



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Young Voices Academy of the Bronx

Elementary School X357

**800 Lydig Avenue
Bronx
NY 10462**

Principal: Nadia Cruz-Perez

**Date of review: January 16, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

The School Context

Young Voices Academy of the Bronx is an elementary school with 167 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 1. The school population comprises 14% Black, 63% Hispanic, 12% White, 10% Asian, and 1% other students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92.6%.

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	Proficient
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	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Proficient
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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. The school communicates and partners with families in support of these expectations.

Impact

There is a culture of mutual accountability for high expectations within this school. These expectations support student progress towards a path to college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's motto is "Cultivating intellect, character and voice." The school's "Creed of Excellence" provides examples of how students, staff, and parents can demonstrate excellence, including students performing acts of kindness, staff working as a team to create a positive learning environment, and parents working as a team with the school for the success of their children. The school's Positive Behavior Intervention Support handbook outlines school-wide expectations for academic and behavioral interventions, as well as social emotional learning activities. Taped to the tables in classrooms are such words as "endurance," "valor," "compassion," and "optimism." When asked what the word "endurance" meant, a student responded, "Never give up." When asked what the word "optimism" meant, another student responded, "Think positive." As rewards earned for compliments collected and excellence, students can exchange "voice dollars" for items in the school's "Excellence R Us" store. Student-led committees for recycling and gardening involve members in critical thinking and decision making to improve the school environment. The school held its first career day in October, where students participated in presentations from professionals from visitors representing the military, police, emergency medical services, nursing, chefs and mechanics.
- Teachers attend weekly school-based professional learning opportunities like Lunch and Learns, and turnkey network-sponsored content workshops on such topics as co-teaching. The staff handbook describes non-negotiable school policies and expectations as well as staff responsibilities aligned to the Danielson Framework. For example, under the Framework's 2(a), creating an environment of respect and rapport, students are to be greeted every morning with an inviting smile and greeting, and with such language as "I expect nothing less than your best" and "You are in charge of your learning."
- Teachers regularly write letters to parents at the beginning of a unit to communicate (a) what students will study and learn, (b) things parents can do at home, (c) websites parents can explore on the unit's topic, and (d) unit vocabulary. For example, a letter to first-grade parents described a unit that would provide opportunities for students to explore the weather and become familiar with instruments used by meteorologists. Suggestions to parents included discussing weather reports in the newspaper or on television, collecting rain in a cup to measure how many inches fell, and observing clouds to try to predict what kind of weather they will bring. Monthly parent newsletters communicate days to remember and sight words to practice. The principal facilitates monthly parent workshops called, "Pastries with Principal Perez." Parents talked about the academic and social/emotional progress they see with their children. For example, parents shared: "My son didn't speak until age 4. He's in speech therapy and now he reads aloud" and "My daughter had delayed reading, but she has moved from a Level A to Level G."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributive leadership structures are in place.

Impact

There is improved teacher practice and progress towards goals for groups of students. Teachers have built leadership capacity and have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers participate in collaborative team meetings one to two times weekly and take turns facilitating their meetings. During meetings, teachers look for common trends, including strengths and weaknesses, among student work categorized as low, medium, and high. During these meetings, teachers look at common trends—strengths and weaknesses—among student work categorized as low, medium, and high. In today’s meeting, focused on a unit about the human body, first-grade teachers noticed that students were able to identify the main idea and give two to three details about the digestive system. They discussed making individual sheets of vocabulary words for students who need that scaffold, and agreed that the use and sequencing of visual image cards for ELL students was helpful for deriving meaning. The team also noticed that some students are struggling with the skill of paraphrasing, and discussed looking at different types of text for close reading as the passage used was short and some kids had trouble putting it in their own words. Teachers agreed that having the vocabulary available on the desks to reference was also helpful for students. They talked about breaking the close reading of text into two lessons, one focused on key details and main idea, and the other focused on summarizing. While these inquiry approaches positively impact student learning, they are not yet part of a systematic, multi-tiered inquiry program.
- Regarding the impact of their teams on pedagogy, teachers talked about reflective practice and discussions of what’s working or not working in their checklist creation. A new teacher commented, “I’ve gotten better in data because of the conversations I’m having with more experienced teachers. We talk a lot about strategies. By talking about it, we’re always helping each other.” Teachers were looking forward to intervisitations, which were just beginning, to observe each other’s practice.
- Teachers reported that they have input into school decisions. For example, teachers were surveyed about the school’s implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS). They also take part in the grouping of kids for rotations. Teachers expressed that they are empowered by the collaboration and discussions around school-wide decisions prompted by the principal. During Professional Learning Committee (PLC) monthly meetings, the principal and teachers share their thinking and make collaborative decisions. The PLC is new this year and thus the well-defined systems and processes that will contribute to effective role development, input and decision making are still evolving.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous tasks and higher-order skills across grades and subjects, and are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

A diversity of learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and special education students, have access to the curricula and tasks and are cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The vision statement of the Young Voices Academy of the Bronx begins, "...to engage every child in a curriculum that challenges them to investigate, synthesize, debate, problem solve, and demonstrate thought in writing." The school is using *Core Knowledge Language Arts* (CKLA) to incorporate fiction and nonfiction texts and to emphasize academic vocabulary across subjects. A student said, "In writing, I'm working on 'How to Books' about how to read to a dog and how to ride a bike." Teachers noticed that CKLA lacked reading strategies, and therefore decided to supplement CKLA with Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) units of study to target reading skills and better support students. As a result of this decision, more students are meeting their Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) benchmarks for growth, as evidenced by data from running records conducted in October and again in January. Teachers focus on phonemic awareness using Pearson's *Words Their Way* program for word study, *Kindervention*[®] by Abrams Learning Trends for foundation skills like letter recognition, and Wilson *Foundations*[®] for letter sounds. Teachers scaffold, model and discuss independent reading strategies with students with diverse needs during small guided reading groups. Teachers said that guided reading started earlier this year, which they expect will have a positive impact on building reading stamina. During independent reading, students discuss tricky words they encountered in the books read and explain how the strategies used helped them to become stronger readers.
- Teachers participated in a summer session of professional development focusing on rigor. When asked, teachers defined rigor as "pushing yourself," "breaking down and analyzing the lesson or activity," and "does it ask students to explain their thinking." Teachers refer to Depth of Knowledge (DOK) when developing tasks and planning questions, and incorporate text-based questions and writing from sources in Writer's Workshop. The objective of a kindergarten lesson is, "I can compare and contrast two different animals that live on a farm using a Venn diagram." Students shared what they learned about pigs and cows, and then drew and wrote similarities and differences between the animals. The lesson focused on the meaning of compare and contrast, and included visuals prompts for the ELL students and a word menu on the board for writing assistance, focused on the words, cow, pig, food, and farmer.
- A letter to parents of first graders described how their class will be starting a scientific study on insects, as follows: "The class will be caring for and investigating several insects to discover how insects have some similar characteristics and some differences." The letter outlined things that parents can do at home, including fun activities like making insect puppets using paper bags and construction paper, and creating their own insects after reading about an insect's body parts.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching (the Framework) and the instructional shifts. Also, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

All learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are engaged in challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- This year the school is focusing on two aspects of the Framework, 3(c), student engagement, and 1(d), demonstrating knowledge of resources to facilitate planning the task. Teachers report that informal observations using the Framework has strengthened their instructional practice and promoted self-reflection among the staff, particularly in the areas of engagement, classroom management, and curriculum development. Across classrooms, teachers model learning targets and expectations for students, using exemplars of work so students understand the expectation.
- The learning target of a first-grade lesson was, “I can gain a deeper understanding of a topic by reading multiple texts about the same topic.” Using the SMARTboard, the teacher showed a slide show entitled “Your Teeth” to students seated in the classroom’s meeting area. During prior day’s lesson, students did a close reading of an informational text about the mouth and stomach. Responding to the teachers question about what was learned in this week’s lessons on the digestive system, a student stated, “I learned that the molar teeth in the back of your mouth grind and break apart food.” The teacher emphasized how the student used her own words to explain her learning. The students were split into two groups, an independent reading group for higher-level readers and a guided reading group for English language learners. Students were tasked with reading a new passage about the tongue and identifying the main idea as well as three new facts, and then to summarize what they learned during the past three days about the digestive system. Using the same lesson plan as the other first grade class, an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class was also focused on the digestive system. Co-teachers and a paraprofessional worked with small groups of students focused on questioning to push student thinking. Sitting with a group of six students, a teacher asked, “What happens to food?” A student responded, “It goes out of the body.” The teacher said, “Yes, that’s called waste. What was the main idea about this passage? What made the food mushy?” Students responded, “The tongue. Saliva.” In a pre-kindergarten class, students work in learning centers aligned to their unit of study, Space, and their lesson on the planets and stars. Students can choose to play with blocks to build a toy spaceship, or play space games on the computer, or add red color to sand to make it look like dust from planet Mars.
- The school has grouped all students by level and then by skill. Each group has an identified area of need based on the data and specific instructional programs used. The school has dedicated one 50-minute period each day, three times each week, to targeted instruction called “Rotations.” During rotations, each AIS teacher and classroom teacher works with a small, targeted group of students, who rotate from class to class. “Because we have each other’s kids, our communication and articulation is strong,” said a teacher.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments to determine student progress towards goals across grades and subject areas and the results are used to adjust curricula and instruction. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Students keep track of the books they read using Reading Logs. Running records are used to measure growth in the patterns of student reading behavior. Schedules are posted in classrooms for teacher conferencing with students. Teachers have goals and strategies for each guided reading group. For example, students reading at Level A "will begin to use tricky word strategies and use pictures and the initial sound of words to identify unknown words and answer simple comprehension questions about the book." Strategies include "Stop, look at the picture, and look at the initial sounds; monitor understanding strategy; and use pictures to understanding simple comprehension questions."
- "We meet with students, who can tell you what level they're reading at," said a teacher. Student affirmed, "When teachers sit with us, they know what level we're on and what we need to work on. Levels mean how much you read. We have a level tree that shows you how well you are reading and when you'll be ready to move to the next level. Our teacher puts a sticker on the strategy we need to use to move to higher levels." When asked about goals, a student said, "We go up one step every month. My next level is Level D." Another student said, "My goal is to move from Level E to Level I." Class goals for reading and writing are posted in classrooms and tracked by student using "I Can Statements." Teachers also track student goals. In a kindergarten class, the teacher's data binder reflects goals tracked by student and by level (Levels AA through D). Each goal has a list of teaching strategies that will be used to achieve the goal. For example, the goal for two students at Level D is: "Students will (a) track words with eyes, (b) read with expression, and (c) use tricky word strategies and answer inferential questions about the characters." The related strategies include: "Monitor understanding strategy, Stop & Summarize," and "Look at the picture and key words that describe or tell more about the character."
- In a kindergarten class, students were self-assessing by coloring in happy faces. A teacher-created checklist with four happy faces was used by students to ensure that they (a) matched two pictures that rhyme, (b) wrote the words for the pictures that rhyme, (c) worked nice with their group, and (c) asked a friend if they needed help. It was evident that students take the checklist seriously as some students did not color in all the circles. Students were able to articulate what they were working on. Feedback to students is detailed and provides both areas of strength as well as next steps. For example, a teachers' feedback to a student follows: "I noticed how you added sequence words to let the reader know the order in which they need to follow the steps. Next time, try to reread your work to make sure you used upper and lower case letters appropriately."