

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement

**Middle School 366
650 Hollywood Avenue
Bronx
NY 10465**

Principal: Cameron Berube

Dates of review: March 3 - 4, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Marina Volanakis

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Urban Academy Assembly of Civic Engagement is a middle school with 250 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 23.2% Black, 62.4% Hispanic, 10.8% White, and 3.2% Asian students. The student body includes 7.2% English language learners and 28.4% special education students. Boys account for 47.2% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52.8%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 91.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

The school is currently in its second year of operation, with plans to expand by one grade per year until it serves grades 6 through 12.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal has a strong vision for the future of the school and she leads through continuous reflection and focused commitment to school improvement. In her first year and a half, she has already implemented many good systems, most notably those for regular collection and analysis of student achievement data from a broad range of sources. In addition to the standardized assessment data that schools typically examine, all teachers administer their own assessments at regular intervals to measure student mastery of the curriculum standards they have taught. They analyze the data from these assessments thoroughly, and they use it to identify students and skills for intervention services, and to guide their instructional planning at the group level.

The school has also developed a formalized process for individual student goal setting that involves the parents and the students themselves. However, it does not yet yield the kind of rigorous, content-specific goals best suited for driving student achievement. Communication with parents is very good, both in its frequency and in the level of detail parents receive about their children's strengths and areas for improvement.

The majority of teachers are relatively new to the profession and many are still working to develop a broad repertoire of effective instructional and management techniques. Although teachers do generally do have a good handle on the importance of using data to guide instruction, most do not yet use data to adequately meet the needs of the full range of learners. Many lessons lack rigor, both in the academic and behavioral expectations set for the students. Teachers collaborate with one another and school leaders conduct informal lesson observations very frequently. However, the school has not yet developed a comprehensive, individualized system for planning and providing professional development that pushes all teachers to improve their practice.

The principal has effectively drawn parents, students, and teachers into the school improvement planning process and there is broad understanding and consensus around the areas of focus for the year. Without measurable goals and interim targets directly correlated to student outcomes, however, it is difficult to monitor progress in these areas accurately and consistently.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Teachers and school leaders gather and analyze student achievement data from a variety of sources multiple times throughout the year.
- Teachers and school leaders implement a consistent system for assessing student mastery of curriculum standards at regular intervals, and using data from these assessments to target instructional interventions for struggling students.
- At least twice a year, teachers engage all students and their parents in an individualized process of reflection on student achievement and development of learning goals.
- Staff members consistently model the positive character skills and respectful attitudes they seek to instill in their students through their interactions with their students and with one another.
- Teachers regularly use collaborative team meetings and intervisitations to inform data-driven instruction.
- School leaders regularly monitor instruction to identify individual teacher needs and provide feedback to support professional growth.

What the school needs to improve

- Enhance the system for individualized student goal-setting by aligning all goals with students' specific learning needs and conferencing with students regularly to discuss individual progress.
- Further develop teachers' capacity to model high expectations for all students through rigorous, purposeful activities that target the needs of all learners.
- Ensure that school goals focus on measurable student outcomes and include interim benchmarks that can be assessed throughout the year.
- Formalize a system for creating individualized professional development plans for every teacher that include long-term goals and interim benchmarks, and tailor support opportunities accordingly.

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.

Collection and analysis of student achievement data from a variety of sources is a true strength of the school. In addition to analyzing traditional standardized test data, teachers in all content areas conduct a detailed item analysis of student responses to teacher-made summative assessments every nine weeks. They use this analysis to create color-coded spreadsheets that provide information about individual student mastery in each curriculum strand they have taught, as well as lists of students who require remediation in each area. Teachers of humanities and science have also spearheaded the collection and analysis of data through a set of assessments designed to measure college-readiness skills. Finally, the school has developed a portfolio system that facilitates collection of student work in all subject areas throughout the year and summative assessment of the totality of each child's work in June.

The school has also disaggregated student data to understand the gap in achievement between boys and girls more clearly and they keep a close watch on the achievement of their sizable subgroup of students with special education needs.

Through all of these assessment systems, teachers and school leaders gain an in-depth knowledge of each student's skills and areas for improvement at several points throughout the year. However, they have not yet developed a system for organizing all of these various data points to create a single holistic picture of each child. Their strategies for monitoring student growth over time are also in the beginning stages and the use of ongoing formative assessment data has not yet become a regular part of all teachers' practice.

The school has strong systems in place for communicating with students and parents about student achievement. They supplement regular informal communication with parents via phone and email with formalized conferences twice a year where students, parents and advisors come together to discuss strengths and weaknesses in both academics and character development. The teachers use an extensive rubric to evaluate students in each content area and students themselves present to their parents about their accomplishments and next steps.

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 begun to put some consistent systems in place for the creation of individualized learning goals for each student. At the beginning of the school year, each

student set a year-long academic goal, and several teachers have posted these goals in the classrooms as reminders throughout the year. The school has also included a formal collaborative goal-setting process into their semiannual conferences. After discussing a student's achievements and areas for improvement, each student's advisor works with the student and parent to develop goals for the upcoming school term. Thus, every student has goals each term for both academics and character development. The goals tend to focus on students' general learning skills and habits, however, rather than specific curricular elements in each of the content areas.

One way that the school promotes its emphasis on civic engagement is by including students in various aspects of school leadership, including the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan. An equal number of teachers, students, and parents came together to analyze school data and to draw conclusions about the school's three most critical areas for growth. This collaborative process yielded broad awareness and strong support for the school's annual goals. Although the school can reasonably expect these goals will support improved student achievement, they focus on teacher inputs and do not include measurable targets for the short- or long-term.

The principal articulates a powerful vision for the high expectations she sets for her staff, her students and herself. Although her teachers speak the same language of expecting all students to be successful in college and embracing an ethic of constant learning, many teachers fall short in modeling these high expectations in the classroom. In some instances, for example, students were doing activities that lacked purpose, students were disengaged and not redirected and students' written work was limited in scope and depth.

The school Inquiry Team has used an extended data-informed process to identify a focus for their study, and they have spent the bulk of the year developing a set of instructional tools to implement with their target students. As such, they have not had an opportunity to measure the impact of their work on student learning or to use their learning to have a broader impact on 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.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Teachers use the data from their nine-week assessments to inform curricular and instructional planning in a variety of ways. The primary and most consistent use of this data is to inform the curriculum for their academic intervention classes. The school targets individual students and skills for these classes based on demonstrated areas of weakness. Teachers also use data to inform the content of their core lessons, but they tend to address group, rather than individual, learning needs. The expectation that all teachers of the same subject will teach the same lesson each day supports this practice. In many cases, the failure to differentiate the content of lessons to meet the needs of different learners in the classrooms results from an insufficient use of ongoing formative assessment between the nine-week exams.

Some teachers also develop differentiated resources and extension activities to meet students' varied skill levels and learning needs. These good practices are not consistent

and widespread enough, however, especially given that all classes, excluding math, include students from both grade levels.

The principal conscientiously reflects on the needs of the school and makes many sound organizational decisions accordingly. In response to English language arts scores lagging far behind math scores, for example, she hired a literacy coach this year. To maintain high attendance levels as the school grew, she marshaled the support of teacher-advisors by moving advisory periods to the first activity every morning.

Throughout the school, teachers are supportive and respectful of one another. Many teachers cited the support and shared commitment of their colleagues as the greatest strength of the school. Teachers also extend this positive, respectful approach to their interactions with students, and serve as powerful models of the values of collaboration and communication they seek to develop in their students. Some students' attitudes toward their teachers and peers are not always as positive, but many students demonstrate social skills far beyond their years.

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 principal and literacy coach spend a great deal of time conducting informal observations of lessons and providing individualized feedback to teachers about their strengths and areas for development. Because these observations occur on a consistent, ongoing basis, every teacher has a keen sense of which aspect of their instructional practice they should be working on and what steps they should take to improve. Once they have achieved mastery in that area, the principal and literacy coach move on to support them in another area that needs development. Although staff members report feeling well supported by this step-by-step approach, it does not ensure that all teachers are working toward the right interim targets to meet broader long-term goals. As of yet, there are no formal year-long professional development plans with detailed action steps for each teacher to ensure that all teachers receive ample professional development opportunities to meet their individual needs.

The school has created multiple structures, including department meetings, house meetings, and meetings between co-teachers, that enable staff members to reflect on their practice and help one another grow professionally. Teachers use these meetings effectively, centering their discussions on the examination of student work, analysis of data, and planning of lessons. Teachers also take advantage of opportunities to visit one another's classrooms and they participate in weekly professional workshops led by members of the school's leadership. Although the school provides multiple structures through which staff members learn from one another, the opportunities for teachers to draw on external expertise for professional growth are not as well developed.

Now that the school has begun to grow in size and grade span, the principal has begun working on building the leadership capacity of her staff members. She promoted two of the founding teachers into leadership roles and she has appointed leaders for each of the three houses in the school. Although she has made strides in this direction, the school does not yet embody a true distributive leadership model.

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 assessments that all teachers design and administer every nine weeks enable them to monitor students' achievement of curriculum standards closely, at regular intervals throughout the year. The teachers work in teams to analyze the data from these assessments closely and they use it both to place students in intervention classes according to their needs, and to guide the content of whole-group lessons. Although systems for monitoring student achievement and adjusting to meet their needs every nine weeks are strong, teachers do not employ consistent strategies for checking in with students to monitor progress toward individual goals in between formal assessments.

Departmental teams also engage in a regular practice of monitoring the progress of their lessons against their year-long curriculum maps and making adjustments in their instructional plans accordingly. The school expects teachers who teach the same subject to teach the same lesson every day. This enables good collaboration around instructional planning, but somewhat limits the extent to which teachers can adjust their curriculum to meet the individual needs of students across and within classes.

School leaders and teachers continually look at student achievement data from a broad range of sources and this analysis, along with regular lesson observations, enables them to draw broad conclusions about the effectiveness of their professional development efforts. They have not yet developed a system, however, for measuring the impact of their professional development offerings in a more targeted and deliberate fashion.

The school has targeted three areas for school-wide improvement and they have developed detailed action plans to promote growth in each one. The goals are not directly tied to measurable student outcomes, however, nor do they include interim benchmarks. Though the school leaders regularly review their practices for evidence that staff members are working on each of the three areas, they are not able to identify how much progress they have made toward any fixed target.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement	△	➤	✓	+
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, DYQ, 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