



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**The Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice**

**High School 483**

**50 Navy Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11021**

**Principal: Elana Karopkin**

**Dates of review: December 12 - 13, 2007**

**Lead Reviewer: Chris Andrews**

# 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**

Progress made since the last review

Overall evaluation

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

## **Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice is a high school with 409 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 75% Black, 22% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 32% of the students enrolled and girls account for 68%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 92.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 59% eligibility.

The Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice is a relatively new school and will graduate its first class in the summer of 2008. The school currently shares its building with an elementary school but is scheduled to move to a new site in 2008. It does not have a specialist science room, library or computer lab and some core curriculum teachers do not have their own teaching rooms. However, the purchase of five laptop carts and a mobile science lab, along with careful scheduling, have minimized the impact of these inconveniences on instruction.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The collection of data is excellent and there are clear systems and procedures in place to make this data accessible to all teachers.
- Goal setting for students and grades is a collaborative activity with clear timelines and criteria for success.
- Expectations are very high and are shared by parents and students who fully endorse the view that all students are potentially “college bound”.
- Students enjoy coming to school because they are engaged and challenged by their instruction.
- Relationships are excellent and contribute strongly to the sense of the school being a genuine learning community.
- There is a very strong focus on differentiated teaching informed by high quality pedagogical dialogue which has ensured the leadership has a very clear understanding of the nature of good instruction.
- The management of resources is flexible and enables identified needs to be met in creative ways.
- Support for students in their preparation for college is of the highest quality.
- The school’s links with community based organizations and entities are very strong and contribute significantly to the social and academic development of the students.
- The principal is respected as an effective instructional leader with a clear vision for the school’s further development and the capacity and support to achieve this.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop further teacher expertise in respect of data analysis and management to enable them to benefit fully from the new assessment procedures.
- Use existing data handling tools to develop strategies and programs to predict and track student progress across their time in the school.
- Ensure that there is a high degree of consistency between and within departments in terms of grading policies.
- Provide more examples of high quality, assessed student work in classrooms and in the halls to enhance further the environment for learning.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is well developed.**

At the heart of the Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice is an absolute commitment to preparing students for their lives both after high school and after college. There is a clearly articulated expectation that all students are “college bound”. Instruction is focused on this goal. However the school also aims to develop in its students a wider awareness of their roles as citizens and future leaders. This is accomplished in partnership with the Urban Assembly and with legal institutions including major city law firms and through the provision of opportunities for active participation in a range of experiences which are academic, cultural or social. Students enjoy coming to school as it is a small school where teachers have “a real interest in students”, even if they (the teachers) “do keep on top of us”. Students are enabled to follow interests in dance or photography, politics or film making knowing that the school will support them in their interests to the extent of using the Urban Assembly network to provide opportunities that the school itself cannot.

The principal is the sole administrator but has already built around her a delegated leadership team which shares her vision for the school and which combines a range of strengths in terms of pedagogical and administrative expertise. The professional development of teachers is a strength of the school. Teachers recognize and are very aware of their responsibilities to the students. As one teacher explained about the principal, “she is all over the data,” and they readily accept that they will be held directly accountable for progress both in their content areas and in their advisory classes.

Since the last Quality Review in 2006 the school has addressed all the key issues with particular success in terms of the uniform policy and developing the advisory program. In this respect the introduction of “Kid Talk” has led to more focused discussion of student needs. Protocols have given structure to regular student-teacher conferences about short term goal setting. This area of school practice is now very strong, with all members of the school community sharing in the process, ensuring that students are very clear as to how to progress in all subject areas. There remain areas for development but the quality of data analysis and utilization is such as to allow the school to begin developing strategies to set goals for students in grade 9 predicting where they should be by the end of grade 12. The inquiry team is well established with a clear area for focus and a target group of students. The focus on “Kid Talk” and the effect of different strategies on progress is one which has the potential to benefit students of all levels of performance.

## **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 the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The collection of data is excellent and there are clear systems and procedures in place to make this data accessible to all teachers. Student scores from grade 8 are used to place students in heterogeneous advisory classes in which they will remain for their four years at the school. This provides continuity to ensure that their personal development is well monitored. Grade 8 scores are also used to identify any students in need of the "ramp up" preparation for grade 9 provided by the summer school. Immediate baseline testing in September confirms earlier assessments and allows for early interventions such as a pre-algebra class and phonics for weak readers. Interim assessments, with progress reports every three weeks ensure that every student is monitored closely and interventions are made swiftly. As a result students do very well, and this is equally true of special education students and the English language learners. The progress report for 2006-07 confirms the exemplary progress made by the former and the individualized programs in grade 9 for the latter ensure that all are fully integrated into mainstream classes in grade 10.

Data analysis by subgroups revealed no significant differences in the performance of ethnic or economic groups. However, comparative under performance by boys has led to a range of developments including the hiring of a Young Men's Initiative Coordinator, additional professional development for teachers of science and the purchase of resources targeted at boys' literacy. The Urban Assembly network provides comparisons with similar schools, including opportunities for comparing students' work from different institutions as well as giving the principal access to a working group of fellow principals who share both expertise and data. The principal's aim is to develop culture of high academic expectations and the Urban Assembly links contribute strongly to this. Teachers are accustomed to using data but there is a realization that the school must develop further teacher expertise in respect of its analysis and management to enable them to benefit fully from the new assessment procedures.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is outstanding.**

Goal setting for students and grades is excellent occurring through a collaborative activity with clear timelines and criteria for success. The grade and subject teams meet regularly, and there are meetings every three weeks with students. Students prepare for this with their own goal setting questionnaire as a result they know precisely what their immediate goals should be in all subject areas. The most successful students in every three weekly progress report are celebrated through the Honor Board which lends additional challenge and a sense of competition to the process. To assist teachers in supporting their students, the school uses the Inquiry Target Tool, a database which allows for the sophisticated manipulation of data. It has the potential to predict and track student progress across their time in the school, but as yet the school has not developed the strategies and programs to maximize the benefits of this system.

Expectations are very high and are shared by parents and students who fully endorse the view that all students are potentially “college bound”, including special education students even if their target is initially a two year course. However, they are encouraged to see this as just a step to transition to the four year course. One student explained that, “the school has showed me that I can”, and all subscribe to the culture of challenge being developed. Parents rightly feel that they are kept well informed about, and involved with, their children’s’ education. They have access to TeacherEase, a web based program which is used to record all student’s scores and grades. The school can show that since students and parents have been able to monitor progress from home there has been a marked improvement in many students’ progress. Parents are kept informed of the results of the interim discussions and have the opportunity for discussions with teachers through open evenings held every six weeks.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

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

The school’s philosophy in terms of learning is to develop young people who will succeed at college and beyond or, as a student explained, “to get you out into the world and make it”. To this end teachers see interactivity and independent learning as central and the core curriculum, especially the “*College Preparatory Math*”, lends itself to this. Explicit literacy teaching in other content areas and in grades 11 and 12 a research writing course which effectively develops research and other skills is good preparation for college. Equally important are opportunities to study photography or media, and to hold exhibitions or contribute to the Boston film festival. In practical reflection of the school’s name and focus, students gain a practical experience of local politics through the “Teens take the City” program of citizenship. This culminated in a presentation about the needs of the community to the Council. As one student commented, “you also learn a lot about yourself in such activities”.

The English department holds “grade parties” to moderate grading but students have the impression that “it is easier to get a high grade” with some teachers than with others which indicates that there is insufficient consistency between and within departments in terms of grading policies. The management of resources is flexible and enables identified needs to be met in creative ways, as with the cross-grade pre-algebra class or the clustering of grade rooms to minimize movement for those specialist teachers without their own classroom.

Relationships are excellent and contribute strongly to the sense of the school being a genuine learning community. The mutual respect is manifest everywhere, in conversations in classrooms or in the halls. The existence of a Straight-Gay alliance group in the school is testimony in itself to the tolerance and lack of discrimination which make students happy to come to school.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

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

There is a very strong focus on differentiated professional development, informed by high quality pedagogical dialogue which has ensured that the leadership has a very clear understanding of the nature of good instruction. The principal is the sole administrator and undertakes all formal observations, but there is a strong pattern of distributive leadership involving grade and subject leaders who observe and support teachers informally. Opportunities for intervisitations, both within and across content areas, are frequent and the Urban Assembly network facilitates visits to other schools. Teachers are therefore provided with professional development which is well differentiated and allows for their growth.

Support for students in their preparation for college is of the highest quality and this is closely aligned to the school's links with community based organizations and entities. These are very strong and contribute significantly to the social and academic development of the students. Mentors from Princeton University, as part of the Young Men's Association, support boys and at the same time act as role models. There are close ties with the New York University as well as with leading City law firms. These hold regular dinners for students and their parents and organize "Lunches with Lawyers" to deepen student understanding of the law and legal procedures. Grades 9 through 11 all receive significant help in writing applications for college.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The school leadership team reviews the four overarching goals for the school at its regular meetings. A major strength of the school's systems is the frequency and effectiveness of the review of students' progress and needs, involving students themselves in regular reflection. Every student receives a three weekly progress report and every six weeks reviews with their advisory teachers in scheduled periods. This reviewing procedure is linked to the advisors' own professional development in that the principal discusses with teachers the goals they have helped their students set and monitors the success rates of each advisory class as well as the subject classes. There is therefore an ongoing dialogue between all interested parties which has secured increases in student scores. It also addresses the overall school goal of preparing students for their future by taking a meaningful role in managing their learning. The dialogue about students who are causing concern is taken a step further through the medium of the "Kid Talk" procedure. A similarly structured procedure, twice a year, reviews teacher professional development equally effectively and in all cases the school shows excellent flexibility in revising plans and targets as required.

The principal is respected as an effective instructional leader with a clear vision for the school's further development. "College Bound" and "Lifelong learners" sum up her goals for her students. She and the leadership have developed a scope and sequence program for collaborative learning across the four years so that by grade 12 students are able to undertake sophisticated assignments as a team. Eighty percent of the students have already passed out in math reflecting a determination that students will leave the School for Law and Justice with all the credits they need. There is also a program in place to support those who need further help after they leave school. The principal has both the capacity and support from the leadership to achieve these goals.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME:</b> The Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				X	

<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.</b>					
<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?					X
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?					X
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?					X
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				X	

<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.</b>					
<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?					X
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?					X
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?					X
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?					X
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>					X

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?					X
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?					X
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?				X	
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?					X
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				<b>X</b>	

<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?					X
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other's classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another's instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					X
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				<b>X</b>	

<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?					X
5.2 the school's plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?					X
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?					X
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to make strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan's interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>				<b>X</b>	