

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**The Young Scholars Academy of The Bronx**

**Middle School 289  
3710 Barnes Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10467**

**Principal: Jeanette Vargas**

**Dates of review: May 7, 2013  
Lead Reviewer: Luz T. Cortazzo**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Young Scholars Academy of the Bronx is a middle school with 352 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 67% Black, 28% Hispanic, 1% White, 2% American Indian and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal makes key decisions around the budget, assignments and scheduling aligned to the school's instructional goals to increase learning for all students. ( 1.3)
  - The principal's budgeting coupled with staff input, result in strategic use of resources that are well aligned to the principal's performance goals and the Comprehensive Education Plan and school wide instructional goals. Budget allocations are made to support literacy and math specialists who collaborate with and coach individual teachers and teacher teams, who all share responsibility for targeted groups of students. Together, they plan and design tasks and rubrics to support the development of students' writing skills with text based evidence. In addition, the school has made a great investment in enhancing the use of technology. Across the school, every classroom is equipped with SMARTboard computers, and iPads. The school wide use of Achieve 3000 encourages technology integration, resulting in students benefiting from the consistent use of technology tools. Consequently, comparisons with writing baseline data reveal progress in students' using evidence to support arguments in writing, as noted on teacher developed rubrics.
  - Teacher assignments and student groupings are strategic as seen in the Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes and flexible scheduling on each grade. As a result, students receive interventions in a rich learning environment and benefit from the challenges to achieve at a higher level. All teachers participate on multiple grade level planning teams to strengthen student work by examining assessment results at the end of each unit, refining performance tasks so that individual students and group of students, including students with individualized education plans and English language learners, are challenged and engaged. This has lead to individual students achieving at a higher level as their needs are explicitly met as evidenced by the 12:1:1 (NYSAA) 6/7 Bridge and 12:1:1 8<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts (ELA) classes observed.
- The school provides a safe, nurturing environment that coordinates guidance supports to impact positively on students' personal and academic development. (1.4)
  - The Young Scholars Academy's educational team shares the vision that, "Intelligence plus character is the true goal of education". Students readily embrace the school's vision and all efforts to support students' needs are guided by this unifying mission which supports the school's goals. A review of the school's incident reports, led to the adoption of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) initiative. This school wide initiative involves all members of the school community who monitor students' behavior. Positive behaviors, including demonstration of specific character traits such as respect, excellence, achievement and responsibility, allow students the opportunity to earn PBIS dollars as a reward. Students then save these PBIS dollars for a culminating trip to Camp Ramapo. This focused initiative has led to a reduction in the number of incidents in OORS, and a notable reduction in principal and

superintendent suspensions. Additionally, the students' Colgate all girls track team, and Yellow Hornets boys and girls track and field team, meet monthly with their coaches. Their input has resulted in the creation of additional sports teams. The recently installed National Junior Honor Society, comprised of students in grades six through eight, meets monthly with the principal and provides input in activities that best meet their needs. These activities demonstrate students' active participation in shaping school-wide decisions, thereby bolstering self-esteem and the development of leadership skills.

- Parents, staff and students unanimously agree that the school fosters a safe climate where students' social emotional and academic needs are readily addressed and underpins the 1% improvement in student attendance compared to the previous year. The school's inclusive culture and middle school advisory program enables every student to be well known by staff who helps support their academic and social growth. As such, students and families appreciate that they can turn to teachers and members of the pupil personnel team to help resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with learning. Consequently, students report that they feel "safe" and are able to focus on their academic achievement.
- The school has strategically developed curriculum maps aligned to key Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and refined learning tasks to promote critical thinking, so that the resulting instruction engages all students. (1.1)
  - Over the summer, school leaders and staff deliberately adjusted the curricula in order to make changes to the math scope and sequence and to integrate CCLS into math units of study. Additionally, they further adjusted the English language arts (ELA) Common Core units in order to close the achievement gap and promote college and career readiness. As a result, students routinely show fluency, application and conceptual understanding in math, as evident in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade integrated algebra class. Moreover, most students experiencing Common Core-aligned curricula across subjects as evident in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class, and a 7<sup>th</sup> grade science class, were able to cite text based evidence to support their verbal and written arguments.
  - Curricula and academic tasks emphasize higher order thinking in all grades and content areas. Teachers utilize Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) to design lessons and effectively scaffold questions that challenge students to apply concepts in a new context, connect ideas using supportive evidence in reading, use concepts to solve problems, or show reasoning, planning and evidence in math. Additionally, teachers consistently utilize student work products to refine their practice. Consequently, performance-based tasks that probe for deep understanding and application of learning is extending across all content areas and grade levels so that all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities are suitably challenged, are able to make personal connections to themselves and the world, and are able to transfer their learning to new contexts, as evidenced in a 12:1:1 class English language arts class (ELA) , where one student was recommended to take The New York State test in ELA, instead of the New York State Alternative Assessment (NYSAA).

- Through a wide range of assessments and common measurements, leaders and faculty have an informed understanding of student performance resulting in interventions to positively impact student achievement. (2.2)
  - Teachers use student work samples, conference notes and exit slips at the end of each lesson to analyze students' work and provide feedback to students. Acuity results, Achieve 3000 and teacher designed writing and math benchmark assessments are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) to gauge student understanding of the taught curricula. In one 6<sup>th</sup> grade class students cited textual evidence from the text 'Twitter in the Classroom,' to support an analysis of what the text says, explaining why using twitter would engage students in the classroom. In an 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class several students used evidence from the text to explain, how the role of government contributed to the economic changes in the United States in the 1920's. Students worked in groups and gave an oral presentation and explicitly cited specific aspects of the standards. As such, students are becoming cognizant of the connection between the tasks and the expectations espoused by the CCLS. All teachers utilize rubrics and most align written feedback on students' work with the specific rubric being used in order to note students' strengths and needs. Consequently, teachers have an understanding of students' assessments results relative to select standards with the goal of providing specific feedback to increase student outcomes.
  - Assessment results, including student work products, are reviewed by grade level teams as evidenced during the math and Professional Learning Community PLC 8<sup>th</sup> grade team meetings. Teacher teams create common assessments and use results to measure progress toward specific goals, are able to provide relevant written feedback to students to increase their achievement levels, as well as evaluate and revise units of study and individual lesson plans. As such, teachers use common measurements to inform decisions on appropriate interventions during class, Learning lab, or Saturday academy in order to guide increased academic achievement.

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

- Build consistency of the teacher observation and feedback process to ensure closer alignment to the common teaching framework in order to elevate professional growth and student achievement. (4.1)
  - While the administration provides teachers with verbal and informal written feedback aligned to a research based framework, this process is infrequently done, as evidenced in documents that reflect informal written comments once or twice to date. In addition, the recommended feedback is not suitably effective, as it doesn't cite evidence from student work, instructional practices or other data sets. Consequently, teachers do not consistently receive actionable feedback, which results in missed opportunities to accelerate professional growth and student outcomes.

- Teachers participate in external and internal professional development opportunities. However, school leaders do not yet consistently use observation data and teacher input to drive professional development opportunities or link to the identified competency for individual teachers in order to support their professional growth. Consequently, the absence of an ongoing system using data from observation reports to make informed decisions for individual teacher growth, limits opportunities for the administration to make informed tenure and assignment decisions.
- Promote greater consistency across classrooms in the use of questioning and student participation, in order to provide multiple entry points for a range of learners. (1.2)
  - Through the use of the workshop model and essential questions, classroom practices reflect a clear set of beliefs around student centered learning. In some classroom visits, there were some examples of student engagement in higher order thinking through questioning and student discussion. For example, in one math class students discussed a math problem in pairs and in a science class student questioned each other's assumptions and ideas in their groups. However, this is not a consistent instructional practice across the school. Consequently, teaching strategies to support multiple levels of learning with thought-provoking questions, conversations that give students opportunities to support their views with evidence, re-think their positions and use questions as a way to learn more, are not yet the norm across grades.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Young Scholars Academy of the Bronx	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
<b>Instructional Core</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, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?			X				
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?			X				
<b>School Culture</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?			X				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				X			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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 <b>inquiry approach</b> that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?			X				
<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>