

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**The Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice**

**Middle School 609**

**4200 16th Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11204**

**Principal: Mariela Graham**

**Dates of review: April 23-24, 2009  
Lead Reviewer: Karina Costantino**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice is a middle school with 147 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 32% Black, 26% Hispanic, 12% White, and 30% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 9% special education students. There are no boys enrolled so girls account for 100% of the students. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

### Overall Evaluation

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

The Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice is an all girls' school, currently housing grades six and seven, in which the school addresses the social and emotional needs of the whole student. The school will eventually be a grade six through twelve school and the foundation is being set now. There are many opportunities to take part in programs that run before and after school which enhance the formal curriculum of the school day providing academic rigor, all while keeping their eye on entry into an exceptional college.

The informed vision and commitment of the principal is key to taking the school forward and improving academic achievement. With thirteen teachers, there is a strong collaborative atmosphere throughout the school. Faculty demonstrates a strong commitment to their students and the students show mature behavior and a desire to excel. Teachers, parents and students use technology confidently. Parents indicate strongly that they feel like partners in their child's education and enjoy the collaborative spirit. They express the same high expectations for their daughters.

Curriculum mapping, looking at student work and data all drive the development of student goals in English language arts, math, social studies and science, although goal setting is a work in progress. Standard rubrics in all work are displayed throughout the building and the students own the rubric as well, readily able to discuss what they need to do to achieve a level three or four. Teachers conference with their students during advisory periods in order to develop their goals. There is however no systematic approach by all core subject teachers in setting short term learning goals for students to help them precisely understand their next steps for learning. This approach is also lacking in the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan, where timeframes for interim measures of progress aligned with scheduled evaluations of student progress are lacking. This means that the school is unable to monitor its ongoing progress towards achieving its goals carefully enough, or to make timely adjustments and modifications.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Leaders and faculty use data effectively to develop an ongoing understanding of individual, group and subject performance, which informs instruction and organizational adjustment.
- Teachers work effectively in collaborative teams to share good practice, analyze data and to plan curriculum and instruction.
- The staff, students and parents share and demonstrate high expectations for improving student achievement.
- The curriculum offers a wide range of experiences and choice during and after school including the arts, summer programs and technology to facilitate student's ownership of learning, so that they are college ready.
- The development of project-based learning is giving students the opportunity to undertake research, solve problems and be more active learners.
- Professional growth is high priority so the reflective faculty profit from varied opportunities to share and develop strengths as individuals and as members of the teaching community.

### What the school needs to improve

- Establish a systematic, school wide approach to goal setting so that short-term targets help students to understand their next steps of learning.
- Support all teachers in using data effectively to differentiate their lessons and instruction in all subjects.
- Improve data systems to more precisely analyze and monitor the progress of all students, in all core curriculum subjects.
- Ensure that the goals in the Comprehensive Education Plan include timeframes so that student progress can be monitored regularly.

## Part 3: Main Findings

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

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

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

School leaders and faculty collect a suitable range of data for all subjects, attendance, student behaviors and learning styles. This enables leaders and teachers to have a clear picture of student achievement and progress in these areas. Baseline testing in subjects informs teachers' understanding of students' prior knowledge and determines where to concentrate instruction and the next steps in learning. This promotes rich conversation during grade and advisory meetings. Teachers are supporting each other in collaborative groups to extend the use of data to plan for effective student learning across all subjects and classes. At present, some subject areas are developed well and staff use the data with confidence, however this is not yet consistent in all core subjects.

The school disaggregates subgroup achievement data and analyzes it to identify trends and variations for ethnicities and to highlight the specific needs of English language learners and special needs students. As a result of careful monitoring and secure follow-up processes, student attendance remains consistently high.

The school refines its tools for collecting and analyzing data. Technology is used so that teachers, students, parents and school leaders can access and track student progress, including mid-period progress, in English language arts, math, social studies and science. This has increased communication between students, parents and the school. If parents do not have a computer, the school provides a printed report. In addition, the school implements an online grading program for all students. Teachers input test/quiz scores, project grades, homework completion and class participation and post messages for students. This allows teachers, parents and students to check progress and performance regularly.

**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 school has sound structures to ensure that teachers use data correctly to set suitably high goals and identify next learning steps. Teachers, meeting in small groups, examine one of their lesson plans critically each week with a focus on differentiation. They highlight best practices in instruction for various topics. At grade team meetings, teachers discuss individual student's academic progress with parents to develop smart goals and action plans for each student. However, there is not a consistent approach by teachers in all core subjects, so the short-term learning goals do not closely meet the needs of all students. Teachers discuss possible barriers to individual students'

academic progress in department and pupil personnel meetings, providing resources to address these barriers.

The school leadership team, teachers and parents work collaboratively to plan school improvement. The leadership team develops suitable school and student goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan from all available school data that demonstrate high expectations for improving student achievement. However, the school does not include in the plan, timeframes for looking at benchmark goals to regularly measure student progress.

A nationwide assessment tool, the College-Ready Performance Assessment System, prepares students for success in college. Math and language arts teachers use this assessment each semester to assess students' abilities to synthesize and utilize the skills they gain; thereby utilizing the higher cognitive thinking skills. The school uses four year universities to name their classes. The school collaborates with Duke and Columbia University, through iMentor. Since a number of the teachers were high school teachers, the learning expectations for intermediate school are high with a constant eye on high school achievement.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.**

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

The teachers discuss interdisciplinary units and prepare collaboratively for educational trips. At department meetings, teachers examine scope and sequence and how it corresponds to subsequent grades. With the help of the achievement coach from their network, teachers work together to ensure a coherent 6-12 sequence. The principal has thirteen teachers instead of eight to allow for flexibility of planning and a push-in model for subgroups, such as English language learners and special education. This creates a wonderful opportunity for collaboration among teachers. The Urban Assembly provides an Enrichment Coordinator who plans with the teachers for academically rigorous curricular and experiences for the students. Due to the scaffolding and classroom support provided by the school, some teachers plan differentiated lessons and instruction, but this is not consistent across the school or based on student achievement data in all subjects. This restricts the progress of many students, as not all their work addresses their specific needs. Some students find the tasks set too easy and lacking challenge where others struggle with their class activities and require support.

The curriculum offers a wide range of experiences and choice during and after school, such as Baker's Brunch, Town Hall Meetings, and Teen Biz 3000 to facilitate student's ownership of learning so that they are college ready. In addition, the development of project-based learning is giving students the opportunity to undertake research, solve problems and be more active learners. TeenBiz 3000 is an online, non-fiction, differentiated reading program aligned to New York State Standards, which English language arts teachers use to assess students' reading levels and skills. Teachers use this weekly as a formative assessment. In addition, all students have class section sheets as they move as a class to each subject. This practice allows teachers and staff to have a daily lens of any concerns that may be developing and address them in a timely fashion. All these procedures enable the principal and teachers to see and address particular problems that may be interfering with performance at any given time of the day and to notice behavioral trends.

The principal believes the school is successful because all members of the building began teaching at The Urban Assembly together and since it is small, everyone wears a number of hats, sharing ownership. The principal supports openness and all teachers are encouraged to exercise a voice in all matters involving student performance.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.**

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

The principal has a clear understanding of instruction and student outcomes. She visits each classroom every day, enabling her to have a clear picture of teacher performance from formal and informal observations. She also utilizes a computer program that allows her to monitor student progress in each classroom and to compare outcomes between classes and subject areas. The feedback she receives from this helps her provide support for teachers to make the necessary changes in curricula, pacing and instruction to raise student progress. This work also increases accountability for faculty as they fully understand the impact of the quality of their instruction on student engagement and outcomes.

Professional growth is a high priority and school leaders encourage teachers to evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes. The reflective faculty profit from varied opportunities to share concerns and develop strengths as individuals and members of the teaching community. School-wide goals drive professional development and this provides the staff with many opportunities to receive appropriate training, for example on how goals for each student drive the differentiation of instruction. Teachers enjoy a number of professional development opportunities, and travel to various national conferences, for example in Washington and Chicago.

There is a range of highly valuable links with outside partnerships that add hugely to the quality of life for the girls in the school. For instance, through a partnership with Baker Hostetler, small groups of sixth-grade students have catered brunches with accomplished female professionals in a variety of fields. These Baker's Brunches set high expectations for the students and positive role models to emulate. Partnerships with private, public, non-profit and academic institutions create learning opportunities for students outside the classroom, demonstrating high expectations and academic rigor.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.**

School leaders have a thorough grasp of whole school data and statistical information and use it strategically for planning whole-school improvement. The principal is widely respected by teachers, parents and students. Her clear vision, which is to have all students attend top universities upon graduation, motivates the entire school community. This ensures that, through improving the school's ability to use data to improve student outcomes and differentiate instruction, all students will reach this goal. As the school grows, this understanding of the use of data to improve student outcomes becomes more meaningful.

While interim goals are in place, they do not yet have clear timeframes for the school to measure student outcomes regularly or rigorously enough toward their long-term goals. Similarly, teachers discuss individual goals, but this is not always in the context of clear, objective and measurable goals over time. Currently, timeframes for interim measures of progress are not included in the Comprehensive Educational Plan. Similarly, there is no alignment with scheduled evaluations of student progress.

The administrative team makes effective use of data from a variety of sources to modify organizational decisions and professional collaborations. The outcomes of the inquiry team's research led to a more refined target population and brought a school wide focus on non-fiction reading. Although it is too early to evaluate the impact of this initiative, there is clear evidence of improved reading across the curriculum, as evidenced by Book Clubs.

<b>School name: The Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice</b>	△	➤	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			X	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X	

### DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.**

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?				X
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X	

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.**

To what extent do school leaders...	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?				X
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?				X
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				X

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed