

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

The FORWARD School of Creative Writing

Middle School 287

**3710 Barnes Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Adrienne Phifer

Dates of review: March 23 – 24, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Elizabeth White

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The FORWARD School of Creative Writing is a middle school with 347 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 68% Black, 29% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% others. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 42% of the students enrolled and girls account for 58%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 91.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 76% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

A principal who has set high expectations for students and staff leads the FORWARD school. She gives strong leadership, which is providing the vision and drive for continuous improvement. To plan effectively to meet the needs of students, the school has worked to develop systems and practices to gather and disaggregate a variety of data. The school collects data systemically and analyzes it effectively to support planning and goal setting in English language arts, math, and social studies. The exemplary progress made by students in the greatest need of improvement demonstrates the impact of this.

The school is working towards goal setting for both teachers and students with interim benchmarks in all core subjects. The school plans to undertake a more systematic evaluation of its plans to provide for more in-depth management information to monitor progress towards goals and the impact of the school's achievement improvement strategies. Strategic planning by administration focuses on data. However, formal monitoring and evaluation of progress is not evident. The school is working towards a deeper understand of differentiation to offer enough challenge to sufficiently meet the needs of all students. Differentiation of instruction is not, at present, creating sufficient challenge for higher achieving students.

The school has employed staff effectively and nurtured outside partnerships leading to the improved personal growth of students. The arts residency and creative writing programs are enrichment activities offered that enhance learning both during the day and after school. A paradigm shift from a discipline system focused on negative behavior to one that emphasizes the positive has resulted in an improved school climate.

Parental involvement has increased significantly, through the school's positive and creative approaches. Parents feel that the administration holds faculty accountable for high expectations for their children. They observe that the principal and staff are visible, accessible, and willing to support their needs. Families receive regular feedback from teachers about their children's progress. The addition of a dean and the efforts of the parent coordinator support student academic and personal development and improve communication with parents.

The leadership team is striving to build upon the schools' strengths to further develop instructional practices and maintain the rate of progress made by the students. Everyone involved is committed to the best possible outcomes for all the students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has high expectations for improving student achievement.
- School leaders and faculty analyze a range of data sources to gain a good understanding of student progress and plan interventions where appropriate.
- Administration and faculty have worked successfully to improve the tone of the school to provide a safe and respectful learning environment.
- Parents are enthusiastic about the level of communication about the progress of their children and are very appreciative of the academic and personal support provided by staff.
- The school's support services and partnerships support students and their families in continual learning to promote students' personal growth and development.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish a systematic approach by which teachers of all core subjects are involved in comprehensive school-wide planning to inform student short- and long-term goal setting based on benchmark data with specific next steps for improvement.
- Improve the use of data to inform instructional planning in order to create learning activities that fully match the students' achievement levels.
- Ensure that differentiation of instruction, learning activities and student groupings provide high levels of appropriate challenge for all students at all achievement levels.
- Develop with teachers, goals and plans for their professional growth and the improved achievement of their students that reflect and support attainment of school-wide goals.
- In strategic decision-making, evaluate progress toward defined school-wide goals and make associated changes through regular, formalized interim checks against measurable targets.

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 utilizes formal and informal data for analysis to assess the learning outcomes for their students in English language arts, math and social studies. It utilizes state examination results, Acuity interim assessments and skills-based tests to get an accurate understanding of what each student knows. This analysis enables teachers to instruct based on student needs and the school to design future assessments to monitor progress in those areas of need. The school's review of data has led to a good understanding of student progress and plans for interventions that are shared effectively with families.

The school has focused its analysis on subgroup data that has led to interventions to support the particular needs of these student populations. The focus of these interventions include English language arts, ELA "boot camp", subgroup-specific class concentrations (English language learners, special education and gender), and an extended day program for the lowest academic performers. These efforts have resulted in exemplary proficiency gains on the past state assessments in both math and English language arts. The inquiry team works successfully with students, identified through use of data, to improve achievement in reading.

School leaders and faculty are accessible to parents and provide multiple opportunities formally and informally to communicate on the learning needs of their children. Parents appreciate the academic and personal supports provided by the school. There is a stronger collaboration with the parents' association this year resulting in effective communication between parents and the school. Parents state that the emphasis on "rewarding positive behavior has made the children really love school".

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

Faculty and parents state that the principal has high expectations for improved student outcomes. Teachers receive regular constant feedback on their instructional practice through written formal and informal observation reports. The school provides parents with monthly feedback on student progress that enables them to support students at home. It has implemented a new positive behavior model that has reduced inappropriate behavior and promotes students to focus on academic learning.

School leaders and senior staff evaluate the previous year's Comprehensive Educational Plan to set new school-wide goals. The administration and senior staff meet weekly to plan the next steps for professional development based on trends from classroom visits and interim assessment data. The fact that teachers are not yet included in this school improvement process limits the effectiveness of the school's goal setting efforts. Student goal setting is a new initiative this year with a heavier emphasis on English language arts and math than that in social studies. The school set initial goals in October and is in the process of completing a mid-year goal assessment school-wide. While there are established long-term goals, students are not always clear about the next steps in learning to achieve the long-term goals.

The school uses progress reports distributed between the reporting periods in each subject, to communicate learning goals to parents. Prior to major assessments, the school holds seminars for parents to offer strategies on how they can help their students at home, which parents say are helpful. In addition, it communicates attendance and behavioral expectations through notices, the *Voice Master* automated telephone system and parent goal conversations. This enables parents to keep track of their children in order to support them socially and academically. The parent coordinator, as well as a newly hired dean, also supports these efforts.

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.

The school makes effect use of baseline, interim/unit assessments and midline assessments to inform their efforts in supporting students in meeting their learning goals. In all classrooms, teachers display enlarged item analysis. This enables students to compare their results to those of their peers. They can readily identify their own individual needs as well as class cohort needs. The 'friendly public competition' encourages students to do their best. Teachers are working towards a more careful use of data to inform lesson planning to meet the needs of all students at every level. Administration reviews lesson plans twice a month to ensure that teachers are planning differentiated lessons and to provide support as necessary. Differentiation is not yet systemic. After the identification of trends in classroom visits and lesson plan reviews, administrators see the need to focus school-wide professional development to support teachers with creating differentiated tasks that offer sufficient rigor for students on all academic levels.

Academic intervention services now push into classes to provide better alignment with classroom instruction resulting in continuity and improved outcomes for students. Curricula conversations are also moving from grade specific discussions to one that spans grades 6 to 8 to promote vertical alignment for all content areas. Though not yet implemented, the school plans to programmatically embed the arts into the curriculum and offer it to all students in all grades in an effort to make the arts central to all core subjects.

Because of last year's Learning Environment Survey, the school has made effective efforts to address the social and emotional needs of students, resulting in an improved school tone. The school has moved from a punitive student discipline system to one that

accentuates the positive. Students who exhibit positive attitudes toward learning participate in monthly reward activities. Teacher volunteers are creating the foundation of a school-wide positive behavior intervention strategies initiative. This aims to expand further the school's efforts toward maintaining a culture of respect that promotes positive student outcomes.

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.

Administration set goals with teachers at the beginning of the year, refined them in December to align with school-wide goals, and is currently working towards completing an assessment of individual teacher progress towards meeting them. Professional development has largely focussed on the Comprehensive Educational Plan goals in data analysis, interdisciplinary writing and differentiating instruction for all teachers. Weekly grade/department meetings with the coach and mentor allow teachers to collaborate and assess student data to evaluate classroom practices to improve student outcomes. Teachers receive both formal and informal feedback after lesson observations by administration and support staff, but often feel overwhelmed due to the feeling of having to do "everything at once". Individual teachers elicit the support of both coach and mentor as needed. Individualized professional development planning is not yet formalized which impedes on the effective assessment of school-wide professional development efforts.

Several outside organizations assist in promoting the academic and personal growth of students. The school collaborates with the 47th police precinct to offer students seminars in life skills and internet safety. The Beacon program offers after school instructional support with their tutoring program. The DreamYard organization provides a full time teacher/art resident to support the school's creative writing instruction and art initiatives.

Teachers state that the school is moving in the right direction. They feel supported by administrators and support personnel. Teachers meet weekly to discuss their practice and share strategies for improving instruction. In addition to administration, the mentor and staff developer provide evaluative feedback based on their classroom performance. They also provide modelling through demonstration lessons. Classroom practice has improved as a result, with evidence of more teachers grouping their students for instruction. Even with these supports, newer teachers in particular would like to participate in even more professional development sessions to develop further their practice in differentiation of instruction and classroom management.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

Administration meets with coaches weekly to analyze data and monitor progress towards teacher practice improvement. In addition, the school has done a careful

analysis of accountability tools such as their Progress Report, Learning Environment Survey and last year's Quality Review to plan strategically this year. This analysis led to an improved school environment, a move towards student and teacher goal setting and accurate planning for the Comprehensive Educational Plan. The inquiry team's work has led to improved academic intervention strategies for the lowest performing students in English language arts resulting in improved interim assessment data. Evaluation of school-wide goals, however, is not systematized to determine progress towards improving student outcomes.

Administration and senior teachers work with teachers to embed approaches aligned with the Comprehensive Educational Plan goals. They follow this up with observations to see if training has taken hold. However, while the school carries these processes on throughout the year, they do not involve specific timeframes or measurable targets. The school plans to meet formally twice a month to "constructively talk about academics across all grades in each core subject area". The school also plans to include teachers throughout the school improvement planning process to accelerate professional and student learning.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The FORWARD School of Creative Writing	△	▷	✓	+
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, DYQ, 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