

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

The Urban Assembly School for the Urban Environment

Middle School 330

**70 Tompkins Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Kourtney Boyd

Dates of review: May 29-30, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Alicja Winnicki

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School for the Urban Environment is a middle school with 94 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 68% Black, 31% Hispanic, 1% American Indian, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 27% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 88.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Programming at the school is beginning to improve instruction so that all students are exposed to more complex learning experiences. (1.3)
 - The principal re-programmed the school in January of this year and developed a teacher and student schedule to begin providing opportunities for common meeting and planning time. There is a weekly schedule and teachers begin to meet in various teams. They are in the process of focusing their discussions around curriculum planning. For example, content area meetings are scheduled three times a week for teachers to have time to plan units of study aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). They have also started talking about teaching strategies from the Danielson's framework. Additionally, teachers are scheduled to meet two times a week for inquiry work and they beginning to bring student work to these meetings and are in the process of reviewing results of classroom assessments. Furthermore, all special education teachers are beginning to plan with classroom teachers and they sometimes participate in grade level and across grade level meetings. As a result, increased time for teacher collaboration is leading to more engaging academic tasks for students.
 - Most teachers, including health and Physical Education, special education, paraprofessionals and a social worker, are programmed to increase time servicing students in small groups, so that the individual academic and social and emotional needs of each student can be addressed. The principal started to assign teachers to match their content strengths with the needs of the students. Therefore, the school is developing alignment between instructional goals and teacher assignments. For example, two special education teachers are programmed to work in teams with general education English language arts (ELA) and math teachers in the Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) models in grades 7 and 8. They are also beginning to plan together with their content and grade level partners. A licensed special education teacher services students in a bridge class where paraprofessionals are regularly scheduled to assist identified students in grades 6, 7, and 8. As a result, the student - teacher ratio this year is 10:1, thus giving identified students an opportunity to work in small groups in order to elevate their individual learning outcomes.
- The school is in the process of making purposeful decisions to emphasize the Common Core Learning Standards and to provide opportunities for all students to experience CCLS-aligned units of study. (1.1)
 - A review of curriculum artifacts reveals that the school has begun the alignment of units of study in English language arts (ELA), social studies and math to the CCLS. The maps reflect that the school is developing an emphasis on key standards, such as informational text or response to literature in literacy, and ratios and proportional relationships in math. Moreover, the school is in the process of accentuating instructional shifts by infusing academic vocabulary in most of the curriculum maps and

teachers are beginning to include skills, assessments and resources as well as content objectives. Some maps list interdisciplinary and real world connections. For example, the 7th grade ELA unit of study on how decisions change lives references a social studies connection to current events and social issues as well as to learning about resources available for people in various positions needing social support. Teachers across the grades use the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) scope and sequence in math and are currently following the guidelines for pre- and post-assessments. Furthermore, a health and Physical Education teacher have begun to adhere to monthly unit planning for her discipline of healthy living in grades 6, 7, and 8. Additionally, some teachers use planning resources from the support network and the NYC DOE common core library. As a result, all teachers are in the process of implementing the CCLS aligned units of study designed to develop students' skills in reading and writing informational text and problem solving.

- Teachers have begun to develop essential questions and include them for every instructional unit of study across grade levels. Furthermore, some curriculum maps and some individual lesson plans list skills such as: compare and contrast, distinguish between fact and opinion, make connections between historical fiction and non-fiction accounts, or apply percents to real life and perform algebraic procedures with accuracy. Moreover, a review of lesson plans revealed some alignment with the instructional units of study and strategies for teaching aforementioned skills. Therefore, most students, including students with disabilities in ICT and self-contained classes, are provided with increasing opportunities to experience standards based curriculum.
- The administration uses a research based teaching framework to provide teacher feedback which is beginning to inform professional development to improve pedagogy and support student growth. (4.1)
 - A review of formal and informal observation reports and meetings with teachers reveal that school leaders use the Danielson's rubric for teacher effectiveness and are beginning to adhere to the school specific areas of professional development. The principal conducts frequent informal observations and follows with immediate verbal feedback during scheduled conferences with teachers. Additionally, all teachers are observed formally and receive specific and targeted recommendations, evident on observation reports, such as to plan questions in advance so they are reflective of learning objectives, or to use formative assessment strategies like conferring to adjust instruction. Moreover, teachers and the principal have participated in professional activities offered by the support network in the area of teacher development and they are beginning to develop common language about effective instructional strategies for planning, questioning, assessment, and classroom environment. For example, teachers participated in workshops targeting planning and preparation focusing on lesson and curriculum planning. As a result, the school is beginning to meet the professional needs of individual teachers. Also, all teachers joined the faculty of another school for a day of staff development around the Danielson's rubric. In addition, the principal began inviting teachers to participate in joint classroom walkthroughs to look at instruction collaboratively by using the lens of the

teaching framework, with a specific goal of supporting student discussions in small groups. As a result, more teachers use thinking maps as an entry point to class discussions and all students are beginning to experience working in small groups.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve instructional practices across the school to consistently provide opportunities for all students to demonstrate higher order thinking and standards mastery, in challenging tasks and discussions. (1.2)
 - The school has started working with the Depth of Knowledge rubric to develop critical thinking skills and teachers have begun using higher order verbs, such as analyze or interpret in planning lesson teaching points. They also commence to plan more open ended questions to ask students, such as, “How do the formulas differ?” with the goal of developing higher order thinking skills. Nevertheless, in classes we visited teachers usually ask students simple and general questions during instruction. Similarly, in most classes teachers attempt to group students for independent learning and discussions, but lessons are still teacher-centered. For example, in one class observed, students had an opportunity to critique their poems, while in another one they productively discussed different ways to arrive at answers during independent small group work on math problem solving. However, student partnerships and small group discussions around rigorous tasks are not embedded in all lessons to ensure that all students have an opportunity to demonstrate higher order thinking skills and engage in collaborative activities. Moreover, in another classroom visited, the teacher called on individual students to answer questions, thus preventing others from active engagement in discussing text in response to a class novel. Likewise, in another classroom, students were given a choice of informational text to read, discuss and respond to an extension to the lesson, but the instruction was limited to teacher-student interaction. Consequently, inconsistencies in planning for challenging student engagement hinder students’ active participation in their learning and limits opportunities for extending their thinking around tasks across content areas, to support mastery of the state standards.
- Develop consistency in the use of data from common assessments to inform timely adjustments to lesson and unit plans in order to measure student growth toward goals, thereby meeting the needs of diverse students.(2.2)
 - Teachers were provided with item skill analysis based on last year’s standardized assessments in ELA and math and started planning addressing identified academic deficiencies of students as evidenced in curriculum maps in these areas. Grade level teacher teams are also beginning to use common formative assessments, such as pre-tests and post-tests in instructional units of study in math to identify skills and areas for academic improvement. Literacy teachers across grade levels make an effort to use rubrics that are becoming aligned to standards. For example, grade level teams generate rubrics from available resources such as the units of study posted on the NYC DOE Common Core Library website. Additionally, ELA, math and science teachers use the Castle

Learning assessment program that is aligned to the CCLS and allows teachers to generate relevant assessments. However, only in a few classes do teachers use rubrics to provide students with next steps. Similarly, there was little evidence that teachers collaboratively create rubrics or other forms of formative assessments and use it to give students actionable feedback. For example, in one class the teacher posted next steps for a student to improve while in another class student work included only grades and lacked specific feedback to guide their next steps. Likewise, many teachers use exit slips at the end of a lesson to assess student learning but meetings with teachers and a review of planning artifacts revealed that the data generated from this formative assessment has not yet yielded results in monitoring student growth toward goals or making timely adjustments of lessons and unit plans across the school. Consequently, the inconsistency in the use of assessment data across the school to provide actionable feedback to students and inform instruction limits teachers' ability to track progress and make effective instructional adjustments that meet students' learning needs.

- Develop processes and systems for monitoring, adjusting, and evaluating school-wide decisions, expectations and student progress towards the standards, thus enabling the school to respond to student learning needs. (5.1)
 - The school leaders and teachers, with the help of the support network, devote a great deal of their work to creating curricula and lessons that are becoming aligned with the CCLS. At this time however, it is not evident that student work or assessment results are used to make sufficient adjustments in instruction that results in an effective response to meeting the needs of all students. Whereas the standards-based rubrics are used and teacher teams meet regularly, the instruction is mostly based on the set unit plans and lessons that are being followed. Similarly, the principal works closely with teachers, support and administrative staff and community-based organizations on establishing some systems that help to improve attendance and social and emotional learning, but these efforts are not carefully tracked, thus hindering opportunities to make adjustments in monitoring growth toward the school expectations and their impact on student development and working towards the standards. As a result, the absence of embedded systems to evaluate school expectations and student progress, limits ongoing information for teachers and staff to adjust strategies and curricula to respond to student needs, in order to support increased academic achievement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: K330 Urban Assembly School for Urban Environment					UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score						X		
Instructional Core								
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>					UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?						X		
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?						X		
School Culture								
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>					UD	D	P	WD
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?						X		
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?						X		
Systems for Improvement								
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>					UD	D	P	WD
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?						X		
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?						X		
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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		
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?					X			
Quality Review Scoring Key								
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed	