

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

Olympus Academy

High School 635

**755 East 100 Street
Brooklyn
NY 11236**

**Principal:
Seth Schoenfeld**

Dates of review: November 16 – 17, 2009

**Lead Reviewer:
Jacqueline Grossman**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Olympus Academy is a high school with 202 students from grade 9 through grade 12. It is a transfer high school affiliated with the Center for Interpersonal Development, and opened its doors in September 2008. The school population comprises 85% Black, 11% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 0% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 76.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

In the 14 months since it opened, Olympus Academy has made a good start towards developing solid instructional coherence. All of the students enter Olympus Academy over-age and under-credited. The energetic principal motivates the tireless staff well and they are wholly devoted to the school's mission of reconnecting these disenfranchised students to their education. Together they have created a climate in the school that is non-judgmental, accepting and comforting.

An intricate benchmark and communication system every two weeks is the hallmark of the school. Students rely on the clarity and routine of these benchmarks to help them stay focused on short-term goals, which are developed with the singular long-term goal of enabling them to catch up on credits so that they can graduate. All aspects of the school's work, from curriculum and assessment development to student support services are evaluated using the lens of the benchmark results. This is particularly relevant since, at this point in the school's development, very little State summative data is available. Benchmark outcomes have thus far been used to revisit assessment practices and to influence student scheduling. Similarly, there is very close monitoring of teachers' own growth and development. Almost the entire faculty consists of either first- or second-year teachers. The instructional support and ongoing feedback that they receive have helped them to move well ahead in their understanding of data, assessment and pedagogy. They are engaged in collaborative planning and action research that has helped them to streamline units of study. The principal's door is always open to both students and teachers, modeling an environment of trust and safety.

Although the school has implemented many systems effectively in its first year, some areas require further development. Classroom instruction is not sufficiently differentiated to meet the precise needs of students, particularly those who are very delayed in literacy or those who are quite ready for greater sophistication. The emphasis has been on meeting task or academic behavior benchmarks, rather than on the development of skill. As a result, some students are "going through the motions" towards their high school diploma, rather than truly feeling prepared for post-secondary success. This is reflected in the school's collaborative processes as well, which are not yet focused on specific students and precise outcomes. Although the school is a highly cooperative and collaborative place, these structures are not embedded in the daily routines and still seem somewhat informal and impermanent.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school culture promotes a strong sense of dignity and personal accountability, successfully reconnecting students to their education.
 - Students unequivocally express the view that the school has “renewed their hope for a better future” because “if you don’t succeed here, it’s not because you were not supported.” An understanding of each student’s specific social and academic needs is developed during admission, enabling the school to tailor the type of supports offered, ranging from basic academic support and tutoring to finding shelter for homeless students. In addition, a highly engaging “Learning to Work” program has provided students with professional and financial incentives to achieve in school.
 - The school carefully maps out a plan with each student that helps them progress towards graduation at a pace they can maintain. Most of the students arrived at Olympus Academy with far fewer than 10 credits, many with none. The overwhelming majority of students have accumulated more than 11 credits during the first year of the school’s existence, with many students accumulating more than 15.
- Effective systems for organizing and analyzing data positively impact decision making for the whole school, individual teachers, and counselors.
 - A bi-weekly benchmark assessment system is the cornerstone of the school. It informs virtually every decision made by and for students, from their own determination to attend and participate in class, to the adjustments made to curriculum along the way. Assessments results are combined with attendance, participation, homework and class work to form a profile for each student of their progress towards graduation. The clarity derived from this routine holds everyone accountable for their own decisions. This organic data then provides the school with global view of trends and patterns, enabling mid-course corrections or enhancements to school-wide practices.
 - A “speed conferencing” protocol occurs every other Wednesday after benchmarks are distributed. This system promotes clear four-way communication between students, teachers, counselors and families. It enables counselors to work closely with students to ensure personal accountability and has created an atmosphere in which there are no excuses for failure.
- The school’s partnership with its community-based organization results in deeply customized and effective attention to every student.
 - Each day begins with the counseling staff greeting every student at the door. Counselors are visible in classrooms all day long, touching base with teachers. An exciting feature of this partnership is that the CBO maintains contact with the students for two years following graduation, and counsels them through the college application and entry process.

- The system of daily “exit tickets” from each class gives counselors immediate data to scaffold support for students so they can meet the next benchmark. Counselors are in constant contact with families or relevant agencies, often conducting home-visits and making daily phone calls, including for positive reasons, which deepens the level of trust the students have in their counselors.
- The school’s instructional focus and mission are reinforced in hiring practices, engagement of external resources, and feedback to staff.
 - Teachers participate in effective external professional development and do so willingly on weekends and after school. In addition, they are motivated by ongoing feedback from the principal, both formally and informally on a daily basis. The hiring and selection process for teachers is highly thoughtful and thorough, resulting in a staff that not only meets students’ academic needs, but brings talent and enriching abilities to the community. The school has had one hundred percent teacher retention from its first year which is a result of the affinity teachers feel for the school and the support they have received.
 - Every teacher is observed formally six times per year and the outcomes of each observation drive the next phase of goal setting for each teacher.
- Well-organized support for teacher development promotes the accelerated progress of the mostly novice staff, who are already highly reflective.
 - The school’s instructional partnership with the Center for Urban Education provides the staff with ongoing support from a dedicated coach, who has customized plans for each teacher, agreed upon by the principal. These plans include short- and long-term goals, reflective of the schools’ goals as a whole, and the weekly meetings between teachers and the coach enable teachers to monitor progress towards these goals.
 - Teachers are paired for “action research” projects, and are reflecting on a wide range of topics such as deepening infusion of literacy skills in to content areas, developing more sophisticated questioning techniques, and refining assessments. These teacher pairs meet weekly, and the whole staff meets twice a week to engage in collaborative examination of student work, review of benchmark data, and curriculum planning.
- The principal and faculty have a clear vision of the further development of the school, and engage in ongoing long-term planning that has been driven by the results of their first year.
 - The summer retreat and the mid-year retreats afford the staff an opportunity to reflect on the results obtained in their first year and as a result, several curricular areas have been revamped and new curriculum maps developed. This also reflects the growth of the teachers.
 - A review of school-wide data has indicated that writing is not consistently strong across the content areas, and does not benefit from the use of a rubric which has been developed collaboratively and agreed by all teachers.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop teachers' expertise in differentiated instruction for all students and increase opportunities for student-directed learning.
 - In an overwhelming majority of classrooms, all students perform the same task, using the same resources, at the same time. Effective use of technology is not apparent in most classrooms and classroom environments, for the most part, are not conducive to group work or set up to support student independence.
 - Widely varying degrees of teacher skill with regard to questioning, awareness of resources, and comfort with student ownership of class conversation is highly apparent. Most classrooms consist of "teacher-student-teacher-student" interactions that result in a few students dominating. While students are attentive, they are not uniformly engaged.
- Incorporate skill- and outcome-based goal setting in to the benchmark system so that students see growth in the elevation of their intellectual abilities.
 - Currently the benchmark system is focused on tasks to be completed or academic behaviors to be demonstrated. Student goals for themselves tend to be based on doing more homework or participating more in class, rather than, for example, on improving their reading ability or becoming more skillful in math. Students were not able to describe why they were working on certain skills or their own improvement in academic terms. Some students express concern over being ready for college, both in terms of personal independence as well as academics.
 - Teacher feedback on student work is inconsistent. While some teachers utilize rubrics, precise next steps to help students improve their work are not always given and feedback is often cursory. Student work exemplars vary widely in quality across the school.
- Refine the staff's collaborative processes to include a more defined inquiry approach that directly links to improving precise student outcomes.
 - The staff's efforts at action research are not usually grounded in target populations of students, but rather in "things we notice" about classrooms. Precise instructional strategies based on the needs of groups of students are not consistently explored.
 - Teachers' schedules are not arranged to promote collaborative inquiry. Leaders and staff said, "the whole school is one big inquiry team." While it is true that the staff is collaborative in spirit and has worked together to develop curricula, a system is not in place to ensure that, as the school develops, its common core value of collaboration is perpetuated and systematized as a non-negotiable.
- Continue to focus on building alignment across and between subject areas, particularly in literacy skills, to ensure a coherent experience for all students.
 - Although the school holds as a value and a goal the explicit teaching of literacy in all subject areas, there are insufficient books and materials to

reinforce this vision. Student work exhibited in the school is not selected using uniform criteria and often does not demonstrate a path towards college-readiness. The amount of authentic writing that students are engaged in also varies widely.

- Course pairings such as the English language arts and history classes that are both focused on literature of war and propaganda reflect some emerging evidence of interdisciplinary planning, but opportunities to form content or grade level teams are missed, as are opportunities to develop differentiated curriculum maps and outlines that would support all types of learners.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Olympus Academy	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			X	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?		X					
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed