

Quality Review Report 2010-2011

Young Women's Leadership School of Brooklyn

Middle School 614

223 Graham Avenue

Brooklyn

NY

11206

Principal: Talana Bradley

Dates of review: January 28 and 31, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Young Women's Leadership School of Brooklyn is a middle school with 197 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 65% Black, 34% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian/Pacific Islander students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 18% special education students. Girls account for 100% of the students enrolled. The average attendance rate for the school year 2009 - 2010 was 91.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The faculty skillfully design curriculum-based assessments to inform instructional decisions so that each student can work towards mastery.
 - Excellent use of State and periodic assessment item analyses has resulted in important changes including adjustment to the grade 7 math curriculum, with the addition of two units on integers to remedy last year's shortfall, and enabling faculty to pinpoint individual and general areas of need. Strategic design and tracking of "do-nows", exit slips, and teacher-made math assessments that require substantial writing and critical thinking, generate precise insights and adjustments to instruction. Student work reveals the positive impact of these teachers' refined assessment practices.
 - Baseline writing assessments precede each humanities unit, which allows for agile adaptations to the needs of each class, and guides target setting, grouping strategies, and effective individual conferencing. Final projects are evaluated on standards-aligned rubrics to inform future planning and students' next steps. Electronic tracking of reading achievement against rising benchmarks provide a fluid understanding of progress and timely interventions to accelerate learning.
- A rigorous observation process combines with highly reflective practice and differentiated supports to enable the faculty to deliver high quality instruction.
 - A refined hiring protocol that elicits input from staff, union representatives, and students after candidates' demonstration lessons, results in optimal selection of new faculty for seamless induction into the culture and values of the school. As a result, the school's focus on embedding literacy is evident across classrooms, and teachers rise to the challenge of providing consistently high quality lessons.
 - Faculty use a nationally recognized tool for setting professional goals that align with the school's instructional focus. Teachers are then matched with a differentiated set of internal and external supports and are held accountable for reaching specific recorded interim benchmarks. As a result, all teachers can give specific examples of how their instruction has improved.
- The principal allocates resources wisely to maximize support for student learning needs.
 - A school-based option enables highly effective grade and department teams to collaborate at least twice weekly to improve instruction based on needs identified in their examination of assessments and student work. A daily check-in ensures staff are proactive in addressing areas of concern and can share best practice. Differentiated small group enrichment is scheduled three times a week to maximize student-learning time. Nearly all students in a new high quality accelerated literacy class have already surpassed their reading goals.
 - Grade-level teams share responsibility for a small number of students in classes designed around the high-needs students. Electronic sharing of students' observational data enables faculty to take responsibility for their cohort and act upon the revealed patterns.

- An inclusive high-energy environment actively promotes student social-emotional growth and leadership capacity as conditions for academic excellence.
 - Students meet three times a day with a faculty advisor who helps them identify their academic strengths and weaknesses as they set goals. Advisors provide an executive skills curriculum to build habits of practice, coach for student-led conferences, and interface with parents. As a result, there is intimate knowledge of the students' needs, a system to keep parents apprised, and follow-up on strategies that make parents partners in learning.
 - The school's expectation that students demonstrate leadership on and off campus has led parents to praise their daughters' character development. Models, such as the peer tutor who helped another pass science, are publicly celebrated. A new teacher has instituted a weekly, well-attended "safe space" which students say allows them to talk about social and emotional issues. As a result, students show great enthusiasm, attendance is up, and suspensions have been slashed by 80%, despite an increase in enrollment.
- Thoughtful planning connects organizational, professional development, and material requirements to outcomes, to systematically phase in improvements to build an instructionally coherent learning school.
 - The school's multi-year strategic plan to support its growth into a grade 6-12 school is founded on a set of core values articulated by all constituents, and understood as the means to the overall goal of 100% college attendance. Data based discussions of a comprehensive range of data underlie the building-level action plan, which embeds on-going monitoring and evaluation metrics related to academic and social-emotional growth along with relevant organizational and instructional practices.
 - Parents and students play influential roles in school decision-making, which builds their allegiance. Students report that their request for a "plus" to each performance category motivates them to persist until they reach mastery, and parents are pleased with the weekly recess and art they requested.
- Highly effective collaboration on teacher teams leads to creating and sharing an expansive knowledge base to meet the needs of diverse learners.
 - The investment in training teachers in facilitation skills early in the year is part of the school's deliberate attempt to embed distributed leadership. It has resulted in highly efficient meetings where teachers use protocols to push forth specific learning agendas for themselves and the students. Teachers express that they are expected and empowered to be part of the school's leadership.
 - Through scrutiny of student work samples, inquiry teams have developed nuanced understandings of where learning breaks down. The humanities team teased out the relationship between context clues and comprehension, and developed lessons so students apply specific strategies across the grades to improve their ability to work through complex text. The math team's inquiry resulted in the adoption of a research-based problem-solving approach and error analysis, new practices that evidenced by student work samples is dramatically impacting improved outcomes.
- Strong structures exist to monitor and revise curriculum, instruction, and organization so that student learning progresses.

- Regular cabinet meetings use data to review and adjust decisions to ensure that students are effectively served by the organizational decisions of the school. For example, the school added recess to their schedule and have noted that despite a 50% increase in enrollment, disciplinary actions have significantly decreased. This kind of ongoing scrutiny of data ensures that changes do have the intended consequences and allows for further adjustments as needed.
- Several teams meet regularly to review student academic progress. Their focus on struggling readers led to significant gains in the scores among their most at risk students, including a doubling of their 8th graders scoring proficient on their periodic assessment scores in ELA.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine curriculum to improve alignment across subject areas so that internal understandings of rigor fully match existing and evolving State standards and enable the students to master distinct stages so they are ready for the next level.
 - The school, in its third year, designs its curriculum purposefully around enduring and high-leverage standards, and enriches it with high quality art and two Regents courses. However, this year's focus on two common core literacy standards are not yet fully supported by grade- and course-specific expectations for the volume and quality of writing to ensure that student learning is pushed in this cross-curricular priority. A superb, demanding, and highly engaging moot court where students assumed different roles to critique early industrialists lacked the integration with the English department necessary to allow students to demonstrate their learning with a fully standards-based written assignment.
 - Although excellent structures exist for ongoing revision of curricula, tasks and rubrics are not yet refined based on student outcomes and the standards in a way that ensures higher order skills are embedded coherently and consistently across grades and subjects.
- Strategically plan differentiated supports and extensions to ensure high levels of challenge for all students, to maximize their potential.
 - Lessons are typically differentiated for groups of students, with multiple points of entry and small-group opportunities to focus on skill-specific work and activities that build on student interests. Extensions have improved through "challenge tasks" but products and homework are generally uniform for all students. This reduces the level of challenge for some higher achieving students, especially those in integrated co-teaching classes that students cited as "easier". Posted work corroborates variations in the expectations of writing across subject areas.
- Refine rubrics and calibrate scoring criteria to ensure that classroom grades accurately reflect student achievement of the standards.
 - The school has excellent structures for improving assessment practices. It has realigned its standards-based report cards to the evolving State standards and teachers examine student work collaboratively to generate a uniform understanding of quality. However, the report cards assign the "high performance" category to work that is only proficient and grades factor in behavior and habits of practice. As a result, internal pass scores overestimate the number of proficient students, reducing the utility of classroom grades for evaluating academic achievement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2010-2011

School name: Young Women's Leadership School of Brooklyn	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 Align assessments to curriculum and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, 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

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>	UD	D	P	WD
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

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>	UD	D	P	WD
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

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>	UD	D	P	WD
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	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed