

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts

High School M369

**509 West 124 Street
Manhattan
NY 10027**

Principal: Fia Davis

Dates of review: October 17 – 18, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Ronald Feinstein

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts is a high school with 363 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 57% Black, 37% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 21% of the students enrolled and girls account for 79%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 79.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Through routine analysis of a range of relevant data and on-going assessments, teachers make informed instructional and organizational decisions that result in growth for students. (2.2)
 - Teachers, both individually and in teacher teams, use data from periodic and teacher constructed assessments and mock regents to identify strengths and weaknesses in student performance. Analyses of these assessments, along with task-specific rubrics applied to student work products, are aligned with the school's power standards and provide actionable feedback so that teachers can make instructional adjustments, especially for the school's lowest third and those almost on track. This results in instruction that better meets students' needs, as evidenced by a 50% increase in student performance on the most recent mock Regents exam in English language arts.
- Leaders make informed and effective organizational decisions across various aspects of the school that lead to improvements in learning. (1.3)
 - The school leader assures that her strategic and coherent post-secondary plan for her students focuses on college and career readiness. A full-time, school-based college advisor meets with students and families at multiple times during the year to discuss and guide them through the college application and financial aid process. Teachers work with students during and after school to write college application essays. In addition, counselors meet with students periodically to review credit and Regents requirements to ensure that all students are aware of the expectations needed to move to the next level. During meeting with students they articulate a clear understanding of what is needed to move along to meet their instructional goals and to create high quality work products. These staff assignments are well aligned to the school's instructional goals of increasing the number of graduates who are accepted to college and they result in a clear understanding, by students, of what is needed to move along "the path to college."
 - Twice weekly departmental and content area meetings enable teachers to look at student work and engage in item skills analyses. The principal and assistant principal attend teacher team meetings and co-facilitate or lead sessions. The presence of school leaders at the meetings has led to an increase in the number of teachers attending each meeting, collaborative conversations on student placement and the use of protocols to drive professional dialogue. This supports an increased focus on using student results to reorganize curricular topics and modify academic tasks to include content-pedagogy. As a result, student programs have changed to better meet the needs of students and the school has developed a more focused approach to supporting the lowest performing students.

- The school uses the observation of classroom teaching along with an analysis of learning outcomes to monitor teaching practice with clear expectations that improve classroom practice. (4.1)
 - Using a research-based common framework for teaching, administrators provide one-on-one and written feedback to teachers from short and frequent cycles of observations. The first cycle was conducted by the administrative team to norm the understanding of elements in the research-based framework used by the school. Other teachers and staff members are then invited to participate in the inter-visitation walk-through. Feedback to teachers, from both of these structures, identifies strengths and weaknesses in classroom practices. This information becomes the foundation for setting individual professional and personal goals and ensures that professional growth and reflection is a shared practice. Feedback for next steps is welcomed and understood by the school community and contributes to improved teacher practice as shared by staff.
- The school's extensive network of specialized supports ensures the personal, social and emotional needs of students and families are met so that students attain greater levels of success. (4.4)
 - A dedicated full-time counselor for college advisement works with students and parents to understand graduation requirements and explore college options. In addition, using a school-wide advisory curriculum, the school's two guidance counselors work with grade cohorts to address the importance of good attendance, understanding the requirements for core course and post-high school expectations. Collectively, these practices help students in grades 9 through 12 to understand post secondary expectations and prepare for the transition to college via the college application process. As a result, strong parental and staff support contributes to a school culture with a clear picture of college bound success and a college enrollment rate of 39.7%.
 - Performing arts provide the framework for partnerships that assist in meeting the needs of students and school-wide goals. Grants from Explore the Arts support the arts programs and funds scholarships to teachers who then design and implement arts projects in classrooms. Epic Theater from CUNY supports an integrated English Arts and Global History project in which a play is performed dramatizing Robespierre being brought to trial. Other partnerships such as Shakespeare Remix and Martha Graham In-school Ballet Technique ensure an infusion of the arts across the school that meets school-wide goals, enhances the overall learning experience and engages students.
- Leaders use a wide range of data to evaluate the effectiveness of organizational decisions, interventions, professional development supports and staffing and make adjustments as necessary. (5.4)
 - Teacher team work is monitored weekly and includes a mid-year reflection by facilitators as well as team members. These feedback loops contribute data to monitor, revise and re-form new teacher teams for professional development. For example, based on data from cycles of observations, the school teacher team structure has been reconstituted to

reflect a mix of effective teachers alongside those who are still developing their practice in specific areas of pedagogy. Teachers interested in taking on leadership roles engage in a collaborative process based on informal classroom visits by administrators. As a result of this strategic adjustment to teacher learning structures, there has been growth in pedagogical practice that is evident in the number of commendations received from one informal visit to the next.

- The principal and assistant principal share responsibility for all new teachers so that they receive twice the amount of administrative support. This results in the teacher's swift acculturation to the school community and leadership's increased ability to evaluate and adjust effectiveness of each teacher's pedagogical growth as well as the administration's hiring practices. When necessary, administrative support is extended into a teacher's second year, thus these teachers continue to receive direct and targeted professional development support from their immediate supervisor, leading to improved practice and a stronger teaching staff overall.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that modifications to curriculum include the school's chosen power standards so that the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) tasks are part of an implemented plan in all grades. (1.1)
 - School leaders and faculty are in the process of aligning curriculum to college readiness anchors with due consideration for how CCLS and tasks must be aligned to curriculum. However, this is not yet apparent in all curriculum maps, limiting the school from assuring the transference of the higher order thinking necessary to promote greater post secondary outcomes. In addition, the modifications made do not yet address special populations within the school, such as students with disabilities and English language learners. Therefore, not all students are provided with the appropriate opportunities to engage in or demonstrate their thinking.
- Promote greater consistency in key pedagogical practices such as purposeful grouping, effective questioning and structures for student discussion to maximize learning across classrooms. (1.2)
 - While some faculty are learning how to differentiate activities and the administration works to move all teachers in this direction, questioning inconsistently offers differentiated learning opportunities. Lessons, for the most part, are delivered up-front to the whole class with little immediate teacher access to student thinking, which leaves students merely compliant and unchallenged.
 - Although the school has expectations that teachers use a range of questioning strategies in reading and writing, these practices are not evident across classrooms. Most activities do not demand substantive cognitive engagement and so student imagination is not consistently challenged and participation is uneven.
- Ensure that all constituent groups are involved in setting goals that include higher levels of challenge in order to accelerate student progress. (3.2)

- The school, teachers and teacher teams set goals in order to promote learning. Currently, some teams have goals that are limited to the results of the mock Regents and do not include more granular student data. This surface analysis inhibits the school's ability to differentiate goals or focus instruction in order to accelerate progress for all students.
- Teams of teachers' goals for groups of students are set to meet achievement levels for students. At the end of each term, these goals are revised with an eye towards improving outcomes for future classes. However, due to the broad nature of these global expectations, there is little effective guidance for teachers to determine additional supports needed for some students, higher levels of challenge for others, or curriculum specific competencies to assure higher levels of achievement for all students.
- Refine and deepen the goal setting process to include precise short-and long-term measurable outcomes to monitor students' progress effectively. (3.3)
 - Although goals for certain high stakes sub-groups are modified mid-year and again at end of every semester, this practice is not consistent across all at-risk student groups. Goals for high performing student groups are not yet adjusted mid-year based on progress monitoring data and, therefore, the change of performance of these groups of students is not surfaced until the end of the semester. This lag in progress monitoring for all groups of students limits the school's ability to make refinements to goals to ensure that learners at the high and low end of performance are successful.
 - Student work products reflect levels of achievement and consistently contain encouraging comments and contain encouraging teacher comments. While rooted in the school-wide grading policy, teacher feedback is not specific enough to help students understand what they must do to monitor their progress, or meet the expectations of assigned tasks.
- Extend and expand communication and collaboration with families, including specific feedback and next steps, in order to assure that they have the capacity to support their child at home. (2.4)
 - The school provides opportunities for students and families to become aware of students' progress, such as mid-semester progress reports. This year parent teacher conference schedules were expanded to provide more choices over a span of days to maximize opportunities for increased parent attendance. However, progress reports do not include specific information on strengths and weaknesses, nor do they include next steps, thus limiting effectiveness and hindering parent understanding of how to further support their child.
 - The school informs parents of activities and events at various times during the year. Parents show up in high numbers during evening performances of the competing performing arts majors. Although these events are incentives to attract more parents into the school community, parental involvement in key decision-making remains an on-going

challenge for the school. As a result, parents are not full and active participants in helping the school actualize its vision for student achievement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Urban Assembly for the Performing Arts	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score		X		
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		X		
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		X		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?		X		
Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X	
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?		X		
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		X		
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X					
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed