Quality Review Report

2013-2014

Academy of Urban Planning

High School K552

400 Irving Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11237

Principal: Kyleema Norman

Dates of review: February 11 – 12, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Academy of Urban Planning is a high school with 313 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 28% Black, 69% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 29% English language learners and 27% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 73.5%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school thoughtfully integrates Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts into the curricula and revises instructional materials so that all learners have access to rigorous learning experiences. (1.1)

    - The school works to ensure that all curricular materials purposefully integrate Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and instructional shifts in a coherent fashion by having them vetted by a Curriculum Review Team. This team of lead teachers meets regularly to assess curriculum maps and provide feedback to their colleagues. The team uses the Department of Education's Curriculum Mapping and Alignment Coaching Rubric as a guide for their work. One of the rubric's criterion is "alignment to the English language arts and/or math NYCCLS." All unit and lesson plans reviewed clearly showed Common Core standards that informed the design of the learning activities. Documents from both grades 10 and 11 English language arts courses, Economics, Urban Geography, Living Environment, and Intermediate English as a second language, and the grade12 College Summit course all contained tasks that required students to cite textual evidence to support conclusions and/or determine the central idea of a text. Such an intentional process for reviewing and providing feedback on curriculum plans ensures that CCLS and instructional shifts are coherently embedded in planning materials, resulting in learning experiences that guide students toward college and career readiness.

    - The school's curricula show a commitment to using academic and social-emotional data to provide all learners with access to cognitively engaging tasks. The lesson plan for a grade 10 Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) English language arts class showed that all students were being asked to investigate the contrasting arguments for and against euthanasia after reading a non-fiction article. To access this higher order task, the plan showed that students of varying ability were to be strategically grouped, either homogenously or heterogeneously depending on the students. For example, among the seven small groups there was: a homogeneous group of self-motivated learners, a heterogeneous group of emergent learners (assigned to one of the teachers), and a homogeneous group that needed frequent check-ins. A homogenous group, which was facilitated by the second teacher, would use a study guide and abridged text to support their work. Furthermore, a geometry unit plan presented numerous learning objectives including: "deconstruct a parallelogram into two triangles to prove that opposite sides and angles are congruent", as well as "apply the properties of an isosceles trapezoid to solve problems." The plan outlined how English language learners and special education students would engage in such tasks by being provided with extra visuals, English/Spanish translation dictionaries, additional time to explore processes, utilization of a word wall as well as emphasizing speaking, listening and note-taking skills while in small groups. Such learning objectives and academic tasks accompanied by thoughtful need-based supports were consistently apparent in planning documents across grades and subjects, resulting in access to cognitively engaging experiences for all students.

- Across classrooms, teachers share coherent pedagogical practices that provide multiple entry points into the curricula so that all students are engaged in challenging tasks and higher order thinking. (1.2)

- The school has a clear belief that students learn best when provided with structured opportunities to learn from each other. This structure also emphasizes the use of academic vocabulary. This pedagogical perspective is directly linked to the Danielson Framework component 3c: Engaging Students in Learning and was evident in all classrooms observed. In a grade 11 course, Urban Geography, the class was divided into small student groups, each one charged with reading, analyzing and sharing out one of seven articles. Each article was taken directly from a New York City newspaper from the 1970's and pertained to the "planned shrinkage" of Bushwick. As groups shared out, students were observed interpreting quotes from the text, offering their opinions, asking each other to elaborate and inferring why the policy did not take hold. In a Geometry class, students worked in small groups and supported each other's efforts through discussion. At one point, a student asked the teacher for support and was directed to a student at another table who had already successfully answered that problem. The school's use of common core instructional shifts as well as the Danielson Framework for teaching to inform this pedagogical belief has resulted in the consistent use of student voice as a learning tool across all classrooms.

- Given the relatively high numbers of students with learning challenges, the school persists in its efforts to provide the instructional support necessary for them to engage in rigorous learning tasks. In a Living Environment class a push-in English as a second language teacher supported students as they worked to summarize the relationship between genes and DNA, as well as explain the relationship between genes and proteins. For example, the beginning English language learners were provided with visuals, language support from bi-lingual peers, and consistent monitoring and differentiated assistance from the English as a second language teacher. Learners were also seen referencing printed copies of the projected PowerPoint for note taking, using Venn diagrams, and teachers directing them to the textbook as needed. In an ICT English language arts class, students worked to relate their interpretation of a quote to the idea of being impartial as a trait found within a fair jury. Graphic organizers as well as scaffolded questions were used to facilitate student thinking throughout the process. Across classrooms, teachers consistently work to provide multiple entry points to ensure that all students are engaged in challenging tasks. As a result of such practices, students, including those with learning challenges, were able to produce meaningful work products. For example, essays were reviewed that called for the students to extract text evidence that demonstrated how the author used imagery to impact the reader's understanding of the narrative.

- The majority of teachers participate in structured professional collaborations where teaching and learning are systematically analyzed, resulting in improvement in instructional practices and increased student achievement.(4.2)

  - All teachers are members of a grade team and subject area department that are responsible for promoting quality teaching and learning. The grade 9 team was observed norming their understanding of the New York City Performance Assessment Common Rubric. They then spent time reading through and scoring student writing samples in response to a Global History document-based question. Each teacher reported out the score which was captured on an excel tracker by the teacher taking minutes. The team then shared noticings such as, "… he pulled from the text, but there was no elaboration." After noting patterns across student work they determined their instructional next step which was to explicitly instruct students to not only simply cite from the text, but also to explain their findings. Furthermore, the English Department meeting was analyzing data of a target

population given their performance on questions 27 and 28 from Regents exams. Specifically, they were looking for evidence of the impact of their writing strategies on student performance. The targeted students included two English language learners, one special education student and two general education students. All improved in both their overall Regents scores as well as their rubric scores for questions 27 and 28 when comparing the June 2013 Regents to the January 2014 Regents. Such structured collaborative activities across all teams result in school-wide instructional coherence, improved teacher practice and increased student mastery toward goal achievement.

- Strategic decisions regarding hiring priorities, teacher time and student schedules along with accountable collaborations among teachers work to promote rigorous and meaningful work products from all students. (1.3)

    - The principal strategically hired an additional special education teacher and English as a second language teacher. The hiring of these two special needs teachers, in addition to a reallocation of teaching assignments school-wide, has resulted in ICT classes in all grades and all academic subjects as well as push-in support for English language learners in science and social studies. Other hires which support school goals are: a new data specialist, a new guidance counselor focused exclusively on college advisement, and a teacher who has a lighter teaching load so that he can facilitate the school's student government. Furthermore, program interventions are available to promote college readiness. For example, a senior, who'd struggled at various points in her high school career, noted how the principal made certain that she had all of the courses that she needed to graduate on time and be ready for college. That senior's program for the second semester shows opportunities for her to earn two English credits, two social studies credits and two science credits. In addition, she is scheduled for a blended learning experience after-school as an alternative means for credit accumulation. The principal's strategic allocation of human resources and student programming work to provide college and career readiness for all students. Furthermore, the sixth period of every school day is a non-instructional period allocated exclusively for professional collaborations. Department, grade team, co-teacher, coaching, as well as informal collegial meetings all take place during this period. Teachers noted that they all engage in daily professional collaborations focused on instructional goals at this allocated time; specifically designing writing and discussion tasks that necessitate text-based evidence to inform arguments. Co-teachers review and adjust lesson plans as well as meet with learning specialists and coaches to receive feedback on the implementation of practices designed to meet the needs of struggling learners. The highly organized teacher teams were observed utilizing agendas, rubrics, protocols, student work, and data trackers. Meetings ended with clear next steps involving the implementation of identified strategies with the expectation that reflections and evidence of impact would be shared the following week. The minutes, outcomes and next steps from all team meetings are logged in a Goggle doc accessible to all teachers. The principal reviews and when necessary, provides feedback on all team logs as well as coaching logs which are also maintained as Google docs. The instructional cabinet, which consists of lead teachers and school leadership, meets twice per month to drive school-wide initiatives that guide the work of the teacher teams and ensure team focus on school goals and instructional priorities. As a result of such focused and coherent work regarding how staff collaborate, there is ongoing improvement in the instruction of writing as evidenced by increased student achievement on argument-based tasks.

What the school needs to improve

- Improve assessment practices so that checks for understanding inform effective lesson adjustments and actionable feedback is more readily available to students, resulting in increased student mastery. (2.2)

    - The school engages in some practices which result in students getting feedback regarding their performance. For example, a number of students noted that after tests, teachers go over the exams, focusing on items that the majority of the students found challenging. Students then take notes on how to get the questions correct. In addition, there was sporadic evidence of students engaged in peer feedback in some classrooms. However, in looking through student work in classrooms, the vast majority of the work contained little or no written feedback. In addition, most writing assignments were not accompanied by a scored rubric. When showing their work, students were not consistently able to share the steps they would need to take to improve their performance. When asked how they would find out what they needed to do in order to get a better grade, the common response was, "I would ask my teacher." Student work is not regularly accompanied by clear feedback for improvement. As a result, students are not consistently empowered with the knowledge of how to achieve at a higher level.

    - Though most teachers are committed to issuing exit tickets and referring to them to make informed decisions about the following day of instruction, as well as using strategies to get a sense of the level of understanding during a lesson, there was little evidence of checks for understanding being used to make instructional adjustments while teaching and learning were occurring. For example, in a co-taught English language arts class, a teacher directed, "Thumbs up if you feel ready. Thumbs in if you're not sure. Thumbs down if you're definitely not ready." All students gave the sign that represented their level of understanding, yet the teachers did nothing to address those with their thumbs in or down. Though checks for understanding are present across classrooms, they are not used effectively to inform immediate adjustments to meet student learning needs and result in increased student mastery by the end of the instructional period.

- Develop a systematic means of communicating high expectations throughout the school so that all constituents own their roles in ensuring that students are college and career ready. (3.4)

    - The principal works diligently to instill high expectations in the staff. Teachers were able to cite numerous ways in which the school thoughtfully prepares students for colleges and careers including: vertically aligned writing tasks, the College Summit course for seniors, an annual Career day, partnerships with various organizations like Summer Search, Public Broadcasting Service and mock United Nations, as well as college trips. However, when students were asked how they are prepared for post-graduation success, seniors referenced college trips, and all students agreed that the writing assignments get harder and longer as they move from grade to grade. Outside of becoming better writers, they shared no coherent sense of their roles in ensuring that they are successful after high school. Parents mentioned college trips and a workshop about financial aid and having consistent access to teachers to get information about how their children are performing. When asked what the school expects of them as parents, a father said, "We do whatever it takes. That's our job". Though the school is invested in a number of initiatives to prepare its graduates for success in life after high school, there was no unified set of high expectations or consistent messaging regarding how the school approaches this goal. Consequently, students and parents are not

able to speak to and effectively own their specific roles in preparing for the next level.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Academy of Urban Planning	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
Instructional Core				
To what extent does the school regularly…	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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				
To what extent does the school …	UD	D	P	WD
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports 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 those expectations?			X	
Systems for Improvement				
To what extent does the school …	UD	D	P	WD
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			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