

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Urban Scholars Community School

X463

1180 Tinton Avenue

Bronx

NY 10456

Principal: Debra Jones

Dates of review: May 1 – 2, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Sara P. Feliz

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Urban Scholars Community School is an elementary school with 295 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 38% Black, 59% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 92.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Teachers benefit from a cohesive balance of supervision and support which prompts deep reflection on their practices so that they grow adept at implementing strategies that promote increased student performance. (4.1)
 - This year, the school has greatly capitalized on its involvement in the Department of Education's Teacher Effectiveness Pilot. Through a series of tiered conversations between and across grades, balanced with frequent visits to classrooms, which average three snapshots per week, the administration has made a concerted effort to push their instructional agenda with ongoing classroom feedback aligned to the school's instructional needs. Across the school, there exists a clear focus on improving teacher planning and the use of questioning during instruction so that students delve deeply into discussions and writing tasks during literacy lessons. Teachers are greatly appreciative of the significant investment which the administration has made in: providing timely feedback on snapshot visits; utilizing the comprehensive data collected from visits, over time to engage in reflective, mid-year conversations on progress made vis-à-vis the Danielson Rubric for Effective Teaching; and developing individualized professional growth plans that celebrate pedagogical strengths and surface key areas for continued development. As a result of this comprehensive investment in supervision and support, seasoned teachers are readily identified and positioned as instructional leads, who effectively support their peers in deepening their collective understanding of school-wide expectations for using best practices, including the use of assessment data to determine the appropriate supplemental strategy lessons for targeted groups of students. Additionally, probationary teachers are systematically poised with plans of assistance to support them in their work to become effective teachers. In the end, the ongoing work with teachers is impacting students in several classrooms, reaping more stamina during project research and independent reading, improving focus and respect during discussions, and increasing volume and depth in on-demand and formal writing pieces.
- Teachers meet regularly in both vertical and horizontal team configurations in order to engage in targeted inquiry work and curriculum refinement that builds leadership capacity and supports improved student work habits. (4.2)
 - All teachers participate in both grade-level and cross-grade team meetings each week. Grade team sessions serve as a prime opportunity for curriculum development and refinement of literacy and math units. General education and special education teachers, including cluster specialists, collaborate formally once per week and informally up to three times each week. During that time, teams closely scrutinize the English language arts units and "bends" to ensure that the texts proposed for use, do in fact, meet and engage students at their respective ability levels, bearing in mind the Common Core expectations and the gaps which are in the process of being bridged. Team members also capitalize on these meetings to analyze the progress of select students, based on periodic

running records and on-demand writing samples, in order to identify common strengths, diagnose barriers to academic growth and determine viable strategies and resources to guide students in overcoming their academic difficulties. As a result of these structured team sessions, cohesiveness among teachers has increased as several of them have taken on roles as instructional leads and meeting facilitators who purposefully guide peer discussions regarding curriculum development and instructional moves. Moreover, the school is experiencing major shifts in pedagogy as teachers have openly discarded traditional teaching approaches and embraced more student-centered strategies. Consequently, the behaviors of students in several classes now include the fluid use of accountable talk, a balance of text-based evidence and insight embedded in discussions and writing, leading to overall autonomy during independent work opportunities.

- The principal has worked diligently with staff to develop a productive school-wide climate where students are afforded multiple opportunities for social empowerment and voice, promoting an eye for college and career readiness. (1.4)
 - Students assuredly express that they feel very satisfied with the individualized support they receive from administrators and teachers when they require immediate help with personal issues that disrupt their focus in school. Moreover, the school has successfully developed multiple avenues for students to express their innermost thoughts and feelings. Glitter Girls, for example, is a self-empowerment program geared for girls in grades 2 through 5. Led by a core team of teachers who serve as mentors, approximately a dozen female students consistently participate in activities on Friday afternoons and Saturdays, twice per month. During the informal advisory sessions, the girls and their mentors engage in a wide variety of discussions and tasks, such as recipes for healthy eating and proper dressing. The Eagle Boys Club is another expanding, informal advisory program at the school. In partnership with the Eagle Academy for Young Men, the school affords its fifth grade boys dedicated time on Thursdays and Saturdays to engage in small group and individualized conversations with Eagle Academy mentors, on behavior choices which they apply to acts of maturity and college readiness. The School-wide Enrichment Model (SEM) affords all students a special space on Thursdays, during which they participate in cross-grade, small-group club activities, ranging from *Zumba* to book-making to jewelry-making, in order to tap into students' innate talents and spark interest for potential long-term career passions. The school's Student Council is yet another entry point for student voice to be exercised; to this end, the current *Book Buddies* program, in which upper-class students model proper book etiquettes, such as careful turning of pages, and a love for books as they read to younger students, originated from members of the council. As a result of these varied supports, the school maintains a generally productive climate with decreased incidents and suspensions compared to this time last year. Additionally, students and parents alike have developed an increased awareness and appreciation for education, and overall student attendance has increased from an average of 87% in 2011-2012 to 92% currently.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop curricula and tasks across all disciplines that integrate clear and consistent expectations of State standards, to cognitively challenge all learners, including sub-groups, in order to close the achievement gap. (1.1)
 - The school has made great strides in aligning its English language arts (ELA) curriculum to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) so that students experience multiple, purposeful non-fiction reading and writing units across grades, throughout the year. To this end, a great proportion of the social studies and science content is infused into the literacy units in a thoughtful way. In math, teachers have pieced together a wide array of resources from the internet and Singapore Math in their journey to map out units and performance tasks that support the school's balanced focus on problem solving and fluency development with computation. Across some classrooms, individual teachers are providing some additional resources to support the large population of English language learners (ELL's) and students with disabilities (SWD's) with hands-on manipulatives and visual aides such as, color coded process charts, content related vocabulary word walls and teacher exemplars to support cognitive engagement in academic tasks aligned to their needs. However, at this time, the school has not yet fully developed its curriculum maps and units so that additional resources, strategies and supports for use with English language learners (ELL's) and students with disabilities (SWD's) are clearly delineated and consistently accessible to teachers across all grades and content areas. As a result, the absence of visual, kinesthetic and audio supports infused within the curricula and unit plans, limits opportunities to cognitively challenge sub-groups, particularly ELL's and SWDs, to support improvements according to their own needs.
- Ensure that instruction in official classrooms regularly includes mechanisms which further promote student independence and offer meaningful supports so that all students demonstrate success with higher-order thinking. (1.2)
 - During classroom visits, some teachers utilize the workshop model for literacy and math instruction, allowing for multiple entry points to assess and also give students voice during the independent work time and whole-group shares. It is clear that there has been a school-wide thrust for teachers to deepen their questioning techniques during mini-lessons and conferencing with individual students, as a few teachers use a wide range of questions that prompt insightful discussions among students. However, the school does not yet demonstrate the consistent, strategic use of resources, including peer supports and technology, to bridge the great language deficiencies of newly arrived immigrants. As a result, these students do not experience and understand the content being taught, and consequently, they do not benefit from active participation in whole group or strategy lessons during times when they do not receive pull-out English as a second language (ESL) instruction, in order to build language acquisition skills to promote higher order thinking.
- Strengthen assessment practices with consistent common data analysis and checks for understanding to inform adjustments to curriculum and instruction, to improve academic achievement for all students. (2.2)

- The school utilizes running records to record reading progress, rubrics to offer students feedback on writing products and unit tests to assess math skills periodically. The use of individual conferences to assess student understanding of reading, writing and math is the premier common assessment used daily. Across grades, teachers can speak to the process and ultimate value of conducting and documenting one-on-one conferences with students in real time. However, several teachers do not yet demonstrate regularity in recording the key points of their ongoing conferences with students so that both immediate and longitudinal views of student mastery or shortcomings of knowledge and skills are clearly captured. As a result, there is an inconsistency in the ongoing use of this key data streams to significantly influence student groupings, modifications to curricula and instructional adjustments in some classrooms. Thus, leaving several teachers with a missed opportunity to further support their planning efforts to tailor instruction, particularly for English language learners and students with disabilities, in order to support improved academic performance for all learners.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Urban Scholars Community School	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