

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

The Forward School of Creative Writing

**Middle School 287
3710 Barnes Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467**

Principal: Adrienne Phifer

**Dates of review: March 18-19, 2010
Lead Reviewer: Sheryl L. Watkins**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Forward School of Creative Writing is a middle school with 331 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 68% Black, 29% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 91%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal is dedicated and committed to accelerating student progress. She empowers staff to collaborate in order to provide consistently challenging learning experiences for students. Relationships across the school are warm and positive, allowing staff and students to focus on their teaching and student progress. A newly created behavior support system, developed collaboratively by administration and staff, sets the foundation for a caring environment where students and parents know what is expected, feel safe and secure, and appreciate the clear expectations for student success. An on-line program offers students and their families' information on current performance, attendance, homework and student work products, but does not yet provide for the reciprocal sharing of information in order to promote greater achievement.

A strong focus on collaboration has begun to flourish as administrators and teachers routinely meet to analyze data, monitor student progress and revise instructional plans and strategies for students. However, this data analysis has not yet reached the students or parents, preventing them from assisting in setting specific targeted goals with interim benchmarks for their personal development. Currently, they are unable to identify their challenges, set data-based goals or monitor their own progress. Teachers set professional goals for their own development that are supported by both in-house and out of school professional development opportunities. As a result of monitoring the effectiveness and success of these collaborative learning experiences, the school has secured additional funding to extend this practice. This ensures the collaborative development of units of study and the effective delivery of curriculum. However, data-driven engaging learning experiences for all students are not yet fully in place. Instruction is differentiated for groups of students, but does not yet address the needs of the highest performing students in all classes and subject areas. As a result, not all students are achieving as well as they could.

Students are engaged in their learning and want to succeed. Teachers frequently provide them with rubrics in order to develop their work and ensure that they are on target for producing work to meet the assignment expectations. Teacher feedback is however, often limited to short conferences with the students and a summative grade upon completion. Information on next steps for student progress is not consistently shared, preventing students from taking responsibility for their learning, extending their thinking skills and developing stronger focus on accelerating their own progress.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's positive leadership and focus on improving student outcomes is fully embraced by staff and parents, and is a driving force in continually improving student achievement.
 - o The principal provides the time and resources needed to enable teachers to build units of study, develop pre-tests, and build curriculum based on what students know and need to learn. Strategic year-long plans are regularly revisited, ensuring the coherence of instruction and the ongoing review of achievement. Individuals and teams of staff measure progress towards mastery of critical skills and modify their instructional strategies wherever needed. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of students scoring at levels 3 and 4 on State assessments.
 - o A positive behavior support program provides students and their families with a framework under which to build and monitor their progress toward instructional and social/emotional development. Developed to address the challenging behaviors that interfere with learning, students report that "there is more order" and parents state that there is now the expectation that students can "reach for the top."
- Through regular review of a broad range of data, school leaders and teachers have an ongoing understanding of the performance of all students, which informs organizational and instructional decisions.
 - o An on-line data system, updated at least weekly by teachers, allows for a transparent view of student academic achievement across all subject areas for students and families. This provides all staff with the facility to analyze the accomplishments and challenges for all the students, promoting content area focus on areas in need of further progress, and acknowledging achievement.
 - o Item analysis of all pre-tests, summative assessments and unit tests provides an overview of grade-wide proficiency as well as identifying areas of challenge for students. This enables the teachers to identify and support students appropriately, promoting greater achievement and success.
- Professional collaboration is a high priority and faculty benefit from varied opportunities to share and develop strengths as individuals and members of the school community.
 - o Effective scheduling allows teachers to meet regularly in both grade and subject areas. This year the principal has promoted a "big time launch" in using data analysis to determine the effectiveness of instruction and the identification of strategies for improving outcomes. Using a common protocol for meetings, the teachers assign their own rotating roles in order to take ownership of student progress and develop distributive leadership.
 - o Professional development opportunities, both external and in-house, provide groups or teams of teachers with a common understanding of

subject matter and data analysis in order to cohesively study, plan and implement instruction that focuses on improving student outcomes. Teachers and administrators are noting an overall improvement in student performance as a result of this work.

- The school is proactive in identifying and securing additional funding, resulting in supports to promote the acceleration of teaching and learning.
 - Significant funding has been secured to enable the school to build a state of the art library. This provides students with materials and resources to build on their learning and to develop their research skills. Funding to continue supporting the after-school tutoring program and to enable teams of teachers to attend collaborative professional development training has been secured, thus allowing the school to continue to focus on improving student outcomes.
- Relationships across the school are warm and supportive, based on open communication, and students, teachers and parents feel valued and take pride in being members of the school community.
 - Parents appreciate the multiple communications they receive from the school through the system of on-line grade books, phone messaging and the email availability of staff members. In addition, their voice is heard and acknowledged through the school leadership team. This allows them to be active participants in the school, and they report that they are better equipped to support their children at home.
 - Students say that they feel safe and cared for in the school. They value the new behavior support program, stating that “the school is stronger and better,” allowing them to know what to do so that they can focus on their learning.
- The school is a strong learning community that is well focused on student outcomes, with a vision to continue to accelerate learning.
 - Professional learning teams have become an integral part of teacher responsibilities. By reviewing student achievement data, teams of teachers promote the strong focus on instruction and strategies to support accelerated growth. Grounded in the workshop model of instruction, teachers work collaboratively in setting goals and developing plans to improve student outcomes by sharing promising practices and successes. Evidence of success can be identified in the significant improvement in work products in English language arts and mathematics.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve the use of data to inform instruction, processes of learning and work products in order to differentiate all learning activities, so that all students are presented with appropriate challenges in their work.
 - Small-group instruction exists in most subject areas, and teachers provide students with options from a pre-determined list of individual projects. However, these groupings and outcome choices are not securely based on analysis of data. As a result, the school does not always effectively support students, particularly those at the higher levels of achievement, inhibiting greater acceleration of their learning.

- o An after school tutoring program provides extra help for students who are at-risk, or those struggling with content. Higher achieving students serve as peer tutors. While effective in supporting some students, enrichment activities are not in place, resulting in a lack of differentiation to meet the needs of all students.
- Ensure that students and their parents are involved in data-driven goal setting that includes higher levels of challenge in order to accelerate student progress.
 - o Students develop general goals at the beginning of the school year, enabling them to focus broadly on their learning. Progress reports, in narrative form, are issued during the months that report cards are not distributed. Although these provide direction for students to improve, no short-term objectives or differentiated plans for progress are included. This prevents students from knowing whether they are on track to meet their goals and what they need to do to improve, thus reducing their development as independent learners. In addition, parents are not clear about how they can assist their children at home.
- Strengthen teacher's responses to all student work to include guiding comments to convey high expectations and clear next steps.
 - o Teachers sometimes provide students with rubrics to identify the competencies for successfully meeting the requirements in advance of their work. However, there is currently inconsistent use of the rubrics, as some teachers use them only as a grading tool. This prevents students from knowing their strengths and areas for improvement prior to completing assignments, thus hampering their ability to independently monitor their own progress.
 - o Hallways display an abundance of student work, and student portfolios demonstrate progress over time. However, teachers do not provide students with precise next learning steps to focus their attention on specific targets for improvement in order to accelerate their progress.
- Consistently include interim checkpoints in goal setting across the school, in order to monitor the progress and growth of individuals, groups and sub-groups of students.
 - o Although teachers have a good understanding of individual student progress, the progress of groups and sub-groups is less well monitored to identify patterns and trends in performance. As a result, not all sub-groups are maximizing their potential.
 - o Goal setting processes across the school do not consistently include interim checkpoints to monitor all student progress in order to make the necessary adjustments to curriculum and delivery.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Forward School of Creative Writing	△	▶	✓	+
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>	△	▶	✓	+
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>	△	▶	✓	+
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