

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Young Scholars Academy

Elementary School 636

**280 Hart Street
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Danika LaCroix

Dates of review: February 8-9, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Evelyn Santiago

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Young Scholars Academy is an elementary school with 269 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 57% Black, 39% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% Asian, and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 92.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Young Scholars Academy for Discovery and Exploration is in its second year of existence. The principal, teachers, parents, and students share very strong beliefs that the school has developed rapidly in its pursuit of providing support and quality education for all students. As a result, a climate of trust, where everyone feels welcome is evident and the school is an integral part of the community. School leaders and faculty make strategic organizational decisions that positively affect instruction and student achievement. The school has refined the use of instructional resources including the literacy and math coaches, academic intervention and character development programs to good effect. The numerous after-school programs, that include weekend activities, align with school-wide academic goals and extend learning experiences for a majority of students. In addition, the school offers many enrichment opportunities for students in the form of clubs and pullout programs. This increases student time on task, and has improved the quality of implemented school programs. The principal is highly committed to continued development and refinement of effective instructional strategies. Consequently, the school provides extensive opportunities for teachers and support staff to engage and collaborate in collegial learning experiences for their professional growth. One of the school's focus areas this year is lesson differentiation. However, while there is differentiated instruction in most classrooms to address the needs of individual students, there is inconsistent instructional rigor in questioning, discussion, and classroom projects to promote thinking and higher order skills for high performing students. The school has made good strides in collecting and analyzing a wide range of summative and formative data that informs planning at all levels and shows what students know and can do. However, data analysis does not consistently extend to an evaluation of systems and structures in order to make needed adjustments for continued improvement of school-wide practices. Teachers gather data to set individual goals for students at the classroom level and at the team level for target population students to ensure achievement. Students maintain individual achievement data and personal goals in binders. This enables students to reflect on their progress and to take ownership of their learning.

While parents are members of the school leadership team and are included in the discussions pertaining to school goals, they do not participate in the construction of the goals. This limits parents' role to the approval process. Additionally, although there is some communication with families, there is inconsistent communication regarding individual student goals, progress, and next steps to maximize student achievement. Therefore, parents have limited understanding of how to support learning at home. Community partnerships support the school's efforts and enable students to apply their learning to the real world.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and faculty make informed and effective organizational decisions to support improvements in learning.
 - The principal has programmed the school to allow resource personnel to conduct push-in programs in all classrooms during English language arts and math to maximize time on task and minimize instructional interruptions for students. Additionally, the school hired a math and a literacy coach to support teachers in their instructional growth. This has led to increased levels of differentiation and goal setting, resulting in increased student participation and progress in both content areas.
 - The school has established numerous after-school programs, including programs on Saturdays. These programs, with over 90% of student participation, provide students instruction in English language arts and math and offer student membership in teams and clubs such as the Robotics Team, the Chess Club, the Latin Club and the Fencing Program. ABC News and Educational Ambassadors from China visited the school and celebrated the school's program design as a model for extending student learning and enhancing their academic progress.
- The school has created a nurturing environment where students receive a high level of support to accelerate their personal and academic development.
 - The school purchased and effectively implemented a character development program. The program focuses its curriculum on establishing school-wide character development themes, such as respect, to promote student motivation, engagement, and positive social behavior.
 - The school provides many helpful opportunities for one to one and group interactions among faculty such as the Scholar Study Team. This staff collaboration focuses on student needs by examining individual student attendance and academic and emotional development, and by creating plans with agreed next steps for continued growth.
- School leaders and teachers diligently gather relevant data using school designed tools to identify student needs, plan instruction and provide intervention strategies to address learning issues.
 - School leaders consistently gather summative data from item analysis of State tests and student attendance reports to determine areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. The administration captures this information on school designed data sheets. The tool allows school leaders to target school-wide initiatives and allocate resources to help reach these goals. This analysis has resulted in increased workshop opportunities for teachers on differentiated instruction and extending the school day until six in the evening to provide additional time to address the needs of all students.

- Teachers and students maintain data binders containing student results on summative and formative assessments such as Acuity, running records, writing on demand, and other student work. This data, used to inform progress and next steps, ensures learning of required skills in the school curriculum. This has also increased consistency and coherence of assessment practices and classroom data gathering protocols.
- The school uses data-informed processes to reflect on progress toward short and long-term goals and to make adjustments to ensure achievement of academic expectations.
 - The principal and the instructional team, which includes the coaches and assistant principal, analyze the results of formative and summative assessments logged in data spreadsheets. This is to ascertain whether student progress is in line with predicted outcomes. This has led the school to reorganize groups of students for targeted instruction at key intervals.
 - After reflecting on the success of students in individual classes, the principal met with the teachers and decided to provide additional supports to build capacity in differentiation of instruction and the use of ARIS. Because of this, the school instituted a series of workshops to increase teacher confidence in the use of data in lesson planning.
- The school provides a variety of professional development opportunities to support teachers in the improvement of instructional practices.
 - Teachers receive multiple professional development opportunities that include common planning time to meet, support from coaches, and intervisitations to share and learn from colleagues. In addition, there are collegial visits to other schools and attendance at workshops and study groups held on and off campus. This has resulted in improved implementation of the school's targeted programs, such as Writing on Demand, which has led to greater student success in content areas.
 - The school has a strong and consistent belief in the value of authentic feedback to students. Consequently, reflections on student work are part of collaborative teacher teamwork that focuses on deepening the level of constructive comments throughout the building. Post-it notes on student work in classrooms demonstrate this priority.
- The school's extensive collaborative partnerships with outside agencies are supportive of student achievement and promote continual learning.
 - Programs and clubs such as Studio in a School, robotics, swimming, golf, fencing, and cheerleading among others, provide opportunities for students to expand their experiences and pursue their interests.
 - Partnerships and/or grants from organizations such as New York Polytech, Long Island University, Afterschool Corporation, and the Brooklyn Public Library extend opportunities for students to apply their learning and enhance their academic development. Student teachers from Long Island University provide additional individual and small group support to students.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that higher functioning students receive challenging instruction to develop their higher order thinking skills to maximize learning.
 - Currently, classrooms use differentiated instructional strategies to provide various entry points for students performing at specific levels. However, teachers do not consistently provide academically rigorous instruction to accommodate the needs of high functioning students to promote thinking and higher order skills. As a result, not all high achieving students receive appropriate challenge in all lessons to stimulate their interest and engagement.
- Extend and expand communication with families on their children's progress and academic needs in order to address next steps toward meeting goals.
 - The school informs parents of student performance in the form of reports on reading levels and report cards. However, the school does not inform parents of their children's curricular goals, progress, and support needed to achieve the goals, at regular and frequent intervals. As a result, parents are not able to articulate in-depth understanding of their children's needs to help maximize their academic progress.
 - Although the parent coordinator is currently working to increase parents' use of the ARIS link, not all parents have developed the confidence to log on to connect with the school in support of student learning.
- Provide opportunities for families to engage in decision making to promote active involvement and leadership in the school community.
 - Parents are members of the School Leadership Team and were included in approving the goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan. However, parents do not sufficiently participate in the development of school goals and, as a result, are not as involved in school decision-making processes as they could be.
- Establish structures to evaluate systems for gathering and analyzing data regularly to ensure effective development of organizational and instructional practices.
 - School leaders conduct formal and informal observations and provide feedback based on findings. However, there is inconsistent follow-up in monitoring the implementation of recommended items to promote improved classroom practices.
 - While the school has grade level and school-wide inquiry teams, no school-wide protocols are currently in place to assess the workings and findings of these teams on a continuous basis.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Young Scholars Academy Elementary School	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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed