

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Urban Assembly Academy of Government and Law

High School M305

**350 Grand Street
Manhattan
NY 10002**

Principal: David Glasner

Dates of review: April 10-11, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Ronald Feinstein

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Urban Assembly Academy is a high school with 312 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 42% Black, 51% Hispanic, 4% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 87.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has an effective system for improving all teachers' practices by capturing strengths and challenges while providing actionable feedback. (4.1)
 - The school's support for all teachers includes a goal setting process early in the fall that has been aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. The principals' written feedback to teachers captures specific elements of the rubric as well. For example the principal commended one teacher on how well she "engaged students in higher-order thinking throughout the lesson", and added that "students were required to discuss the values most important for leadership". He also suggested ways to improve the instruction such as "Work on incorporating informational texts into your class and develop structures for students to work in pairs or groups" along with specific strategies. Teachers maintain a portfolio in which collected student work demonstrates that specific student learning outcomes and the goals collaboratively identified by the teachers and principal have been met. The principal makes four to six formal or informal classroom visits for each teacher thus ensuring accountability for the support provided. For example, in October, one new teacher set a goal to build checks for understanding into daily lessons and written feedback with specific examples and strategies was provided to the teacher. On subsequent visits the principal prescribed additional support in this area and set up an intervisitation schedule with a teacher who excels in the practices encompassing checks for understanding. In subsequent visits written feedback clearly commends the new teacher on the presence of these assessment strategies in several parts of the observed lesson. The principal suggests as follows, "I have also attached a check for understanding toolkit to this email and the link below is to an article that describes best practices..." The written observation further notes that they had discussed *Teach Like a Champion*, specifically the chapter on checks for understanding. This frequent feedback capturing strengths and next steps supports all teachers in the development of their instructional practices.
- Students experience a broad and engaging standards-based curriculum in which CCLS units of study are embedded along with evidence of the instructional shifts. (1.1)
 - The school has built on the work begun in previous years to align curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and focus on problem solving, engagement and the use of informational texts. This year teachers have further enhanced the curriculum framework using units from the University of Oregon C-Pass Common Core Ready which embeds hypothesizing, strategizing, identifying and collecting, analyzing and evaluating, organizing and constructing, and monitoring and confirming. The resulting curriculum and tasks are provocative, rigorous and engaging. For example, in one humanities unit, a culminating task is to write a valedictorian speech on "Loyalty: Your Country, Your Family, Yourself." In this unit the students are expected to learn that an analytical

writing project represents something that the general public consumes or uses. After watching several commencement speeches by notable leaders, students would write critical lens essays with the awareness that others will be listening to their speeches. In another classroom, “Destiny versus Free Will” was the focus of a college-level essay assignment. Students were tasked with developing a thoughtful essay based on the following question: What role does the individual play in controlling his/her life? In mathematics, students investigate data and probability through inquiry; making a hypothesis, deciding which data to gather, selecting an appropriate sample and then presenting results in a data representation with calculations for the bivariate by graphing the dependent variable against their independent variable and drawing the line of best fit. Curriculum design includes detailed attention to several key cognitive strategies to ensure consistent emphasis and evidence of rigor for all tasks. These critical thinking strategies are the foundation of the framework adopted by the school that emphasizes precision and accuracy, problem formulation, research, interpretation and communication, thus ensuring high levels of rigor in the planning and refinement of tasks. For example, in a senior science research methods course created this year, students complete a college-level research project that further delineates the path to college and career readiness. In the ninth grade all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities improved their scores on the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) with an average improvement of one to two points that further closes the achievement gap.

- High levels of student engagement reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn that is informed by a common teaching framework. (1.2)
 - The school’s foundational belief that students work best when they are required to think critically and apply knowledge to real-world situations, to think persuasively and engage in the collection of evidence from informational texts permeates all classrooms. For example, in an algebra classroom students investigate the correlation between how long they can balance on one foot and their shoe size. Likewise in the science lab, “Of Maggots and Murder” students didn’t merely study pictures of the life cycles of various insects, but used evidence of the larval metamorphosis of flesh flies, skippers, and house flies to estimate time of death. This example, among others, illustrates the alignment of the school’s instructional work to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Building on the work begun in the previous year the school has focused on designing coherent instruction, engaging students in learning that requires them to construct evidence based arguments and struggle with complex text in all content areas. Across classrooms teachers use multiple checks for understanding such as cold calling, think-time, stop-and-jot and purposeful and thoughtful exit slips to ensure that all students are involved and engaged. In one Integrated Co-teaching classroom (ICT), students investigated what sociologists do and then wrestled with the complexities of “When does job loss becomes a public problem?” One student suggested that employers could create more work shifts thus keeping more workers on the job and another student offered to “cut taxes on small business”. Scaffolds for students in an 11th grade English literature classroom included tips for navigating challenging texts without

compromising the rigor of the task. As students read *Othello* they quoted from the scene of puppets to draw inferences about the opening scene. The teacher provided strategies for knowing when some words were more significant than others and further strategies to ensure that “you aren’t just summarizing a quote”. These challenging tasks and the teaching strategies used to present them afford students the opportunities needed to develop higher-order thinking skills.

- Assessments are aligned to curriculum alongside a common grading policy and provide information to make purposeful instructional team and classroom level decisions. (2.2)
 - Teachers across classrooms administer multiple assessments to provide themselves and their students with concrete feedback on their progress toward meeting transparent learning outcomes that are aligned with CCLS as well as the New York State Regents requirements. Students also have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency and self assess at several stages in the student work cycle. The school’s focus this year on checks for understanding amplifies the attention given the close alignment of curriculum to assessments. Teachers and students use assignment specific rubrics in all content areas informed by the work of Marzano, Wormeli and college and career readiness resources from the University of Oregon. Key cognitive components of problem formulation, research, interpretation, communication and precision and accuracy frame the self-assessment and students use concrete examples of what expert performance looks like to make improvements to their work. A novice to expert scoring guide helps students to self-assess their work on a seven stage continuum that begins at insight and culminates at solution seeking. Students also self-assess their individual participation as well as the overall performance of their groups. This year the school administered the DRA to students in ninth, tenth and eleventh grades to further inform course design and develop common reading support strategies and services. In addition to these diagnostics, formative assessments in January and May and practice Regents exams, Acuity and end-of-unit assessments are used to evaluate how reading scores improve and to make adjustment to curriculum and instruction. For example, teachers adopted a conferencing technique which includes developing next steps for both teacher and student. In science a content-specific rubric is scored for content research, analysis, organization, mechanics, presentation and pre-writing which measures how the student work product has improved over time. A timely visit to the research methods in science class found seniors retrieving electronic copies of their peer’s research papers to make changes and suggestions on their editing sheets. This process of self- and peer-assessment helps teachers to make meaningful adjustments to their instruction and students to refine and improve their final work products.

What the school needs to improve

- Make more explicit the connections between the school’s instructional goals and organizational decisions that result in improved instruction and challenging academic tasks that engage students. (1.3)

- The principal strategically moved an English teacher into the instructional coach position to support new teachers and five teachers are now dual-licensed to more ably assist growing numbers of students with disabilities and English language learners. With three new lab carts, Smartboards in use in almost all classrooms visited and the use of instructional time that permits scheduling on every Friday for an additional hour for collaborative team meetings, the school is utilizing its resources to support the schools goal of increasing the reading proficiency of all students. While the school has also hired a reading specialist and extra classroom support for lowest performing ninth graders, the large number of new staff increase the urgency for concrete long-range action planning and opportunities for strategic collaboration of faculty particularly around the needs of a growing population of students with disabilities and English language learners.
- Grade level and content teams meet weekly with a focus on curriculum and lesson development and the special education department is scheduled for drafting and revising individual education plans (IEP) everyday first period. The administration meets weekly with team leaders to collaboratively craft agendas and planning templates and then meets again with the teacher team members to implement the instructional plans that engage students in challenging academic tasks. Teams use common templates and similar protocols, however these team meetings are not yet deliberately structured to share best practices across all content and grade levels to ensure coherence in providing challenging tasks to all students.
- Build onto the existing substantial sense of community and shared responsibility that further motivates students' academic and personal growth. (1.4)
 - The school's emphasis on building strong community centers on the student support team comprised of the assistant principal, the dean, two social workers and the parent coordinator. This team discusses specific students who struggle with attendance, discipline, and credit accumulation. Henry Street Settlement (HSS) provides two social workers and two interns who effectively work with those students who are chronically absent. HSS also provides an extended day program so that ninth grade students have the opportunity to earn additional credit in order to stay on track for graduation. Students and their families are enthusiastic about the school and the support students receive to be college ready. "We anticipate that this year well-over 80% of our kids are going to college." The school is a safe environment hallmarked by individualized support for students, open communication to parents, and enthusiastic school spirit. All classes for ninth graders are conducted in one corridor, strategically supporting them through the transition into high school. Eighty-three percent of the current cohort is on track to earn ten or more credits, an increase of 4.3% from last year. While the school has added several after-school clubs and advisories, and student government has gained more traction this year than ever, student voice thus far is limited to spirit-building and social events which leaves space for student participation in meaningful decision-making that can guide school improvement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Urban Assembly Academy for Government & Law	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