. However, good teaching, an innovative and effective curriculum and high levels of pastoral support ensure that most students achieve well by the time they graduate from the school. The high expectations of the standards required in all aspects of the school's work, and the well-developed systems for monitoring progress, help to ensure that little is recognized as a barrier to student learning, and the progress they make is therefore good. Teachers' written and oral evaluation and feedback to students about their work is exemplary. Over time they are able to show the successes of interventions made with students which have led directly to improvements in work. This was well borne out in case studies presented to reviewers and in student work shared in classrooms. The school has systems in place to allow for good communication regarding all aspects of the school's work. This clarity allows rapid identification and response to a range of needs. Daily informal discussion takes place against a background of regular team meetings to review curriculum. Professional development is linked in. The advisory system promotes strong supportive relationships between teachers, students and their families. All of this is enhanced by the support shown by many parents who receive regular and detailed reports on their children's standards and progress. The school recognizes that it is not yet able to demonstrate that it is setting targets which are challenging enough for all students, particularly when they may already be achieving at or beyond State expected levels. It is therefore ready to embrace a more sophisticated mode of data collection and analysis which will allow the confirmation of high levels of value added for all and the further development of the setting of challenging targets for individuals and whole school improvement. Further development of students' involvement in evaluating their own progress towards these targets, and therefore their awareness of what they need to do to move forward quickly in their learning, would expedite this. The principal has recognized that students respond well to high expectations and high levels of challenge. She is continually looking for ways to provide this, for example, in the adoption of the International Baccalaureate.

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

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

The schools' curriculum is developed carefully to focus closely on the needs of its students in order to achieve the vision the school has for them. Part of its success can be

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

attributed to its simplicity, and clarity to all. It ensures academic rigor while developing essential higher order inquiry and thinking skills which students can and do apply in other areas of learning and life. Therefore students learn well. They are enthused, focused and interested in their studies, engage with learning in a sustained way and collaborate with others effectively. Students' mastery of curriculum content and other skills are ably demonstrated in their high academic and personal achievements. The students have access to a phenomenal range of curriculum enrichment activities within school, through visiting speakers and providers, and beyond school on trips to science centers, businesses, arts facilities, higher educational establishments, cultural, charitable and political events and much more. These all deepen the students' understanding and broaden their experiences. The school has not surprisingly won awards for its outstanding science and music programs. The curriculum is further enhanced by high quality experiences of the visual and performing arts and the students' joy in participating in performance is obvious, thus, helping to build their confidence and self-esteem. The school successfully raises students' aspirations and expectations for themselves by exposing them to positive, successful and eminent female role models. A very impressive range of partnerships with other agencies is pursued which considerably extends the range and depth of students' experiences, particularly through their internships and summer programs which are chosen because of the high level of challenge that they present.

The school makes outstanding provision for students' personal, social and emotional development. Through Advisory groups, Family Support Team and the positive and caring role models presented by all adults, it successfully ensures remarkable relationships based on mutual respect and trust. Students feel safe, demonstrate increasing maturity and self-confidence and feel valued and well cared for. The school is the central part of their community and, indeed, they say it provides the kind of support and care that makes them feel they are part of a family here. This is evident from the way the older students show care for their younger counterparts and others from their own community and beyond. The school's programs for college readiness and internship are well structured and matched to students' individual needs ensuring the best possible experiences for them in preparation for life beyond high school. The full time involvement of the able college advisor is very effective in making attendance at college an expectation and reality for all students. TYWLS students get to college and they do well when they get there. The school has high expectations of how students will conduct themselves. Rules are consistently applied and reinforced by all. Students respond well to these expectations, behave well and work hard. Excellent positive and supportive relationships are forged with all members of the school community, for example, through work with parents and the good quality of communications. This ensures parents and guardians are supportive and proud of the work of the school and that students' experiences are enhanced where possible. The school quite rightly recognizes the positive impact this has on the academic and personal success of its students and would like to develop this work further. A high priority should be given to continuing to implement work to increase the participation of family and community members in the life of the school. An essential aid to this would be help with the acquisition of additional space given that which is currently available is fully utilized.

Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

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 overall well-developed

The leadership and management of the school are extremely effective. The principal provides inspirational leadership. She has been successful in building an enthusiastic, hard working and dedicated team of staff. They are empowered to lead their own curriculum and other enrichment initiatives in the interests of their drive for continual school improvement. Students are also involved in important decisions about the school through their role on the school government team. There is a strong shared culture which values students as individuals, a sense of shared goals and high expectations and a determination to provide students with high quality experiences. Staff knows when they are recruited to the school that commitment to this culture and the hard work to achieve it is paramount and the recruitment process ensures that this is the case. The principal and staff pursue monitoring and development procedures which ensure that this remains the case. These regularly involve staff in peer observations and support. Teaching is therefore good and promotes learning successfully. Lessons are carefully planned, challenging and interesting. As a result students show enthusiasm for their learning, work hard and progress well. Teachers take great care to ensure that the activities they provide and the teaching strategies they use are matched well to the needs of each student. It is an expectation that practical, first hand experiences are provided for students to further enhance their learning wherever possible. Goals for lessons are made clear. Good teaching is maintained in a culture of high expectation, openness, continual self-evaluation, reflection and improvement. Professional development opportunities for staff are focused on school priorities and these are evaluated regularly through surveys and interviews for their impact on student performance. Effective management, maintenance and use of the building ensure a delightful learning environment which helps to make TYWLS a wonderful place to be. The school is particularly successful in its proactive approach to securing additional funding to further enhance students' learning experiences, for example, through the provision of additional Information and Communication Technology and financial support for students to pursue a much extended curriculum. A testament to the school's success is that it has been held up as a model for similar schools which have been set up subsequently in its image. The school successfully mentors a number of aspiring principals, many of whom go on to lead or even establish their own schools.

Quality Statement 5: 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 well-developed

The school reflects on its work well, its self-evaluation is accurate and it takes appropriate action to address areas that need improving. The school's Comprehensive Education Plan and Quality Review Self-Evaluation Form demonstrate that it knows its strengths and weaknesses, identifies strategies needed to effect improvement and monitors closely the effectiveness of actions it takes to achieve them.

Teachers know their students well through a good range of formative and summative assessments. There are well-developed systems through which all school staff members

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

are effectively involved in assessing and evaluating students' progress. This information is gathered from a range of sources, as outlined above. As a result interventions are effective in helping students realize their potential. The school is inclusive and works well in partnership with ISS, regularly reviewing IEPs and making suggestions to improve teaching and particularly differentiation, to ensure students of all abilities make the progress of which they are capable. Passing rates, standardized test scores, attendance rates, incident rates, graduation rates, college acceptance rates, financial aid rate, college retention rates and various surveys are regularly reviewed and strategies for improvement are discussed. The school conducts regular family conferences to discuss progress with students and their families. Teachers prepare narrative reports on their students with course descriptions and information on each student's performance. The standard of written evaluation and feedback to students and parents about their children's work is of a very high standard. Staff make regular phone calls home, send letters and schedule conferences with parents whenever necessary. They are proactive and parents value this. There are many opportunities to enlist the support of parents to help their children and to tackle underperformance. The school is concerned however, that within the current grading system they are not able to show the important value added to all students by the good work that the school does and would welcome the support and tools to help it record small incremental steps in academic, personal development and value added.

Other key observations

A high priority should be given to assisting the school in acquiring additional space in order for its innovative work to continue to flourish.

The school is effective in all areas of provision and is an excellent place for dissemination of good practice to others. However, this should continue without losing sight of the need for a period of stability and continuity with Assistant Principals in the school to support the principal in being able to sustain her outstanding work.

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English language arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 			X
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>		X	
<p>1.3 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>			X
Quality Statement 2: 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.	o	✓	+
<p>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 it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>			X
<p>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 warranting attention.</p>			X
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>			X
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>			X
<p>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</p>			X

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	0	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.			X
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.			X
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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
3.6 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
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X

Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	0	✓	+
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 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 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.			X

THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

Quality Statement 5: 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.	o	✓	+
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 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 interim 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 each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.			X