



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Academy for Young Writers

Secondary School K404

**1065 Elton Street
Brooklyn
NY 11239**

Principal: Courtney Winkfield

Date of review: December 3, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Donald Conyers

The School Context

Academy for Young Writers is a secondary school with 544 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 72% Black, 23% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 35% of the students enrolled and girls account for 65%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 88%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	Well Developed
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

**3.4 High
Expectations**

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

School leaders communicate high expectations to the entire staff, provide written feedback aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, and have a clear, transparent culture of reciprocal accountability. Additionally, teachers and administrators have a collaborative expectation system and provide clear, focused advisement supports to ensure all students play a major part in their educational experience.

Impact

Administrators foster a mutual accountability system that has led to improvement in pedagogical practice and student progress. As a result of communicating high expectations to diverse learners, including English Language Learners(ELLs), students with disabilities and highest achievers, students take ownership in their educational preparation for the next grade level and college experiences.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders' staff handbook, written feedback from teacher observations, summer new teacher "bootcamp" curriculum planning sessions, teacher-to-teacher instructional feedback sessions, and personalized Danielson Framework for Teaching goal setting conferences, reinforce the school-wide instructional expectations.
- The principal arduously redesigned the school-wide advisory program. Students receive weekly intense academic advisory support that includes tracking credit accumulation, college planning, social-emotional support, and PupilPath data review. In advisory sessions, students review their work with rubrics and develop actionable next steps.
- Students speak confidently about their progress in class toward their learning goals. Learners are able to explain the tasks, articulate how well they are doing and what steps they need to take to improve their work.
- Students reported that teachers frequently connect their learning to college level expectations and continually push them to do their very best at all times. For example, the challenges of the week and exhibitions that are completed after every unit of study promote high expectations.
- Teachers, guidance counselors and administrators continually create experiences that expose and immerse students on a path that ultimately leads to college. For example, all students, including the lowest and higher achievers, visit colleges, 22 % of juniors and seniors take courses with City Tech through College Now. 75% of the senior class is eligible for the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP). The school partners with New Jersey City University to create the opportunity for seniors to stay on campus to earn up to three college credits. The school has a four-year long partnership with South Vermont College. The high school and the college work together to select 4-6 seniors per year for a full ride scholarship. There are 4 cohorts of these high school students at South Vermont College presently.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classes, teachers use rubrics, and create assessments directly aligned to the curricula to track, analyze and understand student mastery and use data to make adjustments to common assessments and academic tasks.

Impact

Teachers are keenly aware of student progress and develop an ever changing portrait of student mastery causing teachers to make adjustments to curriculum or instruction in order to increase student achievement; however, some targeted students are not yet consistently provided enough meaningful feedback.

Supporting Evidence

- The school develops its own assessments (Design Your Own) which are tightly aligned to the unit plans and lessons developed. The DYO assessments provide a range of feedback along a skill continuum that describes a range of mastery.
- Each classroom supports the use of rubrics aligned to the school's curricula and the Common Core Standards for student use in advance of assignments and after assignments to ensure transparency and information about how well students have performed on the specific tasks.
- Teachers create scoring guides for each unit assessment. The scoring guide is connected to each specific assessment and its accompanying rubric. The scoring guide is created to ensure that scoring is valid. The guide takes general characteristics of student responses and articulates typical student responses to specific assessments at each of the four rubric levels.
- All teachers administer DYO three times over the school year and the analysis of these data is used to adjust instruction and curriculum planning to support student skill growth and learning. For example, all teachers write action plans. These plans are done in department meetings to facilitate discussion and professional support around content-area planning. Teachers analyze the student results and make decisions/statements about the skill that gave students the greatest challenge, what strategies could be put in place, describe the specific ways in which the students will practice the skill through upcoming curriculum, what changes (if any) need to be made to accommodate the action plan, and what are some barriers to supporting students with this skill?
- The classroom teachers use exit slips, graded tasks and student discussions to understand student progress and they articulate coherent reasons for the assessment choices. Students are provided appropriate supports and the school promotes constructive cognitive struggle; yet not all students are fully benefiting from meaningful feedback regarding progress in the midst of their struggle.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core learning standards and strategically include the instructional shifts. Higher order skills are emphasized in a coherent way for all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities across all grades and all subjects.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions promote higher levels of student thinking for students at the lower and higher levels of achievement and build coherence that promotes college and career readiness for all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The school engages in a thorough planning process incorporating Understanding by Design to ensure that all content, skills, enduring understanding and academic tasks are aligned. For example, in sixth grade unit on the Neolithic Revolution students engaged in a nonverbal discussion about the first humans by presenting symbols which represent Neolithic settlement and technological advances. Students explained the meanings of three Neolithic illustrations via gallery walk and completed a document-based question about the Neolithic Revolution.
- Teachers meet in department structures to plan and ensure that the lessons, units, content knowledge and skills are either sequenced appropriately and/or extended. For example, the English department continues to refine its completed writing scope and sequence across grades and text types. Not only does the scope and sequence detail the levels of complexity for each writing focus but it questions the differences from grade to grade and whether there should be a difference. Lastly, the document identifies supporting structures for students at each grade level.
- All lesson plans incorporate reading, writing and real world application or real world identification features. For example, a grade eleven social studies unit was designed to discuss the caste system of India. Plans revealed the reading of several documents to include the Constitution of India, a speech of the 1964 prime minister and several articles about the untouchables. The rigorous argumentative essay task called for all learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities to use evidence from documents and other outside information to support their thesis, analyze how each piece of evidence helps support the position taken and highlight relevance and connection.

Findings

The school has a solidly expressed belief about how students learn best and has embedded the instructional shifts and guidance of the Danielson Teaching Framework into the work products, discussions and assignments that reflect participation, critical thinking and student ownership.

Impact

The school's shared beliefs create achievement for all students, promotes student participation, thinking and ownership, resulting in high level discussions and finely prepared work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms observed, lessons in science, social studies, English, writing lab, and mathematics are anchored to the school's selected Habits of Mind: viewpoint, evidence, connections, suppositions and relevance. The students develop and defend their thinking during discussions and written assignments based upon selected habits of mind. For example, a grade 10 math class applied the point slope formula to a real world problem of drop distance. The various student groups discussed the problem and formed a hypothesis before using the tools and materials provided during the lesson to test the hypothesis. Students discussed the findings and retested and converted the function into the slope intercept form.
- Teacher team meetings provide the rich opportunity for teachers to discuss teacher pedagogy and design strategies directly anchored to the course of study and the independence in student learning that the school espouses. One strategy for supporting lower level readers with nonfiction text was to provide them early support via a reading lab class with a special education teacher who would support them with vocabulary, constructing meaning and participation in discussion. These students would then see the text again in their Global History class. The text was an excerpt about Malala Yousafzai and her experience with the Taliban.
- In the math department, students engage in a challenge/problem of the week. This weekly challenge is built upon the identified skills, understandings and habits of mind that the teachers have collaboratively identified during planning. The students worked independently or in a group (based on challenge) to satisfy the challenge. For example, in a Robotics class, students programmed their robot to move from the start box to the end box – a distance of 10 feet. Each student in the group had a specific role such as information specialist, engineer, programmer and project manager to enable them to solve the challenge. This activity promoted higher levels of student application and thinking.
- In a seventh grade class, students engaged in rich high level discussions anchored to evidence, as a habit of mind. The students discussed the current controversy over the use of Native American symbols in professional American sports. After reading multiple viewpoints, analyzing relevant historical documents and listening to various media, students used their evidence to engage in structured academic debate. A letter will follow to the Washington Redskins owner either urging him to change the name or encouraging him to keep it.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

All teachers are engaged in professional collaborations that support the presence of the Common Core Learning standards, build coherence across the middle and high school grades regarding student achievement and improved teacher practice. All teacher teams exemplify effective teacher leadership in decision making.

Impact

As a result of the collaborative teams, teachers continually make strong key decisions that support student improvement and strengthen teacher practice.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers report that they have a powerful opportunity to create a seven-year corridor that begins with the thinking around what students need once they are handed a high school diploma. The teams then do backwards designing to ensure that everything that precedes is aligned and that there is no unintended overlap or redundancy. The United Federation of Teachers chapter leader stated, "It may appear that everything is uniform; however, we are not doing this because we are told to. We believe in the vision and want to always capture best practices."
- Grade teams focus on the social –emotional needs of students and are responsible for a caseload of 12-15 students that they know very well. The teachers serve as advisors, advocates and guides. They track Regents, credits and attendance and are in constant contact with the students and families.
- Department teams are run by teachers who serve as experts in content and facilitation. These meetings are driven by protocols and almost always include the observation of student work products. During these team meetings teachers also present their DYO assessments and scoring guides so that all teachers can provide timely feedback and norm to ensure that the assessments are valid.
- Teachers reported that the principal really supports their professional learning because she invests in them by providing 4 full eight hour days each so that they can continue scope and sequence work, planning, assessment design and curriculum revision.
- The structure for team meetings was developed by staff members and is also used to provide counsel or advisement to the administration based on developments that teachers notice. For example, the closer focus on accountable talk emerge from classroom teacher observations. Teachers support one another and work with the department chairs and the instructional coach who sits on the principal's instructional core cabinet. They have voice in PD sessions and represent the needs of each department.