



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The Urban Assembly Institute of Math And
Science for Young Women**

Secondary School 527

**960 Prospect Place
Brooklyn
NY 11213**

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Urban Assembly Institute of Math and Science for Young Women is a secondary school with an enrollment in grade 6 of 73 students. The population comprises approximately 94% Black, 4% Hispanic and 2% Asian and other students. Approximately 6% of the school population is special education students and a further 1% is English language learners. The average attendance rate for students is 95%, above that found in similar and City schools. The school is Title 1 eligible with 73% of students qualifying, which is in line with similar and City schools. The school opened in September 2006, and a further 75 students will join in September 2007. When the school reaches its full capacity it will have approximately 525 girls spanning grades 6 through 12. The school is led by two co-directors.

As an Empowerment school, it has more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for the 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 co-directors have shaped a clear and ambitious vision for this new school and have put in place secure foundations for its future development.
- The model of shared leadership provided by the co-directors is effective and strongly supported by students, staff and parents.
- The school's math and science specialisms are having the desired impact on student learning.
- The school collects data authoritatively, and is beginning to use it appropriately in classrooms.
- The curriculum, with its variety and choices, offers an enriching program for the students.
- The staff know and care for the students very well.
- Students with particular needs are given good support.
- The strong attendance levels reflect how much the students enjoy coming to school.
- The school works imaginatively with a range of external partners, valued by the students.
- The staff provide a strong sense of community and common values.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure more effective use of data at classroom level to improve differentiation.
- Share the best practice in lesson planning, classroom management and instruction through peer observation.
- Develop further the students' literacy skills, particularly to support their understanding of math and science vocabulary.
- Continue to develop distributed leadership throughout the staff.
- Establish clear systems for the day-to-day running of the school as it expands.
- Adapt the current curriculum and schedule to accommodate increased numbers of students in September 2007.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The Urban Assembly Institute is currently the only all girls math and science school in New York City. The co-directors have created a strong vision for the education of girls and the particular emphasis on math and science instruction has impacted quickly on the learning goals. From the outset, they have established a curriculum which enriches the core academic programs and a strong sense of community and common values. The girls benefit significantly from the range of external business and community partners linked to the school.

The students feel safe and valued in the knowledge that there is always a member of staff on hand to support them. Students with particular social or academic needs receive good guidance. More work is needed to build all students' literacy skills. The new staff team has established appropriate day-to-day routines, and teachers are starting to develop their classroom practice informed by the effective use of data. Parents have been pleased with the way the small school has started.

The model of shared leadership practiced by the co-directors is effective and is well placed to promote further distributed leadership as the staffing numbers expand. The hiring committee is an interesting example of shared responsibilities across the staff. The co-directors are imaginative educators, adept at self-evaluation, and recognize the key challenges ahead as the school doubles in student numbers in September 2007, and then expands further on a new site in September 2008.

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 well developed.

The co-directors have taken an exemplary and intelligent lead in ensuring that robust data about the students, both quantitative and qualitative, has been gathered from the very start of the new school. The starting point, progress and achievement of each student are well tracked. A comprehensive record of each student's progress in grade 6 is stored centrally, and is readily accessible to all staff. Standardized and diagnostic tests provide this core data, supported by teacher anecdotal reports and twice yearly portfolio assessment. The quality of documentation is of a high standard and it is regularly brought up to date.

Data about students' achievement upon enrollment to the school is used effectively to identify special education students so that suitable teaching programs can be designed for them. There are currently very few English language learners. The school is keenly aware of its highest achieving students and their academic needs. In math and English language arts, interim assessments provide reliable and objective data on students, individually and by group.

The school has used technology well to track students' progress, with suitable plans to extend this practice to classroom level as the building is refurbished. Given the new girls' school context, specializing in math and science, the co-directors have been pro-active in exploring ways in which they can make meaningful comparisons over time with the progress and performance of students in other schools and contexts.

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 proficient.

Based on the robust data which the school holds on each student, the co-directors, social worker and small team of teachers have used data collaboratively to set goals for improvement. These are clearest in English language arts, science and math. Students in greatest need of improvement receive a strong focus: their needs are diagnosed through the use of the data, and suitable planning goals and systems for review are put in place. Where appropriate, meetings with individual parents are held to support student progress.

In this first year of operation, most of the teachers teach all of the students and therefore know their academic needs well. They recognize the need to formalize some of the systems for evaluating and analyzing student progress as the school expands. The weekly Kid Talk session held by staff offers a very good opportunity to review student progress and plan for any interventions in a prompt and timely way.

Students and parents value the progress reports that are issued every six weeks, providing a snapshot of progress. The school has not yet conducted formal surveys with parents and students. Given the limitations of the building, celebration boards are developing but are not yet used consistently to celebrate high achievement. There is an emerging picture of all members of the school community focusing on ways in which the intelligent use of data can help raise expectations of what the girls can achieve across their academic programs.

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 proficient.

The school offers a creatively planned curriculum which meets the mandatory requirements for grade 6. Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions are suitably targeted to develop student outcomes. A singular feature of this small school during its first year of operation is the skillful scheduling of electives and after-school programs which enables girls to follow a wide range of courses including robotics, horticulture, yoga, power play team sports, graphic design, leadership and forensics. The electives capitalize on the individual enthusiasms of the teachers and are very popular with the students. Clinics and enrichment classes are also scheduled to support and extend student progress. The celebrations file records a range of events, for example the science fair and international women's day, which have enhanced the girls' learning experiences.

Teachers are fully aware of their accountability for the progress of the students they teach. However, they are not consistently using prior assessment data on the girls to shape how

they differentiate in their lesson planning and classroom activities. Good teaching is characterized by teachers' strong subject knowledge, enthusiastic delivery and motivating activities. Relationships between staff and girls are warm, laughter and enjoyment of learning are evident, and there is a positive climate in the classrooms; students are mutually supportive of one another's learning. The teachers know the students very well as individuals and respond to individual learning needs promptly. The level of work in math and science is strong, and the school has suitable plans to appoint a literacy coach next year to develop reading and writing skills across the curriculum.

Where teaching and learning are less effective, there is a reliance on over-didactic instruction and the purpose of an activity is not altogether clear to the students. Group work is not sufficiently focused and the level of work is not always challenging for the highest achieving students. Independent learning skills are variable.

The attendance of the girls this year, at 95% overall, indicates that the school is a place they want to be. A special lunch, with families, was held to celebrate those girls whose attendance this year has been exemplary. Any tardiness or absence is followed up carefully by staff who recognize that more formal systems will need to be put in place as the school expands.

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 proficient.

The co-directors have set a clear vision for the school and sought assiduously to build capacity in the small team around them. The goals of the school, and the attendant outcomes for students, are clearly shared, and there has been meticulous attention to detail in shaping many of the founding systems and procedures. Both co-directors have significant background experience in education and their complementary skills have brought the school a long way in a short time.

The teachers have felt well supported with professional development opportunities within and beyond the school; all staff have recently completed an on-line course in programming which has enabled them to share in the school's plans for expansion. While the co-directors have carried out classroom observations, there has not been the opportunity for teachers to observe each other's lessons in action and share best practice.

Regular meetings of teachers take place to review student progress, but these are not yet focused sufficiently on how data can be used to revise plans and lead to more effective classroom practice. By the very nature of the school at this stage in its development, subject teachers are working in relative isolation, a situation which will be remedied next year with the addition of new staff.

The school enjoys strong partnerships to advance the girls' academic goals. The Urban Assembly partnership coordinator has enabled productive links with Barnard College, Polytechnic University, Thornton Tomasetti and a range of non-profit organizations. Trips out and visitors into the school are properly focused on raising all girls' expectations that a college education, particularly in the areas of math and science, lies within their horizons. The girls commented on how much they have enjoyed and gained from many of these opportunities. The coordinator evaluates carefully the impact of the partnerships and how their potential for future work can best be maximized.

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.

The co-directors have established a positive climate for self-evaluation. Their own review of what the school has achieved to date is open, honest and recognizes equally what the achievements have been and what are the priorities for future developments. The school's emerging structures are conducive to staff being able to examine what is working for students and how, day by day and term by term, improvements can be made. Action plans are objective and measurable. Monitoring and evaluation systems are developing in a way that is consistent with the school's growth. The voices of the students and the parents in how the school develops are increasingly being harnessed and made integral to the planning cycle.

The progress and best interests of each student are the focus of the leadership team and teachers; decisions are taken collaboratively and appropriately to revise instruction programs or realign the curriculum.

This is a school where, ably led, the teachers are growing in confidence as a team. They contribute enthusiastically to the performance and outcomes of the students they serve. Yet it is early days. They are increasingly aware of their critical role in analyzing data so that they can make comparisons across classrooms and thereby modify goals and improvement plans. The school is well placed to build on its achievements and practices, accelerate each student's learning, and create a school for girls with a distinctive character.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Urban Assembly Institute of Math and Science for Young Women (MS/HS 527)	∅	✓	+
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	