



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Academics, Performance, and Support
2013-2014

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Urban Assembly Institute for New Technologies

05M410

**509 West 129th Street
New York
NY 10027**

Principal: Dr. Jeffrey Chetirko

Dates of review: November 12 – 13, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Gale Reeves

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Urban Assembly Institute for New Technologies is a middle school with 97 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 68% Black, 30% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 41% special education students. Boys account for 61% of the students enrolled and girls account for 39%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 85.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is a safe place which cultivates effective partnerships and students appreciate the high level of support they receive that fosters their personal and academic development. (1.4)
 - A deep sense of trust and respect permeates the entire school community. Students and parents appreciate that they can turn to teachers, the guidance counselor and the principal, to help resolve personal issues and concerns that interfere with learning. Warm and cozy areas in the English language arts classrooms equipped with rugs and books, embody the safe culture evident throughout the entire building. Students stated that they feel “safe”, while parents shared that the staff provide, “warmth, love and support.” Parents are extremely pleased with the academic and emotional support provided and stated that, “the teachers love the children.” One parent said it was obvious that the teachers do not regard their support as a “job” and are genuinely invested in helping each student reach his/her fullest potential. It is quite apparent that all efforts to support students’ needs are guided by a unifying mission, supportive of the school’s goals. A review of incident reports encouraged school personnel to develop a partnership with the New York Peace Institute, whose personnel provide mediation services and assist school personnel with developing disciplinary prevention strategies and student incentives. “Go Girls”, a young women’s group for seventh and eighth graders, serves to support gender specific initiatives; progress notes on individual students in the program show good outcomes. This initiative, in addition to others, meets the social-emotional needs of students and has resulted in a decline in incidents by thirty five percent. As a result, suspension data reveals a dramatic forty eight percent decline by the end of the 2012-13 school year. Additionally, class representatives from the eighth grade meet with the principal on a bi-weekly basis, to provide advice and feedback on school policies and events. They recently conducted a survey and their analysis suggested that “dress down” days would help to further build school culture. Their input has led to specific “spirit days” scheduled for the first week in December, such as twin day, sports jersey and pajama days. Such active participation in shaping school wide decisions helps to support the development of students’ leadership skills and bolsters their self-esteem, as evidenced by classroom visits and conversations with students.
 - Students receive monthly incentives for meeting the expectations espoused in the school’s core values, emphasizing integrity, inquiry and perseverance. The school’s Behavior Support Team (BST) meets weekly. Parents acknowledge that the principal and school staff know individual students exceedingly well and have developed close confidential relationships with a number of them. The school’s partnerships with Lincoln Center Education program (supporting the visual arts), Girls Scout, Ramapo (focused on character and leadership development) and Sports and Arts Foundation (afterschool enrichment activities) coordinate well with school based support structures to address the social-emotional and academic needs of students and their families.

The school has a strong collaboration with the Canadian firm, Avis and Young, which is presently coordinating a trip to Columbia University as well as helping to expose seventh and eighth grade students to varied careers. Students participate in varied academic and enrichment electives such as soccer, flag football, step, basketball, and art, as well as English language arts and math tutoring. Students who receive homework and tutoring assistance are demonstrating better academic success in class, with increased levels of progress noted on unit tests. The deans are integral members who support and mentor selected students who display inappropriate actions. As a result of the focus on personal behaviors and skills, parents and school leaders indicate that students with individual education plans feel accepted and integrated into all activities. Additionally, attendance team members utilize a laser-like focus when reviewing attendance data. Noted trends result in focused interventions and rewards such as home visits, phone calls, assemblies and student recognition on bulletin boards. Individually targeted students are meeting with greater academic success, as noted in their work folders, since they now avail themselves of in-school and after school support structures. These targeted efforts result in monthly class and grade attendance increases, an overall current school attendance rate of ninety-two percent, as well as a notable decrease in the number of tardy students and a decline in the referral rate to citywide agencies.

- The administration, in collaboration with teachers, prioritizes the use of resources and makes effective organizational decisions which support the schools' instructional goals, while empowering the teaching staff. (1.3)
 - The principal's budgeting decisions, coupled with staff input, result in the strategic use of resources that are aligned to the school's instructional goals focused on improving pedagogical practices and student outcomes, and improving communication pertaining to academic progress with students and their families. To further support teachers' pedagogic growth, the school was awarded a grant from the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) which supports peer coaches. Additionally, the network's achievement and math coaches provide weekly instructional support. The principal focuses much effort to ensure that the school revisits its original goal of technology integration. As a result, this school year every student has access to an iPad, and instructional technology tools, such as smart boards, are in full use across grades and subjects. This helps to support students' research skills and solidify their learning.
 - The principal's strategic approach to organizational decision-making is also evident in the school's hiring practices in that prospective new teachers must interact with members of the hiring committee and recent hires participated in group interviews and were asked to model lessons prior to being selected. Additionally, the principal strategically hired more special education teachers in order to flexibly program more students with individual education plans into integrated settings for math and English. After a review of data revealed a noted decline in student proficiency, the principal also created a Special Education Coordinator position to oversee the larger special education department and provide professional development to all teachers on how best to meet the individual needs of students. Each content department now has a special educator participating in department team meetings and two teachers are in most

classes supporting students. This not only results in a smaller student to teacher ratio, but ensures that students do not miss critical course work, increases the shared level of accountability to accelerate student growth and is conducive to optimal levels of personal success for all students. In yet another strategic move, the staff also established learning groups in reading and writing classes, focused on developing and reinforcing specific literacy skills for the lowest 25% of students; this results in targeted assistance during the day and afterschool. Consequently, tracking logs reflect growth in performance of these identified students on the most recent formative assessments.

- Critical analysis of a variety of student performance data provides school staff with a comprehensive view of students' strengths and weaknesses and results in targeted supports to positively impact school performance. (2.2)
 - Teachers use assorted streams of data from varied sources, including Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) comprehension tests, conference notes, rubric scores, and teacher prepared tests, as well as design their own writing and math Common Core aligned benchmark assessments, to gauge student understanding of the taught curricula. In an English class, the individual conference that the teacher facilitated with the student was aligned to his reading goals, while in a math class, the teacher helped students uncover their own answers, with skillful open-ended higher level questioning and the use of appropriate content language, in order to ensure that the students met the learning objective. As such, students are becoming cognizant of the connections between tasks and the expectations espoused by the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Teachers utilize rubrics to provide written feedback on students' work, noting students' strengths and next steps. Consequently, teachers are demonstrating ways of understanding and sharing feedback on students' assessment results relative to select standards, with the focus on increased student outcomes, as noted in assessment binders and the online assessment system.
 - In addition to using common rubrics, department level teams also create common performance tasks and baseline assessments which are used to identify strengths and needs, as well as promote ongoing conversation and reflection. The principal and teachers use these results, including student work products, to measure student progress toward specific goals and to make needed changes to the curricula, integrating specific strategies such as requiring students to cite specific evidence to support their claims both verbally and in writing. Teachers review results and create individual plans for students; learning groups are fluid based on a review of student mastery of specific concepts. During conferences in English classes, teachers facilitate guided group conversations with specific students on a rotational basis, in order to review their goals, note progress made and co- create next steps. For example, schedules are prominently displayed on bulletin boards and data binders depict teachers' analysis of assessment results aligned to specific skills and strategies. As such, teachers formulate specific action plans to address students' needs.

What the school needs to improve

- Strengthen the alignment between teacher practice and the school's beliefs about learning, to ensure high levels of engagement and thinking so that all students reach their full potential. (1.2)
 - Teachers prepare lessons that target the specific needs and strengths of students and employ strategies that address a range of student ability levels. To meet students' needs, teachers use scaffolding tools such as graphic organizers and manipulatives to support writing and math. For example, in an English class a variety of graphic organizers were displayed and students were encouraged to use those they think best meets their needs when drafting their essay. In another class, the teacher modeled for students how she supported her claim with specific evidence, while asking open ended questions to check for understanding. However, although students cite text to support their answers, many are not yet adept at using exemplars and student work products do not reflect immersion in a unit of study where students employ research strategies across multiple sources. Additionally, most lessons were at students' independent levels and tasks were not challenging for select groups of students. As such, some teachers do not yet plan lessons that demonstrate sufficient engagement in higher order thinking so that all work products demonstrate activities that stretch the thinking of all learners, especially those performing at the highest achievement levels.
 - Teachers are beginning to employ open-ended questions to spark discussions and students in some classrooms are questioning each other's assumptions and ideas. For example, in one math class the teacher used content vocabulary throughout the lesson and continually asked probing questions to solicit feedback and check for understanding. One student also clearly disagreed with a classmate's reasoning and provided evidence to support his reasoning. However, this is not consistent across all grades; in some classrooms questions and answers are most often between teacher and individual student. Consequently, thought-provoking questions and conversations that give students the chance to support their views with evidence, change their minds and use questions as a way to learn more, are not yet the norm across grades or content.
- Enhance the work around curriculum analysis, to develop consistent alignment of key standards and Common Core tasks that will increase rigor and incorporate higher order skills to cognitively engage all learners. (1.1)
 - Over the summer, school leaders and staff deliberately adjusted the curricula in order to make changes to the math scope and sequence and to integrate CCLS into math units of study. However, these practices are not yet evident across all grades and subjects. For example, refinement of the social studies content does not presently demonstrate rigorous expectations and alignment to state standards across grades. Staff members are in the process of further adjusting the English language arts curricula in order to ensure that it is fully aligned to the standards. As a result, most students are not routinely exposed to the purchased English language arts Common Core aligned curricula and the school is missing

out on incorporating curricula that addresses its widening achievement gap between the lowest and highest achieving students.

- Curricula and academic tasks emphasize higher order thinking skills only in some grades and content areas. Additionally, teachers do not consistently utilize student work products to refine their practices. As a result, some teachers do not yet demonstrate the necessary skill level to cognitively engage students performing at varied ability levels, especially higher achieving students. For example, performance-based tasks that probe for deep understanding and application of learning do not extend across all content areas and grade levels and, while English language learners and student with disabilities are suitably challenged, other students are not equally challenged so that they are able to make personal connections to themselves and the world and are able to transfer their learning to new contexts.
- Further build upon the teacher observation and feedback process to ensure closer alignment to the teaching framework and to teachers' professional goals, in order to elevate teaching practices. (4.1)
 - The principal conducts formal and informal observations. At the beginning of the school year the principal created a Classroom Environment Checklist in order to ensure that classrooms are organized to support learning. School leaders share verbal comments and provide formal and informal written feedback. However, next steps are not consistently actionable and feedback is not consistently effective for all teachers, as it does not always cite evidence from student work, instructional practices or other data sets. This results in missed opportunities to accelerate teacher growth and student outcomes.
 - Teachers participate in external and internal professional development opportunities. Professional development is provided on Wednesdays and a review of the calendar reveals a focus on the use of data in September and October. In November there was the beginning of a school wide focus on planning for high level student engagement, with a focus on norming teachers' understanding of effective teaching strategies. Additionally, teachers' self- assessed their practices using the Danielson Framework and shared their written reflections with the principal. The principal is at the beginning stages of using observation data and teacher input to further drive professional development opportunities and link to the identified competency requiring support. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to help teachers achieve optimal levels of performance that allow them to reach their own personal goals, help achieve school goals, and positively impact student learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Urban Assembly Institute for New Technologies	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