

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Unity Center for Urban Technology

High School 500

**121 Avenue of the Americas
New York
NY 10013**

Principal: Fausto de la Rosa

Dates of review: April 28-29, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Francesca Peña

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Unity Center for Urban Technology is a high school with 192 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 37% Black, 59% Hispanic, and 3% of students from other backgrounds. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 76.8. %. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 87% eligibility.

The principal is in his second year and the school is located on the fourth floor of a five story building, that houses other businesses and not-for profit organizations.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Unity High School analyzes and reviews a wide range of data consistently through different structures established by the administration. Teachers use authentic student work as a conduit for deepening their understanding of how and under what conditions students learn best. Both administrators and teachers echo a clear message of high expectations and the tone of the building has improved significantly.

The principal is a strategic thinker and planner who has shared his vision for raising achievement with the whole community. He has established a promising range of school improvement initiatives. These include the appointment of an instructional assistant principal who, in collaboration with the administrative team and entire faculty, uses information gathered at meetings to make decisions regarding school, academic and administrative policy in support of better student outcomes. In addition, due to the increase in the Hispanic population, the principal has also hired a bilingual guidance counselor. This addition has facilitated communication with Spanish speaking parents and students. However, the school has yet to involve parents in the goal-setting process. The addition of a data specialist and a part-time instructional technology assistant principal has benefited the entire staff in all areas of data analysis and professional development in ARIS. As a result, all teachers are more comfortable in the use of technology, leading to higher students' outcome.

The school's investment in after-school and Saturdays tutorial programs has paid huge dividends for student achievement and credit accumulation. Behavioral incidents are down 71% from last year and the passing rates have risen an average of 15% in each grade as illustrated by the results of the first semester school scholarship. The school provides services to all its special education students. The creation of more collaborative team teaching classes has seen a significant increase in their scholarship in comparison to last year. The school is reflective and understands the importance of student attendance. It has slightly increased from last year, but still remains too low. To this end, the school has a more aggressive action plan ready to implement immediately. The school curriculum lacks a range of advanced placement courses that will better prepare students for post-secondary education and meet the needs of high achieving students. Lesson observations reveal that the development of students' writing skills is not implemented consistently across the curriculum

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Staff are effective in collecting and analyzing a wide and varied range of assessment data to review student progress and plan interventions.
- The school consistently communicates high expectations in many tangible ways that leave staff and students in no doubt about what they are striving for.
- The principal makes informed and effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school to support improvements in learning.
- The entire school community has worked successfully to raise the tone of the building and to provide a safe and stimulating learning environment.
- Teachers work collaboratively, plan effectively together and visit each other's classrooms to share ideas and best practice, through a desire to improve student outcomes continually.
- The school community is reflective, and uses data to plan realistically for future improvements with a focus on improving student outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend the curriculum to include more challenging classes to meet the needs of high achieving students.
- Engage parents in the goal-setting process to ensure that there is a clear understanding of their child's goals.
- Ensure that all lessons and homework consolidate writing skills consistently, challenge students and extend their learning at their level using varied methods to demonstrate understanding.
- Implement a strategic action plan to monitor and increase student attendance as a matter of urgency.

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.

Unity Center for Urban Technology is becoming more effective in gathering, analyzing and interpreting of formative and summative data about student performance and progress. The wide and varied range of data includes Regents data, inquiry team, analysis of scholarship reports, transcripts, attendance, ARIS, Acuity, individual student progress and item analysis by units. The administrative cabinet, the inquiry team and all teachers play a critical role in interpreting formative and summative data and use their analysis to inform instructional practices across the school. This information enables administrators and teachers to plan for, act on and achieve the goals set for the 2008-2009 school year. Two periods per week of dedicated common planning time supports data analysis effectively. Professional development and continued support for teachers in using ARIS to disaggregate data have enhanced teachers' proficiency in interpreting data, thereby sharpening the lens by which they improve instruction.

As a result of creating additional collaborative team teaching classes, hiring an instructional assistant principal, a bilingual guidance counselor, a data specialist and a part-time Instructional technology assistant principal, there has been an increase in student scholarship and, as a result, the school expects to have a 10% increase in this year's graduation rate. The addition of a data specialist and a part-time instructional technology assistant principal has benefited the entire staff in all areas of data analysis and professional development in ARIS. As a result, all teachers are more comfortable in the use of technology, leading to higher student outcomes.

School leaders and faculty have not yet sufficiently developed a systematic way to identify and address the needs of all sub-groups using a range of data including core subjects and other information, such as attendance, summative and formative assessments, anecdotal, student work and enrichment data. Student attendance rates are still too low and this is having a negative impact on scholarship reports. Although the school monitors attendance, it has yet to implement an aggressive attendance improvement plan, based on an in-depth analysis of student sub-group attendance rates.

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 communicates high expectations in a number of tangible ways and established an effective system for setting goals for all students. School leaders and faculty set clear goals at the beginning of the year. The administration, in conjunction with guidance counselors and teachers, has established a well thought out goal-setting

cycle for individual students, which involves guidance counselors and teachers working collaboratively to monitor each student and ensure that they are on track and to plan interventions where necessary.

Because so many students were falling behind in credit accumulation at the beginning of the school year, teachers devised individual programs for all students based on their needs. This responsive and flexible approach enabled the school to program credit-deficient students for extra classes, which have afforded them the opportunity to recover credit and to get back on track to graduate on time. The administration also has structured common preparatory periods to enable departmental and interdisciplinary groups to discuss students' progress and next steps towards their goals. This initiative has paid great dividends for students who are now more aware of their needs and are beginning to participate more conscientiously in class. One of the students said, "Writing my goals helped me realized where I really needed help." Another said, "I pushed myself to be better."

Guidance counselors, teachers and the parent coordinator play significant roles in ensuring that all parents are informed of their child's academic, social, and attendance progress. Students and parents receive an official progress report six times a year. In addition, parents and students can check their progress and performance in any class at least once a week via the SNAP Program. The online reporting system is constantly updated by teachers and is accessible to the entire school community. Parents are not yet part of the goal-setting cycle for their children and the school knows this is a next step in the goal-setting process.

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 principal and cabinet rely on data to make effective, strategic decisions for budgeting, hiring new staff and scheduling. In response to the needs of its special education population, the school has added collaborative team teaching classes in all core content areas across the grade levels. These classes meet the needs of special education students and general education students successfully in a less-restrictive environment. As a result, the school is providing all mandated services to this population, leading to an increase in their attendance and scholarship performance. In addition, due to the increase in the Hispanic population, the principal also hired a bilingual guidance counselor. This addition has facilitated communication with Spanish speaking parents and students.

The Learning Environment Survey for 2007-2008 indicated that students, parents and staff did not feel safe attending this school. In order to address this problem, the school established new discipline systems, leading to a 71% decrease in major incidents. Quality Review interviews and safety data reveal that parents, students, and teachers feel that the level of safety and tone of the building has improved vastly this year. This positive step has allowed staff and students to spend more time on task and has led to better student outcomes.

The school actively promotes a positive learning environment that fosters personal, social and academic development. In order to help students benefit from a supportive

climate for learning, the school has structured a comprehensive plan for rewards and consequences that has been implemented strategically. In addition, the school invested in the Positive Behavior Interventions Strategies Program (PBIS). This is designed to assist schools with building positive communities of trust and encourages students to take ownership for their learning as well as their extended outside community.

Teachers do not consistently 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. This leads to a lack of engagement at times, particularly from higher achieving students for whom content and activities lack the necessary challenge. Lesson observations further reveal that there is a lack of emphasis on developing students' writing skills across the curriculum. Students expressed the need for more enrichment and Advance Placement courses that will better prepare them for post-secondary education.

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 proficient.

The school has built its leadership capacity through the addition of a bilingual guidance counselor, an assistant principal, a data specialist and a part-time instructional assistant principal. As a result, student achievement and involvement in after-school activities have dramatically increased and incidents have significantly dropped.

Administration's formal and informal classroom observations, as well as learning walks, provide teachers with immediate feedback on best teaching practices and identify focused areas for improvement. Teacher performance is assessed further using formal and informal data and is addressed effectively by differentiated, individualized support. Professional development forums have created opportunities for building capacity among the staff, have increased opportunities for teachers to visit colleagues' classrooms and foster distributive leadership. Weekly collaborative planning time and department meetings are embedded in school-wide scheduling to provide opportunities for regular and content-specific professional development.

Two inquiry teams focus on English language arts and social studies respectively. Each team meets weekly and focuses on using data to identify precise needs and to plan tiered interventions with specific objectives. All teachers do not participate in inquiry teams and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning. However, other professional development forums have created opportunities for building capacity among the staff, have increased opportunities for teachers to visit colleagues' classrooms and foster distributive leadership. Teachers have good opportunities for in-house professional development, but have not had the chance to visit other schools to observe best practices.

Parent workshops have increased parental involvement and improved school and family communication. However, the school recognizes the need to find ways to engage parents more effectively in the implementation of the new attendance plan. The school has established excellent partnerships with the community-based organization, the DOOR, that is located in the same building and provides counseling, after-school activities, stress management workshops, SAT tutoring, a nurse and a very effective

college program. As a result, 85% of students in the graduating class have plans to attend college.

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.

The principal is highly respected by teachers, students and parents. Though he has only been in his position for two years, he has successfully shared his vision for raising achievement with the whole community. This has led to a huge increase in communication, illustrated by the results of the latest Learning Environment Survey and interviews with the different constituencies. The school's self-evaluation is an accurate reflection of the school's practices and demonstrates that self-reflection is a widespread and integral part of the school culture.

Students are able to meet with their guidance counselors on a frequent basis or as needed to review credit accumulation and course progress. The school shares all information regarding graduation requirements and eligibility with families through mailings, meetings with parents, and parent-teacher conferences. As a result, students show commitment to their schoolwork and an improvement in course passing rates is evident in the most recent scholarship report. An assessment of student transcripts has enabled the school leadership to focus its resources strategically to support improved student outcomes. The creation of the extended day program has helped struggling students to graduate on time. In preparation for June Regents examinations, the school plans to conduct mock exams to help teachers identify difficulties that students are facing and revise the curriculum before the actual exam.

School leaders are not satisfied with the current student attendance. However, they do not have an adequate system in place to monitor student attendance regularly and take aggressive action, nor does the school does not have a full time attendance teacher to manage the development and implementation of a strategic plan as a matter of urgency.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Unity Center for Urban Technology	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
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.				
<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	
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 student’s learning.				
<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	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			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.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	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				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			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.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	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				
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			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.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	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				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed