



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning
2013-2014

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

The Young Women's Leadership School of Brooklyn

14K614

**325 Bushwick Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Talana Bradley

Dates of review: March 3-4, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Aimee Horowitz

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Young Women's Leadership School of Brooklyn is a middle/high school with 352 students from sixth through grade 11. The school population comprises 63% Black, 32% Hispanic, 1% White, 1% Asian and 3% other students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 16% special education students. Girls account for 100% of the students enrolled. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 91.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school strategically aligns curricula to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), incorporates instructional shifts, and designs data informed tasks to prepare all students with college and career readiness skills. (1.1)

The school's wide array of CLLS and content standards aligned curricula uses a combination of Connected Math Project, New Visions Accessing Algebra through Inquiry (A2i), Teacher's College Reading and Writing Project, and teacher created curriculum units to support students acquisition of college and career readiness skills. Curricula are intentionally designed to incorporate rigorous, open-ended performance tasks grounded in Webb's Depth of Knowledge and the instructional shifts and are part of units planned using Understanding by Design. Curricula and lesson plans reviewed evidence intentionality in including Universal Design for Learning strategies ensuring access for all learners including English language learners and students with disabilities, and in engaging students in tasks relevant to the real world. For example, in an 8th grade performance task students use tessellations and transformations to design wallpaper for a child's bedroom that would give the child a sense of the geometric concepts of symmetry, congruence, and reflection. Students then wrote a pitch about the best ways to use the wallpaper to teach a child about geometry while addressing potential misconceptions a child might have. As a result of analysis of student work and test data, the foci across the math curricula are making sense of problems, persevering in solving them, and attending to precision. In math classes observed teachers require students to use precise mathematical language as they explain their reasoning, collaboratively solve problems, and critique one another's work. Students are well aware of the requirement to and consistently correctly label diagrams and graphs and use the context of the problem to determine the appropriate solution. Students are consistently called on to explain relationships between equations and graphs. Further, during the math team meeting, teachers used examples of student work to assess students' strengths and weaknesses with attending to precision and then strategized as to how to address weaknesses and hold students accountable for being precise and accurate. In literacy based courses, through Paideia Seminars, a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open-ended questions, classroom discussions, and self-directed collaborative research projects students consistently engage in discourse and writing where they cite evidence to support and refute claims and counterclaims and synthesize multiple non-fiction and fiction sources to support their assertions. The catalyst that facilitated student progress in these areas are the school-wide close reading and annotation protocols. At the start of the school year each teacher knows the incoming levels of their students, their State and Regents test history, and the standards they previously struggled with. This data in conjunction with results of common baseline assessments are used by teachers and teams to modify and adjust curriculum to meet individual students' needs. The school's systems and structures ensure that curricula are well aligned to CCLS, incorporate the instructional shifts, engage students, and ensure they have the skills necessary for post-secondary success. Consequently,

student performance has increased in synthesizing multiple sources in support of arguments in evidence based writing and discourse.

- The principal's strategic scheduling, hiring, and key partnership decisions are well aligned to the school's goals as evidenced by growth in adult and student learning. (1.3)
 - The use of resources is well aligned to the school's mission and goals. The school has a broad complement of partnerships that align to and enhance its' focus on graduating young women who are academically and emotionally college ready. Partnerships include The Young Women's Leadership Network, RUSH for the Arts, iMentor, New Visions, and Interborough Counseling. Coupled with the school's advisory program and full time College Bound counselor, these partnerships support the school's vision and mission of graduating young ladies with a "sense of self-efficacy and community responsibility" who are "the leaders of the next generation" by "supporting the whole girl in order to maximize academic achievement, social emotional well being, and post-secondary success." In meetings, students touted support from advisors, teachers, and fellow students; reflected on their learning and progress through student led conferences; the standards based grading system and Habits of Being; and the principal and the high expectations in all classes as excellent preparation for college, for providing them with the confidence and tools to set and achieve rigorous goals, to explore what they are interested in, and to take the risks necessary to learn. As a result 50% of students who took the January Regents examination in English met the college ready threshold. The 11th grade fall Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) exam, indicated a .56 class average on counterclaims while the winter MOSL indicated that the class average rose to 2.25.
 - The school's schedule meets the needs of all students while providing extended blocks of time including planning days for teacher teams to meet. Teams create, augment, and revise curriculum to align to CCLS and incorporate the instructional shifts; look at student work and data to assess effectiveness of teaching strategies, improve instruction, and increase student achievement; develop authentic performance tasks, inter-visit with colleagues to reflect on their own practice; and engage in Kid Talk to support students in developing effective academic and personal behaviors. Thus, teachers have augmented curriculum across all subject areas to explicitly incorporate close reading strategies to aid students in using evidence to support claims, identify and refute counterclaims, and understand rigorous text. The school's rigorous hiring process, which includes screening by a faculty committee, meetings with students, and an in-depth interview with the principal, ensures that new hires believe in the school mission and are firmly committed to the school's culture, resulting in low staff turnover and a commitment to adult and student learning in a collaborative setting. Additionally, 10th grade students who used close reading strategies on their English Regents midterm performed better than those who did not. Further, as a result of state assessment and MOSL data analysis, to aid students in achieving standards, students' schedule were revised to incorporate seminar, a block of time for small group targeted instruction in literacy, math, or study skills and to provide high school students with an additional period of math instruction. Study skills seminar students reported that they are now regularly completing their work and achieving better results as evidenced

by earning proficient and highly proficient in a greater number of report card standards.

- The school's intensive focus on "supporting the whole girl" cultivates an inclusive, trusting, and supportive culture, shaping a safe and respectful learning environment, ensuring students' academic and personal growth. (1.4)
 - In addition to advisory lessons on positive self image, female adolescent development, healthy eating, women's empowerment, college and career awareness, and job shadow programs that develop the whole girl, systems that support academic and personal growth are embedded in the school's culture. Examples include Pledge Day, student government, college counseling, Safe Space Club, iMentor, Big Sis/Little Sis, and counseling along with parent communication and involvement. Through the student initiated Big Sis/Little Sis program, 10th grade students mentor 6th grade students providing peer support as students transition to middle school while building leadership skills for high school students. This aids younger students in understanding the school's Habits of Being and goal setting process. Students articulate that they have access to school leaders, they are challenged in all of their classes, and the school expects them to graduate college ready and enroll in a four year college. There is a commitment to college readiness from the time students enter the school in 6th grade and students are supported through the process. For example, the school has a full time College Bound Counselor, seminar support classes incorporated into students' programs, new Advanced Placement and College Now course offerings, and Inquiry Explorations engaging students in in-depth explorations of particular topics. Student and parent voices are heard through School Leadership Team, student government, Pledge Day, surveys, the Parents' Association, and the school's open door policy. Participation in these venues and communication with student leaders led to the implementation of initiatives and programs aimed at increasing student achievement and developing a supportive and respectful school culture. Specifically, Big Sis/Little Sis, Respect 360, and The Young Women's Leadership School Trifecta programs have deepened relationships between middle and high school students and created a more inclusive and respectful environment that supports college and career preparation. As a result, 75% of 11th grade students have achieved success on all Regents exams required for graduation.
 - Teachers and school leadership evidence an exceptional level of knowledge of their students, undergirded by strong grade teams and a strong advisory program. Each student belongs to an advisory with an advisor who is a member of the student's grade team. This intentional system ensures that every student is well known by at least one adult. Advisors liaise between families, students, and teachers; they are the advocate and point person through which academic and social emotional communication is routed. Advisors collaborate with students to develop goals and action plans around the school's Habits of Being and for academic improvement. They periodically conference with students engaging them in reflecting on their progress towards goals, and thus are integral to each student's academic and personal growth. Advisories engage in myriad activities ranging from team and trust building to academic support and goal setting. Each grade engages in a yearly team building trip that has connects to their learning. For example, through a

partnership with Christadora, the 7th grade spends three days camping at the Manice Educational Center in the Berkshires. There they engage in team building as they apply their 6th grade learning around sustainability and interdependence to farming. They analyze soil, prepare the farm for winter, and organize meals with the goal of reducing waste management. Each night students reflect on their learning, their leadership, how they responded to challenges, and how they contributed to the group. A decrease in incidents, improved scholarship, 60% of students enrolled in College Now courses earning grades of A or better with 90% passing, and doubling the number of students on Honor Roll for the second and third marking period evidence that the school's environment supports students learning and growth.

- The school has a clear portrait of student mastery and progress towards goals through use of standards based grading, common assessment, and ongoing checks for understanding, resulting in increased student outcomes. (2.2)
 - Throughout the school teachers use rubrics, student reflection and self-assessment, on demand assessments, common assessments, and performance tasks aligned to the curriculum to assess students' progress towards mastery. Coupled with the school's CCLS based grading system, along with standards aligned grading rubrics, teachers conference with students regarding next learning steps. These structures support students in understanding proficiency and in navigating the specific steps they need to take to achieve mastery. Students speak to specific standards when discussing what they need to do to improve and demonstrate highly proficient achievement in each class. As all tasks and assessments are aligned to particular standards, all teachers are aware of where individual and groups of students are in their progress towards mastery and target instruction to meet their needs. Thus, the math department has now spiraled fractions throughout the middle and high school curriculums. Further, all teachers have revised curriculum and lessons to include close reading strategies and teaching students to recognize and refute counterclaims.
 - At strategic points in their lessons all classroom teachers regularly use jot and talk, turn and talk, thumbs-up, thumbs-down, exit tickets, have students use a rubric to self assess midway through a task and create their own next steps, exam corrections and reflections, and other in class assessments to check for understanding, to make students cognizant of their next learning steps, target ongoing adjustments to meet students' needs, and have students reflect on their learning. Teachers consistent checks for understanding and their use of the data to adjust their lessons have led to improved student writing as evidence by 100% of students passing the January 2014 Regents examination in English and increases in the numbers of students achieving mastery of standards as indicated by scholarship reports.
- The principal fosters professional growth by ensuring frequent observation and feedback, collegial support, and strategic professional development resulting in improved instruction across the school. (4.1)
 - The principal and assistant principal conduct frequent and focused observations that provide teachers actionable feedback via the Danielson framework. To support implementing next steps, the lead teacher and the

Teacher's College coach provide teachers with individualized support. Further, the assistant principal meets individually with new teachers and weekly with the new teacher team so that together they can identify and address challenges and support one another in implementing feedback. Additionally, using a teacher designed protocol for taking low inference observation notes, teachers inter-visit with peers, reflect on implications for their own practice and debrief with the teacher observed. Teachers articulate that due to Danielson aligned observations and feedback, there is coherence between the professional goals they set and the specific recommendations they receive for next steps. Accordingly, teachers share a common understanding of engaging, rigorous instruction that is translated into elevated practice as they progress towards meeting targeted goals for professional growth aligned to school wide goals around improving teacher practice. As a result, teaching practice in questioning and discussion has improved as evidenced by 61% at effective and highly effective after the second round of observations and 72% currently at effective and highly effective. Additionally 47% of teachers moved up at least one level in engagement from their previous observation with 54% now at effective or highly effective.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue providing high achieving students with opportunities to extend their learning while continuing to provide all students with the skills necessary to close the achievement gap and foster post-secondary readiness. (1.2)
 - All teachers provide multiple entry points for students to access lessons, provide supports for struggling learners, and engage students in higher order thinking through questioning, discussion, and writing tasks requiring students to cite textual evidence to support claims and refute counterclaims. While a 6th grade English teacher provided targeted students with an extension to deepen their learning about author's purpose and other teachers allow students to select "mild, medium, or spicy" tasks, teachers are still challenged in routinely or strategically providing extensions to support higher achieving students in deepening their learning and reaching their potential, thus limiting their achievement. Although questioning facilitates student participation and student-to-student evidence based discourse, and accountable talk with use of academic vocabulary extensions are not yet fully embedded to ensure, students routinely craft questions of high cognitive challenge Thus, not all students are pushed to think at higher levels, limiting self-guided inquiry.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name:	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score				X			
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?				X			
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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			
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports 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 those expectations?				X			
Systems for Improvement							
<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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?				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			
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				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed