



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Urban Assembly School for Arts and Letters

**Middle School 492
225 Adelphi Street
Brooklyn
NY 11205**

Principal: Allison Gaines-Pell

Dates of review: April 14-15, 2008

Reviewer: John Francis

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School for Arts and Letters is a middle school with 169 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 77% Black, 12% Hispanic, 9% White, 1% American Indian and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 10% special education students and no English language learners. Boys account for 43% of the students enrolled and girls account for 57%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 95.3%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's clarity of vision, shared with and supported by the whole faculty, is instrumental in bringing about improvement.
- Students and their parents recognize and appreciate the dedication, commitment and care demonstrated by the principal and teachers.
- Teachers have a good knowledge of the students and respond well to their personal and social needs.
- There is a respectful relationship between students and teachers and clear strategies in place to reinforce desirable behavior and attitude.
- The school collaborates well with a good range of other agencies and organizations to enhance the range of activities available to students.
- The school provides a broad curriculum with a range of enrichment activities that engage students' interests.
- Effective use is made of writing rubrics to evaluate the development of skills and record aspects of students' progress.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish clear systems for gathering, analyzing and using data that become an embedded feature of the school's work.
- Regularly emphasize whole school priority targets and ensure that teachers use data to set measurable student goals to achieve these targets.
- Enable teachers to use data more effectively to plan work that meets the needs of all students, particularly those who need most support.
- Ensure that core programs facilitate meaningful assessment that guides plans for students' future learning.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal has a clear vision for the school and the direction it should take. Faculty and parents share this view. In its second year, the school continues to make progress in a number of aspects of its work while consolidating its current practices. Some of this progress has been promoted through attention to the areas for improvement from last year's Quality Review. The school has made particularly good strides in the development of positive attitudes to learning and students' study skills. The teachers provide sound guidance and support, particularly for students' personal needs. As a result, relationships and behaviour are good. Parents appreciate the work of the school, particularly the dedication of the teachers and the care their children receive. They feel the school provides them with the necessary information about their children's achievement and progress. The school is currently less effective in embedding consistent systems for gathering, collating and using the data generated through tests and assessments. Discussions through the inquiry team on individual students are suitably detailed and the case studies provide a helpful vehicle for this. Available data is not sufficiently well organized and teachers do not make consistently good use of this information to plan lessons that meet students' needs exactly. As yet, leaders do not share whole school goals emphatically enough and teachers do not use data consistently to set targets for individuals and groups of students to encourage progress towards the school's overall development priorities.

One development focus at present is to improve students' writing. The school has an extended year that begins in August. During that time, teachers gather sample of the students' writing and analyze it to determine each student's strengths and needs. Students with the biggest gaps in their learning are part of the school's Inquiry Team work. The literacy coach works with these students throughout the year, building their skills in both reading and writing. The literacy coach also provides professional development to the entire staff, developing their teaching strategies. The school's philosophy is authentic assessment and the classes are project driven. The projects provide multiple entry points for students at different skill level. Teachers monitor and support the students by assessing the students at various points throughout the project.

The school provides a broad curriculum with a range of enrichment activities that engage students' interests during and beyond the school day. Much of these come about through good collaboration with other agencies and organizations. Students are appreciative of these. A big feather in the school's cap is its selection as one of a very small number of schools chosen as part of a pilot program through Citizen Schools next year. This is a prestigious honor for the school and will add significantly to what it is able to offer its students.

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 proficient.

As a relatively new school, there is little in the way of longitudinal data to track trends in students’ progress. Some comparisons have been carried out against similar schools but this can only give a broad picture at this time. The teachers, coaches and the principal meet regularly to collect and analyze information for all students. During their grade meetings, they share information and analyze students’ results and progress in tests and projects. A data analysis on the periodic assessments provides the school and the teachers with additional information on all students. At this early stage, the school does not have a well-embedded systemic way to collect, analyze and use data. In addition, teachers use of data to guide goal setting and differentiated instruction is inconsistent.

The services for special education students are well managed. The Inquiry Team focuses on these students and the literacy coach provides additional support for the students and the teachers. The school has many plans for securing their recording and evaluation systems. The administration’s view is that the other measures they use, such as conferencing and exhibitions, give a much more reflective view of students’ achievement and progress. Other monitoring systems, for example portfolios and a revised report card, are aimed at providing additional data. The school continues to monitor the effectiveness of these systems and to make revisions as they see necessary. The regular exhibitions are popular with parents, who feel that they provide a good picture of their children’s achievements.

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 proficient.

The administration has high aspirations for the whole of the school community, and its members are taking the lead from this. The whole-school goals are broad, and the school is working on measuring the progress made in meeting these goals in the previously set timetable. These goals are driven by the production of exhibitions as well as teacher made assessments, and the periodic assessments that measure goals for student progress or achievement. As yet, goals are not as emphatically shared as they might be. This means that teachers do not always use the whole school priorities to set individual and group goals for students. Some encouraging work takes place in the use of outcomes of diagnostic assessments to set up specifically focused programs, such as the very helpful rubrics to guide students’ writing. Discussions on individual students are suitably detailed and the use of case studies by the inquiry team is a helpful vehicle for this. The information gathered during these case studies is used for future professional development and developing strategies for addressing the needs of the students. Leaders recognize that this work is useful in establishing consistently good support for students in most need of improvement.

Teachers design their own assessments and while there is some analysis of individual question responses, this is not yet at a sufficiently sophisticated level to provide the detailed information needed to accelerate progress. The school is moving towards its own system through exhibitions, analysis of work habits, skills and strategies, but this is not yet finalized. There are good relationships with parents who feel that they receive appropriate

information about the achievement and progress of their children. Parents, caregivers and teachers all have similarly high expectations of each other and the students.

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 proficient.

The principal has a clear view of how resources are to be used and aligns these with the agreed priorities. Sensible budgeting has enabled the school to employ a literacy and a math coach to improve instructional skills, and class numbers have been deliberately kept low to allow more individual attention. The school is trying to “create the conditions for students to learn”. However, some of the students that have been in school for the past two years feel they are receiving less attention from teachers as the school continues to grow toward full capacity. Attendance is monitored well and students feel safe at school and part of a community.

The curriculum is suitably broad and offers a number of enrichment activities including drama, dance, gym and chorus. Students themselves would like to see this broadened to include such subjects a foreign language and culinary arts. There are high expectations for student’s academic and personal growth. Teachers respond appropriately to students’ personal and social needs. Regular meetings of teachers discuss students’ needs but mostly focus on their social and emotional development.

The teachers use outcomes from some of the predictive assessments to guide their planning but the approaches used do not generate sufficient ‘hard’ data about achievement. While they strive to differentiate planning, this is not sufficiently developed in practice. Most differentiation relates to pupils’ responses during classes and their ability to complete the tasks. While this can be effective in guiding students it is not consistent or an effective method of planning for differentiation. The approach taken by humanities is making links between English and other subjects but this is at an early stage and it is not yet possible to ascertain the impact of this. In math, tests results from last year have led to the subject becoming an area of focus for the school. With the expansion of the math department the school has moved to a more formal curriculum. While this aims to give structure, it is still a pilot program and is not fully in place. Although the school continues to adjust instruction based on observational data and the results of teacher-designed tests, accountability for improving instruction and student outcomes to ensure that each student makes appropriate academic progress has not been formalized.

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 proficient.

The literacy and math coaches are regular class visitors and provide a good level of subject support for teachers and identify common needs that inform aspects of professional development. The principal visits the teachers’ classrooms and provides them with feedback on their progress and recommends areas for improvements. These visits along with feedback from the coaches provide the basis for the professional development at the school. The new teachers are appropriately supported through the work of the Lead Instructional Mentor and the close links with the Urban Assembly. Most

of the discussions about instructional skills take place in common planning time and during meetings with the coaches and the principal.

Relationships between teachers and students are generally positive and respectful. The school runs smoothly and day-to-day management is unobtrusive, although this still requires the visible presence of teachers at transitioning to ensure its smooth operation. One aspect of the school's work that is well developed is the productive links established with a range of organizations for the benefit of the students. There are good links with the Urban Assembly, Marquis Studios, Ars Nova and Children's Pressline – writing for 'real' newspapers. One very prestigious opportunity is the forthcoming link with 'Citizen Schools' next academic year, which will provide further enrichment activities. The school is one of only four to be selected for involvement with this and is rightly proud of this honor.

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 proficient.

The principal has a clear vision for the school, shared with and supported by the whole faculty. As the school grows it is important to continue to articulate clear structures and systems for strategic planning. The work towards a system of portfolios and exhibitions is commendable, but the school must align this work with other measurable and diagnostic evaluation in order to evaluate its own successes. The school had a couple of retreats during the school year, and has a couple more planned for the summer, where they reflect on the progress made by the students and the staff in meeting their goals and the implementation of their school's proposal as an arts and writing secondary school. As a result of these retreats, the school has a clear picture of what they have accomplished and the areas for further development.

The school's proposal has a detailed six year plan that was developed by the Urban Assembly and the principal. The school has already had to alter these plans as they assess the strengths and needs of both the staff and the students. As the school grows, the school needs to revise these plans and set up structures and systems for all aspects of the school including curriculum, student assessments, professional development, and planning.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Urban Assembly School of Arts and Letters	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	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?	*	*	*	*	*
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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

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.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, 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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

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.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
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 and tardiness?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

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.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
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, and effectively address discipline related incidents?			X		
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X		

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.

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
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 makes 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		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X		

* There is no score for 1.3 since the school has no English language learners.

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped