

# Quality Review Report 2008-2009

**Women's Academy of Excellence**

**High School 282**

**456 White Plains Road  
Bronx  
NY 10473**

**Principal: Arnette Crocker**

**Dates of review: February 9-10, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Alexis Penzell**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Women's Academy of Excellence is a girls' high school with 277 students from grade 8 through grade 11. The school population comprises 53% Black, 41% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 6% special education students. Girls account for 100% of the students enrolled. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 91.7% in the middle school and 88.6% in the high school. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 66.5% eligibility.

The school has phased out grade 7 and is phasing out grade 8 because it has had to vacate the trailers in which it was housed for the past two and the new space can only accommodate a four-year high school. The school is no longer affiliated with the Young Women's Leadership Foundation and has a new name.

### Overall Evaluation

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

The Women's Academy of Excellence, formerly The Young Women's Leadership School, is the first all girls' public high school in the Bronx in 30 years. It is a standards-based, college preparatory school with a focus on leadership, math, science and civic responsibility. The principal and staff, many of whom have been at the school since its inception, have maintained and strengthened their high standards for academic achievement, their strong sense of community and their focus on the personal growth of each individual student through advisories. They have collaboratively reworked their vision and renewed their commitment to the school's success and development. The clear vision is well supported through plans and actions and informed by analysis of data.

Teachers have access to a variety of data and share their formal and informal assessments in various grade and department meetings, as well as in weekly, common planning time. However, there is not yet a whole-school system for gathering and analyzing the information that provides all teachers with easy access to the data. Teachers share data with students in both classes and advisories to encourage ownership of learning and responsibility. Staff set their own goals for professional growth at the beginning of the year but not all incorporate measurable targets and checkpoints to monitor their progress, and professional development plans are not individualized to meet specific needs. Students develop year-long and five-year goals within their advisories in the fall; however these goals do not have specific course targets. Staff develop focused academic goals and action plans for student growth, but only for the bottom third and those at risk. Formal reporting systems, as well as mid-marking period academic alerts, are used to share achievement results. The school has just begun end-of-marking period parent-teacher conferences for students at risk to further provide interim support for student achievement. Curriculum plans are strong and tied to standards. Classes, for the most part, challenge students at the right level, with questioning that stimulates critical thinking and tasks that support differentiation.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Members of staff gather a range of relevant data, both formal and informal, across all subjects, to understand student performance and modify practice.
- The school has high expectations of its students and communicates these effectively to students and their families.
- Well-focused curriculum maps, syllabi and pacing calendars aligned to state standards assure that teaching is engaging, purposeful and targeted to learning outcomes.
- Creative scheduling successfully provides teachers with opportunities for professional development, collaboration and planning for curriculum development that raises student achievement.
- A strong advisory program provides the students and their families with feedback opportunities for goal setting and support for personal and academic growth.
- The school's mission and vision are well understood and communicated to all constituencies and effectively supported through school plans.

### What the school needs to improve

- Refine and streamline data systems for gathering, analyzing and sharing across subjects, classes, grades and whole school and increase teachers' access to these.
- Extend student goal setting to include specific targets for progress and interim benchmarks for achieving those targets in all core subjects.
- Increase opportunities for English language learners to receive language support in all content classes.
- Create individualized professional development plans that include expectations for student outcomes and support school goals, in order to further improve instructional practices and accelerate student progress.

## 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 proficient.**

The administration and faculty generate, gather and utilize a wide range of student performance data, including results of learning style surveys and informal advisory data, to develop a clear picture of student achievement and progress across the school. Teachers are given binders with all relevant data at their disposal, but the data is cumbersome to use. Some teachers use their own electronic systems for gathering and storing relevant classroom data. This practice is not widespread and as a result, the school has collaboratively decided to incorporate Teacher Ease as an online grading system to be used by all. Baseline and periodic assessments made every six to eight weeks, GROW reports and six interim checkpoint marking periods provide the school with an ongoing picture of strengths and areas for improvement across grades and subjects. Baseline testing also informs teachers' understanding of students' prior knowledge and, as a result, where to concentrate instruction; for example, subgroup achievement data reveal that Black students slightly underperform Hispanic students.

Teachers maintain open communication with parents, and involve them in an effective learning partnership by notifying them of student successes and challenges through advisors, mid-marking period alerts and formal reporting six times a year.. The school has established a new practice of meeting with parents of students at risk each end of marking periods to further strengthen that communication and provide stronger support for student achievement. Staff share data with students to encourage ownership of learning and responsibility.

While some staff use technology as an instructional and diagnostic tool, its use is not widespread. At present teachers cannot access all information on an individual student in one place, including achievement across subjects, performance trends over time, learning styles and individual action plans. As a result, use of multiple data sets is not readily accessible for all staff.

**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.**

Students are dismissed early on Mondays to provide common planning time in grade, department and interdisciplinary configurations for teachers, leaders and coaches. These opportunities are used effectively to analyze assessment results, student work and other evidence of achievement against curriculum plans and maps, as well as their blackboard configurations called "BBCs", a snapshot of the week's lesson plans.

Teachers use backwards planning to design their curriculum and continuously refine the content as they assess what students have learned and need to learn. Rubrics are used to help students understand expectations for projects and written assignments.

The school's high expectations for student achievement are embodied in its mission, and going to college is clearly understood as a mandate for all the girls. Goal setting has been part of the school since its inception and the principal has invested in programs to assist teachers in the development of SMART goals for their courses. It is most specific in math where a typical goal for the day's lesson framed as "what you will learn" was "to identify congruent figures and their corresponding congruent parts". All students set goals in their weekly advisories and update them each marking period for all subjects around four areas: academic, leadership, community service and personal development. However, the academic goals are more general than specific in terms of learning targets, for example, "passing English with an 85 or better". As a result, students understand their requirements for passing a course and earning credits but they do not routinely analyze their learning needs in each class and set specific long-term goals with incremental goals and time frames for achieving them. Action plans with specific academic goals are developed with students in the lowest third of the school and those at risk.

The administration is effective in using a range of data to determine the school's needs and plan for improvements. Teachers and parents are engaged in the collaborative development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan through the school leadership team and weekly common planning time, and the goals for the school are clearly understood by all constituencies. The school effectively communicates the goals to students and families, as well as its expectations of students for graduating, going to college and becoming a future leader, through advisories, mid-marking period alerts, report cards and email or phone contacts. Advisors and guidance/college counselors further support the students and their families in understanding the requirements needed to reach those goals and be successful.

**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.**

There is a special emphasis on ensuring standards-based instruction in all classes, including the arts, and curriculum is strongly aligned with state standards. Each teacher develops detailed curriculum guides using backwards design, and these, along with the pacing calendars, provide guidance in the development of content knowledge and skills. These also ensure that there are plans for each unit that include pre-assessments, essential questions, skills and habits to be taught and final assessments. Learning style surveys, interest inventories and family surveys add additional information that teachers use in planning lessons. The school's emphasis on differentiating instruction is in its second year of development. Coaches and classroom observations support the strategy well and, as a result, there is evidence of strong instruction and engagement in many classes and effective levels of challenge and rigor in some classes. In some classes, students were grouped together but did not use the opportunity to work together to complete tasks. There are only eight English language learners in the school and they receive services during ninth period and Saturday school. The school plans to find dual certified teachers so that these students can have greater support in all classes.

The principal and her team monitor all aspects of the school and ensure that all decisions provide optimum learning conditions. The loss of the Young Women's Leadership Foundation's support has resulted in the elimination of several popular programs. Limited technology has been another challenge. The school is aggressively pursuing alternative funding sources to subsidize these gaps, and as a result of one grant, the school is waiting for new laptops and cart to arrive. Despite its small size and the lack of specialized areas such as science labs and a library, the principal is optimistic that funding for these "must-haves" will be found. Ninth period classes and the Saturday Academy provide opportunities for girls to receive individual and small group academic instruction.

Students, known as "scholars", are focused and relationships among them and the staff are respectful. Students learn in a respectful, purposeful environment in which there is a palpable sense of responsibility for their own success and that of each other. The principal is highly visible and greets the girls outside each morning and during passing time, calling them by name and giving them support and encouragement. There is a strong "I can do it" atmosphere in the school.

**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 identifies her staff's strengths and areas for development through formal and informal observations or snapshot "learning visits", discussions. There are also monthly learning walks that allow teachers to share best practices and spark conversations about students they have in common. Learning visits are followed by detailed feedback. However, the focus of classroom visits is on teachers' skills and activities rather than on what and how well students are learning. .

Interdisciplinary units have been developed by the English language arts and science departments and the 11<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, each of whom have common planning time additional to the weekly Monday afternoon sessions. Collaborative team meetings at grade levels and within subjects are an effective structure for supporting instructional development and sharing of best practices. They also provide opportunities for teachers to analyze student work and other evidence of learning. These teams are being trained to act as mini-inquiry teams involved in investigating the obstacles to students learning a specific content area and providing effective support to change them.

All staff are expected to develop a high-quality, college preparatory curriculum for their subject and plan lessons that target specific skills and learning strands for each course they teach. Weekly planning time provides opportunities to build on their thoughtfully crafted curriculum maps and adjust them to match the learning that takes place in the classroom.

Teachers completed a needs assessment for professional development and these were used to craft the school wide goals for this year. They also set their own professional growth goals, such as "build my technological skills", "implement strategies and techniques to differentiate instruction and tap into scholars' learning strengths styles and preference". They receive support for their own professional growth from coaches, the principal, consultants and collaborations with their peers. However, while these

practices for individual improvement are effective, detailed individual plans for teachers' future professional development haven't yet been established. Although the school is in its second year of learning about differentiation and putting it into practice, there is no targeted benchmark goal in mind for this work. There are examples of strong differentiation in some classrooms, for example in math and Spanish, but there are, as yet, no systemic footprints evident and therefore it is difficult to determine how fully this has taken hold.

This is a student-centered community which values individuals. Students and families benefit from guidance that supports the academic, social and personal development of each girl. Guidance counselors, advisors and classroom teachers maintain continual contact with families to encourage students' growth in reaching their goals.

**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 school's vision to prepare students for college success was developed collaboratively, shared with all constituencies and supported by them. This commitment for the newly formed Women's Academy of Excellence has been instrumental in grounding the new school, ensuring its stability and giving it the impetus to excel. It is the driving force behind all decisions. Despite the challenges of three moves in four years, the school finally has what feels to be a real home. The principal is reflective about this process and has used the experience to gain an even stronger understanding of the school's needs and the direction it needs to take as it grows into a full high school. Her commitment to the girls, and that of the greater community, is the glue that holds the school together.

There are six formal and six informal opportunities for monitoring progress for all students, including subgroups and those with specific needs, thereby providing good interim information for making adjustments and providing interventions. Members of staff review and discuss scholarship reports. They review their formal and informal data weekly, including assessments, exit slips and advisory information to adjust and refine their instruction. Some teachers meet outside of school, for example the special education teacher and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher meet each Saturday morning to plan for their Collaborative Team Teaching class, which demonstrates their commitment to improving outcomes for students. There is a sense of urgency to keep the scholars on track, have them pass their Regents and ensure a high school diploma and a college acceptance. Next year the school will have its first graduating class and it is determined to leave no girl behind.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Women's Academy of Excellence</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, DYQ, 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.**

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+
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.**

To what extent do school leaders...	Δ	➤	✓	+
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.**

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+
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	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed