Department of Education
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

The Young Scholars Academy of The Bronx

Middle School X289

3710 Barnes Avenue
Bronx
NY 10467

Principal: Jeanette Vargas

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Lead Reviewer: Heidi Pierovich

The School Context

The Young Scholars Academy of the Bronx is a middle school with 294 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 70% Black, 25% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 11% English Language Learners and 25% students with disabilities. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 90.5%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Focus**	**Developing**
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		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Additional Findings**	**Proficient**
Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school…	**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	**Celebration**	**Proficient**

Area of Celebration

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

Findings
The majority of teachers are engaged in organized inquiry-based professional collaborations. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact
Professional collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards, and strengthen the instructional capacity of the teachers, who have a voice in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers are engaged in several teams, including grade, subject, and professional development. The English Language Arts (ELA) team meets with social studies and science to incorporate literacy across the curricula. For grade teams, teachers stated that their function is to collaboratively discuss and analyze skills across the grade that all subjects need students to know and be able to do well, to find a common task to teach, and to assess in a close way. It is in this collegial way that teachers share best practices. For example, during the ELA team meeting, teachers focused on *Word Generation* to determine students' ability to use these words well. Teachers stated, "What I like about these collaborations is I make more connections to claims and theories in ELA and for science. I have grown professionally; it is enlightening." And another teacher stated, "This work has changed the type of teacher I am—now I reflect on how I can incorporate [my colleagues'] ideas into my own."

- Distributed leadership is evident in that each teacher team rotates the facilitation so that each teacher shares the duties. Teachers stated that they appreciate that everyone has input this way. Teachers use a protocol for looking at student work and use the information to determine next steps in their teaching to analyze the gaps in learning by grade level, to determine focus standards, to group students, and then to revise curricula accordingly. A peer instructional coach on campus supports teachers' professional growth toward goals.

- Teachers spoke about how analyzing assessment data and student work has improved their instructional practice, as well as improved student achievement toward school goals. One math teacher explained that the math department team's inquiry regarding the baseline data determined that most students across grade had misconceptions regarding the rules for negative integers. To that end, the team connected the problem of practice to the school-wide focus and goals, and narrowed it to two instructional strategies to implement, the number line and manipulatives, along with revised curricula. Teachers targeted groups for intervention and then provided a post-intervention assessment. The results demonstrated an increase in achievement across the grades, as well as among the targeted students who include students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). The percentage of students who scored between 70-89% increased from 16% to 26% while 90-100% increased from 10% to 22%, and, most importantly, the percentage of students who scored less than 70% decreased from 73% to 52%. One teacher stated and others agreed, "This work has helped me adapt instruction to meet my students' needs, to use the chips and a hands-on approach which helped those who were having difficulty, especially the large amount of ELLs." Teachers also believe that since they present their results to the rest of the staff, it helps them maintain a high level of professional practice.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing

Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula, Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, and the instructional shifts, beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best, and beginning to provide multiple entry points and opportunities for discussion for diverse students.

Impact
As a result, students are not yet consistently required to make thinking visible. Inconsistent teaching practices lead to uneven engagement in challenging tasks and in students' demonstrating higher-order thinking skills in discussions and work products, including the work of English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration and staff believe in providing students with multiple entry points to succeed in a student-centered learning that is engaging with higher-order question that leads to student discussions and authentic writing. However, this belief system is in the beginning stages of uneven implementation across classes and grades based on classroom visits.

- To varying degrees, students engaged in challenging tasks with discussion and higher-order questions. Students were engaged as they answered the questions individually, and then shared their analysis in their groups, with most students engaged in some classes. Yet, in a grade 7 ELA class, students were to select a book and read independently while the teacher conferenced with targeted students. To review the process of close reading, with the whole class together, she facilitated the discussion in a rapid-fire, ping-pong manner. In a grade 8 science class, students had the choice to select an animal for the do now activity, and, when a question led to further clarification, the discussion became teacher-centered. In a grade 6 math special education class, students worked on simplifying equivalent ratios in word problems. Students were provided small white board tablets to solve problems. However, the examples started with standards from several grades prior, and spiraled into a teacher-dominated discussion moving from teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher.

- Some classes used different methods to provide access for students. In a grade 8 math class students were graphing proportional relationships, and students received materials in both English and Spanish if needed, as well as a video to support the visualization of 'slope'. In a grade 6 math lesson, students worked in small groups to determine inverse operations. But the sharing of ideas was teacher-directed relying heavily on a small number of student responses in a ping-pong fashion from teacher-to-student, and structures to hold individual students or groups of students accountable for their thinking relative to the questions posed were not sufficiently evident. Similarly, in a grade 8 ICT math class, students presented their work on proportion in everyday situations, and although the audience had the opportunity to ask questions, the participation and engagement of the audience was minimal.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
School leaders and faculty adopted selected curricula to ensure that they are providing instruction aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and are using student data to plan and refine rigorous academic tasks.

Impact
The school's adoption and refinement of curricula enable school wide coherence and college and career readiness for all students. Academic tasks provide opportunities for all students to be cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration shared that they and staff work collaboratively to adjust the Common Core-aligned adopted materials such as *Teachers College Reading and Writing Program* (TCRWP) and *EngageNY* for math, and use the *New York City Scope and Sequence* for social studies and science. Science teachers use *Glencoe,* in addition. Staff has adopted *Word Generation* across the core content areas to build academic vocabulary and writing fluency. Staff determined, through the support of the Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI), that students need additional time on task for independent reading. To this end, the school has implemented a strategic reading time, implementing small group reading instruction and conferencing during independent reading. Teachers use an online program called Atlas to store curriculum maps, and this supports transparency. A review of curriculum maps, unit plans, and lesson plans indicated that teachers have planned with the end-in-mind using essential questions, enduring understandings, and skills to create a view of the unit as a whole, as well as the smaller components of the lesson plan. Also evident in curriculum maps, unit plans, and lesson plans are teacher-developed assessments, rubrics, and scaffolds to ensure that all students have access to these curricula that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

- A review of lesson plans indicates that across the school an agreed-upon format employs the *Understanding by Design* elements of essential questions, enduring understandings, differentiation/*Universal Design for Learning* (UDL), objectives, academic vocabulary, and the workshop model. Each addresses providing access for all learners, with data-determined groups based on previous assessments. Curriculum maps in literacy and math indicate the instructional shifts, especially in the areas of speaking and listening, academic vocabulary acquisition, and citing evidence during argumentative writing. Further, evident across subjects are lesson revisions based on student work and data to support reteaching.

- Curriculum maps and lesson plans indicate that tasks are differentiated for ELLs and students with disabilities, using UDL. The principal and staff shared a group of common practices that are used across grades and subjects. These include, but are not limited to, literacy methods with the strategic reading time and writing arguments using RICE-restate, infer, cite, and explain. A review of curriculum planning documents demonstrates evidence of the use of these schoolwide practices. Additionally, scaffolded discussion prompts are planned for all to have access to the curricula and tasks so that they are cognitively engaged.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
Across classrooms, teachers use common assessments that measure students' progress of acquired skills aligned to Common Core Learning Standards, rubrics, and a common grading policy aligned to the school's curricula.

Impact
The school analyzes assessment results to adjust instruction and curricula to meet student-learning needs. Common assessments provide a common lens and language to discuss student progress and inform instructional adjustments to advance student achievement, and teachers provide actionable feedback to students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have aligned assessments to the curricula and created or aligned rubrics to support the determination of student achievement. Students use the rubrics or checklists in revising their work or "To grade our own or someone else's work and see what is required for each grade," and "We look at a rubric to help us make sure everything required is there." So students learn how to use rubrics and checklists to help determine completion and ratings.

- Teachers provide students with feedback on their work and post it on bulletin boards both inside and outside the classrooms. The actionable feedback is rooted in the rubric language and is attached to the rubric with ratings that often include next steps. Students are able to explain their next steps according to the teacher's feedback for the next assignment. Student notebooks and folders show student work, and most demonstrate teacher responses in the form of checkmarks, feedback, and some with statements or stickers of encouragement. Additionally, staff uses *Jupiter Grades*, an online grade book with family portal, for students to view their grades and upcoming or missing assignments. Students stated that they check *Jupiter Grades* at least weekly and share the process with parents who need technical support. Some parents stated that they personally check *Jupiter Grades* to track student progress toward goals.

- Teachers use common formative and summative assessments and use the analysis of data to determine student progress toward goals. Teachers use *Schoolnet* to support the data analysis of class reports. A data cycle that is consistent across classrooms includes teaching a lesson, analyzing student work for mastery and areas of need, reteaching and regrouping according to student need, and then reassessing. Staff has a yearlong common assessment calendar. Teacher teams conduct inquiry based on common assessment data and determine next pedagogical steps. Then they present their results to the whole staff. The math department had recently completed an inquiry cycle, showing growth towards student goals, and decided to continue to add to this inquiry process. Each department uses the same assessment analysis form to facilitate their analysis and design of next pedagogical and curricular steps.

- Students' reading scores on the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) are taken three times yearly, and from these scores, goals are created. Most students can name their reading goals.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient

Findings
High expectations connected to professional and instructional goals, as aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, are consistently communicated to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff consistently communicate high expectations to students.

Impact
Structures that provide training and foster the existing culture of accountability support the school's high expectations for teaching. Ongoing and detailed feedback provides support toward next level preparedness and learning amongst students.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff through multiple ways including bulletins, weekly publication to staff called *YSA N.T.K.* [*Need to Knows*], professional learning, and feedback from classroom observations. Common topics in the weekly publication include a focus on supporting access for English Language Learners and the data inquiry process. Administration also provides a staff handbook and resource guide to support teachers in upholding the high expectations in the classroom and at teacher team meetings. Administration conducts walkthroughs and informal and formal observations as a method and structure for monitoring the implementation of the high expectations and providing actionable feedback to staff.

- Teachers create and deliver professional learning sessions for their colleagues, as evidenced by the professional learning plan. These professional learning sessions are created based on teacher need as per feedback from administrative observations and by request from teachers. Additionally, the peer instructional coach (PIC) supports teachers' professional growth through modeling and co-teaching. In the teacher team meetings, teachers spoke about these professional learning opportunities, especially with implementing these strategies in their own classes. Teachers spoke about this culture for learning among and for themselves and for their students.

- Parents and students spoke about the support from teachers for moving students to the next level. Although teachers use *Jupiter Grades*, an online application to communicate grades and messages to parents, all teachers consistently contact parents on Tuesdays, as evidenced by parent feedback. Parents shared that they receive calls or come in to speak with teachers weekly regarding their children's successes and areas of growth and how to support learning at home. Further, parents spoke about receiving support in completing the high school application during workshops. Students and parents also spoke about attending trips to visit high schools to aid in making important decisions.