



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Unity Centre for Urban Technologies

High School 500

**121 6 Avenue
New York
NY 10013**

Principal: Maritza Tamayo

Dates of review: February 8 – 9, 2007

Reviewer: John Collings

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 Unity Center for Urban Technologies is not a neighborhood school as it accepts students from across all boroughs of New York. Many of its students are from alternative schools and the school is situated within 'The Door' project buildings to enable the school to provide social support to its students. The school has been entitled to Title 1 funding for the last three years. At 82.4%, attendance is above that of similar schools and City schools.

The school has approximately 200 students but, because of the demographics of the students it serves, this can vary from week to week. The proportion of students from different ethnicities therefore, also varies with the most up-to-date information indicating 44% Hispanic, 54% Black, 1% White and 1% from the Pacific Islands currently attending the school.

The proportion of special education students is 21% which is higher than similar and City schools. At 7.5%, the proportion of English language learners is lower than similar school and City averages.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school uses State data very well and is innovative in creating and recording its own data base of information and is beginning to use it effectively to inform the curriculum and instruction.
- There is a very strong climate of care and support and individual attention to enable the students to learn effectively.
- There are very good relationships and mutual respect between staff and students.
- Students feel safe and are able to approach and discuss often extremely difficult problems with members of staff.
- The school is very good at modifying the curriculum to meet the very particular needs of these students.
- The school has very clear goals in order to raise the level of literacy.
- Professional development is very well focused, with good emphasis on literacy across the curriculum, ensuring all staff are 'teachers of literacy first' and then of their subjects.
- The curriculum meets the needs of individual students, classes and grades, where necessary.
- The school has a very good program through which it widens the experiences of students and stimulates their interests in order to raise their aspirations and to achieve the Regent grades of which they are capable and to become proud, self-reliant, responsible citizens.
- Students are well behaved, articulate and a credit to the school due to the caring, disciplined and supportive climate in the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to refine the use of data to inform the school more precisely on the progress of individuals, grades, subjects and other groups of interest to the school.
- Clarify the criteria through which the school sets and reviews the success or not of progress towards its goals through systematic evaluation of lessons and results.
- Refine and develop the use of differentiated teaching to include greater use of 'differentiation by expectation' to improve student engagement and accountability.
- Continue to use and develop the current strategies that are in place to improve attendance and reduce lateness of students.
- Develop the means by which parents are more actively involved in the school.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school has very clear goals. The most obviously successful one is to produce students who have made very good academic progress to enable them to become confident, articulate and personable members of society. The school's aim is to achieve this through raising students' communication skills. It is doing this through emphasizing literacy in all curriculum areas and providing the professional development to enable teachers to do this successfully. However, although these and other goals are clear and focused, the criteria by which success and progress toward them is evaluated is less well articulated.

The school modifies the curriculum well to meet the very particular needs of many of its students. Instruction is generally appropriately differentiated to ensure the majority of students are working at a level suitable to their ability. However, the amount of differentiation by expectation within a lesson to meet the needs of individuals or groups of students to ensure that the knowledge, understanding and skills are firmly based on their prior attainment is less well developed.

The school has developed and is refining a very good database through which it is able to monitor the academic progress of individuals and groups of students and has a significant amount of information that can be used to inform instruction.

Due to the diverse nature of the student population and despite the school's best efforts, attendance is around 80% and the lateness of some students is an issue. Parental involvement is also extremely limited.

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.

The school has a very good system to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance of students. It is able to identify the performance of each student, classroom, grade level, ethnic group and other group of interest to the school quickly and effectively. It is now working on refining this system to enable it to evaluate the progress of students more effectively, to identify whether they make expected, better or worse progress from one time period to the next. There are only a few schools across New York that have a similar profile and so making comparisons with similar schools is very difficult. The school focuses on each student's and group of students' progress within the school and on improving overall school performance year on year. English language learners are very well supported as are special education students. The school' developing data systems are beginning to enable it to monitor the academic progress of these groups more effectively.

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.

The school uses data effectively. For example, from student performance and from student responses to questions in Regent examinations, the school has identified that the most significant factor reducing student performance is lack of literacy skills. Students are affected detrimentally by their inability to interpret questions effectively, not only in English language arts but also in mathematics, science and social studies. Thus, although students may have been able to answer effectively if they had understood the question, they were not able to do so. The school's main goal therefore is to improve literacy through a very strong emphasis on literacy aspects across all subjects in the curriculum. To meet this whole school goal, each subject department is reviewing teachers’ practice in order to support each student, class and grade. The school is increasingly using data to set measures against which it can evaluate how effectively it is reaching its goals.

The climate of this school is to support all students through individual attention, by an understanding of their needs and to create a safe, stimulating learning environment particularly for those students who struggle to learn. The goal is to do this through raising the academic performance of all students but with particular emphasis on those in need of the greatest improvement. The goal has been successfully achieved through individual support in lessons and targeted sessions during the extended day for special education students, English language learners and those in danger of not reaching grade standards.

The school has very high expectations of its students with a strong desire to develop and instill self-belief, inspire confidence, and to have high aspirations for all. These high ideals are relayed through not only the learning climate of the school but also the personal attention each student gets. This results in committed students many of whom entered the school well below their grade level yet leave the school working within their grade level. The school has not yet successfully relayed its goals and high aspirations to parents, many of whom are not sufficiently involved in the school. Consequently, goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of most but not all members of the school community.

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 works within the mandated curriculum and uses the gathered data it has to modify the curriculum for different individuals, groups, grades and subjects to ensure teaching is appropriate to the students’ instructional level. The school makes high demands upon its teachers both academically and emotionally and has very high expectations of teachers to moderate their instruction to meet the widely differing needs of students. Since a review of its goals, it now expects all teachers regardless of subjects or discipline to be teachers of English first and their subjects second. With its emphasis on literacy, the school is monitoring data very carefully to establish whether this is resulting in improved performance not only in English but in other subjects.

Teachers are accountable for ensuring students make the progress they should. They use

data to differentiate instruction but this is in a large part done by individual support for students who are finding particular aspects difficult. In this respect teachers are very adept. However differentiation by planning a lesson that has different expectations for, for example, students of varying ability is less well developed.

The school uses its resources effectively to, for example, direct professional development to improve teacher's ability to emphasize literacy skills regardless of the subject they are teaching. The school is very flexible about scheduling and staffing to ensure all students are able to receive the instruction best suited to their needs, particularly where there have been gaps in their education which need be addressed before they are able to work at the grade level expected.

Students are engaged in lessons, concentrate well, behave appropriately and mutually respect each other. That staff know their students very well is a basic tenet of the school. Teachers are knowledgeable about students' academic history and, where appropriate, their social circumstances. There is a very high level of respect between students and between teachers and students. Students trust teachers and feel confident to go to them for help and support. They know teachers are there to do the very best they can for them. Attendance and lateness continue to be issues despite the school's very good proactive and rigorous systems in place.

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 principal is very visible in the school. Students know and respect her as they do all staff. Through formal and informal observations the principal is very aware of the standard of classroom teaching and has a clear plan for improvement. There is a strong current focus in the school to increase the effectiveness of differentiation and the emphasis on a literacy based curriculum. The principal and vice principal visit classes regularly and feedback is welcomed by staff to help them improve their instruction.

When appointing staff, the school puts significant emphasis on ensuring that potential teachers are sufficiently skilled to use data to differentiate their teaching. Pre-requisites also include a commitment to support students who are not necessarily at grade level, a willingness to be flexible about what they teach and when, and people who can be understanding when dealing with students who require emotional support. Professional development is very well directed towards this end. Teachers support each other well in professional development meetings and, where possible, through visiting each other's classes.

The school reviews its plans regularly and moderates these very promptly when they are not having the effect desired. This requires a great deal of flexibility by teachers and challenge to which they rise effectively. The principal is an effective leader of change within the school. The school runs smoothly and is very adapt at dealing with unpredictable instances. The school uses the facilities of 'The Door' with which it shares the building. The school is particularly good at extending the experiences of students in the school whose past experiences are often limited and impoverished. It organizes a number of visitors and visits to enrich learning effectively. For example, staff from New York University support student College applications and visits to industries such as Google raise students' aspirations.

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.

Through the Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal's personal record, goals and expectations for the school are well documented. These include the emphasis on literacy, increased differentiation, increasing the accuracy of the assessment and greater use of data to inform differentiated instruction. This information is appropriately used to compare, particularly individual progress, to compare students' performance and progress in classes, grades and subjects. Goals are regularly monitored through data analysis, monitoring of learning and looking at student work. However, the criteria by which success towards these goals is measured is not so well documented and articulated. However, goals are reviewed and moderated to meet the changing needs of students and staff, and adjustments made to interventions and programs accordingly.

The school reviews its goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan every year through a well-organized team structure. Regular meetings ensure monitoring, evaluation and review activities are collaboratively carried out and subsequent goals are set based on the outcomes of this evaluation.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Unity Center for Urban Technologies (HS 500)	∅	✓	+
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	