

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Academy for Young Writers  
High school K404

183 SOUTH 3 STREET  
BROOKLYN  
NY 11211

Principal: Courtney Winkfield

Dates of review: February 6 - 7, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Cathy Powis

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Academy for Young Writers is a High school with 379 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 63% Black, 30% Hispanic, 3% White, 1% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 26% of the students enrolled and girls account for 74%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 85.8%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is well-developed.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal promotes organizational decisions that strategically support focused instructional goals and action plans through a distributive team leadership model that consistently improve instruction and student outcomes. (1.3)
  - Several configurations for structured professional collaborations are scheduled 4 to 6 periods each week and effectively facilitated by teacher leaders. Grade teams engage in business meetings, inquiry teamwork, and curriculum development. Department teams develop Design Your Own (DYO) assessments aligned to interim targeted instructional goals and as well as continuously refine and revise curriculum. 'Teachers as Critical Friends' groups support each other in their yearly goals. The Special Services team meets on Monday morning in addition to special education Integrated Classroom Teaching (ICT) teachers who regularly co-plan lessons that support the co-teaching model across subjects and grades. Additionally, guidance counselors lead case-conferencing teacher teams to address specific struggling students' needs. These teams of teachers share common groups of students and work diligently to understand what they need to succeed holding themselves accountable through frequent analysis of student work. As a result, all teacher teams' work is aligned to school's targeted goals and long range plans by knowing exactly what students need in order to make progress and support them towards mastery as evidenced in continuous refinements and revisions to curriculum, assessment and instruction, students' individual goals, and rigorous student work products.
- Highly developed school wide assessment practices explicitly aligned to the curriculum ensure the effective analysis of student progress that leads to adjustments in teaching and learning and increased student achievement. (2.2)
  - Supported by administration and the data specialist both grade and department teams are intimately involved in the DYO process. Levels of student understanding and skills are captured in learning progressions. In turn, well-crafted DYO rubrics are designed to measure a basic learning progression for each skill and drive the content, structure, and design of each DYO task matched to a scoring guide explicitly written by each subject-specific team of teachers. Additionally, drafts of DYO assessments are continuously vetted as a process of reasoning from evidence. The validity and reliability of assessments are ensured through the consistent structure for norming at the beginning of each DYO scoring period. Iterative changes on DYO documents lead to greater validity. Following a detailed analysis of meaningful content- and skill- specific benchmark DYO data, action plans are created by each teacher strategically detailing adjustments to curriculum and instruction including this year's school wide goal emphasizing the use of evidence to support an argument. This year teacher action plans are matched with the development of student-driven action plans to further improve individual progress. As a result, midyear growth data by department and grade level from 2010-11 to 2011-12 show significant growth in skills and content with the greatest gain of 20% in 12th grade.
  - Each unit of study across grades and subjects ends with a team-created final exhibition, i.e., a detailed, rigorous performance task focusing on specific content and one or more components from Habits of Mind such as viewpoint, evidence to support position, and relevance. In response to school wide instructional goals exhibitions incorporate opportunities for students to conduct research and use supporting evidence and are aligned to the school's DYO process. In turn,

detailed, exhibition-specific rubrics determine unit skill and content levels. Consequently, teachers are able to identify strengths and needs, track progress, and adjust instructional decisions and learning goals for all learners with particular attention to special education students.

- The observation of classroom teaching and continuous analysis of learning outcomes to evaluate student progress are systematic and effective in promoting professional growth and teacher reflection that results in improved instruction. (4.1)
  - Incorporating a research-based rubric, school leaders and faculty collaboratively designed an 'Academy for Young Writers (AFYW) Instructional Framework Rubric' that clearly articulates expectations for teacher practice. In turn, written, rubric-based goals for professional growth are detailed by individual teachers in collaboration with school leaders. As models of instructional leadership the principal and assistant principal developed a consistent and highly effective rubric-based system for formal and informal classroom observation reports that accurately identify strengths and challenges directly aligned to individual teacher goals and broader school wide instructional goals. In turn, teacher coaches and critical friends are assigned to support teachers in areas in need of improvement. Coaches document focused work with individual teachers on a weekly basis that includes discussions of concrete teaching strategies to try and a series of intervisitations to share feedback. This constant cycle of observation, support, and feedback is complemented by an 'AFYW Mid Year Reflection' whereby each teacher meets with the principal and/or assistant principal to determine progress toward goal achievement through a review of scholarship data, students' DYO benchmarks, work products, observations to date, professional contributions, and 'critical friends' work. Goal recommendations, adjustments and next steps are clearly delineated in a written reflection form that is signed by all present. This embedded process for supporting teacher development is used to adjust professional development plans and teacher tenure and retention. Impact in improved student performance is evident in an 87% projected cohort graduation rate in June, up from 85.5% in 2011 and 84.6% in 2010.
- Instructional coherence across grades and subject areas is reflected in standards aligned curricula emphasizing higher order thinking and rigorous tasks that cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
  - Standards-based curriculum maps describe a yearlong sequence of content learning and skill development for each course. DYO skills and content are chosen based on these year-long curriculum maps. Following a detailed gap analysis using DYO data from June 2011 across disciplines and baseline student work samples from the first two weeks of school, teams found that students perform weaker in the area of using evidence to support their written arguments. As a result, this year's teams focus their inquiry work around students' performance in the area of using evidence in their writing. This work informs the focus of the English department as they developed the Common Core tasks at each grade level in conjunction with the 2011-12 citywide instructional expectations. Furthermore, embedded in curricula and academic tasks, referred to as exhibition tasks, are five rigorous Habits of Mind, i.e., viewpoint, evidence, connections, relevance, and supposition, which emphasize the higher levels of thinking that students must demonstrate. Additionally, all 9th graders take five periods of writer's lab in addition to English language arts to shore up their writing skills so that they can meet the demands of high school work and beyond. As a result, midyear DYO assessments reveal that 9th graders made significant benchmark growth ranging from 10% to 33% across all core subjects. As a result, the 2010-2011 Progress Report shows that the school makes progress in closing the achievement gap by a gain of 5.0 additional credits for exceptional graduation

and/or Regents outcomes by students who entered the school at the lowest performance level.

- DYO performance tasks and exhibitions are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and are designed mindfully and specifically to give all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and special education students as well as higher achievers, the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do. The data gathered comes directly from student work that is assessed using carefully developed rubrics that describe a range of cognitive- and performance-based "landmarks" for each skill embedded in the tasks. Rubric criteria and indicators are described in terms of performance or product, to ensure accurate measurement of student skill levels from the written work they create in response to the DYO items. DYO rubrics, assessment tasks, and scoring guides are modified for ELLs and special education students when appropriate. Subsequently, curriculum maps, exhibitions, and the DYO process are continuously refined and revised following results of each cycle.
- Embedded, differentiated teaching strategies offer additional supports for chosen key standards that ensure consistently high levels of student thinking and outcomes. (1.2)
  - The school has an unwavering belief about how students learn best that is based on the Habits of Mind, a meta-cognitive process of teaching students how to think. Teacher teams and individual teachers write detailed, coherent lesson plans using a wide range of strategies that emphasize the "Understanding By Design" approach to meeting the needs of all learners especially ELLs and special education students. Modeling, guided practice, high level questioning and application, and feedback cognitively engage students. Teachers use SMARTboards to vary modalities and provide one-to-one facilitation for individual and groups of students to target instruction. Also, assigned paraprofessionals are an integral one-on-one support for students with special needs to understand and successfully complete academic tasks. These differentiated approaches allow all students to explore standards-based essential questions and learning objectives matched to appropriate text complexity. As a result, student work products reflect high levels of rigor and critical thinking with an emphasis on using evidence to support an argument, the overarching school wide goal aligned to CCLS.
- High priority is placed on professional development that results in a multi-faceted and differentiated approach that builds adult capacity with special attention to new teacher development. (4.3)
  - A cohesive distributed leadership model enhances the collaborative culture that exists at AFYW and is evident in continuous cycle of professional development. Last June, planning goals and expectations were forecasted based on student data for the current school year. This has become an annual school wide practice. In August, faculty and school leaders meet for rubric revision, curriculum vetting, DYO document drafting, and goal-setting for the upcoming year. Throughout the year weekly school wide professional development sessions and dedicated staff development days are calendared to address school wide goals and Common Core initiatives. Support to teachers is further differentiated through feedback from frequent, short cycles of classroom observations by school leaders and coaches. Coaches support individual teachers to achieve differentiated professional goals. Critical friends groups and teacher teams provide another forum for professional growth and include inter-visitations and study groups around common instructional themes. This tiered approach builds adult capacity and leadership that improves instruction across classrooms. As a result, credit accumulation is increasing across grades with the highest gains evident in 10th and 11th grade on track to achieve 10 or more credits, up from last year by 14% and 19% respectively.

- The principal is a proactive leader who develops highly successful and efficient systems that create a data-driven learning community well focused on building adult capacity and improving student outcomes. (5.2)
  - In response to the school's long-term action planning aligned to the Common Core Standards, integration plans have begun to adjust and revise the school's grading policies. Initiated by the data specialist a voluntary team of teachers developed a Standards-based Grading (SBG) program that articulates standards-aligned mastery objectives, broadly categorized as either content- or skill-based learning goals from their curricula. Student work is then explicitly graded with respect to these learning goals, using a rubric that describes the learning progression from beginning to excelling. In turn, teachers can communicate clearly and specifically with individual students and their parents about their progress in achieving mastery of each learning goal. Consequently, this program increases coherence between the Common Core expectations and assessment and grading practices with a deeper understanding of mastery of learning goals.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Increase opportunities for student voice and participation in school-wide decisions that support both personal and academic growth. (1.4)
  - School leaders and faculty are unified in creating a safe and inclusive environment that fully supports both personal and academic progress and performance for all learners. In response to an analysis of the school's Learning Environment Survey (LES) a plan for professional development was put into place with the goal of revising and rearticulating the shared discipline policy, referred to as "Guided Discipline". In turn, level 3 suspensions have dramatically decreased this year. However, although students have a voice in their daily advisory classes, the school has not yet established a structure or venue for student voice and a more active role in matters that influence school-wide decisions. The lack of students' voice in school wide decisions hinders further opportunities for student ownership of their personal and academic growth.
- Expand on existing structures for communicating with and engaging families in key decision-making, school activities, and an open exchange regarding student progress, to build even stronger parental buy in and support for school goals. (2.4)
  - Parents appreciate the opportunity to log on to a web-based program to monitor their child's grades, assignments, and attendance. Teacher teams plan family conferences are planned by teacher teams to support student progress complemented by monthly progress reports and newsletters sent home. However, parent participation in school activities, meetings, and empowered decision-making is still hampered by a low rate of parent attendance as expressed by parents. The lack of high parent involvement in activities and meetings limits their voice in shared decision making.
- Build on existing high expectations for academic growth to include more opportunities for post-secondary and advanced coursework. (3.4)
  - A unified message for high expectations for both students and families permeates every facet of the school and is supported by school leaders and staff. However, although there are opportunities for post-secondary experiences and credit accumulation, advanced placement courses are limited. These limited opportunities hinder progress toward increased number of students who graduate with Advanced Regents diplomas.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Academy for Young Writers	UD	D	P	WD
<b>Overall QR Score</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<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?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?				<b>X</b>
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?				<b>X</b>
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?				<b>X</b>

**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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				<b>X</b>

**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>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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, with particular attention to the CCLS?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				<b>X</b>

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>