



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Urban Assembly Academy of Arts and Letters

Intermediate School 492

**225 Adelphi Street
Brooklyn
NY 11205**

Principal: Allison Gaines Pell

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Reviewer: Corinne Brown

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Urban Assembly Academy for Arts and Letters is located in the Fort Greene area of Brooklyn. This is a college preparatory school in its first year with 85 students enrolled in the 6th grade. It plans to serve students in 6th through 12th grade. Six percent are special education students and there are currently no English language learners. The majority of students, at approximately 77%, are Black, with 14% Hispanic, 7% White and 2% of Asian and other ethnic backgrounds. At present 46% of students are Title 1 eligible, which is lower than in similar and City schools. Student annual attendance averages 95%, which is higher than that in similar and City schools.

The building is shared with another school, which means that the cafeteria, auditorium and gymnasium are shared facilities. This school has its own music room and art room as well as a teacher resource room.

Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is strong, sets the school tone and embodies the school's 'four Cs' of courage, confidence, clarity and creativity.
- There is a good sense of community within the school, characterized by respect and equal value for all.
- The school has a strong focus on continual improvement based on realistic reflection and evaluation.
- Dedicated staff strive to engage students in learning and make real life connections.
- Data is used to inform and modify instruction and strategies in order to improve student outcomes.
- The case study and descriptive review program works effectively to target students in greatest need.
- The school benefits from excellent parental support and strong partnerships.
- The school works strenuously to maintain and improve its very good student attendance.
- Staff selection is well considered and driven by student need.
- The budget is carefully used to support student learning through professional development and enrichment programs.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine data disaggregation by group and subgroup in order to further understand student performance.
- Incorporate timeframes and appropriate progress checkpoints for achieving goals into all school planning.
- Strengthen consistent, quality teaching, assessment and learning, and include the use of positive language in all evaluative feedback and target setting with students.
- Develop common and cohesive systems for data gathering across the school.
- Ensure that procedures and structures are in place to maintain the school vision and tone as it expands.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

The Urban Assembly Academy for Arts and Letters has already managed to establish a sense of respect and equal value for all throughout the school community in its first year. The school knows its strengths and areas for improvement well, because data is used to inform modification or adaptation of instruction in order to improve student outcomes. As a college preparatory school, teaching and learning is planned to develop student courage, confidence, clarity and creativity. These are the school's 'four Cs'. The strong principal is the embodiment of these qualities and leads with clear vision and dedication. The school seeks to meet the needs of all its students through access to student-centered instruction, which motivates and develops higher thinking skills. Teachers strive to plan interesting lessons that broaden experience and make connections to real life. Parents are highly appreciative of the committed staff and what they do for students. Communication between all constituents is given high priority and students are encouraged to be individuals. The school community already works well together to enable students to become creative independent learners and offers relevant after school clubs and activities. Partnerships with high quality offsite partners greatly enrich student experience and provide further possibilities for student expression and success.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

This school gathers a wide range of data to evaluate student and school performance, which helps determine need. State standardized test and assessment results and sources such as the Northwest Evaluation Association assessments and Qualitative Reading Inventory are used in conjunction with teacher and student input to form a whole student picture. Students are followed during their day to gather information about their experiences and learning. Within the classroom, teachers observe and evaluate student work, maintain grade records and work with students to set goals. For example, a student self-evaluation and parent feedback form, which includes a participation rubric, is used bi-weekly by one teacher. At present this practice is variable with differing grades and methods of recording amongst teachers. The school intends to develop common and cohesive systems for data gathering across the school to enable more meaningful discussion about student progress among all constituents.

In its first year with only one grade and small numbers, the school is extremely focused on understanding the individual student by using a range of perspectives. Attendance data analysis means that early intervention is applied, strategies devised and challenges anticipated for individuals. Similarly, students are required to complete 'stop and think' forms following disciplinary issues, which contribute to understanding the individual and encourage self-correction. In this individualized atmosphere, data is not currently disaggregated to observe patterns and trends for gender or ethnicity. The school has five

identified special needs students who receive targeted intervention and the school is continually monitoring their performance. As the school grows and has English language learners in its population it intends to look at their performance by group. In conjunction with the New School Intensive, the school closely monitors the ten lowest performing students in each class. The school breaks down reading and mathematics data by class group and also identifies lower achieving students in order to particularly target their needs. This is not currently formalized for the higher achievers. State assessment and test data enables the school to measure its performance against other schools, in particular those in the same district.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: 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 well developed.

The school opened in September 2006 within the network of the Urban Assembly movement, so considerable planning for both the long- and short-term is already in place. The detailed proposal for the school was written in consultation with teachers, students, parents and the Urban Assembly partnership coordinator. As new information becomes available through data analysis the school modifies or adapts its plans accordingly.

With a small number of teachers and staff in this new school, there is intensive use of data to set goals and inform planning and instruction. Scheduling has been arranged so that all staff can meet together weekly to look at data, with the support of a literacy consultant who works rigorously to support the quality of teaching and learning. Programs are adjusted and new strategies are also guided by such information. For example, Northwest Evaluation Association assessment data is used to set growth targets for the year and to plan professional development. The school focuses great efforts on improving student outcomes and so well-targeted academic intervention is planned for students based on State test data and the school’s holistic knowledge of the student. The case study and descriptive review program work effectively to target students in greatest need. This is based on cross-referencing different sources of data together with teacher observations to plan suitable and timely interventions. The process itself has already been revisited and refined to improve student outcomes. The school has seen positive impact on student performance as a result of such work.

The school manages to make all constituents feel that they are part of something special, so that they strongly invest and work with a shared vision. Clear communication of this vision means there are significant numbers of families who want to be part of the school community. The school sets and maintains high expectations for parents and students. All staff model expected interpersonal relations and establish a positive school tone from the outset. The weekly ‘Parent Blast’ newsletter illustrates just one element of the very open communication. Parents are genuinely supportive of the school’s mission, as demonstrated by the outstanding financial support from the parent teacher association for the whole school camping trip this year.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school carefully tailors the standardized curriculum to match its vision, so all content areas are mapped and lesson plans are carefully compiled each month. The curriculum is characterized by a student-centered inquiry based methodology to foster the creative individual. This is greatly valued by parents as contributing to increased confidence and self-esteem. Detailed course descriptions are sent to every student and parent to build engagement. The off-site elective program is a cross-curricular project incorporating the arts, so students are empowered to hone their skills as communicators and critical thinkers. Teachers are dedicated and strive to engage students in critical thinking and independent learning and to make real life connections. There is high quality interactive instruction, including differentiation by groupings according to task, but the practice is variable. Teachers are held accountable for the learning that occurs linked to data and to the knowledge of individuals. The school is working to strengthen consistent, quality teaching, assessment and learning.

The budget is very carefully managed to support student learning, for example, through professional development and enrichment programs. To this end, art and drama teachers, a reading teacher and also the literacy consultant, bring differing expertise that enrich student experience and contribute to increased achievement. Staffing and scheduling are also arranged to maximize opportunities for collaboration and collective discussion and planning that impact positively on instruction and student performance.

There is a strong sense of community within the school characterized by respect and equal value for all. Students feel their voice is heard and greatly appreciate the relationships with all adults in the school. They enjoy the hands-on collaborative approach, such as in science, and appreciate that teachers make them feel comfortable and work to make learning interesting. One student said, “The teachers make the kids what they are: a close community.” The Friday community celebration of student achievement, driven by the students with teacher support, illustrates the high level of student commitment. Student attendance is very good, but the school is not complacent and works strenuously to maintain and improve it. Calls are made immediately when a student is absent and particular care is taken to note and tackle quickly any emerging patterns of absenteeism. The family and school compact clearly outlines the requirements and responsibilities around attendance.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: 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 well developed.

The school makes well considered choices when hiring and chose to open with staff who have relevant and significant experience. A hiring committee includes all constituents and uses a rubric that indicates the essential characteristics of successful candidates so that the process is fair. Selection is based on identified school need, high expectations and complementary strengths and expertise to existing staff. The willingness to use data and desire to continue learning is an intrinsic requirement of the process.

Professional development is given high priority within the school and is well planned as a result of teacher needs noted within the classroom as well as student need identified by data. The principal and literacy consultant plan professional development, conduct observations and individualize professional learning, which frequently occurs in classrooms. Inter-visitations also occur. Professional development has increased staff confidence and competence to use data effectively to improve student outcomes. The focus on differentiation this year has impacted on classroom practice. The case study review process was modified to include more teacher planning time in order to meet all students' needs. This school is very reflective and continually adjusting its practice to meet changing needs. The school intends, rightly, to develop more directed common planning and mutual support as it expands.

The highly respected principal sets the tone and is seen as a strong leader of the school. She shows clear vision and sensitively guides the community in an open and collaborative school culture. With detailed knowledge of her staff and students she works in a calm yet purposeful way to bring everyone along with her in driving the school forward. She has demonstrated that she has significant skills and expertise to continue to effect change. Clearly understood routines mean that the school runs smoothly. The school is working to ensure that procedures and structures are in place to maintain the school vision and tone as it grows in the coming years.

As part of the Urban Assembly network the school has the continued valuable support of the network leader. The Ars Nova and Marquis Studios provide stimulating semester-long arts workshops with a culminating activity for the students. The Fashion Institute of Technology, as well as other significant partners, work effectively with students, expand their experience and enhance learning.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: 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 proficient.

In its first year this school has come a long way and established a strong foundation on which to build. The school was founded by teachers, community members, parents and the principal with a shared vision. There is a strong focus on continual improvement based on realistic reflection and evaluation. The school continually adjusts plans, goals and strategies in the light of data. It, rightly, intends to also incorporate timeframes and appropriate progress checkpoints for achieving goals into all school planning. The principal's performance review clearly details the whole school goals that align with the original school proposal. The principal is consulting with teachers, the school leadership team and administrative team to write the Comprehensive Education Plan in the light of this year's experiences.

Comparative data regarding student and school progress continually drives this school, as it seeks to improve student outcomes. It flexibly responds to changing student needs through associated modification of instructional strategies, professional development or planned interventions. The school intends to formalize its review process and has already begun to plan in draft for its third year, which includes the appointment of a parent coordinator and assistant principal.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Urban Assembly Academy of Arts and Letters (IS 492)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 	X		
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 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, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: 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.	∅	✓	+
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 to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
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 a particular focus area.			X
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
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.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 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
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
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 decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. 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 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
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: 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 accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
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 being effectively implemented and 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 periodic 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 successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	