

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Urban Assembly
Academy of Civic
Engagement**

08X366

**650 Hollywood
Blvd.**

Bronx, NY 10465

**Principal: Mary-
Anne Sheppard**

**Dates of review:
May 8-9, 2013
Lead Reviewer:
Timothy Behr**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement is a middle school with 203 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 24% Black, 64% Hispanic, 8% White, 1% Asian, and 3% Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 31% 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 90.7%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal makes informed and effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school to support improvement in learning. (1.3)
 - The school underwent a transition in leadership and the new principal has effectively created a shared vision with her faculty and staff. The principal converted an enrichment period to an additional instructional period to support student achievement. A review of school documents and interviews of staff indicate that the school has a short list of clearly articulated goals based upon careful data analysis. Emphasis is on improving students' reading and writing skills. Administrators communicated this focus and shared academic expectations for each unit of study with the staff, during a summer retreat. As a result, independent reading levels for 79% of the students have improved from September 2012 to May 2013, as evidenced by Degrees of Reading Power assessment results. Also argumentative writing skills for the majority of students have improved throughout the year, as evidenced by student work products.
 - There are six new teachers at the school. The principal interviewed each candidate to inform the final decision, leading to effective assignment of the teachers to provide for improved instruction and interventions for students. Each academic discipline has a department chairperson to ensure that students receive the support (including extended day/tutoring) necessary to be successful. Teachers are provided with targeted verbal and written feedback to improve pedagogy, as they collaborate to accelerate the achievement of students for whom they are mutually accountable. This results in a coherent approach to teaching and improved learning for students, as evidenced by the percentage of students reading at or above reading level improving from 21.3% in September 2012 to 47.6% in May 2013.
- The principal gathers and analyzes information on student learning outcomes, utilizing a common grading policy and common assessments to prioritize areas of need at the school and class level. (2.2)
 - Teachers use an argumentative writing rubric across disciplines to provide consistency in evaluating student work. There are content specific grading policies so students know what is expected of them in order to pass classes. Teacher teams analyze and discuss student writing products and other performance indicators from common assessments such as Degrees of Reading Power, Acuity, and NY Ready, to provide staff and students with feedback about learning and develop strategies to address students' learning needs. One adjustment was to incorporate differentiated texts in lessons to meet the individual needs of students. Another effective adjustment was to prioritize student argumentative writing skills across grades and classes in the content areas. Most work displayed on bulletin boards and in portfolios provides evidence of the school wide focus. Tasks are continuously reviewed and revised by teacher teams in a focused effort for students to synthesize and apply their knowledge of content through writing activities. As a result, ongoing adjustments to curricula and instruction have led to

improvement in mastery of goals by all students, as evidenced by the majority of students in all grades scoring in Tiers 2-4 in English language arts and math on the Spring 2013 Acuity.

- The principal utilizes a common teaching framework to monitor instructional practices with a clear priority to improve pedagogy throughout the school. (4.1)
 - The principal is consistently visible throughout the school, prioritizing visiting classrooms and involving teachers in a combination of informal and formal observations, utilizing the Danielson Framework. Administrators utilize a classroom environment checklist and examine student work to ensure that teachers have created a purposeful classroom environment where the focus is on academic achievement. Standardized lesson plans for all content areas provide consistency in the delivery of instruction. Regular verbal and documented feedback informs teachers of what they are doing well and their next steps to improve their pedagogy. Supports are tiered to address the specific needs of all teachers, including new teachers. The principal has provided demonstration lessons for new teachers with subsequent professional development activities to support teacher practice in planning lessons, questioning skills and assessment practices. Currently, the principal is utilizing the data from the Degrees of Reading Power assessments to provide targeted feedback that supports differentiated instruction to improve the reading skills of students. These practices have encouraged collegiality and empowered teachers to share their content expertise with peers, leading to enhancement of teachers' pedagogical skills.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the school's curricula to insure access to a wide range of learning experiences that promote high levels of cognitive engagement across content areas, leading to college and career readiness for all students. (1.1)
 - The focus in English language arts has been for students to understand an author's purpose, to read grade level texts, and to improve argumentative writing skills. For math the priority in grade 6 is to improve students' abilities to compute ratio and proportions. In grades 7 & 8 the focus is on using expressions and equations to solve real world problems. Social studies and science teachers have emphasized reading and writing. The school is incorporating these skills to meet the citywide expectations of having all students' complete two tasks in all core content area subjects. School wide curriculum templates are used to develop coherent, Common Core aligned curricula and promote a school wide priority on literacy. Essential questions, transfer goals, and Webb's Depth of Knowledge content, are embedded in unit maps that were designed to ensure a coherent approach to curriculum development and professional development. Student work linked to the maps and units are analyzed regularly to inform subsequent lesson planning activities to meet students' diverse learning needs and styles. However, lesson plans showed minimal evidence of the use of technology applications to design tasks that insure cognitive engagement of all learners, especially the lowest and highest achieving students. As a result, there are missed opportunities to maximize engagement and accelerate learning for all students.

- Strengthen instructional practices across content areas to meet the varied needs and interests of a wide range of students, via discussions and tasks that engage all learners in higher order thinking. (1.2)
 - The majority of teachers in classes observed use flexible grouping which is based on an item skills analysis of current formative and summative assessments. Targeted assistance to students within small groups and at times independently is embedded in some classes. However, for subjects other than English language arts and math, teachers tend to group students less strategically and consequently student learning is not maximized. There was inconsistent evidence of teachers providing multiple entry points and promoting higher order thinking skills throughout content areas. For example, instead of completing an assigned reading task, one student stated that she wasn't reading the content; she was just "looking at the pictures because she wanted to be an artist". Hence, students manifest uneven levels of engagement in tasks and discussions that deepen their thinking, leading to limited progress in learning.
- Continue to implement and build support for a coherent and collaborative vision of school improvement in both academic and social areas, which is shared by the entire school community. (3.1)
 - There is a short list of school levels goals, some of which are consistently tracked, especially in English language arts. Consequently students' argumentative writing skills have improved in all content areas throughout the year as evidenced by work products. However, at the time of the review there was no consistent evidence across grades to indicate whether all the goals, as reflected in the Comprehensive Education Plan and other school documents, were mastered. In addition there was no clear evidence of documented next steps based on analysis of progress towards school improvement goals. There was also minimal evidence of tracking mechanisms to indicate progress towards the attainment of those goals. Consequently, planning, goal setting and tracking activities are not effectively implemented across the school community, hampering rapid growth in achievement by all students.
 - Although the school has tried hard to engage parents as partners in learning, it was reported that Parent association meetings have low parent attendance. The school shifted from three to four marking periods to allow for more frequent grade reporting and a web-based grade book enables parents to review student performance at their convenience. There have been two parent workshops to support understanding of the 2013 exams and the school progress monitoring tools. Global Connect and an automated messenger service inform parents of a child being absent. However, only 39% of the parents have participated in the 2012-2013 Learning Environment Survey (LES) as of April 2013. This is down from 51% last year and below the city average of 53%. Current student response rate to the LES is at 87% which is below last year's rate of 89%. Teacher response rate to the 2012-13 LES is at 64% which is above last year's rate of 60%, yet below the city wide average of 81%. Consequently, the school community has limited knowledge of school improvement plans, leading to inadequate support for school improvement initiatives.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement	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