



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Young Scholars Academy of the Bronx**

**Middle School 289  
3710 Barnes Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10467**

**Principal: Vaughn Thompson**

**Dates of review: November 1 - 2, 2006**

**Reviewer: Richard Woolf**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Young Scholars Academy of the Bronx, Middle School 289, has recently been created as one of three new middle schools from the old MS113 which had served the community of Baychester. It was created based on current thinking to make the middle school sector more manageable in terms of numbers and for students to feel valued as individuals. The school benefits from Title 1 funding.

The school currently has 441 students enrolled with a slightly higher percentage of girls than boys. The main ethnic groups are 85% Black, 10% Hispanic and 5% from other cultures, including Asian. The number of special education students is 45 and 12 students are English language learners.

The main focus of the school is to prepare students for high school and college through imaginative organization and excellent instruction. The school now caters to students in grades 6 and 7 and by 2007 will take in a third grade level, bringing the number of students to around 600. The staff believes the impending increase in enrollment could provide an immense challenge considering the physical layout of the building.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is very clear about its aim and articulates it proudly within the school community.
- There is a growing number of dedicated and professional staff.
- Students are proud of their school.
- The principal has a clear vision and fully supports the student body and staff to achieve success.
- The school's organization is good, especially when taking into account the constraints of the building.
- Data is used well to drive instruction.
- Teaching in single gender classes is starting to impact upon the learning of individual students.
- Leadership and management are innovative in their approach to learning.

### What the school needs to improve

- Further improve students' behavior through the development of a well-defined behavior management system.
- Develop the awareness of staff, from cabinet level onwards, through of how data can be more effectively used to monitor and inform instruction.
- Ensure that professional development is tailored to meet the needs of the whole staff in improving student achievement
- Share more widely, across the cabinet and beyond, the responsibility for change.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

**This is a proficient school with some well developed features.**

The school has been open only 14 months and the principal has been in post for this short period. He is a first time principal, but is visionary, hardworking and thoroughly professional. These qualities are a good model for staff and students and have a strong influence on the school's culture.

Data is used well to inform decisions at all levels, whether for individual improvement or whole-school developments. A great deal of the data generated is in-house as there is little State or City data with which to compare student achievement over time. The school is aware of the need to analyze more in-depth information about the students, particularly to evaluate the experiment with instruction in gender-specific groups. The staff work well as a team, demonstrated both in meetings and in lessons.

There is no question that the dynamism and intellect of the principal runs through the whole school as teachers take up the challenge of raising standards.

### 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 principal has acknowledged that the more effective use of data-driven instruction will be to the overall benefit of the staff and students. To this end he has employed a mathematics coach who acts as a data manager. This person has broken down many aspects of official data into more accessible pieces of information. As a result, each student has very specific information recorded and teachers are now becoming aware of the detail of students' achievement in order to facilitate changes in their instruction.

School-wide interim assessments take place every six weeks in English language arts and mathematics, with outcomes recorded electronically by individual teachers in a database. This is beginning to impact upon the work of teachers especially as they analyze the differences between single-gender groups and the impact it will have on individual student learning.

At present, there is not enough analysis of the performance of gender and ethnic groups. The school has started to generate interim data based on previous official results that indicate that more students are reaching higher levels in the tests. It is also beginning to compare outcomes between grades and classes to see where instruction needs improvement. The principal acknowledges that a great deal more work needs to be done with data analysis for it to become the effective tool he imagines it to be in the future.

**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.**

Teachers are developing confidence in using data to inform their instruction. Teachers meet weekly to discuss their work. These meetings also provide an early warning system to identify those students who may be falling behind in their work or are experiencing difficulties outside of the school. Through developing effective use of the assessment folder, staff have up-to-date knowledge of the progress their students are making and can call upon specialist help when identified situations occur. The school is developing an imaginative program of instruction centered on single-gender groups and treating students as individuals to encourage a more holistic view of their education. There is acknowledgement of the need to improve writing across the curriculum and plans are underway to address this issue.

The principal has created sound systems for data use, but all staff do not currently fully embrace these or understand the impact data could have in raising standards. Support is needed for these staff. Despite these reservations, the amount of new data received by staff is having an effect on their instruction. In a meeting of teachers, the level of debate was high and challenging, but throughout was focused on how best to improve student understanding and development. The work of the literacy coach, mathematics developer and academic intervention director makes a significant contribution to the school’s efforts to raise achievement. There is a high number of special education students, and the staff are committed to identifying their needs early so that intervention can be initiated. Instruction with students separated by gender is a measure that the school has adopted to contribute to further success.

Specific goals are not yet shared with students so that they can be more involved in decisions about their education. Parents are encouraged to be active partners in their children’s learning. However, due to the school’s recent past, this is a strong challenge for the principal and his team as there is not a history of positive relationships with parents. Many parents remain difficult to engage.

**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 is developing a balanced curriculum with a clear focus on improving the basic skills of English language arts and mathematics while at the same time providing opportunities for science, art, music, physical education and social development. There is evidence of good teaching that engages the students, and this has had an overall effect on the tone of the school. There is still some work to be done to develop a behavior management system that will assist in enhancing learning opportunities for the whole school population. The students are aware of the need to try hard and to be successful. They have a great deal of respect for their teachers and for the principal, who one student described as ‘a big brother but one you did not fight with’. Staff know their students well, and students feel cared for within the school.

The staff are very aware of the principals' goals and have been very supportive of his challenging agenda. This is highlighted by the use of common planning time, scheduled into their work, to meet with colleagues and discuss future developments, share ideas and strategies. Data is being used carefully to examine how well particular skills are being taught, but not yet used sufficiently well to differentiate instruction. Staff are appreciative of the time to discuss their practice and are now accepting the responsibility of being more accountable for their student's progress.

The principal has creatively used the budget to ensure the most appropriate use is made of both human and material resource. The effect of this is evident in the increased use of specialized staff. The better use of technology in the classroom would be advantageous to further enhance student learning.

Attendance has improved dramatically and continues to improve. A challenging target of 95% has been set for the end of the academic year 2007. Tardiness poses an issue, but is being addressed directly with the parents. Parents are pleased with the positive effect of the tutorial program.

**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 proficient.**

The principal is building a strong team of like-minded individuals who are beginning to appreciate that the students in their care can succeed in life by being given a positive and encouraging start to their middle school education. He has made appointments to his leadership team that complement his own strengths and, given time, this team has the capacity to develop into a very effective unit. Teachers accept that he is a model of hard work and is a risk taker, and recognize that he is supportive of them. There is still some way to go for teachers to take more responsibility in effecting change within the school. Staff feel encouraged by the support of the cabinet in undertaking the good opportunities for professional development. However, there remains a great deal more to be done in this area for it to have a real impact on student learning.

The principal sets high standards and demonstrates these to the whole school community on a daily basis. He is well respected as being approachable and having an open door policy. He is constantly seen around the school and informally visits staff as well as conducting formal lesson observations. He has developed a detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of his staff. As a result of new initiatives, such as common planning time, advisory program and the use of the academic intervention team, staff are responding more quickly to the needs of the students. This is having a positive effect throughout the establishment. The school is becoming better managed and more orderly, which should benefit student learning. Parents see this as a positive step, when compared to their previous experience, and are supportive of the measures being taken. They would, however, like to become more fully involved in the improvement initiatives to further strengthen their children's opportunities.

**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 is in a transitional period in which the staff, following the lead of the principal and cabinet, are challenging previous practices as they become more proficient in the use and monitoring of data.

A greater emphasis is being placed upon diagnostic test outcomes. This is slowly beginning to enable comparisons between individual classes within grades to determine how best to improve aspects of understanding which are common across the whole grade and how best to tackle them, collectively or individually. The effective monitoring of special education students has led to a varied teaching approach to meet their individual needs. The same approach could be adopted for those students who show higher level skills and who need to be challenged more fully, especially those aspiring to levels 3 and 4.

The principal has made clear his intention to raise overall standards and is putting into place step-by-step milestones to demonstrate that progress is being made. As part of the review and monitoring process, he and his data manager have developed data sheets, available electronically to staff, which track interim assessment data and demonstrate how instruction is moving student development forward. These are regularly monitored by the principal and are starting to provide staff with an effective tool that enables them reflect upon their past work and future practice.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Young Scholars Academy (MS 289)</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	