

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice

Middle-High School 609

**4200 16 AVENUE
BROOKLYN
NY, 11204**

Principal: MARIELA GRAHAM

Dates of review: Nov 20 - 21, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice is a middle-high school with 486 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 32% Black, 22% Hispanic, 10% White, and 36% Asian students. The student body includes 16% English language learners and 17% special education students. Girls account for 100.0% of the students enrolled. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 90.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school thoughtfully integrates Common Core aligned curricular materials and instructional shifts to ensure all students have access to rigorous curricula in all grades and subject areas. (1.1)
 - School leadership and middle school staff, have identified Connected Math Projects 3 (CMP3) and performance tasks for the math curricula, and Expeditionary Learning for English language arts, and are adjusting these materials to ensure that all students experience rigorous materials and tasks that incorporate the instructional shifts. In the high school, math teachers are modifying Common Core materials acquired from Pearson, while English teachers are using the Expeditionary Learning framework to develop curricula. Additionally, with the increase in informational text, there is a curricular focus on writing from sources and basing arguments on evidence from text. Math instruction shows a focus on math fluency. For example, the plans of an eighth grade math teacher showed two to three periods in the earlier part of the week are used to build fluency with the foundational skills needed to engage students in the curriculum during the latter five periods per week.
 - The entire school has embraced close reading, critical discussion, and writing for argument, as three higher-order skills needed to prepare students for college and careers. These rigorous activities are found in lesson and unit plans across all content areas. Additionally, English as a second language and special education teachers actively co-plan with teaching partners to ensure that necessary scaffolds are built in so the students participate fully in learning activities. For example, a math lesson plan that showed both a math-learning objective and an accompanying language objective for the English language learners (ELL) included the language objective “note to self,” where the teacher reminded herself to focus on correct pronunciation, thus supporting the ELL students’ ability to identify the correct angle as they pronounced the word. Such measures have resulted in all students having access to rigorous tasks.
- All school resources are used in accordance with the schools instructional goals and student needs to ensure meaningful student work products. (1.3)
 - The principal has strategically allocated funds to secure a full time individual education plan (IEP) coordinator and six special education teachers, one per grade in the middle school and one per core subject area in the high school, in order to provide focused support for students with disabilities. An outcome of this is five out of seven seniors with IEPs are expected to graduate with Regents diplomas. Having a full time technology coordinator has resulted in the effective maintenance and viability of instructional technology with every class having a Smart board or LCD projector and access to laptop carts. The school’s advisory board has raised over \$60,000 to support various college preparatory initiatives such as college application fee support, an overnight college trip, and scholarships resulting in an increased awareness of the college admission process. A partnership with Duke University has yielded a

summer research initiative where students engage in high interest and relevant topics such as discrimination against Muslims, homelessness, and taxes on cigarettes. The principal's coordination of budgetary, partnership and technological resources has resulted in increased college preparation and awareness for all students, and increased academic success for students with IEPs.

- Eight math and English periods are built into the week to allow for embedded instructional support for more rigorous content. In addition, a school-based option (SBO) produced two significant shifts in teacher time that has had a positive impact on the school. Teachers agreed to use one of their Circular 6 periods for weekly department meetings ensuring that all teaching staff participate in subject specific collaborative work. Teachers also engage in weekly grade team meetings. The SBO also resulted in an extended day for all students, focused on Silent Sustained Reading. This program, aligned to the schools goals around literacy, has not only increased student interest in reading but has improved student awareness of their own reading strengths and areas for growth through protocolled Reading Conferences with teachers.
- All members of the school community cultivate a nurturing environment that supports the academic, social, and personal growth of students. (1.4)
 - Community, Organization, Rigor and Evidence (C.O.R.E) are the values of the school and are embedded throughout the school's culture. At the beginning of the sixth and ninth grade years, acculturation programming is in place to familiarize and/or remind students of these values and the academic and behavioral expectations that accompany them. In addition, there are monthly gatherings in the gym where students who embody these CORE values are acknowledged with certificates and rewards. The open door policy of the school's principal and assistant principal creates ongoing opportunities for students to take initiative and approach administrators with ideas that might benefit the school. Students are always encouraged to submit proposals in writing for consideration. Students stated that fundraising for victims of natural disasters, the increase in the number of Advanced Placement offerings, and the creation of a course called "Man & Technology" were all the result of proposals written by their peers. Such practices along with the school's commitment to its values sustain a culture where students feel safe, acknowledged and included.
 - For students who require more individualized attention given their behavioral challenges, there is an informal "adopt a student" practice, which was started as a ninth grade team initiative. When kid talk in the grade team meetings reveals students who are exhibiting problematic behavior in a number of classes, staff members who are best positioned to connect with consistency to the student do so until there are noted shifts in the student's behavior. In one instance, the eighth grade math teacher committed to having lunch daily with a female student. These relationship oriented check-ins resulted in a decrease in the undesired behavior. In addition, the grade teams and the middle school dean regularly review section sheets and intervene when a pattern of off-task behavior is noted. The high school dean reviews on-line call logs maintained by teachers and intervenes as necessary. The guidance counselor trains and coordinates the work of student peer mediators who are called on when needed to de-escalate student-to-student issues that

arise. The parent coordinator meets regularly with students who have challenges with consistent attendance. The school's commitment to school culture oriented structures has resulted in fewer principal suspensions in September and October of this year as compared to last year, even given that there were 383 students enrolled in the school last year as compared to the current register of 486 students.

- Instructional leaders cultivate professional growth by ensuring frequent observation and feedback, collegial support, and strategic on- and off-site learning, resulting in improved instruction across the school. (4.1)
 - The principal has purposefully developed a teacher observation system that ensures that all teachers receive sufficient feedback given their needs. In this structure the principal focuses on the high school grades and the assistant principal observes the middle school grades and a chart in the principal's office clearly tracks who has been seen to date. As of the time of the review all teachers except for one had at least one memorialized observation, though leadership had already completed a staff wide initial round of verbal feedback in the first three weeks of school. In addition, teachers who evidence needing more support are observed with more frequency. A new teacher commented, "I was assigned a mentor that I meet with weekly. Between that, and the principal coming in for observations and inter-visitations, I get a lot of feedback." These systems ensure that all teachers are observed, provided with feedback in a regular reliable fashion, while leaving room for even more support and feedback for those who need it.
 - The school, which began implementing the Danielson framework two years ago, is now using the City's focus to deepen its commitment to it as a tool to improve instruction. Observation reports printed from Advance were clear and outlined both strengths and areas for improvement. Samples of Teacher Development Continuum plans, used for struggling teachers, evidenced areas of emphasis that are aligned to Danielson. In addition, the principal's and assistant principals' noticings while debriefing after class observations included: missed opportunities for students to answer each other's questions as opposed to the teacher, pushing students to find evidence, the use of a timer to ensure urgency, good pacing, and the more effective use of small group discussion, all of which are aligned to Danielson competencies. A teacher noted, "The Danielson professional development made my ratings tangible. It's very detailed. I know I need to work on developing higher order questions." As a result of the various forms of feedback provided, teachers have a clear sense of where their teaching practices are strong and where their practice needs improvement. One example of how the entire staff has shown marked progress as a result of focused professional development and feedback is in pushing students to state and defend claims through writing and discussion.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that teacher pedagogy consistently reflects the school-wide commitment to rigorous practices so that students engage in cognitively demanding work and discussion in all classes. (1.2)
 - Though there is consistent intent across classrooms to embed critical discussions, some teachers struggle with depth of implementation. For

example in both a geometry class and a living environment class, there was little to no peer-to-peer discussion, yet in an eighth grade social studies class, there was a rigorous structured fish bowl discussion occurring where students debated women's rights. The result of such inconsistency of practice is that not all students are experiencing the intended impact of peer-to-peer discussion as they move from class to class.

- Across the school, there is a high volume of student writing occurring. While meeting with students and looking at their work with them, they all had pieces of writing from various subject areas. They could all speak to having to find evidence to support their stance as not only a criterion for many assignments, but a value of the school. In addition, when visiting classes, the vast majority of students were participating at a high level. Students were observed raising their hands to volunteer, engaging each other in discussion, pair share when asked, and readily answering questions when cold called. In a number of cases, it was pointed out that those being cold called were ELL students or those with IEPs. However, there were a number of instances where teacher talk dominated the learning process, which resulted in missed opportunities for students to think for themselves.
- Refine the collection and analysis of common assessment data matched against goals to inform instructional adjustments that ensure each student is aware of and works toward their next learning steps. (2.2)
 - The school community administers benchmark, Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), and performance assessments, with fidelity over the course of the year. Each is leveraged thoughtfully to reveal different aspects of student ability while pushing the schools instructional goals. For example: The first administration of the benchmark assessments was focused in part on student test taking behaviors. Proctoring teachers took copious anecdotal notes to identify patterns. Two specific noticing's were that students exhibited a lack of sustained focus and that they were indiscriminate in their highlighting of text. As a result, teachers focused students on what to annotate. DRP data is used to identify tiered interventions and purposeful grouping. Performance assessment data confirmed the need for more emphasis on counter claim, text complexity, and academic vocabulary. The use of these three literacy assessments yield data that the school uses in a structured and thoughtful manner to understand the needs of its students and make the appropriate adjustments to teaching practices. However the math assessments, particularly on the high school level, do not provide such insightful data.
 - Though the school uses common assessments, its strength lies in English language arts. When talking with the both leadership and members of the math team, it was clear that the school is still developing its ability to disaggregate and use math data in a way that produces the kind of pedagogical impact that is found in their reading and writing assessment practices. Specifically, evidence that the math department has the tools to look at math skill oriented data after assessments are administered was not fully evident. Therefore, an inconsistency in how data is leveraged across subject areas hinders a department's ability to effectively identify student needs and adjust instruction appropriately.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice	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 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							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	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							
<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 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