

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Young Leaders Elementary School

Elementary School 369

468 East 140th Street

Bronx

NY 10454

Principal: Dr. Karen Collins

Dates of review: April 2 – 3, 2012

Lead Reviewer: Yolanda Torres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Young Leaders is an elementary school with 296 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 16% Black, 82.9% Hispanic, 0.1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 31% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 91.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders make instructional and organizational decisions in support of adult and student learning. (1.3)
 - A newly hired coach supports teachers through collaborative planning and ongoing professional development via modeling, coaching sessions, fishbowl activities, one-on-one conversations, and feedback. Teachers define this help as a meaningful challenge that demands more of their creativity resulting in rich conversations that lead to thoughtful planning of lessons. Cluster teachers meet with classroom teachers on a monthly basis to discuss and plan the themes in social studies and science in order to align their work so students can experience learning via the use of technology and hands-on experiments.
 - School leaders make sure that teachers on the same grades have at least three common times weekly for planning. Teachers take this opportunity to voluntarily meet more frequently and share student work and teaching practices. They indicate the team collaboration is a 'helpful experience where they are growing together and continue to learn alongside their students. During these meetings, teachers confer with each other on how their strategy groups provide support to their students' instructional needs with more focused lessons that result in improved student work products.
- Teacher teams and the coach collaboratively analyze and use student work to make data-informed decisions for improving student outcomes. (2.2)
 - Assessments are matched to the Common Core Learning Standards to ensure that the decisions made for student improvement are consistent with academic expectations. During collaborative meetings, teachers provide each other with feedback on the impact or effectiveness of these instructional decisions. Student work, running records, rubrics, and summative assessments, provide teachers with a clear picture of what is working and what is not. As teachers look at student work and discern the learning needs of students, they discuss adjustments on practices to strengthen the instruction that leads to effective teacher feedback as evidenced by student academic progress at the classroom level.
- Frequent cycles of formal and informal observations and walkthroughs promote professional growth leading to progress in teacher practice. (4.1)
 - School leaders put together a complex observation schedule where they conduct walkthroughs on an ongoing basis and provide teachers with timely feedback using a research-based framework for instructional improvement. As a result, there is a noticeable improvement in teacher lesson plans and instructional delivery as they work with students in classrooms and the evidence of progress is denoted in the formal and informal observation reports.

- Due to the high number of inexperienced teachers, school leaders are cognizant of the importance of ensuring that the decisions around professional development support the individual needs of teachers. Thus, administrators have been intentional on the management of the professional development for teachers by providing differentiated support needed for their individual growth, with a keen eye to identifying teachers by cohorts and giving an initial focus to teachers up for tenure. There is a close monitoring of implementation of learned skills, with ongoing check-ins during the school year. This serves as a barometer of progress allowing both sides to agree on next steps for continued improvement.
- Parents appreciate consistent communication with the school and the guidance provided in support of their children’s academic and social emotional growth. (3.4)
 - Ongoing conversations with teachers, progress reports, report cards, newsletters, monthly calendars, and phone calls are varied means of communication used to convey important information and expectations to parents. Parents praise the school’s sensitivity to the social emotional needs of their children and themselves. This has led to a stronger partnership between the school and home.
 - Students who participate in book-choosing events have opportunities to peruse through a variety of genres and leveled materials, resulting in students choosing just-right books they can read during independent-reading time, or at home. During on-site classroom trainings and curriculum nights parents engage in activities that help them learn strategies they can implement at home. Parents who learn side-by-side with their children are given a sense of guidance and motivation on how they can impact their children’s academic achievement.
- The school implementation of a behavior incentive program supports the students’ social emotional and academic development resulting in a positive learning environment. (1.4)
 - A school-wide positive behavior incentive program, under the organizational leadership of teachers, recognizes students as “Star Leaders” during grade assemblies. Students who are well aware of the criteria used to achieve this monthly distinction share their pride and describe the positive impact of this honor when they arrive home and engage in conversations with their parents. This program helps students channel their behavior and actions via safety nets, and rewards and motivates them towards overall improvement as evidenced by students self-monitoring their behaviors and a decrease in student incidents in classrooms.
 - Teachers and service providers work collaboratively in the development of individual plans to provide social/emotional support to students in order to help them develop self-confidence and self-management. Plans that include behavior modifications, attendance improvement strategies, and/or daily feedback, keep specific students on track towards successful outcomes. Students appreciate the expectations bestowed on them through the ongoing dialogue with staff members leading to trustworthy relationships and a strong sense of community.

What the school needs to improve

- Reflect on the alignment of planning standards-based tasks vis-à-vis teaching practices in order to promote consistency of rigorous habits and critical thinking skills across all classrooms. (1.1)
 - Teachers use the Depth of Knowledge framework as they actively plan together to provide all students with learning opportunities in the development of their oral and writing skills on rigorous tasks aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards. As teachers capture and take notes of students' responses to higher order questions during conferrals and turn-and-talks, they reflect on how students respond in order to ascertain if the level of conversation is rigorous and challenges students' thinking. In spite of this school-wide practice, the continuum of higher-level dialogue amongst students is not consistently maintained from classroom to classroom, thereby leading to uneven student cognitive engagement.
 - Teachers meet regularly and, with network support and use student work to plan and strategize lessons in support of diverse learners. Once teachers learn the strategies to help students improve their speaking and writing skills, they implement and assess the lesson outcomes. Although successful strategies are implemented in classrooms to challenge students at a high level of engagement, this is not consistently evident across all classrooms.
- Improve the consistency of differentiated instruction across classrooms to meet the needs of varied subgroups of students. (1.2)
 - School leaders, the coach, and teachers, are involved in conceptual work on differentiated instruction across content areas, especially social studies and science. Teachers create instructional charts with color-coded letters and features that support students' learning styles. As students engage in discussions and independent tasks, there are selected classes where the differentiated tasks are beginning to emerge; nonetheless, differentiation is at the developing stage school-wide.
 - Teacher discussions around student work lead to the identification of instructional trends across grades. Conversations become more granular as discussions focus on trends of student subgroups and the implications to next steps in support of student progress. Some of these interventions stem from Academic Intervention Services (AIS), differentiated homework packets, and future referrals for more strategic academic support. However, these practices have yet to suitably impact improving student achievement.
- Ensure that the goal-setting process for and by students is clear and understood by individuals, suitably targets relevant subgroups of students, and identifies next learning steps to improve learning. (3.2)
 - Weekly lesson planning takes into account students' goals and data to inform instruction. As teachers conduct data analyses, they record

relevant information into a school-wide grade book which is monitored by the administration to ensure that teachers use the data to set learning goals. Teachers articulate students' goals with school leaders in order to identify the additional needs of students to accelerate learning. Although these goals are data-based, goals are not differentiated so that students are clear in their understanding of personalized goals, nor are goals sufficiently targeted to student subgroups, and the lack of clear next steps limits all students from reaching his/her intellectual potential.

- Refine professional development opportunities so that all teachers consistently reflect on their instructional practice leading to students' mastery of their learning. (4.3)
 - School leaders and faculty work together to establish a professional learning community that contributes to instructional improvement across classrooms, as evidenced by teachers meeting frequently and sharing their practices. Inter-visitations and participation in vertical planning sessions contribute to instructional enhancement and stronger professional partnerships through ongoing support for each other. Additionally, frequent meetings with the coach serve as a 'meaningful support' to challenge teachers and provide feedback to each other in a risk-free learning environment. While these structures are in place, the school is yet at the developing stage where teachers consistently reflect on their learning and practice resulting in purposeful lesson delivery and assessment of the same for improved student outcomes.
- Re-evaluate the systems for measuring progress of goals to establish sustainable learning, genuine ownership, and improved instructional practices. (5.3)
 - School leaders reflect on next steps towards progress. They hold conversations with the coach on the professional development cycles and the implications for the up-coming school year. The school-wide grade book data is another catalyst for conversations with teachers on how they measure students' attainment of goals resulting in teachers making instructional decisions to impact student progress. Cabinet meetings with teachers provide a venue to discuss student instructional performance and include planning for strategy groups based on student goals and data. However, these systems are neither granular enough nor is there evidence of consistent monitoring among staff members in order to ensure cohesive impact on students' academic learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The Young Leaders Elementary School	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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
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?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?			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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			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, 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?			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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			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