

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Life Academy High School for Film and Music

High School 559

**2630 Benson Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11214**

Principal: Kaia Mashariki

Dates of review: May 27 - 28, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Dr. Salvador A. Fernandez

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Life Academy is a high school with 119 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 40% Black, 38% Hispanic, 17% White, 1% Native American and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 83.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

School leaders and faculty communicate their high expectations through hallway displays and in letters addressing school-wide goals that are sent home to families. The principal effectively shares with all stakeholders his short and long-term plans to provide a quality education for students. Classrooms are well organized, print rich and display student's work to promote positive learning environments. The English language arts film study component, well supported by a partnership with an outside organization, provides students with opportunities to create short film documentaries based on various topics in their life. Teachers plan skill-based lessons to meet the needs of their students. However, currently, teachers do not plan differentiated lessons that motivate, provide exciting learning opportunities and challenge students at all achievement levels in all core subjects, including film study, to include project-based learning to improve student outcomes.

Content subject rubrics, aligned to State standards, are successfully used by students to self-assess and take ownership of their learning. A collaborative, positive environment enables teachers to comfortably share their knowledge and teaching strategies. Time is embedded into their programs to meet and discuss student performance and the development of social skills, allowing teachers to plan student work and academic interventions. However, teachers have not yet established good interdisciplinary connections between core subjects, including film study, to engage and excite students in making connections to reinforce their learning.

During twice weekly grade team case conferences, teachers review student work and develop narrative reports on student's academic and social growth. Teachers use grade level meetings to review grade goals around attendance and scholarship and make modifications as needed to their plans. Additionally, content level meetings enable teachers to review unit goals, student work and unit tests in order to monitor progress towards attaining set goals. They use this time to discuss student performance and to identify students in need of academic intervention. Assessment data is used successfully to group students in all content subjects. However, the school does not have individualized professional development plans for teachers allowing them to learn new skills and teaching strategies to improve student outcomes. Teachers meet with their students once or twice monthly to track progress towards credit accumulation and scholarship. At present, no structure is evident for students to set individual learning goals in core subjects, with clear next steps, to support improving achievement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a developmental long-term vision for the school, which includes interim checkpoints to celebrate success and makes adjustments as needed.
- The school has an effective system for analyzing, interpreting and recording formative and summative assessment data that is used well for grouping students in English language arts, math, social studies and science.
- There is a strong sense of trust and respect among teachers and students that promotes a positive climate, conducive to learning.
- Teachers collaborate during weekly case conferences to assess students' work and plan academic intervention activities to improve student outcomes.
- The school has an effective system to communicate with families about expectations for students in core subjects and attendance.
- The school has developed excellent organizational tools that students use to self-assess their work and help them develop next steps to improve their learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop interdisciplinary links between core subjects, including film study, to engage and excite students in making connections to reinforce their learning.
- Use the observation process to formalize a continuous tiered professional development plan to provide teachers with strategies for rigorous learning and differentiated approaches to promote students' learning.
- Build on the existing advisory structure to support teachers and students to jointly develop individual learning goals, including interim benchmarks, to strategically monitor and evaluate student's progress.
- Enhance the curriculum across all core subjects, including film study, to include project-based learning and differentiated lessons that motivate and challenge students at all achievement levels.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school does a good job in collecting, analyzing and interpreting formative and summative data to identify trends within sub-groups to track progress. This information is used effectively to drive instruction and to ensure that students are provided with interventions or enrichment to increase their academic outcomes. Teachers meet weekly by content level to analyze formative assessments from unit tests, class quizzes and other standardized exams to modify instruction in order to target and address students' skill deficiencies. Students' content area binders enable them to keep all their work together, so that they can track their own progress and reflect on their academic performance. As a result, they have an investment in, and ownership of their learning.

The school has developed a data-driven culture that empowers teachers to find ways to improve student outcomes by carefully looking at formative and summative results. Teachers review student work and scholarship reports to assess student progress during grade level meetings. They also look for emerging grade-level trends and patterns which may prevent learning. The school communicates well with families about student progress, performance, attendance and behavior concerns. Progress reports, sent home between each report card, keep parents informed of students' progress. During a daily advisory period, students work on school-wide projects and meet with teachers to go over credit scholarship and credits accumulated in order to keep them on track for meeting their goals. Projects that are organized by the social worker focus students on improving their social skills to promote academic success. The guidance counselor also meets with students on a regular basis to go over credit accumulation, scholarship report and next steps in order for students to track 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 proficient.

School leaders and faculty communicate their high expectations to the entire school community by connecting real life experiences to students' learning. Hallway displays celebrate student work and rubrics provide students with feedback to guide their studies and promote ownership in their learning. Rituals and routines are clearly embedded in school practice, which has contributed to a positive climate. All stakeholders know exactly what the goals are for the year. Classroom environments are print-rich and conducive to learning. The school provides teachers with feedback from school leader

walkthroughs to ensure that school-wide goals are being adhered to in every classroom and to provide clear expectations for students.

The Comprehensive Educational Plan was developed by the school leadership team, parents, teachers and students. All constituent groups collaborated by looking at each of the accountability reports from the Department of Education. In addition, they analyzed formative and summative data which they used effectively to set school-wide, specific departmental and class goals. These goals are posted throughout the hallways to create a goal-setting culture that promotes clear expectations about students learning.

Teachers meet regularly and conference with students around class goals specific to attendance and scholarship, and then make modifications as needed. The grade level teams keep student content binders to track progress towards credit accumulation and scholarship. However, during the advisory period teachers are not consistently setting individualized student goals in core subjects that include the precise next steps to enable students to achieve their long-term goals.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

School leaders and faculty effectively collaborate in content grade-level meetings to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of their students. Teachers are able to meet regularly to discuss students’ needs by analyzing formative and summative data. Teachers’ lessons mainly focus on ensuring that students take and keep notes that are well organized in a notebook. Uniform rubrics provide students with a vehicle by which they can assess their learning.

Teachers’ maintain daily standards-based lesson agendas in all content areas to provide students with clear expectations for all classes that guide them through their learning process. At present however, teachers do not include interdisciplinary links between core subjects, including film study, to engage and excite students in making connections to reinforce their learning. Teachers collaborate during weekly case conferences to assess student work and to plan academic intervention activities to improve students’ outcomes. Students appreciate the fact that teachers provide extra help as needed to ensure that they understand their work. However, teachers do not yet incorporate project-based learning and challenging differentiated activities that motivate, provide exciting learning opportunities and challenge students at all achievement levels.

There is a strong culture of trust and respect among teachers and students, which contributes to students’ academic growth. As one student stated, “We feel supported in a caring family atmosphere where everyone knows each other”. Parents are positive about the work that school leaders and faculty are doing to promote a positive learning environment. Students have a voice and feel safe in the nurturing, caring environment at the school. The school community is becoming more proactive in addressing concerns from the community.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Professional development is informed by classroom observations, both formal and informal, and inter-visitation between teachers. Professional development is also determined by carefully examining achievement data and dialogue from content level meetings. It is difficult for the principal to provide teachers with regularly scheduled common time to meet because of the size of the school. However, teachers meet informally to go over student work, revise the curriculum and make organizational decisions within their grades. At present, the school does not have a formal, tiered professional development plan that provides teachers with strategies on rigorous learning and differentiated approaches to promote students' learning.

The inquiry team has furthered their work school-wide, which focuses on students organizing their work in binders to adding note taking as a skill to help them in college. The team target population consists of 15 special needs grade 9 students performing in the lowest third in English language arts and having difficulties with comprehension. The team conducts twice-weekly case conferences reviewing scholarship reports and formative assessments to track student's progress. Students use graphic organizers and rubrics to guide their learning. As a result, students have shown improvement in their core subjects throughout the term and the inquiry team note-taking templates have been adopted school-wide.

The school does a good job in developing students' social and academic skills through advisory periods and guidance provided by the social worker. School leaders and faculty have established effective partnerships with outside organizations, such as New York University and Kingsborough Community College to expose students and teachers to the film industry by providing real-life experiences for them to develop mini documentaries. This exposure energizes the teachers and excites the students to learn.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 proficient.

The founding principal has a developmental long-term vision for the school. One element of this is to have a viable film program which includes interim checkpoints to celebrate success and make adjustments as needed. Students research, then write about various topics for their film which strengthens their literacy skills. As stated by the principal, "our students will be model citizens as we prepare them to be successful for life." Through the advisory program students are being tracked to ensure that they are moving towards meeting goals. The distributive counseling social worker develops teachers' skills to assist students through their learning experience. The principal has incremental benchmarks to ensure that students are meeting or exceeding school-wide goals in order to fulfill the vision and create an environment of creative thinkers. Although, the principal's vision is clear and has laid the groundwork for this endeavour, teachers are still in the implementation stage.

School leaders and faculty use a detailed data sheet to analyze formative and summative data to monitor instruction, student performance and progress. This is used to evaluate the impact of organizational and curricula decisions throughout the year. Suitable adjustments are implemented as needed. Families are also successfully tracking their child's scholarship progress through agendas, progress reports and reflection logs that are sent home. In addition this provides parents with at-home strategies to guide their child to meet school-wide expectations. As one parent stated, "the school goes way beyond expectation to communicate with us."

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Life Academy high School for Film and Music	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>				
	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>				
	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DY0, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?		X		
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X	
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X	

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

<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed