

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Urban Science Academy

Middle School 325

1000 Teller Avenue

Bronx

NY 10456

Principal: Patrick Kelly

Dates of review: March 13 - 14, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Victoria Armas

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Urban Science Academy is a middle school with 445 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 33% Black, 65% Hispanic, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 36% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 91.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has designed and refined curricula using student work and data and aligned it to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) in order to engage learners in rigorous tasks. (1.1)
 - Literacy development with a focus on reading and writing are areas of particular need by students and is included in curricula across all disciplines. High-level performance tasks that require students to engage in research and argument writing are supported by vocabulary development, a variety of graphic organizers, visuals, and process charts. A sixth grade task on fracking required students to write an argumentative essay supporting their position while acknowledging competing views culled from researching recent articles on the topic. An eighth grade humanities unit on Industrialization required students to develop a thesis based on the reading of a series of documents and argue within a Socratic seminar whether or not Andrew Carnegie was a villain or a hero. Students are immersed in relevant readings throughout units of study and must cite evidence to support their claims leading to learners that are cognitively engaged in building knowledge.
 - Teacher teams with the support of school leaders continually revise curriculum and performance tasks based on student outcomes. A Google doc platform allows all staff to access curriculum under revision and resources, including text sets. Multiple text selections that include a variety of genres and current articles of varying levels and interest to an age group accompany each unit of study so that diverse learners' needs can be addressed. Additionally, vocabulary words and their development are a part of all units of study to support English language learners (ELLs) and struggling readers in their understanding. Teachers are supported in Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and apply this learning to the development of questions and tasks in order to include complexity of activities. Analysis of student outcomes on performance tasks evaluates student achievement, as well as serves to support the revision of tasks for precision of language, level of rigor, and the inclusion of appropriate supports for subgroup populations. Consequently, curricula and tasks are designed to challenge all learners to high levels of thinking.
- School leaders make effective organizational decisions utilizing time and resources to support instructional goals. (1.3)
 - The school leader has implemented a variety of resources directly aligned to improving instruction, particularly in the areas of literacy and math. The school, as part of the 100 Book Challenge, is supported by the American Reading Company as they provide a staff developer twice monthly, as well as assessments, and online data reporting as to how students are progressing, which is currently evidencing improvement. Two literacy coaches, a math coach, and a Cambridge consultant support teachers in classrooms to model and provide feedback on practice as well as during collaborative planning sessions to develop lessons. Teacher team meetings programmed into schedules allow teachers to meet at least twice weekly, where they engage in revising and planning curriculum as well as data analysis and review of student work. Student

transitions from class to class have been minimized in order to maximize instructional time. Allocation of resources provides every teacher with a laptop computer, projectors are evident in every classroom, and there are permanent as well as portable SMART boards available for use in classrooms. The use of technology during a social studies lesson on the Boston Tea Party was evident as ELL students viewed video clips of dramatic enactments of this historical event in order to ground their understanding and write about its impact on the formation of the First Continental Congress, thus promoting literacy skills and meaningful work products.

- Using information culled from teacher surveys, the school leader identifies potential teaching positions for the upcoming school year. Then using a collaborative approach administrators and teachers interview candidates and view demonstration lessons. The school leader also shifts teaching assignments as needed taking into account teacher's strengths and preferences. In one case, a strong teacher of ELLs who was working with beginner level students was placed with intermediate and advanced level students to accelerate their progress toward English proficiency. To support both the acceleration of English language acquisition for ELL's and learning Spanish by English dominate students, dual language classes were instituted at the school last year in collaboration with the Emergent Bilingual program from the City University of New York, thus promoting an appreciation and respect for the cultural diversity of the school community.
- Systematic cycles of observation and effective feedback from school leaders using a research based teaching framework provide clear next steps that improve teacher practice and promote professional growth. (4.1)
 - The school leader strategically organizes with assistant principals the cycle of observations, providing visits that are more frequent for new teachers and those teachers needing support as revealed by observation data. Mentors are provided for a significant number of new teachers at the school, and senior teachers adopt new teachers, thus providing further support that includes intervisitations and conferencing. Frequent informal observations, in addition to formal observations, identify and address next steps for teachers, including focused intervisitations, viewing modeled lessons, coaching, reading articles and/or books, reviewing samples of lesson plans/units, and attendance at workshops. School leaders' creation of a spreadsheet of information gathered during observations is maintained online and readily accessible to administrators as they evaluate teachers. Follow up visits to classrooms relate back to the next steps articulated in previous observations, so that administration can monitor on-going practices and teachers are able to build upon and improve their practice.
 - Detailed formal and informal observation reports capture teacher strengths, challenges, and clear next steps that are referred to in subsequent classroom observations. Informal observations are noted on a template and aligned to six focus competencies from the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Furthermore, teachers set professional goals aligned to the focus competencies and post them on Google doc so that all staff are able to access the information, thus promoting collaboration. Feedback sessions make reference to teacher goals as well as class-level student data to link instruction to outcomes. Professional

development has been designed to support teachers' needs as identified from observation data. One such area, the development of questioning and discussion, was targeted for support through work on DOK. Another target area aligned to the school's goal to improve literacy has been addressed by network support in the area of literacy in the content areas. One teacher shared that a new teacher modeled the "Stop and Jot" strategy learned during the network workshop series thus promoting collaboration and growth among teachers.

- Teachers benefit from structured professional collaborations that allow for the consistent evaluation of student work leading to adjustment of curriculum and sharing of strategies to improve student outcomes. (4.2)
 - The majority of teachers are programmed to meet in teams between two and five times weekly depending on their content and specialty area, thus allowing them to collaborate, plan, and share best practices that support relevant student subgroups' needs. During the English language arts (ELA) team meeting teachers were discussing the features of non-fiction articles to be included in a CCLS aligned unit of study and how the pictures in one particular reading would support comprehension for ELLs and SWDs. Teachers also discussed decisions about the use of specific graphic organizers that would best scaffold the development of the writing task requiring the comparison of two texts that would support students' success with the task.
 - Once weekly, teacher team meetings are dedicated to the review of data and analysis of student work using a protocol that surfaces the gaps in current and desired student thinking and identifies implications for teacher practice. One teacher commented regarding teacher team meetings that "ideas germinate here". The science team surfaced a student's inability to use quotes in order to cite evidence in an essay, which was to be supported through further modeling by the teacher in order to choose information that would support claims. Each teacher has targeted three students they teach from the school's lowest third who are monitored and discussed during teacher team meetings. Information about the student and strategies to improve their progress are shared among teachers. Additionally, teacher teams are very focused on the improvement of literacy, with a goal of more than a year's growth for students. As of the mid-year, the school is on target toward attaining this goal averaging more than three quarters of a years' growth in literacy as evidenced by assessing and monitoring skills provided by the American Reading Company.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen teacher capacity so that lessons provide multiple entry points to meet a diversity of student needs and promote cognitive engagement. (1.2)
 - Although teachers provide clear target objectives during lessons that were evident during all classroom observations and students were able to state what they were being asked to accomplish during lessons, they were unable to provide a rationale for the learning, or articulate why the learning was important. Lesson scaffolds included modeling, schema building using graphic organizers, bridging to prior knowledge, paired activities, group work, video clips, word walls, translations, and other supports for language, but often times scaffolds were provided to the

whole group. Some classrooms provided higher order questioning during lessons. Although strategic grouping and differentiated activities were provided in a number of classrooms, this practice was inconsistent across content areas limiting student engagement, and access of diverse learners through multiple entry points.

- Students are given time to grapple with texts and concepts, and encouraged to participate through hands on activities and whole group discussions. Shared reading is utilized as a strategy to model and access difficult material. A sixth grade ELA class was asked to articulate the strengths and weaknesses of an essay written by the teacher and read aloud on Greek philosophy and the way we think. Students accomplished this evaluative work *using a self-generated* rubric in order to gain an understanding of what is required in their own writing. However, as this activity was explained to the entire class yet completed individually, it provided little opportunity for students to collaborate and discuss ideas with peers in order to provide greater insights into best practices. Furthermore, although most students are engaged during lessons, interactions are primarily teacher to student and student to teacher. Students had opportunities to discuss ideas with one another in a limited number of classrooms. Work products and discussion in some classrooms are rigorous, while other classrooms' tasks limit students' ability to engage in opportunities that accelerate and extend their learning.
- Develop consistent policies and practices that inform instructional modifications and provide meaningful feedback to students. (2.2)
 - Assessments are becoming better aligned to CCLS across content areas, with the ELA department serving as a model for this work having already incorporated rigorous performance tasks into units of study. ELA classes provide meaningful comments to students aligned to rubrics although this is not a school wide practice yet. Rubrics are in use in most classes; however, feedback to students is limited to a copy of the completed rubric by teachers. Across classrooms feedback to students is inconsistent evidenced by a score on a test or corrections made on the work, without clear next steps. A consistent school wide grading policy has been recently introduced however it is in the process of being implemented, which limits teachers and students from sharing a consistent message relative to achievement.
 - Although teachers have developed a template to note informal checks for students' understanding of concepts during lessons, it is inconsistently used. Exit slips are used by some teachers to identify gaps in learning. Furthermore, there is little evidence of student self-assessment, thus instructional adjustments in daily and subsequent lessons is impacted.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Urban Science Academy	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