



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Academy for Young Writers

High School 404

**183 South Third Street
Brooklyn
NY 11211**

Principal: Carolyn Yaffe

Dates of review: June 3 - 4, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Christina Lewis

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

Progress made since the last review
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

Academy for Young Writers is a high school with 203 students from grade 9 through 10. The school population comprises 49% Black, 25% Hispanic, 3.5% White, and 1.5% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 85%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 71% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is rigorous in collecting an extensive range of data to understand the performance and progress of each student.
- Strong teamwork and collaboration between staff in raising achievement are strengths of the school.
- The school has high expectations of academic success which they share with the whole community.
- The school has created a positive learning environment built on a good atmosphere of trust and respect.
- The principal and her leadership team have a clear vision for the direction and development of the school.
- The curriculum is effectively designed, well balanced and enhances student learning.
- Advisories and skilled guidance counselors support fully students' academic, social and emotional needs. .
- Parents value the opportunities they have to be involved in their children's education
- Students are confident, articulate and proud of their achievements.
- A wide range of focused professional development, including induction for new teachers, increases staff confidence and skills considerably.

What the school needs to improve

- Rigorously evaluate the year's work in order to refine practice and prepare for the next stage of school improvement and growth.
- Develop programs and strategies that will effectively address student engagement and lead to improved attendance.
- Ensure access to the high school curriculum, particularly for lower achieving students, by targeting areas of underachievement in English and math skills.
- Extend the good use of assessment and rubrics to include science and social studies.
- Further refine the process of using students' portfolios for gathering assessment evidence in order to further differentiate instruction.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The Academy for Young Writers has established itself effectively as a school that motivates and inspires both staff and students. The publication of three books of students' writing, which engage the reader through their reflective content and high quality writing, has reinforced this success. Students are rightly proud of their achievements and value the opportunities the school gives them to extend their learning and prepare for college. "We are helped to do our best and become independent adults and learners." students commented positively. Through its partnership with the Institute of Student Achievement and a very strong leadership team, the school, has developed successful assessment strategies and rubrics in English and math, but has not yet established similar strategies in other curriculum areas.

The school's rigorous data collection and analysis ensures it knows and understands the ability of its students. Staff are working on modifying areas of the curriculum to ensure that low achieving student are able to build up their skill base in order to fully access learning. Small classes in English and math have done much to address this, but the leadership team recognizes that more needs to be put in place to support these students. This was highlighted by the work of the inquiry team, who noticed a lack of writing skills in their target group. The team's research led them to develop strategies that would benefit all students. As a result, writing skills have improved across the school.

The school's comprehensive advisory program actively meets students' social, emotional and academic needs. It includes bi-weekly trips where students are encouraged to explore their city and the world beyond. On one such trip, students conducted a survey in Central Park and were amazed at how many different nationalities were visiting the park. Trips also include visits to colleges as part of the schools very effective pre college preparation program. As a result of these opportunities, most students are confident, articulate and eager to improve their chances of gaining a place at college.

The school has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement since the last Quality Review. It is still developing strategies to address the issues of fluctuating attendance that continues to be a problem. The principal is determined that if the students are really engaged in their work, this will motivate them to attend. This reflects the school leadership team's determined focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The impact of this focus has not yet been fully evaluated to ensure consistent practice across the school.

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 the student's progress over time.

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

The school is rigorous in collecting and using an extensive range of data. This information is easily accessible to all staff, who use it to plan instruction. As an empowerment school, do-your-own assessments are developed, based on teacher assessments, closely aligned to curriculum content. The school administers baseline assessments in the key skills as new students enter the school. Together with students' historical data, this builds a very clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of each student. The leadership team carefully analyzes trends and patterns in student achievement across grade and subject. Because of the thoroughness of this analysis, they have identified a lack of basic skills in English and math as an area for concern. As a result, the school effectively organizes small teaching groups for all students in these subjects. This arrangement ensures students receive more focused individual attention. The good work of the inquiry team supports this need, but the school recognizes that there is still more work to be done in adapting the curriculum to provide an initial focus on basic skills. The very small groups of special education students and English language learners receive good support, appropriate to their needs from specialist teachers. Current City data shows that the school has been successful in improving the achievement of these students. School leaders disaggregate data in detail to understand the progress and performance of different subgroups including by gender. The main finding has shown that boys need more support in the organization and preparation of their studies. The school's thorough advisory program addresses these issues methodically, for example, through peer mediation, organizational checklists and time management strategies. The school works closely with similar schools in its network to compare performance and progress.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

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

The school sets realistic and achievable goals for student achievement that challenge the school community to improve continually. A prioritized action plan details actions required to meet these goals. As a result, everyone has a clear understanding of what has to be achieved to secure the school's vision for high levels of student engagement and achievement leading to graduation and a college placement. Teamwork is a strong feature of the school and promotes close collaboration between all members of staff. This is evident through the effective work of the advisory teams who are responsible for the welfare and academic progress of students. Regular case conferencing and screening ensures that no student slips through the net. The school has established a clear credit program based on student portfolio assessments. Students are set individual goals for English and math, and have clear rubrics showing what is expected in their portfolio at the end of each teaching block. Rigorous credit recovery programs, including a summer school and after-school programs address the needs of students at

risk of failure. Similarly effective interventions support lower achieving students. The school recognizes, however, that more needs to be done to support these students in fully accessing the demand of a rigorous skill-based curriculum. Parents value highly the successful way in which the school keeps them informed about their children's progress. Their main point of contact is an advisory teacher who collects information about the student from all their classes and shares this with the student and parents in a family conferencing meeting. At this meeting, students' long-term goals are agreed, giving parents a clear idea of how they can support their child at home. The advisory teacher deals promptly with any ongoing issues through this channel of communication. As a result, parents are confident that the school, "Really knows and cares about our kids, and won't give up on them".

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's curriculum is aligned to State standards. It also offers many opportunities for students to participate in a wide range of activities both within and outside the school day. The school has established a clear curriculum framework with a very strong focus on developing writing skills in all curricular areas. As a result, the school has recently published several books of student work. The instructional team has successfully developed content matter and assessment rubrics in English and math. The school has yet to extend this good practice and develop similar rubrics for science and social studies in addition to establishing links between content areas. Students can take electives in drama and Spanish as well as participating in arts, music and other creative activities that enhance the curriculum. Students have the opportunity to sit Regents exams in science and math. As a pre-college preparatory school, the school also arranges visits to colleges and prepares students for the college application process. The school bases its instruction through exhibitions and portfolio based assessments. The school is applying the structure of 'Habits of Mind' as an effective strategy for learning. This enables students to perform at their own level and consequently differentiation is planned by outcome rather than activity. The school recognizes the fact that it needs to be more effective in addressing the wide range of students needs as it not fully integrated into consistent classroom practice. A major issue for the school has been student attendance that fluctuates throughout the year. The school has used various strategies to address this but attendance rates continue to be low. The leadership team is rightly convinced that if students are more engaged with their learning and really 'want to come to school' then this would not be such a problem. They are currently developing strategies and exploring instructional methods to actively engage students in their learning and to reward good attendance.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

The leadership team observes teaching regularly and provides critical but constructive feedback. Teachers value this and work hard to improve their practice. The

knowledgeable instructional team provides valuable support through coaching and modeling. Teachers have also developed a formal “critical friend” approach with colleagues by which they regularly observe each other and provide feedback. This has encouraged the sharing of effective practices, thoughtful reflection and evaluation of their own teaching. The school aligns professional development to the school mission and has prioritized areas for improvement. The leadership team or consultants provide high-quality, focused training, ensure teams and subject teachers meet frequently to plan units of study, in addition to regular case conferencing where students’ individual needs are discussed. The school organizes an intensive summer school for staff and new teachers, who soon become effective in their role and feel part of the team. A commercial package is effective in identifying students at risk due to social, emotional or academic needs. Skilled school counselors work alongside advisory teams to support them. The school strives to create a culture where students’ holistic development is considered carefully, in order to successfully prepare them socially and emotionally for college and the world beyond. A good guided discipline policy contributes to this and builds on positive behavior and good citizenship. Students say, “We are treated like adults and are taught to be responsible and make to choices for our own actions.”

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

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

The leadership team has a clear action plan with prioritized areas for improvement. In their second year of operation, they have been able to build successfully on goals established in the first year and further develop improvements for the success of the school as it increases in size. The principal said, “We have a very clear focus of where we want to be academically and we have made a very good start.” She has a crystal-clear vision for the school and works hard to ensure the vision becomes a reality within the school community. The school regularly monitors students’ progress and alters or adjusts programs when necessary. The school has yet to fully evaluate the impact of this year’s work. However, the leadership team has time planned for this in the next few months. Through their initial evaluation, since the last Quality Review, school leaders have a good understanding of the school’s strengths and weaknesses. As a result, they are in the process of organizing strategies to improve on current practices. The advisory teachers assigned to individual students are responsible for monitoring student progress through the year. Student portfolios of assessments and work samples are central to this process, in addition to other data collected by the school, including information about attendance and personal development. The school recognizes that student portfolios are still work in progress and that further development is needed to refine and improve this process. The school has devised effective strategies for students at risk of failure. These include tutorials, counseling and a credit recovery program. Regular meetings and effective communication between teachers at all levels, ensure that everyone understands and knows the strengths of each student and those of the school. As result, there is a joint commitment to constantly improve practice in order to achieve the very best outcomes for students.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Academy for Young Writers	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X	

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?				X	
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?			X		
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?			X		
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped