



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Urban Action Academy

High School K642

**1300 Rockaway Boulevard
Brooklyn
NY 11236**

Principal: Mr. Steven Dorcely

**Date of review: November 13, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio**

The School Context

Urban Action Academy is a high school with 317 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 79% Black, 11% Hispanic, 6% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 68% of the students enrolled and girls account for 32%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 85%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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	Proficient
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	Celebration	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	Additional Findings	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Structures and systems are in place to communicate high expectations to the school community. The school staff ensures multiple means of feedback are communicated to students to establish a culture for learning.

Impact

School staff is held accountable for ensuring college and career preparation and readiness and consistently provides supports to increase students' academic progress.

Supporting Evidence

- The faculty handbook, emails and memorandums provide staff with clear expectations on curricula, instruction, and assessment policies. Feedback from cycles of observations using the Danielson Framework hold staff accountable for next steps in the improvement of practices.
- The professional development plan reflects trainings on the Danielson Framework for Teaching based on an analysis of Advance data and provides staff with instructional expectations. For example, listed within the plan are professional trainings on Design Coherent Instruction and Student Engagement, which is consistent with the instructional focus and a review of Advance data.
- Teachers are provided with relevant data in the beginning of the year such as the “graduation impact range” for their particular students in their classes. Data is used to track student credit and graduation readiness.
- The school partners with several outside agencies to promote college awareness and readiness including Brooklyn College and College Now. Through these partnerships, students take classes for college level credit.
- Guidance counselors provide “push in” support services with classroom teachers to deliver guidance workshops focused on SMART goal setting, graduation requirements, Career Zone and the college application process. The guidance team provides students in grades 9 through 12 opportunities to attend college campus tours and college fairs.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Although there is a clear emphasis on the school's instructional focus, all students are not yet consistently supported by teaching strategies which scaffold their access to challenging tasks and increase their abilities to engage in student to student discussions using higher-order thinking skills.

Impact

Students demonstrate uneven rigor in work products, engagement and discussion resulting from limited opportunities to engage at high levels of critical thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, teachers used a variety of strategies to engage students in learning tasks including questioning strategies, videos and realia. For example, in one English class, the teacher gave students a protocol called "Silent Discussion" to prepare for a whole class talk session on "The Lottery".
- In four of the seven classes, teachers used provided opportunities for students to work in partnerships and groups. For example, in one math class, students were asked to collaborate on the "Do Now" in partnerships and groups.
- Although some teachers provided different tasks with scaffolds for groups of students, trends across classrooms demonstrated limited use of efficient strategies. For example, in many classes, students were given graphic organizers as whole class participation tools rather than used as scaffolds targeted to specific student needs.
- Opportunities to engage in student to student discussions at rigorous levels were limited and teacher directed. Only one class allowed for opportunities where students responded to each other's ideas around a text making direct connections to the symbols and how they alter the mood of the story. In several classes, student groups were provided with questions which reflected low rigor and were limited to recall skills such as "What was his responsibility?" and "What does ramification mean?"

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Review of common assessments and ongoing checks for understanding consistently informs teacher practice.

Impact

Adjustments of teacher pedagogical practices focus on providing opportunities to increase student progress on assessments and learning tasks. Work products in folders reflect progress in student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams review performance tasks and set goals for student groups over time. A review of inquiry team documents reflects analysis of student work, discussion of new strategies and setting of student goals during team meetings.
- During a math teacher team meeting, teachers reviewed a performance task in math to determine adjustment of strategies and new goals for a student. For example, teachers decided to incorporate lessons on study skills for students who are not passing assessments due to lack understanding certain math skills.
- School leadership and instructional team conduct reviews of common assessment data after each marking period. Marking period data shows an increase of 14.2 percentage points in grade 9 scholarship data this year from the 2013-14 school years. During the team meeting, teachers used assessments to develop a goals and strategies for particular students. Strategies included the teaching of study skills, use of word walls and guided notes to assist the student with understanding content and questions of future assessments.
- Across classroom, teachers used a variety of strategies to determine the level of student understanding and adjust instruction. Formative assessment strategies used by teachers included questioning, conferring, and self-assessment in the form of exit slips. During an interview, teachers stated they use exit slips to adjust their instruction daily.

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

Teacher teams promote the school goals through ongoing collaborations using school data. Leadership structures across varied teams provide opportunities for teachers to provide insight into school-level decisions.

Impact

Teacher teams' ongoing improvement of curricula reflected in unit plans and tasks demonstrate active revision towards supporting student goals. School-wide structures and decisions to improve teacher practices and student learning are developed using teacher leader input.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly and have developed structures including agendas, Tuning Protocols, minutes, and supplemental materials to support progress toward goals. The focus of these meetings encompasses an integration of the school goals around student engagement and the improvement of curricula reflected in unit and lesson plans.
- During a teacher team meeting in math, teachers used student work and a reflection protocol to determine next steps for teaching practices. For example, as a next step, teachers determined that the students would benefit from an individual word wall and guided notes as support during lessons.
- Teachers are included in the instructional cabinet which meets twice monthly and determines instructional focus and professional development for teachers. For example, recently the instructional cabinet created an Instructional Objective Rubric for the school to use during professional development as a result of reviewing student data and teacher planning practices. Teachers helped design this tool which they now use to assess and strengthen their instructional objectives for the day.
- Each teacher team is facilitated by a team leader who sets the agenda, maintains team documents and discusses issues with administration during instructional cabinet meetings.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Although some curricula and lesson plans are reflective of a clear alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards, the school is in the process of ensuring that these structures contain rigor across grades and subject areas with an emphasis on providing access to all learners.

Impact

Curricula and tasks provide limited opportunities to engage students in all subgroups in rigorous tasks that emphasize critical thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- School teams use the Engage NY Quality Rubric and ARIS Common Core Library to develop curricula and learning tasks to align English language arts and math units to the Common Core Learning Standards and as resources to refine activities. However, this effort is not reflective within unit plans in other subject areas such as science and social studies.
- Teachers and Network instructional coaches are collaborating on the school unit plan design and refined curricula, related assessments and supplemental resources to ensure an emphasis on the instructional focus is integrated. For example, in Health/APEX class, the learning task included the use of technology to research a question on bullying and Asperger's.
- A review of lesson plans reflected a continuum of questions which reflected many low to mid-level questioning techniques. For example, in one class, the learning task only included compare and contrast questions, thus missing examples for students to practice higher-order skills.
- Lesson plans in most content areas lacked varied designs of academic tasks, with numerous scaffolds and entry points for all students. For example, in English, the teacher planned a variety of entry points based on individual student needs and provided modified tasks which included tiered questioning and prompts and graphic organizers. This detailed level of planning to provide entry points for a diversity of learners is not yet reflective of lesson plans across grades and subject areas.