



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Urban Science Academy**

**Middle School 325  
1000 Teller Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10456**

**Principal: Patrick Kelly**

**Dates of review: March 26 - 27, 2007**

**Reviewer: Denis Pittman**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Urban Science Academy was founded in September 2004 and is one of three schools derived after the restructuring of a middle school of 1600 students. The school occupies the same building as the other two schools. The school faces particular challenges with regard to the limited accommodation and physical resources which are available to it. The school has an enrolment 498 students. It provides an education for students from grade 5 to 8. The ethnic composition of the school is largely Hispanic (62%) and Black (36%). The remaining 2% of students are from a variety of other ethnic groups. Approximately 50% of the school are English language learners. Eleven percent are special education students. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding.

## Part 2: Overview data

### What the school does well

- The principal has created a more stable and orderly school community which promotes a better learning environment for students.
- Staff morale has improved which has led to more profitable, collaborative work in teams.
- The relationships between students and staff have significantly improved which promotes a better school climate.
- The collection of data is more systematic and provides improved indicators of students' progress.
- Curriculum planning and mapping of learning activities is good in mathematics and English language arts which is leading to improved performance in these areas.
- Professional development is effectively planned and is focused on the specific needs of staff to improve their teaching.
- Steps taken to tackle absenteeism have resulted in improvements in attendance.
- Additional staffing has led to a significant reduction in class sizes which has had a direct impact upon the quality of education for students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Use data more effectively so as to inform planning for differentiated instruction.
- Monitor teaching more regularly so as to improve its overall quality.
- Improve the assessment protocols and monitoring of student achievement and progress in science, social studies and special education.
- Continue to work on improving strategies and monitoring procedures to increase attendance levels.
- Strengthen current systems to develop more rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The principal has successfully brought some stability to a transitional period in the life of the school. He has worked tirelessly in the relatively short time he has been at the school, to create an environment in which more effective learning can take place. In that context, a calmer, safer and more orderly community has been created. Day to day administration runs smoothly, and students feel they are valued and their opinions respected. The school faces the challenge of improving standards of achievement through changing attitudes to school work, particularly amongst older students. Nevertheless students are beginning to identify with the values and objectives of the school. An essential element of this change is to develop consistency and coherence in teaching throughout the school. At the moment the school is not making sufficient, consistent use of the data it selects to understand the performance and progress of its students. The lesson plans for some classes are not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of individual learners. Teachers are committed to improving behavior around the school and in classrooms. These higher expectations are also being reflected in the increased challenge in some lessons. Senior administration has been effective in adjusting the school's provision to accommodate the changing circumstances of students. Evaluation procedures are currently, insufficiently rigorous. The collegiate ethos within the school is creating the capacity for the staff to sustain the improvements which have already been achieved.

### 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 generated a substantial database of information about the performance and progress of students. Data can be tracked at class, grade and individual level. The external data it receives is proficiently analyzed to gain an overview of its performance against State standards. Raising the achievement profile of students currently at level 1 and level 2 is a major focus for the school. An effective response has been to create an intervention program for this group of students. A number of specialized programs are effectively used to generate data to identify student needs. A baseline assessment is appropriately established through the use of the developmental reading assessment program which delineates basic literacy skills.

As part of the empowerment initiative the school has successfully introduced a periodic assessment of students' progress. An interim evaluation indicates that the mathematics profile is giving the school more precise information than the English language arts testing. The other formative profiles which individual teachers keep provide a comprehensive picture of individual achievement. The multiplicity of data programs are not yet fully rationalized, however, to make the information fit for purpose. Currently there is limited analysis of student progress on the basis of ethnicity. In contrast, the profile for English

language learners is detailed and clearly identifies progress within the respective bilingual and the English as a second language programs. The schools' baseline information about special education students is not sufficiently robust or rigorous. Recovery programs such as Wilson and Read 180 are being effectively used for level 1 students to support improvement in basic skills acquisition. The school compares itself to other similar schools, but does not have sufficiently detailed information of past performance to identify trends in performance.

**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 has a number of contexts in which collaborative meetings to promote planning for short-term and long-term goals take place. The focus on improving literacy skills was an outcome of such discussions in cabinet meetings. An implementation strategy was devised which appropriately identified short-term goals within a specified time frame as a result. In the context of special education, there has been a focus on improving individual education plans. A simplified synopsis of individual education plan requirements was shared with staff and students, which now identify more appropriate targets for improvement. The school's evaluation of its data identified underachievement in mathematics. In response, staff restructured the curriculum to produce a program which now meets the needs of students more effectively. Assessment requirements have been appropriately incorporated into this instructional program which informs progress towards goals set. The school has an adequate database generated by the developmental reading assessment program but the analysis of data is not sufficiently rigorous to identify specific weaknesses in reading skills so that clear goals for improvement can be established.

The school recognizes the challenge it has to raise the academic sights of its students. It is addressing this issue through newsletters and assemblies where achievement is celebrated. In small ways expectations are highlighted to younger grade levels by simple administrative devices such as allocating university names to their classes. This creates a sense of identity and potential aspirational hopes for students. These actions have been more influential with grades 5 and 6 than with the older students in grades 7 and 8. The school recognizes the importance of conveying these messages of high expectations to parents. However, parental involvement with the school is not strong. There is no parents association at present, so communication links are now primarily through the recently appointed parent coordinator. Despite these current variations in commitment, it is apparent that there is now a clearer identification with the school's goals relating to improvements in achievement and behavior.

**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 is proficiently developing its curriculum to reflect State requirements. The curriculum assessment in mathematics and English language arts is providing relevant data on students' progress. However, while the curriculum in science and social studies is

aligned to State requirements, the assessment process is not rigorous enough and in consequence does not adequately monitor progress in these areas. The aspect of accountability is clearly evident in the changes being promoted in the school. The administration has appropriately identified the individual responsibilities of teachers for improving standards and sustaining student progress. The school has a specific focus on improving planning and the use of data to differentiate instruction for the benefit of students. Currently there is an inconsistency of practice in achieving this objective.

The budget is effectively used to satisfy the needs of students. For example, the acquisition of laptops supports instruction delivery in mathematics and science. In addition, the budget has been used to increase by a quarter the number of staff in the school. This has led to a significant reduction in class sizes which has had a direct impact upon the quality of education for students. The increased staffing has also created more flexibility in the scheduling process to enable more collaborative planning. Scheduling decisions are responsive to student need. For example, the English language arts and mathematics programs were given an increased time allocation to focus on improving the basic skills.

These administrative decisions have led to the creation of a better learning environment where students are more effectively engaged in their studies, as evidenced by the work and commitment of younger students in particular. The engagement of older students is an issue for the school, however, resulting, in part, from some shortcomings in organizational arrangements and the movement of these students between lessons. In a broader context the relationships between students and staff have improved. Students have adults to turn to in times of anxiety. The incidence of behavioral issues, although still evident, has reduced as more students are identifying with the school's aims and objectives. This increased level of commitment to the school is reflected in improving attendance levels. Attendance remains a priority as it continues to be below average but shows an increasing trend.

**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.**

Creating a stable staffing structure continues to be a challenge for the school. The school has a young faculty with 14 new staff being appointed this year. A high proportion of the staff has limited teaching and data analysis experience. However, this is significantly compensated by the drive and energy which staff show towards improving their professional competence. The outcomes of this are shown in the improved learning environment and the initiatives shown in curriculum planning.

Professional development effectively supports the changing culture in the school. For example, substantive training was given for using diagnostic programs such as the developmental reading assessment and Princeton Review. The outcomes of this guidance are reflected in the creation of a more secure evidence base for monitoring the progress of students. In order to achieve some consistency of practice, lesson observations are carried out by the principal and senior administration. However, the scheduled observations have not been adhered to with sufficient regularity to reinforce consistency and coherence of practice. Interclass visitations are encouraged but are not a strong feature at present. Nevertheless, the strong commitment to structure more effective learning time in lessons is evident. Teachers meet in a variety of contexts to plan

instructional programs within departments and across grade levels. For example, an interdisciplinary topic is being planned for the summer to stimulate student interest and subsequently improve attendance.

The principal has effectively initiated a cultural change within the school. He has been responsible for creating a more secure learning environment and raising the academic hopes of students. More students feel that they now have increased opportunities to improve their performance at school and in consequence assume more responsibility for exercising choice in their lives. Staff and students recognize and acknowledge the influence and positive effect that the principal has had in the relatively short period he has been in office. The management systems and procedures are better understood by both students and staff. The school is run more efficiently and effectively as a result.

The school is developing its partnerships with outside organizations. The primary relationship is with the Children's Aid Society which successfully provides an 'out of school' range of activities for 10% of students. This group is working on a program to introduce aspects of student government into the school. The school also has a significant relationship with Teacher for America, which provides 46% of the current staff.

**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 undeveloped.**

The school has a number of institutional procedures to monitor its progress. The primary activity is through a range of meetings including all senior staff and faculty. Interim evaluations do take place. For example, the strategy for placing the extended day program at the beginning of the afternoon was found to be unproductive, especially given the high levels of student movement around the building. The recovery program was re-assigned to the end of the school day, which has resulted in better attendance at school and more productive student outcomes. The school uses a significant number of recovery programs to support students. The range of diagnostic assessment data, however, is not being analyzed in sufficient detail to enable more meaningful comparisons across classrooms. Utilizing the outcomes of periodic assessments has only just started. The database showing the progress made by students is not being scrutinized on a sufficiently regular basis to help promote quick responses to the curriculum or institutional issues.

The school leadership team meets regularly to discuss progress towards the goals set in the Comprehensive Education Plan. In general, however, the outcomes of meetings and action planning are not effectively monitored by the senior management. Senior staff are not sufficiently involved in a systematic evaluation of the school's work which prevents them from being proactive in a strategic way. Nevertheless they are responsive to the needs of students and flexible in realigning programs. For example, the school revamped its English language learner program to accommodate an influx of French speaking students. The resilience and determination to improve are the characteristics which will ensure that the school has the capacity to sustain further development.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Urban Science Academy (MS 325)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>	X		