

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Young Women's Leadership School

High School 610

**105 East 106 Street
New York
NY 10029**

Principal: Dr. Althea Bradshaw-Tyson

Dates of review: March 30 - 31, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Elaine Gorman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Young Women's Leadership School is a middle and high school with 416 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 34% Black, 61% Hispanic, 3% Asian students, 1% White and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 0% of the students enrolled and girls account for 100%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.1%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 85% eligibility.

Established in 1996, the school has the distinction of being the first all-girls public school to open in the nation in at least twenty-five years. It serves as a model for other Young Women's Leadership schools in and outside of New York City. The principal, now in her second year, has expanded the school to include the sixth grade.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The Young Women's Leadership School has an exceptionally well-established and highly regarded culture of college entry for all students that binds leaders, staff, students, and parents in a common vision for the school and each student. With a four-year college enrollment twice the national average for women of color, the school community now looks to further its mission to support students to college completion. This highly-focused work is supported by a cohesive leadership team and a self-reflective and committed staff. The 100% college acceptance rate among seniors and the school's exceedingly high scores in the areas of academic expectations and engagement in the Learning Environment Survey both support comments by parents that their children are receiving "a remarkable experience". Students describe the school as a competitive and highly supportive environment, and articulate that their options for college and their future extend well beyond the peers in their community who made school choices with less intention on improving their academic performance.

Building on the recommendations from last year's Quality Review, the school has deepened its focus on differentiation to create a common understanding of student learning, which now permeates organizational and instructional practices. There are substantial practices in scaffolding of classroom instruction and multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of learning. Decisions about the use of resources are made through the lens of improving the capacity of staff and the outcomes of students. Extensive opportunities exist for students to expand their research skills and community service, as well as to receive additional supports to achieve at high levels.

The development of learning goals for individuals and groups is an embedded practice. This work is evolving, but not yet consistently developed at the concept and skill level to provide more precision in the identification of instructional changes. The administration is continuing to examine patterns and trends in order to develop more strategic school-wide action plans, recognizing the benefit of explicit benchmarks and timelines and including professional development plans based on secure observations of classroom practice.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- There is an exceptionally well established and highly regarded culture of college entry for all students that binds leaders, staff, students and parents in a common vision for the school.
- Consistent use of relevant formative and summative data results in an ongoing understanding of individual, group, subject and school performance, which informs instruction and organizational decisions.
- Parents have valuable opportunities to be involved in their child's learning through regular and open communication with teachers and staff about their child's academic and personal progress.
- Highly committed staff regularly set rigorous learning outcomes for all students and engage students in robust self-assessment and peer assessments, as well as giving specific feedback to help them set and achieve their goals.
- Differentiated instruction offers a wide range of experiences, including the arts, research and community service, resulting in exceptional student engagement, ownership of learning and personal development.
- Teachers benefit from highly personalized professional development support that fosters reflection as well as providing options for researching effective instructional techniques.
- A cohesive leadership team drives the school forward with consistent high standards in all academies, sharing the vision with the community to improve student outcomes by refining practice and programs to meet students' needs.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all school plans include timeframes for interim measures of progress aligned with scheduled evaluations of student progress.
- Build on course and unit goals, as well as promising practices among teachers, to further delineate student learning goals at the concept and skill level to enhance existing efforts to extend and support student outcomes.
- Further align teachers' professional development goals with observation feedback, supported by a consistent and coherent professional development plan, to continue the robust self-reflection on pedagogical practices.

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 well developed.

The school's process for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data is a central and effective part of the school's functioning, with multiple sources of data utilized. There is an increased use of ARIS, the New Visions' data tracker and customized tools to understand students' learning strengths and needs. Staff are enthusiastic about the application of new tools to better plan for students and to communicate fully to families about the progress that students are making towards their learning goals. Through cabinet, grade-level, and department meetings, there is consistent use of relevant formative and summative data, resulting in an ongoing understanding of individual, group, subject and school performance, which informs instruction and organizational decisions. The school is currently developing processes to further its collaborative analysis of class-based student work and assessments. Individually and in teams, teachers work to determine root causes for specific learning gaps. They work across content areas to implement and measure the impact of instructional practices on the progress of individuals on groups of students.

Implemented through an advisory period, an explicit and expanded transcript review has resulted in students taking ownership for their own performance, evidenced by student comments and their improved academic record. Many students said, "I came in as an average student and now I ask every teacher what I have to do to get a 90%. They work with me to reach that goal. They educate me to be a better woman." Progress reports prepared by all staff between formal report cards, along with multiple opportunities to complete, revise and extend work, allow for greater monitoring of individual student progress and achievement of college entry standards. Parents have valuable opportunities to be involved in their child's learning through regular and open communication with teachers and staff about their child's academic and personal progress, which occurs through conferences, emails, phone calls, and websites. There is a community culture of collective accountability.

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.

Within a total school community focused on college success for all students, the highly committed staff regularly set rigorous learning outcomes for all students. They engage students in a robust self-assessment and peer assessment, as well as giving specific teacher feedback based on specific rubrics to help them set and achieve their goals. There is a pervasive desire among staff to continually improve as educators, resulting in

the school extending its focus on behavioral and performance goals to develop more precise instructional goals. Teachers regularly share exemplary practices of diagnostic assessments and individualized goals and benchmarks for students. Teachers organically develop opportunities to align their work across content in order to support and extend learning needs of students. Parents are able to discuss their child's next steps and students are motivated to reach and exceed targets. The collaboration among staff, students, and parents is embedded in school-wide action plans and permeates the school culture.

The inquiry team's work for the current year evolved from its work with English language learners last year. This year's focus is on improving middle school students' ability to translate between verbal and algebraic expressions, equations and inequalities in math. In this effort, the inquiry team set a specific goal of increasing the performance of the target population from 58% to 80% on a customized Acuity test that solely assesses this skill. The work of the three math teachers, administrators and leadership development facilitator from the New Visions support organization demonstrates deep analysis of the impact of language in mathematics. However, it has not yet resulted in determining incremental instructional practices required to build sufficient language skills. A discussion of the work has taken place in grade teams with literacy as a primary focus of school-wide instruction.

Although not consistently embedded, the school has begun to build on course and unit goals, as well as promising practices among teachers, to further delineate student learning goals at the concept and skill level in order to enhance existing efforts to extend and support student outcomes.

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 well developed.

Led by a strong instructional leader, the staff, committed to continuous learning for themselves and their students, deliver a rigorous curricular program with strong instructional practices. Sustained practices of writing across the curriculum assist students in refining their writing skills and their understanding of the concepts and processes of the content. Staff have developed a common lens for differentiation and quality instruction which is consistently observed throughout the school, providing opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels. Differentiated instructional practices offer a wide range of experiences before, during and after school, including the arts, research and community service, resulting in exceptional students' engagement, ownership of learning and personal development.

Exceptional flexibility in grouping practices is well-established by staff and well understood by students. Ongoing assessment in classrooms and diagnostic testing is used regularly to provide heterogeneous groupings for substantial project-based learning and homogeneous groupings to support and extend students based on their learning goals. Parents and students commend staff for preparing high levels of instruction, making lessons visual, interdisciplinary and with opportunities to express their point of view through activities such as debates.

Morning tutoring is mandated for students who fall below the well-established 70% threshold in any subject area. Regents-based test preparation and open after-school

tutoring are also available with a large number of students participating. In addition to resource room services for students with individualized educational plans, programming for struggling readers is provided. With high expectations as a norm, instructional and organizational decisions to establish an accelerated math program for students in grade 8 and Advanced Placement courses in five subject areas have resulted in increased student achievement and college options.

Students are competitive with each other but more so with their own academic performance. They eagerly seek to improve their averages and are keenly aware of their progress. They appreciate the communications with teachers and the frequent opportunity to revise their work for higher grades, based on specific feedback by peers and teachers. Students describe the peer pressure as positive motivation to do better and students assist each other. One student in grade 7 developed a website and posts the homework every night for her classmates.

The school is wrapped in an environment of exceptional trust and respect among all. The strength of the school's instructional program is clearly evidenced in the high Regent's exam pass rates, the rate of credit accumulation by students, the consistent 95-100% graduation rate, and the 100% college acceptance rate among seniors.

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 well developed.

The close administrative team shares the responsibility for setting goals with teachers, determining professional development and providing formal and informal feedback, while allowing teacher leadership to become an embedded practice. An exceptionally self-reflective staff value opportunities to collaborate in grade and content teams, both to meet the needs of shared students and to learn from each other. New teachers benefit from peer support and from the new teacher mentor provided by the New Visions network. Intervisitations and off-site attendance at workshops are regularly supported by a flexible administration that also has provided a series of professional development sessions tailored to individual and groups of teachers, informed by an analysis of student needs. An analysis of the Progress Report indicating slower than expected progress by middle school students has led to the implementation of the work of Judith Hochman, which is resulting in sustainable literacy practices. The administration frequently visits classrooms and prepares written feedback. Not yet refined is a tightly aligned system of teachers' professional development goals with observation feedback, supported by a consistent and coherent professional development plan to continue the robust self-reflection on pedagogical practices.

The school community values a relentless mission to educate the whole child. Students consider the school their second home. The college counselor is an influential adult in students' lives due to his intensive work on their behalf and the success students have in entering post-secondary institutions of their choice. These extensive support services from school staff and substantial partnerships with colleges and community organizations ensure that the personal, social, emotional, and academic needs of students and families are met so that aspirations are achieved.

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 well developed.

The school structures support ongoing and robust examination of student outcomes. A culture of flexibility allows for instructional and organizational changes, both school-wide and by subgroup, in classrooms and through extended-day provision. Teacher leaders bring specific areas of student need to the surface which inform decisions made by a responsive administration. These needs span academic and social-emotional areas, as well as addressing needs of subgroups of students. School leaders involve the school leadership team effectively in the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan, but less so in ongoing monitoring and revising. Parent leaders are quick to add that they feel well informed about the progress of the school, including improvement opportunities. Students and parents appreciate the limits the school has to provide sports and additional performing arts programming, but are quick to add that teachers work overtime to offer extended-day options in order to further meet their academic needs and personal interests. An intellectually thoughtful principal has aligned her personal goals to the school's goals, culminating in a strong vision that drives the school's excellent culture.

The school is further enhancing the monitoring and revising of goals by deepening the analysis of patterns and trends that emerge at team and content meetings needed to regularly refine school goals. As referenced in last year's Quality Review, school plans continue to require more precise timeframes for interim measures of progress aligned with scheduled evaluations of student progress. This benchmarking at a deeper level supports the total school's strong instructional work.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Young Women's Leadership School	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	▷	✓	+			
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>	△	▷	✓	+			
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>	△	▷	✓	+			
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							
△	Underdeveloped	▷	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed