Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Academy For Young Writers
Secondary School 19K404
1065 Elton Street
Brooklyn
NY 11208

Principal: Aaden Stern

Dates of Review:
March 13, 2018 - March 14, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Academy For Young Writers serves students in grade 6 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Quality Ratings continued

#### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school’s instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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</table>

### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a set of high expectations to all students and provides clear focused feedback and guidance supports.

### Impact

Effective communication leads to a culture of mutual accountability where all students, including high-need sub-groups, are taking ownership of their learning to prepare for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- Each week, school leaders communicate their schoolwide expectations on building a culturally relevant community and pedagogy through the *Weekly Bulletin* that contains information on the instructional expectations, provides updates on upcoming events, and/or attendance data that highlights a school focus. In one bulletin the principal highlighted a classroom example of a best practice where students challenged each other’s thinking and were taking risks. This was a means to promote similar expectations across classes. Additionally, the *Weekly Bulletin* is posted on the school’s website, reinforcing its consistent use by school leaders to communicate to teachers. Furthermore, educational research newsletters are shared on the website to provide information on student-centered instruction, assessment-based instruction, and higher-order thinking and discussion techniques. In the most recent newsletter, one article discusses how teachers can work with students to generate their own questions during an activity, which is aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

- Across the departments and grades, teacher leaders focus on professional learning opportunities and lead meetings to address ways to meet the school’s instructional goals relative to increasing student achievement through feedback structures and developing a culturally responsive environment. In addition, teacher leaders model best practices to ensure consistency of instruction. One lead teacher shared how modeling group work protocols for her colleague allowed him to integrate the same approaches, fostering more student engagement in the class. A review of teacher *Advance* feedback reports indicates increases in teacher growth resulting from ongoing teacher leader support and reinforcement of best practices during team meetings.

- The school offers a wide variety of opportunities to foster a college-ready environment. Advanced Placement (AP) courses have increased over the past two years and include two courses in Biology and Literature. In and out-of-state college trips, visits from college representatives, an alumni day and several partnerships allow students to be exposed to different colleges and to possible careers, helping them to navigate their pathway towards post-secondary readiness. Guidance counselors and ongoing grade-specific advisory programs help engage students with activities that build confidence in choosing career trajectories. Students reported that classes on financial awareness and college classes have helped them with understanding the college process and what they need to do to be prepared for their next steps. One student stated that she is taking AP Biology so she can be prepared for a nursing career. Another student stated that the college courses led her to review the application process differently and focus on choosing colleges with her desired career path in mind. Similarly, other students shared that the variety of school offerings ensured they were prepared to take charge of their next steps in meeting their educational goals.
Area of Focus

Quality Indicator: 1.2 Pedagogy

Rating: Proficient

Findings

Teacher practices have yet to demonstrate a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is aligned with the instructional focus on actively engaging students in the learning process and helping them make connections to the world.

Impact

In a few classes, work products and discussions have yet to result in reflecting high levels of student thinking, participation, and ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classes, the belief that students learn best when they are engaged in the learning process and their learning connects to the world around them was present in the form of student engagement in groups or partnerships and academic discourse. In an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) humanities class, students analyzed political cartoons, made inferences, and explained the meaning of what was portrayed. One student analyzed a cartoon and wrote that currently kids are more concerned with texting on their phones than playing other more active games, and not paying attention to the world around them. Another student made a comparison of society’s view of two different cultures. After, they shared their inferences as a group, students used details from the cartoon to explain the rationale for their conclusions. Although student work products demonstrated alignment to English Language Arts (ELA) instructional shifts on stating and supporting claims, in a few classes, work products varied in reflecting the application of the shifts.

- In a science class students placed the stages of mitosis in sequential order. After, as a group, students were asked to choose a stage of and create a model of mitosis. Each student chose a different stage to draw and label. Although, students were able to identify the different stages, responses varied in reflecting the importance each stage and why understanding the order of these stages was relevant to the science concept or relevant to them. In an English class, students analyzed different songs and paintings on the great migration in order to compare and determine the idea or message behind them. Some students’ responses only reflected descriptions of the images and songs without deep reasoning related to the great migration, while other students’ written answers provided some reasoning and connections; thus there were a limited number of responses that met the standards.

- Student-to-student group work and partnerships were present in several classes where students worked collaboratively on projects or tasks. In a computer science class, students were given computer-based scenarios and worked in partnerships to develop coding methods with Boolean parameters. When challenged, students worked together to solve problems and questioned each other’s rationale for using certain codes. Yet, in a few other classes, students were not provided the same opportunity. In a math class, students solved problems using equations and were then asked to present their answers on the interactive white board using a computer program. However, the lesson was mostly directed by the teacher. Similarly, in another math class, questions about group presentations of math patterns and rates of change were mostly led by teachers.
## Additional Finding

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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### Findings

The school’s curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards, integrate instructional shifts, and emphasize cultural relevance as well as rigor in academic tasks across grades and subject areas.

### Impact

Purposeful decisions allow all students to access rigorous tasks which build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- This year the school staff have made a decision to integrate culturally relevant topics and texts along with grade-level standards in the schoolwide curricula. To integrate the standards and cultural relevancy, two math teachers created lessons for a sixth-grade math unit requiring students to use information relative to the march from Selma to Montgomery to create a model of a coordinate plane. The lessons aligned to instructional shifts on solving problems using real world scenarios and the standards which ask students to graph points in all four quadrants of a coordinate plane and use the coordinates and absolute value to find the distance between the points. An ELA unit on Language, Identity, and History, contained the standards on citing strong evidence to support an analysis of what a text says explicitly, drawing inferences, and developing central ideas or themes while analyzing their development over time. The emphasis of the unit that is a book study on *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has students creating their own personal ethnography referencing this culturally relevant text on the Harlem Renaissance.

- A review of curricula reflects the integration of instructional shifts geared towards supporting claims and real-world problem solving. In an ELA unit tasks reflect the analysis of texts using annotation to note and highlight details to support the main idea. Then, students need to write short responses which contain those concepts with details. In an algebra unit, learning outcomes focus on recognizing algebraic patterns in different equivalent ways and contextualizing the relationship between two quantities in real-world situations while representing the rate of change algebraically.

- Instructional units culminate with an exhibition project that includes tasks that align to Webb’s *Depth of Knowledge* levels three and four, which emphasize rigorous habits. In a Global History unit on globalization, the culminating task consists of creating a research-based online exhibition project which will discuss the positive and negative effects of a historical figure’s belief or achievements, including historical information about the person. In an algebra unit, students will choose three experiments, linear, quadratic, and exponential, from a menu of options, to collect data, determine the category of function, and represent their data graphically while writing an equation to model the situation. In an earth science unit, students will figure out how and why different surface processes have affected the landscape of New York City over the last half billion years and use geologic and fossil evidence to create a representation of it during a prehistoric age.
Findings

Common assessments are used to monitor student progress toward achieving standards-based goals. Ongoing assessment practices reflect consistent use of checks for understanding using formative assessment techniques and student self-assessment.

Impact

Across subjects and grades, small group instruction and ongoing in-the-moment adjustments, including unit revisions, are made to meet all students’ learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Online diagnostic and other common assessments are analyzed and used to make pedagogical adjustments based on students’ needs. Additionally, this data is used to form instructional groups within the class and to develop targeted advisory interventions for remastering concepts. A review of math common assessments informed an instructional adjustment, the Problem of the Week structure, in response to students exhibiting difficulty decoding and comprehending word problems based on need and using prior Regents and other assessment data. Consequently, students analyze the structure of algebra word problems, note key words, develop statements on what the problem is asking, and determine strategies for solving the problem that is then depicted on a graphic organizer. After, students engage in pair partnerships to share their strategies and come to consensus on how the problem should be solved.

- In global studies, a review of common assessment data revealed that students demonstrated difficulty in cause and effect and writing analysis. As an adjustment, additional sustained writing time was provided that incorporated using different graphic organizers, including a see, think, wonder template, to allow students an opportunity to further analyze the meaning behind documents. In ELA, schoolwide data showed the need for tackling words and building comprehension strategies for students in grades six through ten who are in the bottom third of the population, for English Language Learners (ELLs), and for students with disabilities. Tiered groups were formed for targeted support around reading skills, leading to increases in students’ abilities to decode, read fluently, and comprehend texts. This has resulted in an average of 20 percent growth in decoding between October and February for one group. Other groups demonstrated an average increase in fluency levels or two reading levels between October and February.

- Checks for understanding as assessment practices were present across classes. A common practice observed was teacher-to-student conferences where teachers worked individually with a student and used prompting to adjust and guide as needed. In an ICT social studies class, one teacher worked with a group of students to complete a graphic organizer which asked them to use a set of documents to describe Muslim life in the 1930’s. When misconceptions arose, the teacher adjusted with prompting for individual students to help them understand the questions. In two humanities classes, students used rubrics or exemplars to self-assess their responses. A review of student work reflects that this is a consistent practice in the school.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

School leaders support the development of all teachers with effective feedback aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* that captures strengths, suggestions, and next steps through ongoing cycles of observation connected to the school’s goals on assessment, questioning, and discussion.

Impact

Teacher feedback reflects clear, schoolwide expectations for assessment and instructional practices and is focused on implementing strategies and promoting professional growth.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders who use an online spreadsheet as a calendar to track the frequency of observations are assigned to specific grade-level teachers, including those new to the profession, to ensure they meet their set timelines for observations. Each cycle contains a prioritized observation focus such as the lens of the first cycle was connected to building rapport, class management, and demonstration of content pedagogy aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. As evidenced by the online tracker, the majority of teachers have been observed two to three times thus far this year, ensuring teachers receive timely feedback. Additionally, teachers reported that their feedback is timely and helpful with improving their instructional practices.

- Student work and data, including conversations with students, are utilized to support the observation feedback practice. For the observation of one teacher, the school leader noted the level of engagement of the students in the class who were developing a computer game. This was noted as demonstrating that students worked collaboratively and pushed each other’s thinking with questions, yet, due to difficulty in understanding the task, two students were not as engaged. The school leader recommended creating an action plan or prioritizing unpacking the task with those students prior to moving to the rest of the class so they would understand what to do. During the subsequent observation, the report contained feedback complementing the teacher’s efforts to engage the two students and the school leader shared positive statements provided about the students’ participation and increased level of understanding during the lesson. Similar patterns across feedback reports contained comments relative to students’ understanding of the task and level of student-to-student conversation and engagement.

- A review of post-observation reports reflect feedback connected to the school’s goals on student engagement and assessment-based instruction. School leaders conduct norming sessions with each other so that their feedback contains similar language aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and includes strengths, suggestions, and next steps. In one report, the school leader highlighted questions and used student quotes to provide the teacher with context on the level of participation students undertook while copying notes. To increase rigorous and student engagement, the school leader encouraged the teacher to use other adults in the room and breaking up the lesson to provide students opportunities to think, question and engage with the text. In turn, during the following lesson, this became a strength area for the teacher as the observation report reflected the use of more student-centered approaches. Consequently, students were observed working both individually and collaboratively to engage and question texts. Similarly, other feedback reports reflected increases in teacher growth relative to the school’s targeted instructional foci.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

Findings

The majority of teachers engage in structured, horizontal, and vertical inquiry teams that consistently analyze student work and data for students whom they share.

Impact

Teacher teams promote the achievement of school goals towards meeting the Common Core Learning Standards, strengthening teachers’ capacity, and refining instructional practices, resulting in increased student progress.

Supporting Evidence

- A school goal is to ensure meaningful feedback and that assessment practices are in place to increase student achievement. Thus, department teams have created goals that are based on students’ data and identified areas of improvement for the school. For the middle school science department, after its review of formative assessments, the team uses the inquiry cycle to ensure actionable and meaningful feedback is provided and related to students’ progress. The high school history department team focuses its inquiry on student self-assessment and peer feedback practices to increase student analytical thinking. Across all departments, a lens on increasing student achievement using data from assessments is emphasized and aligned to implementing classroom strategies assisting students in meeting the Common Core Learning Standards.

- Examining teacher teams’ second-cycle notes, evidence was noted around the common practice of inquiry work, specifically the review of data and student work, sharing of practices and/or curricula and assessment adjustments. In the social studies team meeting, teachers reviewed pre-assessments of diagnostic data and exit slips. A noted problem of practice was that students were having difficulty with demonstrating literary analysis in their writing and evaluating their evidence. Some suggestions were the use of new graphic organizers, explicit modeling, and strategies that focus on terms such as supposition, bias, and perspective, including sentence starters to help students with analysis and evaluation in writing. The eighth-grade team’s problem of practice, based on a review of reading assessments, aligned to the instructional shifts on text complexity and annotation. Teachers revised a close reading strategy previously used to work with students to improve their reading analysis, resulting in increases and progress for most of the targeted students.

- During a team meeting, ninth-grade teachers reviewed student data and prioritized three standards which data revealed as common areas of improvement needed across subject areas. Then, to prioritize the focus relative to the standards, teachers paired up and reviewed the areas where students struggled on a recent reading assessment and then determined which grade-level standards should be the focus within each content area. The team determined that the focused standards and skills would be cause and effect, argument writing, especially in the area of applying reasoning, and relevant/valid evidence in a nonfictional passage. For each skill, teachers shared instructional strategies that they have used to improve student achievement and impact their progress. Additionally, the social studies department discussed the use of a rubric to assess cause and effect. For their next meeting, teachers will bring in student work from targeted students to evaluate growth as a result of using the strategies shared.