

The Urban Assembly School for Media Studies

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**Martin Luther King, Jr. Educational Campus
122 Amsterdam Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10023**

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Part 1: Overview

What the school does well

- Outstanding leadership sets clear vision and direction for the work of the school.
- The successfully integrated curriculum ensures students are engaged, work hard and make good progress.
- The care taken of students is exceptional. It ensures positive relationships and that students' personal development is good and they are ready to learn.
- Good teaching is maintained in a culture of high expectations, continual self-evaluation, reflection and improvement.
- Ongoing and accurate self-evaluation, which informs action planning for the future.
- The pursuit and maintenance of successful partnerships with other agencies, which enrich the curriculum and support the school with initiatives for improvements to performance.
- Excellent relationships forged with all members of the school community create a culture in which all are proud and supportive of the work of the school.
- Good procedures to measure students' progress ensure teachers build effectively on students' previous learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Though the school vision is clear and self-evaluation, where it already occurs, is accurate and leads to action planning, all strands of these plans need to be brought together and presented in an easily accessible and focused document. This would provide an overview of work in progress, with timelines for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the schools work, focusing on the impact of all initiatives on student progress.
- Though teaching is good overall, there is capacity to build on and share the many features of good practice beyond departments and across all staff.
- The school should continue to expand the areas in which it uses data, in order to develop and celebrate its areas of strength, and identify areas for improvement. For example, the use of formal surveys to gather the views and ideas of parents and students would be a useful source of information.
- Though high expectations of students' work is evident, for example in the presentation of portfolios, a culture of high expectations of the presentation of all students' work needs to be applied across the whole school.
- The school is data rich. Use of individual assessment to inform planning is a strength. It now needs to use available and self-generated data to identify and track trends in performance for groups and cohorts. This will inform a global view of its strengths and areas for further development. Comparisons with other schools would also clarify judgments about standards and progress.
- The school should further develop its work to widen the leadership of the school and develop student leadership skills, for example by introducing a formal school council.
- The school should consider further strategies for supporting students with specific learning needs, for example by the introduction of teaching assistants.

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Part 2: The School Context

Information about the school

The school was founded 20 months ago and is an Autonomy Zone school. It works in partnership with The Urban Assembly. The premises are shared with five other schools on at Martin Luther King Jr. campus. Currently there are 220 students in the 9th and 10th grades. Over the next 2 years it will grow to take students in 11th and 12th grades and will have doubled its size; 400 applications have been received for the 100 places available in 9th grade. As it is not selective, students with a wide range of needs and readiness for learning attend and the majority arrives functioning below grade level. At present there are 14 ELL students. The entitlement to free school meals is 100%. The demographic of the student body is varied. Students travel from all the boroughs of the city to attend the school and the school values the diversity that this provides.

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Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

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 is at least proficient and well developed in many areas.

The principal's self-evaluation of the school is precise, with clear identification of strengths and areas for development. These are all linked with her action planning for the future, the allocation of budget and the professional development priorities of the staff. However, at present, though the principal herself has a clear view, systems for bringing together all school improvement priorities and monitoring and evaluating their effectiveness, are still developing. Their further development will help identify more clearly the school's overall strengths and areas for development, focus and prioritize the key issues and speed progress. The principal is very positive about the need to embrace the effective use of data and is actively seeking ways to strengthen the school's work in this area, for example through her partnership work with The Urban Assembly and Harvard.

The school is data rich. Use of individual assessment to inform teachers' planning is a strength. Large amounts of data relating to students' progress and attainment are collected. This is used effectively to identify individual students' specific needs. Standardized tests are administered on entry, a post-test is given in February and then a year later, administered again. Ongoing are weekly tests, unit testing and task analysis. The school now needs to use the data available and that which it is beginning to generate itself, to identify and monitor trends in performance, not just for individuals, but also for groups of students, across class and curriculum groups and for different cohorts over time. This will inform a more global view of the school's strengths and areas for further development. It also needs to capture data, which will evidence and celebrate the many strengths of the school, for example its essential work to develop students' personal, social and emotional skills, which is vital to ensure their readiness for learning. The school has rightly recognized the need to do this and is doing good work with The Urban Assembly to help with this goal. The introduction of more formal surveys of parents and students would also facilitate this.

One of the school's major strategies for evaluating performance for graduation is through the submission of work for portfolios and through the defense of this work at a round table panel. Here the student's work is stringently evaluated through detailed questioning from adults and peers to ensure they have a sufficient depth and breadth of understanding of their topic. This provides a challenging critique of students' work and students demonstrate that through it's ongoing application throughout their school lives they are developing good thinking, questioning and communication skills which will

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prepare them well for college or work life.

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 is well developed overall.

From often what are below expected levels of attainment at entry to the school, good teaching, an innovative curriculum and the excellent care taken of the students ensure that students achieve well at the school. There are high expectations of the students and all work together to ensure that individuals do as well as they can. Classroom assessment ensures this. The school is developing its understanding and use of the data it has available to monitor students' performance and the principal is enthusiastic and committed to developing increasingly sophisticated systems which will be as rigorous and coherent as possible in setting out goals and monitoring and evaluating progress towards them. Many students face considerable challenges from their backgrounds, which have affected their attitude to learning and have meant that they have been difficult to motivate to attend school in the past. However, the school rarely accepts these as barriers to learning and has worked hard to improve attendance rates and the standards of student behavior. Class numbers are relatively small. Teachers take on an academic and personal advisory role. Their work is considerably enhanced by the contributions made by a Guidance Counselor and a Mediation Specialist. They know their students very well and are quickly able to identify any who are having difficulty or falling behind and give extra support to those with emotional needs. Teachers are willing to share successful teaching and behavior management strategies to ensure that the most appropriate methods are used with individual students. Parents are very supportive of the work of the school and appreciate the regular sharing of information on their children's academic and personal progress whether informally through discussion, formal parent meetings or Round Table events.

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

This area is well developed overall.

The school has developed an excellent curriculum, which successfully integrates media and other subjects to ensure learning is relevant and comes alive for students. Because of this, students engage well, enjoy their learning, think it is fun and make good progress. It also allows flexibility so that it can be adapted to meet individual students' needs.

The care taken of students by all staff and therefore their personal development, including their behavior, is exceptional. It is this strength in the school, which underpins and enhances all other work the school does. Rigorous systems ensure the safety and well being of students who all say they feel valued, trusted and privileged to be at the school. Many say the school has changed them in to better people, more able to cope with academic study and life, including their lives outside school. They say they are being prepared well for the next stage of their academic career and for the world of work.

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Students demonstrate they are becoming confident, articulate young adults who are developing confidence in their own thinking skills, ideas and opinions. The strong ethos that all members of the community, including staff and students, should be engaged in continual self-reflection and be able to defend their work to others, is successful in ensuring shared high expectations and commitment to continued improvement. The interventions the school makes and 'Round Table' meetings are at the heart of this success.

The school has successful partnerships with others from which the school and students benefit a great deal in many ways. For example, with The Urban Assembly they are beginning to develop more effective ways of generating and using data, and with such as Time Warner and College in Focus they are developing useful links to facilitate meaningful internship placements.

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 is well developed overall.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The principal has a strong vision and is an excellent role model for all in school; she works tirelessly and inspires all members of the school community, including all adults and students, to work to achieve the school's aims. She has built a strong and effective team, committed and empowered to improve all aspects of the school's work. Academic staff are well supported to do their work by a team, which includes a business manager, partnership coordinator, parent coordinator, guidance, administration, mediation specialist secretary and assistant principal. Previous successful students who return and do useful work in support of the leadership of the school provide positive role models. The school could now further develop its work to widen the participation in the leadership of the school by introducing a more formal school council.

Teaching is good overall. Teachers have high expectations, good subject knowledge, and a very thorough knowledge of their individual students' achievements. They use this to carefully inform the next steps of students' learning. They work hard to provide very well for all students, giving freely of their time to make sure all achieve as well as they can. They are particularly successful because they have ownership of an effective academic and advisory curriculum, which they have created and are accountable for. They form excellent relationships with students who value this a great deal. The principal provides a good role model for good teaching and learning and there is a shared culture of continual self-evaluation, reflection and improvement. Teachers go through a rigorous selection procedure to ensure they are committed to the school ethos. They receive comprehensive professional development and support to develop necessary skills and to ensure that their quality of teaching is good enough. Good practice is shared well, particularly within departments. However, there is still more potential to disseminate good practice across departments, particularly with regard to developing a universal understanding of what good teaching, and more importantly good learning, looks like and also good practice and techniques for ensuring effective and consistent classroom and student management.

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

This area is proficient with well developed features.

There are a range of systems through which all school staff are effectively involved in assessing and evaluating students' progress. The information is gathered from a range of sources through individual teacher assessments, through close collaboration between different teachers both informally and more formally, through the counselors and advisors working within the school. There are regular and frequent meetings between students and advisors to review achievements.

Students who are thought to be underperforming are identified quickly, individual programs are put in place for them and monitoring continues. The school could consider the introduction of teaching assistants to support students on these individual programs.

There are shared high expectations of student work as is evident in the criteria for developing student portfolios. However, the high standards of presentation expected in portfolio work need to be extended and applied across all areas of students' work as appropriate for audience, in order to create and maintain a school culture of pride in the high standards in the production and presentation of all that they do.

Parents receive regular summaries of their child's activities and this enables them to provide additional support for their child's needs.

Other key observations

Involvement in difficult negotiations and relationships around the shared use and maintenance of the school building take a considerable amount of time from the principal's role as the academic leader of the school. Though the principal takes great pains to ensure that the impact of this on the students and staff is minimal, school improvement would be enhanced by support to resolve these external issues, as it is a distraction to her primary role. Two of the school's most established members of staff were on long-term sick leave at the time of the review.

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Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

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.	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"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 		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>1.1 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	
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.	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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Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	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.			X

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.	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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Quality Statement 5: Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustments	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 final outcome, and the aggregate and comparative outcomes of similar plans, drive each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, including the revision of plans designed to be implemented again.			X
5.5 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