

**NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Office of Accountability**

**Differentiated Accountability - School Quality Review (SQR)
SCHOOL QUALITY REVIEW REPORT**

DBN:	11X289
District Name:	District 11
School Name:	Young Scholars Academy
School Address:	3710 Barnes Avenue, Bronx, NY 10467
Principal:	Jeanette Vargas
Accountability Phase/Category:	Improvement (Year-1) – Comprehensive
Areas of Identification:	English Language Arts - All Students; Hispanic Students; Students with Disabilities; English Language Learners; and Economically Disadvantaged Students
Dates of On-site Review:	May 15-16, 2012

PART 1: MISSION STATEMENT

“Young Scholars Academy is a learning community designed to educate all children with three goals in mind: To promote high levels of academic achievement in all content areas: To nurture the social emotional, intellectual and physical development of adolescent learners: To prepare all students for success in high school, college, and life beyond the classroom.”

PART 2: SCHOOL STRENGTHS

- The school leadership provides opportunities for common planning time among teachers. Teachers regularly use this time to collaborate.
- The school provides a warm, welcoming and nurturing environment.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND UTILIZATION OF DATA

FINDINGS:

- Reviews of documentation, interviews with school leaders and teachers, as well as classroom observations by the review team indicate that teachers are expected to maintain records of student data and regularly use this data to inform their work. Teachers have access to such data sources as

New York State Testing and Accountability Reporting Tool (nySTART) and New York City Department of Education's (NYCDOE) Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS) online learning. Some teachers assess students' reading levels using a system of running records. Classroom observations by the review team and a review of lesson plans indicate that teachers sometimes use data to form student groups. However, there is limited evidence that all English language arts (ELA) teachers consistently use a wide variety of data, such as interim assessments, Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, or item analysis data to identify the specific needs of students in their class. As a result, teachers are not always aware of the range of students' learning needs, and there is limited evidence that teachers regularly and consistently modify their instruction accordingly to enable all students to progress.

- Interviews with members of the staff and document review by the review team indicate that teachers of students with disabilities write IEP goals for ELA using data from Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments and New York State (NYS) ELA exam scores. However, there is limited evidence that teachers use a range of data to monitor and evaluate student progress regularly towards meeting these IEP goals. As a result, teachers are not consistently aware of the effectiveness of their instruction in enabling students with disabilities to achieve their IEP goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school leadership should work with teachers to develop clear guidelines and expectations for the collection and use of data to inform instruction. The school leadership should provide professional development (PD) for teachers on how to gather a wide range of data, including IEP goals for students with disabilities, and use the data effectively to inform planning, instruction, and monitoring of student progress. School leaders should regularly monitor teacher implementation of the use of data through formal and informal observations and provide support as needed.
- School leadership should provide PD to teachers on how to collect and analyze data to monitor student progress in meeting IEP goals. School leaders should consider incorporating these strategies into the guidelines and expectations for teacher data collection. School leadership should develop a system to help teachers set achievement benchmarks for students with disabilities and monitor students' progress towards IEP goals.

II. TEACHING AND LEARNING

FINDINGS:

- Document review, interviews with school leaders and lesson observations by the review team indicate that teachers group students for collaborative work. However, there is limited evidence that teachers consistently differentiate instruction for students in these groups. Lesson observations by the review team indicate that students often complete the same task. As a result, instruction and the assignment of tasks do not always address students' varying learning styles or address their diverse learning needs.
- Lessons observed and documents reviewed by the review team indicate that some lessons provide challenging learning opportunities and some teachers ask questions that prompt students to think more deeply. There is, however, limited evidence that teachers consistently ask questions that

stimulate students to think at higher levels. As a result, teachers are not regularly supporting students to develop problem solving and higher order thinking skills.

- Documents reviewed by the review team, including a PD agenda and student work folders, indicate that the school expects teachers to keep student work portfolios. However, student work folders do not regularly adhere to the stated expectations on the “Student Portfolio Assessment Sheet” provided by school leadership. Additionally, some portfolios contain very little work. Consequently, the portfolios are not useful tools to monitor or demonstrate improvement in student achievement.
- The review team’s interviews with teachers and students; ,document review, including review of students’ work; and lesson observations indicate that teachers use rubrics to assess end-of-unit assignments and projects. Students report that in some classes they assess their own work using a rubric before the teacher gives the final grade. However, there is limited evidence that teachers routinely provide written, detailed feedback. There is limited evidence that rubrics are used to help students monitor their own progress throughout units of study. Consequently, students do not always know next steps toward meeting and exceeding the standard.
- Documents reviewed by the review team indicate that teachers are developing shared expectations for the structure of lessons. However, there is limited evidence that teachers regularly summarize the instruction or assess student learning at the end of every lesson. As a result, teachers miss opportunities to assess the effectiveness of their instructional strategies as well as to reinforce understanding of the day’s lesson and allow students to reflect on their learning.
- A review of documentation by the review team, including the school’s Quality Indicators Self Assessment, indicates that the school has recently implemented a program of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). However, classroom observations by the review team and interviews with teachers and students demonstrate that the system is not consistently implemented throughout the school and that teachers have different expectations for student behavior in each classroom. As a result, behavior varies by classroom, and student learning is sometimes disrupted by off-task behavior.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school leadership should provide PD to increase teachers’ skills in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students and address the IEP goals of students with disabilities. School leaders should conduct formal and informal observations and walkthroughs to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of strategies learned through PD and provide further support to teachers as needed.
- The school leadership should build on PD provided previously on questioning techniques, to enhance teachers’ skills in asking higher order questions that promote students’ critical thinking skills. The school leaders should monitor teacher implementation of these strategies through regular formal and informal observations. Additionally, school leaders should provide specific and detailed feedback and further support teachers as necessary.

- School leaders should communicate clear expectations and build on the existing guidelines for portfolios stated in the “Student Portfolio Assessment Sheet.” School leaders should provide PD to teachers in developing student work portfolios that follow the guidelines as well as address how to use portfolios to monitor student growth. School leadership should also monitor student work folders to ensure that teachers are implementing PD strategies, maintaining quality work portfolios for all students, and monitoring student progress
- School leaders should work with the Staff to develop clear expectations for providing teacher feedback on student work and provide teachers with PD on how to give specific, detailed, and relevant written feedback, so students have a clear understanding of next steps for continued improvement. School leadership should monitor the quality of teachers’ written feedback through regular formal and informal observations and walkthroughs.
- The school leadership should provide PD for teachers on how to manage instructional time to include effective lesson closures. These closures should provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding and for teachers to assess student learning on a daily basis. School leaders should consider creating inter-visitation opportunities internally and externally so that teachers can view lessons that model student “share time” and closure.
- The school leadership, working with staff, should develop schoolwide expectations for student behavior. The school leaders should use the PBIS structure to develop and standardize behavioral management strategies and the application of the citywide code of conduct. School leaders should communicate these expectations for the application of the citywide code of conduct to the school community, including parents and students. School leaders should monitor implementation of the PBIS program throughout the school.

III. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

FINDINGS:

- Interviews conducted by the review team with school leaders and teachers as well as document review indicate that the responsibilities and roles of the testing coordinator and the data specialist have not been clearly delineated. As a result, there is limited evidence as to which faculty members provide support for these areas.
- Document review, interviews with school leaders and observations by the review team indicate that the school posts the school mission and Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) goals, which include academic and behavioral goals, throughout the school. However, there is limited evidence that expectations have been clearly communicated to staff and students regarding how the school community can reach these goals
- Document review and interviews conducted by the review team with school leaders and teachers indicate that school leaders carry out regular formal and informal lesson observations and provide feedback. However, there is limited evidence that the feedback provides effective strategies for teachers to implement in order to improve their instructional practice in delivering the Balanced Literacy program that the school has chosen to use for ELA instruction.
- Review of documentation and interviews conducted by the review team indicate that the school leadership can informally identify schoolwide trends in student population data, including the trend that many students enter the school with interrupted formal education, are over-aged, or “holdovers.” However, there is limited evidence of a schoolwide system in place to analyze trends regarding these specific groups of students within the school population and develop instructional programs and academic supports that are responsive to their needs. As a result, the school is limited in its ability to meet the diverse learning needs of students and enable them all to raise their levels of achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school leaders should identify individuals in the building, including teacher leaders, to assume the responsibilities of data specialist and testing coordinator in order to ensure that there is a clear line of accountability for each of these operational areas. School leaders should establish and communicate lines of responsibility for tasks that the data specialist and testing coordinator would perform to ensure that teachers receive guidance and support in using data and administering tests.
- The school leaders, working with the School Leadership Team (SLT), should develop a shared understanding of school goals and how all members of the community can work together to reach these goals. The school leadership should consider establishing a committee of teachers in the school to become actively involved in schoolwide planning and communication to supplement the work of the SLT and to ensure that all members of the school community understand how to achieve the stated CEP goals.

- The school leadership should investigate obtaining supplementary PD to support its understanding of the key components of the Balanced Literacy program in order to support teachers in implementing the program. This support should include monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the program, identifying successful instructional strategies, and sharing good practices, as well as providing specific and actionable feedback to teachers. School leaders should also consider identifying a literacy specialist to serve as an ELA coach who will provide support to teachers in implementing this program.
- School leaders should develop a method of systematically analyzing data to identify the needs of specific groups of students that the school identifies as having academic challenges, including students with interrupted formal education, over-aged students, and holdover students. School leaders should ensure that instructional programs are developed to meet the identified academic and social needs in order to support the progress of these students.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

FINDING:

Document review and interviews by the review team with staff and a parent provided evidence that the school has a range of methods to provide information to parents about their children’s progress. These include regular progress reports as well as access to an online grading system called Jupiter Grades. One of the school’s CEP goals focuses on increasing parental involvement. However, the school currently does not have a parent coordinator, and there is limited evidence that the school has developed a plan for increasing parental involvement. As a result, few parents are actively involved in activities and events that take place at the school.

RECOMMENDATION:

The school leadership should seek information and support from the Division of Family and Community Engagement and develop a plan to increase parental involvement. School leaders should monitor the implementation of this plan and continue to search for a parent coordinator to support the implementation of this plan.

V. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FINDINGS:

- Documentation reviewed by the review team indicates that the Network has provided PD opportunities for teachers, including specific PD for teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL). Additionally, the school leadership has provided opportunities for PD throughout the year that have included reflecting about lesson aims and how to use Bloom’s Taxonomy to rewrite more cognitively demanding aims. However, there is limited evidence of a cohesive PD plan that is aligned with school CEP goals and is based on a comprehensive school needs assessment. As a result, there is limited evidence that the school’s current PD is delivered in a systematic approach to ensure that schoolwide and individual PD needs are being met.

- The school leadership recognizes that ELA is an area that needs to improve and interviews with school leaders and teachers and document review indicates that the school leadership expects teachers to use a Balanced Literacy approach to instruction in ELA. However, there is limited evidence of a cohesive PD plan in place to provide support to teachers in implementing this model effectively. As a result, teachers are at different levels in their ability to implement key elements of the model, including conferencing, differentiation of instruction, and guided reading to improve students' learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school leadership should work with staff to develop a comprehensive PD plan that addresses the areas cited in this report and is based on teacher self-assessment as well as classroom observations. The school leadership should use the TeachScape program, which is already in place in the school, to monitor the effectiveness of strategies learned from PD as well as to collect data on the needs of teachers. School leaders should use this data to adjust the PD plan in a timely manner.
- School leaders should develop a high quality PD plan to ensure that the Balanced Literacy program is effectively implemented. In addition, the school leaders should consider opportunities for inter-visitation to other middle schools with a similar population where a Balanced Literacy program is being effectively implemented.

VI. FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

FINDINGS:

- Interviews with school leaders and teachers, as well as classroom observations by the review team, show evidence of a significant amount of technology throughout the school. This includes interactive white boards, LCD projectors and laptop carts. In some classrooms, the review team observed teachers using computer software that provided differentiated instruction in ELA. However, there is limited evidence that teachers consistently use this technology to engage students actively in their learning. As a result, opportunities are missed for teachers to enhance their instruction, engage students in their learning, and motivate them to accelerate their progress.
- Classroom observations and interviews with teachers by the review team indicate that some classrooms have libraries of leveled materials and that teachers are using novels to support instruction. However, classroom libraries are not sufficiently extensive to support the implementation of Balanced Literacy, which is the school's chosen method for ELA instructional delivery. As a result, teachers are hindered in their efforts to deliver key components of the Balanced Literacy program effectively, including guided reading, independent reading, and at-home reading. This limits their ability to promote students' achievement in ELA.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school leaders should develop clear expectations for the use of technology in daily lessons. They should provide PD to teachers on strategies for integrating the use of technology effectively

into instruction and learning. School leaders should monitor the use of technology by teachers through regular formal and informal observations and provide support as needed.

- School leaders should closely examine their budget allocations and explore options to obtain supplemental funds to purchase additional resources to ensure that all ELA classrooms are provided with sufficient, age-appropriate, book resources to support students' learning and enable teachers to deliver the Balanced Literacy approach to ELA instruction successfully. These books should reflect student needs and include high-interest, low readability books to support low-level readers as well as challenging books for higher achievers.

PART 4: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The findings and recommendations noted in the report are intended to guide the school's inquiry, planning and the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) for school year 2012-13. The school should also continue its efforts in the implementation of the following Regents Reform Agenda initiatives: P-12 Common Core Learning Standards, Data Driven Instruction and the Annual Professional Performance Reviews for teacher effectiveness.