



**Department of  
Education**

*Joel I. Klein, Chancellor*

**Quality Review Report  
Office of Accountability  
2008-2009**

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**Academy for Young Writers**

**High School 004**

**183 South Third Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11211**

**Principal: Carolyn Yaffe**

**Dates of review: May 7 - 8, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Chris Andrews**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Academy for Young Writers is a high school with 286 students from grade 9 through grade 11. The school population comprises 58% Black, 40% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 31% of the students enrolled and girls account for 69%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 86%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 81% eligibility.

The principal opened the school in 2006. Many of the faculty are new to teaching, and less than a quarter of the teachers have over five years' experience. The school shares a building and the cafeteria, gymnasium and auditorium with another school. This creates significant challenges in terms of scheduling as physical education lessons take place in the auditorium. The school does not have a laboratory, although it is intending to convert one classroom during summer recess.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The Academy for Young Writers is a small school in which students and faculty share a common vision of developing the skills and understanding that will, to quote the principal, "give structure to their development, and give them some power over their own lives". As a small but cohesive community, teachers and administrators know the children extremely well, and use a wide range of data to help them understand their strengths and needs as individuals. Parents and students welcome the many opportunities they have to discuss academic progress with the teachers, whether in the advisory program or with class teachers. Teachers generally engage and challenge students although they do not differentiate instruction equally effectively in all lessons. Expectations are high, and shared by all members of the school community, and students see themselves as college bound. The focus across the whole curriculum of developing "Habits of Mind" which are relevant not only to school but to life after school, ensures that there is common practice in all classrooms, and this reinforces student learning. Students and teachers are encouraged to be reflective about their development, as the school "is big on reflection", as one student expressed it. As a result, the school is developing as a community, which recognizes all as learners at different levels. School-wide goal setting is effective but less well developed or consistent at a more individual level, whether for students or teachers. Similarly, the monitoring of student progress is good but there is less clarity in terms of monitoring whole school progress towards long-term goals.

Relationships are excellent and students have responded both positively and maturely to the use of first names throughout the building. They like the school and the opportunities it provides, particularly to contribute to the school publications, produced in conjunction with Columbia University. They also recognize some limitations created by the size of the school in terms of, for example, the range of electives available to them.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The meticulous collection and use of data at school and grade levels provides administrators with an accurate picture of individual student strengths and needs.
- Close collaboration between the school, parents, and students, enables parents to be active participants in their children's education.
- All members of the school community clearly understand the high expectations, which contribute significantly to the very positive climate for learning.
- The school is developing as a genuine learning community where teachers and students have frequent opportunities to reflect upon their learning and practice.
- Leadership is strong and collaborative, and all members of the school community share and clearly articulate the vision for the school's further development and growth.
- The advisory program and the strong links with community and other organizations support and enhance students' personal and academic growth.

### What the school needs to improve

- Provide explicit, measurable school, subject, and student and class goals and highlight more clearly the next learning steps for each student.
- Continue to develop teacher expertise in using data effectively to differentiate instruction so it matches the needs of individual and groups of students.
- Develop measurable goals for teachers aligned to detailed professional development plans, with benchmarks and clear success criteria to address both school and teacher needs.
- Provide interim goals and clear timeframes to monitor developments and identify the next steps for the school's further improvement

## Part 3: Main Findings

### How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The school collects and uses data at school and grade levels methodically. All students undertake a baseline test in the form of an early design-your-own (DYO) assessment at the start of each academic year. The three DYO assessments are well established in English language arts and math in all three grades. They provide valuable information from which to gauge student progress and so allow teachers to modify their instruction to address identified needs. As a result, the school is now adding similar assessments in science and social studies for each grade. Every unit of work culminates in an assessment or exhibition, which can take many formats. This allows teachers to assess students' on-going levels of understanding, their strengths, and their areas for development. The 'Easy Grade Pro', a computerized grade book used by all teachers for recording class and test data, generates progress monthly reports. These keep teachers and students informed of their grade averages in each subject and indicate missing assessments or homework. The school uses another program to collate teachers input information about any student, to provide a growing profile of an individual's achievements or problems. As a result, teachers have a very clear picture of individual student strengths and needs, which they share effectively with students through the advisory program.

Every member of the faculty has an advisory group. Advisory teachers hold parent-teacher conferences by appointment, arranged within a two-day period to enable more parents to attend. These facilitate the regular exchange of information and encourage parents to share their knowledge about their children. In this way, parents discuss their children's progress with a single member of the faculty who has a clear overview of all subject areas. This does not preclude parents contacting individual teachers directly. Parents value these reciprocal discussions. In addition, at the mid-point of each quarter the school issues academic alerts, or progress reports, which warn of possible failing grades so parents and students can respond before the main report card. The formation of school profiles that include selected examples of student work, allow teachers to assess student growth over time. They also provide evidence of performance that the school passes from one grade to the next. As a result, there is considerable consistency in the assessment of work across subjects and grades so all students make good progress based upon their scores and levels of achievement upon enrollment to the school.

The school has disaggregated the data for the different subgroups, and identified, for example, that the English language learners were accumulating credits in class but failing to pass the Regents examinations. It identified this as weaknesses in reading, so a specialist teacher is working in classes to support English language learner students and provide expertise to their teachers. Meticulous assessments inform specific writing goals for these students, to address this issue, and the school has created a dedicated advisory team to provide additional support to students and parents. The administration has also changed elements of the after-school activities, such as sport, to attract more males, particularly from grade 11 where data shows that females tend to achieve more

highly. However, data for the current grades 9 and 10 indicates that many of the stronger students are male. Overall, the school is developing as a genuine learning community. The school shares the data generated by an electronic program openly with students and parents and all participants reflect collaboratively on learning and student progress.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

Teachers analyze the data to identify students’ strengths and areas for improvement in developing the skills highlighted in the scope and sequence for each unit, which they share with students. The school has not created individual, measurable goals for each student and class in all core areas. The school has made a positive start with individual goal setting however, it is early days and there are inconsistencies between different grades and classes. As a result, not all students are confident about the next steps needed to achieve their long-term goals. In recognition of this weakness, and that many of the teachers are relatively new to the profession, leaders have devised professional development in the use of relevant data.

Administrators create the goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan aligning them to the principal’s personal review monitored by the school leadership team. This provides a clear sense of the direction for the school’s short-term development but does not clearly define long-term goals. The advisory teachers meet weekly with students to discuss their progress and to reinforce the school’s high expectations. Students and parents know that faculty regards students as potentially ‘college bound’, and students in the eleventh grade recognize the importance of this year in terms of college applications and entry. The school shares these expectations through published documents and conferencing with parents and students. One parent commented that teachers “care enough to call” if any student is failing to meet those expectations. The rising grade 8 students attend an orientation and a summer “bridge” program to establish expectations for behavior and academic work. Students therefore arrive at the school well prepared for the demands that will be made of them.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

Administrators ensure that the curriculum aligns to state standards through rigorous monitoring of instruction. They visit classrooms regularly and provide valuable feedback to improve lessons. Students generally find lessons engaging and challenging, particularly when the teacher “knows how to connect”, as one student explained it. Occasionally, they admit to being bored but feel that, “teachers generally put themselves into the lesson and use creative ideas”. Students enjoy their elective classes, such as art, drama, and Spanish. They also have been engaged in their physical education lessons as their teacher imaginatively uses the available spaces for yoga and Pilates, as well as more traditional activities.

Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning through their journals. As a result, they talk meaningfully about what they are learning and how it connects with previous work. Teachers differentiate work by outcome, especially when students have rubrics to produce responses at different levels. Some use differentiated worksheets, such as taking account of a writer's viewpoint or use of evidence that becomes more sophisticated as students reach higher grades or levels of achievement. However, not all teachers use data consistently to differentiate instruction so that it closely meets the needs of individual and groups of students.

The principal develops the curriculum and the use of resources strategically depending on data outcomes. Subsequently the school builds in decisions into the revised curriculum maps for each subject area, and data informs discussions with teachers about class and student progress. Hiring a specialist English language learner teacher to raise student standards is an example of such decision-making. Another example is that because the school does not have a computer laboratory, it has purchased laptop carts and established wireless connections throughout the school to provide greater flexibility for teachers so they can integrate technology into lessons. The culture and climate for learning within the school is extremely positive. Relationships are mutually respectful and fostered by the advisory program and supported by a clearly understood discipline program. The hallways display high standards of student work, including examples of published writing, which students read regularly. Many classrooms also are clearly centers of learning, with displays of current work and relevant word walls, although not every room displays exemplar work, with the associated rubric.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The principal, her assistant and the instructional coach, each observe three lessons a day informally and provide feedback, which addresses both strengths and developmental areas, to each teacher. These observations, combined with discussions about student progress, generate goals for teachers and individual plans for students who need extra support. Teachers are also encouraged to set personal goals, but this practice is inconsistent and there no formalized professional development plans for teachers. There is a strong collaborative culture in the school and all teachers are involved in developing the curriculum. They plan and revise the scope and sequence for each subject area, dependent upon their own data and the outcome of the DYOs. They have also shared in creating the discipline program and school leaders regularly consult them about scheduling and professional development. As a result, one teacher stated, "I feel that I have a voice" and the sense of a learning community is reinforced. Teachers discuss the progress of individual students and share knowledge and understanding of student strengths and needs at weekly grade level meetings. They discuss visits they have made to each other's classrooms as part of their professional development. Because many teachers have relatively limited teaching experience, new teachers each have a mentor and are also well supported by the instructional coach and the consultant from the Institute for Student Achievement

The inquiry team is focusing on the lowest third of the eleventh grade students. Members observed effective practice to develop new ideas to help these students understand the requirements of questions more clearly. Data analysis and the review of exhibitions by the students show that about eighty percent of students are becoming more confident, independent learners. The team has shared the range of successful

strategies with all teachers and the school is now building them into future scope and sequence planning.

The advisory program and the strong links with community and other organizations, support and enhance student personal and academic growth. A valuable link with the Institute for Student Achievement led to the creation of the advisory program and the school's positive culture. Collaboration with the Student Press Initiative at Columbia University provided all students with the chance to become published authors. This has enhanced their self-esteem significantly and improved the quality of students' prose and poetry writing. Subsequently, the writing of some current grade 11 students won a 9/11 Memorial Award for their reflections on that event.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The administration and teachers regularly monitor student progress from end of unit exhibitions and the information from grade books. The outcomes inform the necessary interventions, so students maintain their grade averages. The school communicates them to parents if necessary. It reviews the long-term plan for professional development systematically to respond to emerging needs identified by observations or by the teachers' input. The school leadership team reviews the Comprehensive Educational Plan at its meetings. However, the lack of explicit, measurable goals with interim goals and clear timeframes makes it difficult to monitor developments or to prioritize the key steps for future development.

Administrators use a range of data to monitor and revise planning. They generated a credit recovery program from class scores and monitor the program each quarter to ensure that it is targeting the correct students, and then moves them in or out of the program as appropriate. Regents' data informs the planning of portfolios and assessments to ensure that they focus on the correct testing areas. Equally, the school has created two useful institutes to provide extra support for junior and senior students. At present, only eleventh grade students are in the senior institute. They have an advisory program to prepare for college applications and for possible internships in grade 12 for those who will have achieved the necessary credits. The junior institute advisory program focuses on out-of-school community service, which provides students with opportunities to develop personal qualities as well as experience new environments.

The school leadership is strong and collaborative. The principal is open to suggestions about on-going developments. The students feel that the principal always listens to, and often supports, their ideas, about the development of sporting opportunities. As one student explained it, speaking of the principal, "she's really in to us" and they share her vision for the school's further development and growth.

## School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Academy for Young Writers</b>	△	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>				
	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				<b>X</b>
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				<b>X</b>
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?				<b>X</b>
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>				
	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?				<b>X</b>
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

### DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.**

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X	

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.**

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X	
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X	

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?				X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X	

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed