



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Urban Assembly Unison School

13K351

**170 Gates Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11238**

Principal: Emily Jarrell

**Date of review: December 15, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jo Ann Benoit**

The School Context

Urban Assembly Unison School is a middle school with 199 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 74% Black, 16% Hispanic, 1% White, and 8% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 91%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Focus	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Developing
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	Additional Findings	Developing
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Additional Findings	Proficient
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers engaged in professional collaborations that promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Distributive leadership structures are in place and promoted.

Impact

As a result of the collaborative nature of the work of teacher teams to achieve the school's goals, they implement the Common Core and strengthen their practice, thus exercising their leadership capacity to make key decisions in student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- During the teacher team meeting, teachers looked at student work using a protocol titled, "Learning from Student Work", to guide the process and a rubric developed by one teacher and adapted by another to assess the work. Teachers evaluated students' briefs, a student friendly explanation of a topic presented in class, developed by students, with examples to illustrate the concepts learned. Teachers use a rubric for norming around genre features, explanation of topic, evidence for understanding of the common core standards and brief accountability indicating who on the team contributed to the work. Teachers identified gaps indicating deficiencies in making meaning and using vocabulary in appropriate context. For example, one student did not use standards-based vocabulary and another used a term out of context. One of the teachers' proposed next steps to brainstorm ways to reinforce the use of standards-based vocabulary in the math classroom during lessons.
- During the teacher interview, when asked how they strengthen their practice, teachers mentioned working with the principal in and outside of the classroom, working with a consultant from Learning Cultures, in lab sites, and with each other. One practice they described as being an eye-opener is the fact that they engage in the work that they ask students to do during their professional development sessions, for example writing briefs.
- Teachers meet in content and grade teams, participate in peer visitations and are offered after school opportunities to participate in professional development led by lead teachers on topics that are differentiated for teachers. Some teachers meet during residency cycles with the administration for three weeks around a practice they struggle with to look at those practices in action in their colleagues' classrooms.
- Teachers facilitate the teacher team meetings and many of the professional development sessions. They also meet with other Learning Cultures schools once a month. Teachers meet in coaching teams of five to six teachers, give and get feedback around pedagogy and the implementation of the Learning Cultures' protocols. One teacher shared during the teacher interview: "We don't have official coaches but teachers support one another here".
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Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Curricula and academic tasks reflect planning and inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills across grades, subjects and for subgroups of students.

Impact

Although curricula and academic tasks reflect planning to provide students access to the curricula, and protocols that promote higher order thinking skills are woven into the curricula, students across grades and subjects are inconsistently engaged in appropriately challenging tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- The staff revised the curricula to add “dissections” used by students to initiate questions that lead to inquiry-based learning pursuits and pre and post-tests to better assess the needs of the students before and after a unit. The staff has also continuously worked to embed the protocols and structures of Learning Cultures in the curricula to promote higher order thinking skills.
- Because this is a work in progress at the school, some of the units and lesson plans reviewed lacked evidence of differentiation. Only one of the four lesson plans reviewed described multiple entry points for the students during the lesson. In a social studies classroom, some students were looking at primary sources but could not articulate the reasons why they were engaged in that activity. In another classroom, one student shared that he wouldn’t do the work because no one had explained to him why students had to write briefs.
- A review of lesson plans submitted showed that, most of the questions planned were not open ended questions and/or were lower level questions based on the Depth of Knowledge Wheel. As an example, one lesson had as a focus question “What is blocking?” The lessons’ foci were not as easily identifiable in the other plans.
- Students throughout the day spoke about the aspects of the curricula that engage them: the topics studied, the collaboration between students, opportunities to debate and teach one another in some classrooms. They also talked about the work being sometimes confusing. One student was quoted as saying, “Some teachers seem to be learning the information with us”.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers inconsistently provide multiple entry points and appropriately challenging tasks to students. Student work products reflect uneven levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Because teaching strategies are inconsistent across grades and subjects, students have varying levels and opportunities to participate in appropriately challenging tasks and in high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- In three of the eight classrooms visited, students were engaged in teaching a concept to their peers. In one math class, the teacher went around to the different groups working and asked one group “What would you predict for the coordinates for C?” One of the students at the table looked puzzled and his table mate proceeded to explain the different possibilities for C by drawing axes and rotating them to illustrate his thinking. In another classroom, the teacher asked a group of students if “D” was their final answer and why? And one student who did not agree/understand asked for a “breach” an opportunity to ask clarifying questions, and her table mates explained to her why they felt D was the correct answer.
- In the majority of the classrooms visited, the teachers asked low level questions in the Initiate, Respond, Evaluate (IRE) style. The conversations remained teacher-centered or were teacher initiated. In one classroom, the teacher asked a series of questions about an image she projected on the SMART board to the whole class that did not lead the students to identifying the author’s purpose which was the focus of the lesson. The lesson went on a tangent when the boys began giving reasons why they would not read a magazine with a girl on the cover and headlines dealing with make-up and body image.
- In some classrooms, the teachers did not interact with all of the students. During the student interview, students complained about not having the teachers’ attention in some classes when none of the group members knew the answer or the information. Students appeared frustrated.
- In some classrooms, there were some issues with class management. While a teacher was sitting with a group of students in one of the classrooms visited, it took the group about 5 minutes to focus on the work after bringing up topics that had nothing to do with the lesson, for example, the teacher’s ring. Then the students engaged in unison reading during which one student stopped and said “we sound boring” which disrupted the group once again.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use and create assessments that are aligned to the school's curricula. Teacher's instructional practices reflect inconsistent checks for understanding and provide limited feedback to students.

Impact

As a result of the inconsistent use of checks for understanding and limited feedback across the classrooms, many students do not have a clear understanding of lesson expectations and their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- As a policy, teachers use common assessments that are analyzed in teacher teams with rubrics which they have normed. One type of assessment given regularly across classes is group quizzes. This enables teachers to assess the work done in class throughout the week. However, students have shared their frustration with the group quizzes because as one stated, "You can't really tell how you did. The grade is for the group".
- Two of the six students who shared their folders, had work that had actionable feedback. Most of the students' work was graded using a check or a number grade system with limited next steps to improve their learning.
- Because teachers see students in small groups, sometimes, students do not get to meet with a teacher in a classroom during a lesson. Teachers in the teacher team shared that they have schedules for each student and rotate between groups. This allows for inconsistent and irregular checks for understanding.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff, students and families and provide support for them to meet and understand their progress towards these expectations.

Impact

Regular feedback is provided so that the staff meets the school’s expectations and families understand the connections to college and career readiness and their children’s progress, as a result, teachers and families feel supported by schools leaders.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers engage in a variety of professional development opportunities in school, outside of school with the network, and with Learning Cultures. Teachers are supported with both their pedagogy leveraged by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and their understanding and implementation of the Learning Cultures’ protocols.
- Teachers receive regular visits and feedback from the administration, as well as their peers. In the written feedback given to teachers from administrators, next steps with clear actionable feedback is given to teachers in the form of resources, strategies described in the feedback and/or the suggestion and opportunity to visit a colleague.
- Parents feel that the school turned around in the year that the principal took the helm. Students are in class learning, teachers are accessible and the principal has an open door policy. One parent said “I have a middle schooler here and have two older children. This is the first school I will miss when my child graduates”.
- Parents shared the different ways they communicate with the school and keep updates on their children’s progress: The third Thursday is used to conduct portfolio reviews and parents are welcomed into the classroom. Parents receive weekly calls from teachers, Jupiter Grades, on the online grading platform, resources, such as books and online materials sent to parents to support their children with the common core at home.