

**The Urban Assembly School For The Urban Environment**

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Environment**

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# The Urban Assembly School For The Urban Environment

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## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School for the Urban Environment started in September 2005 and has 80 students on roll in grade 6. Next year there will be 160 students in grades 6 and 7. The school will grow year on year until there are students in grades 6 through 12. 61 students are Title 1 Eligible. 7 students have recognized special educational needs and one qualifies for support with their English language skills. Students come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. 62 Black, 14 Hispanic and 4 other.

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## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Leadership is very good; in a very short time this school has developed a distinctive culture.
- All adults are committed to working towards the goals and mission of the school,
- There are very clear expectations of behavior set through the school code.
- Student behavior is followed up consistently with unambiguous sanctions and rewards understood by all.
- Students value the clear rules and love the positive rewards such as 'shout-out' and 'celebration club'.
- The mandatory extended day and small classes gives students maximum access to learning.
- The teaching staff, while relatively inexperienced, are enthusiastic, highly committed and eager to ensuring students' progress.
- Teachers try a variety of approaches and techniques to engage students in their learning and there is some very successful practice.
- The school is very honest and self critical; if something is not working to the benefit of students it is re-examined, reorganized and re-evaluated until it works, the redevelopment of daily advisory is a good example of this.
- The information management system allows pupil data to be shared readily with parents who can see progress over time on monthly report cards and online.
- Links with partner organizations especially the Urban Assembly broaden and enrich the curriculum and the opportunities available for students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Work towards agreed and standardized levels in all subjects so student achievement can be more accurately assessed and monitored during the year and clear targets for improvement are set.
- Develop instruction techniques, supported by technology, that are differentiated to match the needs of students even better.
- Carry on the development work being done on producing a coherent curriculum, grade 7 through grade 12 that meets the needs of all students.
- Continue to develop and use the data management system to involve teachers in monitoring student achievement so that they can intervene where necessary at an early stage.
- Continue to work on improving parents' involvement in school life following the success of the earth festival and talent show.

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## Part 3: Main Findings

### Overall Evaluation

This is a new school and in its seven months of existence is well on the way to being effective; the students attending the school are getting a good deal. Clearly there are many areas to develop, but the building blocks for consolidating this proficient and ultimately well-developed school are in place.

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

**Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.**

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

School leaders regularly collect data about individual students' success in understanding and completing work and they record overall course marks on a monthly basis. In the first month this was recorded manually but since then the school has used a powerful information technology management system. The data collected month-by-month in humanities, mathematics and science and enables staff to monitor progress. The school recognizes the further facilities the management system offers. It will enable teachers to keep their record books electronically and to select and analyze results to check that every individual student is doing as well as expected. This area of the school's work is developing monthly because the school is so new. The school recognizes the need to develop more objective measures of student progress and has rightly identified the importance of a curriculum map linked to standardized assessments.

Small classes mean that teachers do know their students well and collect information about what each student knows and can do. The use of this information over time is recognized by the school as being important.

Some work has been usefully completed on looking at progress of different groups of students. For example, they have looked at the difference between the achievement of boys and girls. There are significantly fewer boys than girls in the school. Out of 80 students, the 23 boys perform less well than all the girls. To counteract this, the school proposes to teach boys and girls separately next year in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The school also uses the management system to track and monitor students' behavior and this adds valuable additional information to use alongside academic data.

**Quality Statement 2: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient with some undeveloped areas.**

The school is undeveloped mainly because of the difficulty of engaging with parents. School leaders and faculty members use data to monitor student's learning. The school

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has a pass rate of 70% for course work and the monthly report card gives parents information about the current and past months' grades. They also receive comments from the teachers about the students' work and engagement in each academic subject. These comments often include goals or targets but these are very general, such as, "he needs to focus more", and do not help students know specifically what they need to do to improve. This is an area the school acknowledges it has to improve.

Plans for curriculum mapping will enable collaborative planning to take place more generally. Currently teachers who teach the same subject, for example mathematics, plan their work together. In mathematics some excellent work has been achieved through cooperative thinking, trialing and planning by school leaders and teachers to find a format for lessons that motivates students more effectively. The school has put improving the quality of instruction as an important goal for this the first year of its existence. The majority of teachers while experienced in life are relatively inexperienced teachers. Much of the efforts of the principal and teacher's coach are correctly focused on developing teachers' skills and classroom management techniques. They have an accurate view of what good teaching should look like and have already had considerable success in spreading good practice.

Students are challenged and engaged in their work through consistent and regular referral to the schools' code. The Urban Environment code exhorts students towards good learning as well as good behavior. The code is regularly reinforced during morning meeting and throughout the day, it is a characteristic of the school that all, including the students, refer to the code consistently. They are all clear that the code is a constant and that adherence to it is rewarded and transgressions attract sanctions.

While parents get monthly report cards, which they can access at any time online, the school has found parent engagement difficult. Teachers regularly call parents to inform them of their child's successes or challenges. The school states that the majority of parents do not readily come to school to work collaboratively on their child's learning or to attend school events. Many weekend activity days for families planned by the school have attracted little or no support from parents. However, a recent festival Earth Day combined with a student talent competition attracted an extremely good turnout from parents and families. The school is able to identify that parents will attend school functions if they can see their children perform.

Using data, the school sets demanding, objectively measurable, goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals. Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as warranting attention

The performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement has been identified using the data management system. These students have been targeted for after school tutoring.

**Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.**

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

As the school is only 7 months old this area is proficient for the time it has been up and running however, there is much room for development in this area. The school is currently writing its curriculum plans to reflect its mission to 'provide a challenging and supportive academic environment to prepare students in grade 6 to 12 for college and beyond'. Central to this is the adherence to Urban Environment code which is already secure, corporate and rigorously enforced. The code reinforces good learning practices. All adults know and respect the students. They work tirelessly to enforce the Urban Environment code and to get the best for students. For example, the school secretary spent a considerable amount of time ensuring a student understood why coming on time was important and where this fitted into the Urban Environment code. Non-attendance is vigilantly followed up and parents are informed, although this contact is not always welcomed by all parents. Students know and trust the adults in school this is reflected in the improvement in attendance and behavior. One student explaining why they wore uniform explained, "with other schools in the building this is one way Mrs. Cole can keep us safe".

The school's plans to use the facilities of the data management system to generate meaningful ongoing progress data. The plans also include improving the standardization of data that is used for this purpose.

School leadership monitors and adapts the organization of the day and week continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals. For example, the advisory period was given a considerable amount of time within the curriculum. It was to be used to enhance students' social and study skills as well as reinforcing the tenets of the Urban Environment code. The sessions were not a success and were not achieving the desired effect. In addition, sessions varied from teacher to teacher and did not give students the same deal. The school leaders and teachers examined the problem; used a variety of ways to accurately isolate the difficulties and worked alongside a consultant. They are now planning to collaborate to prepare a robust advisory curriculum that will tackle study skills in all academic areas.

Staffing decisions and training are driven by observing classroom teaching and instruction, and the needs that emerge from examining student progress data. Plans are in place for improving instruction and work has begun to support and train teachers where appropriate and to spread good practice. The school has purchased interactive whiteboards to enable teachers to make instruction lively and interesting; training is imminent.

The partnership with The Urban Assembly is fundamental to the success of the school and the education it supplies. Other partnerships, including that with the Brooklyn Centre for the Urban Environment, are regularly used to enrich the students' education and engage them fully in their learning.

**Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

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

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Leaders, faculty, and staff generally have the same high expectations for student performance and progress and use the available data to compare outcomes within and across classrooms. Professional development is a strength, all adults in the school are determined to improve the deal that students receive. To do this they self-evaluate critically; looking at classroom teaching, students' grades, sanctions and rewards given out, as well as attendance. Where things do not seem to be working for any students benefit they adjust, collaborate, plan and take action for improvement.

The principal is much respected and admired by adults and students alike. Her vivacious and tenacious enthusiasm is driving the school towards its goal of preparing students for college and beyond. Her capacity to effect change is indisputable. One of her greatest attributes is the way she involves the full staff team and recognizes their strengths in developing the school. In a very short time the school has become a functioning learning environment. Some students who in the past have been very difficult to manage have taken the Urban Environment values to heart and have embraced the philosophy of the school. Students value the 'shout outs' where they receive praise at the morning meeting, they cite 'celebration club' as a great reward for good academic work. Electives such as recycle-a-bicycle allow students to work on rebuilding a bicycle and if they do so effectively they take it home. They also understand the sanctions and realize that any negative action results in a consequence. Some students have really turned their attitudes around since September because of the consistently applied code and their academic grades have improved. Others are still struggling with their work and the school is very open to ideas to change this. Work that matches each individual's need will help to tackle this difficulty. The school has well thought out plans for further development and there is no air of complacency here.

The day to day procedures and routines; the reinforcement by all adults in the schools and the consistently applied rules ensure the school runs smoothly.

**Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.**

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

The school practice is so very young it has little data to analyze over time and take action upon. However, it is committed to track progress via objectively measurable ways to check if their plans are reaching their stated goals.

There are good plans for continuing the work already started comparing student progress within and across classrooms. These are already used to make short-term diagnostic assessments and over time will be the basis to measure the progress of the school's interventions.

Even in these early days the school uses the monthly progress data to revise plans for individuals, classes, and the school in order to reach stated goals and to give students the best learning possible.

Only seven months in it is not possible to use the objective information provided by data to demonstrate that revision is required to modify final goals.

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### **Other key observations**

The indications so far are that this is a school keen to improve the quality of its objective data in order to use it to monitor every student's progress and to check every teacher is able to contribute fully to this. This is a school offering its students an effective start at the school and it is well placed to continue to improve and develop provision significantly.

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## Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

<b>Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.</b>	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, mathematics, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are “objective” when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• standards-based,</li> <li>• consistent across students,</li> <li>• capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice,</li> </ul> <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the performance of different students to be compared, and</li> <li>• learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified.</li> </ul>		X	
<p>1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.</p> <p>{This criterion and the next are partially aspirational as of now. City and State Report Cards and Division of Accountability and Assessment reports provide only some of the necessary data. The NYC DOE will soon provide schools with fuller access to better data.}</p>	X		
<p>1.3 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.</p>	X		
<b>Quality Statement 2: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	o	✓	+
<p>2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable, goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and it develops plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.</p>		X	
<p>2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as warranting attention.</p>		X	
<p>2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.</p>		X	
<p>2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.</p>	X		
<p>2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners</p>	X		

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<b>Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	o	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.		X	
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.		X	
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			

<b>Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	0	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer- evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.			X

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<b>Quality Statement 5: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.</b>	o	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by interim assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.	X		
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.	X		