



**Department of  
Education**

*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**The Urban Assembly School for Global Commerce**

**High School M157**

**2005 Madison Avenue  
Manhattan  
NY 10035**

**Principal: Erin Gehant**

**Date of review: February 25, 2015**

**Lead Reviewer: Fred Walsh**

## The School Context

The Urban Assembly School for Global Commerce is a high school with 163 students from grade nine through ten, expanding to grade twelve by 2017. The school population comprises 44 % Black, 51% Hispanic, 2% White, and 3% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 33% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 87.0%.

## School Quality Criteria

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

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

High expectations are consistently messaged to staff via the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching, in professional development, and other modes of communication. School leaders consistently communicate expectations that are connected to a path to college and career readiness.

### Impact

High expectations and a system of mutual accountability result in improved teacher practice. Feedback to students and families ensures their understanding of school wide expectations and progress toward meeting those expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school's detailed professional development calendar was collaboratively created with teacher leaders and is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, the school's instructional focus, as well as the work of creating and adjusting curriculum. The school's professional development team frequently facilitates meetings, or participates as co-facilitators along with administration. The principal was able to show evidence using increases in teacher observation scores related to 3B, questioning and discussion, from the Danielson Framework for Teaching, how teachers' ability to create and deliver higher-order questions has increased since focusing on this component during professional development. Additionally, the principal sends weekly updates to staff apprising them of progress toward meeting the school wide goals of increasing reading proficiency, improving daily attendance, and improving teacher practice. Lastly, the school's rigorous and collaborative hiring process ensures that teachers joining the staff have strong content expertise, share the school's core values, are reflective, and take a problem-solving approach to their work.
- Parents articulated how the school does an excellent job of informing them of all upcoming events and provides regular updates about their children's academic progress, often through monthly newsletters. Parents mentioned how teachers regularly call them to inform them of how their teens are doing in class, remind them of upcoming exam dates, alert them of missing assignments, and inform them of when their teen has outperformed expectations. Parents also spoke to how teachers provide them with on-line resources, regularly answer emails and phone calls, and provide sample answers to difficult problems in order to help them support their children at home. Furthermore, all teachers provide students and families with a detailed course syllabus that include course objectives, units covered, weekly routines, classroom rules, grading policy, parent contract, and parent survey, keeping a focus on school wide goals
- Students understand the school's expectations with respect to academic achievement, college preparation and their responsibility to the school community. Students follow a code of conduct and understand consequences for violating the code. The school's student-led culture committee, guided by staff, ensures that all voices are heard and are included in school-level decisions. Monthly town hall meetings provide a forum for student government and school leaders to update the school community on relevant issues, events, and celebrations. Students spoke the school's myriad college and career guidance supports provided by staff and community based partner organizations

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points to the curricula. The quality of student work and discussion reflect uneven levels of students thinking and participation.

### Impact

Across classrooms, there are missed opportunities to engage all learners in consistent challenging tasks and higher order thinking, thus hindering students from exhibiting work at high levels that evidences improving learning. .

### Supporting Evidence

- In classrooms visited, questioning strategies to promote higher levels of student thinking and discussion were inconsistent. For example in English language arts, an integrated co-teaching (ICT) lesson, included questions that were low level, asked in rapid fire and provided little wait time. Some students called out or raised hands to indicate understanding while the majority of the class, including students with disabilities did not participate. In earth science and social studies lessons, teachers repeated student questions and answers instead of redirecting their responses back to the class to promote student thinking and discussion.
- Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of engagement in appropriately challenging tasks. For example, in a social studies lesson the Do Now required that students define the terms social factor and a political factor in their own words. At the conclusion of the activity students had completed extended responses. In an English language arts class a Do Now required students to construct a response to a short poem and use text evidence to support their answer. Students had written thorough responses, using text-based evidence. However, in an environmental science, integrated-collaborative-teaching lesson, the Do Now required students answer two questions. Most student answers were partial, using incomplete sentences. In a second English language arts integrated-collaborative-teaching lesson, the Do Now required students copy definitions of the words, courageous and vulnerability, from the board to their notebooks. Evidence of student written assignments or projects, exhibiting higher order thinking, were inconsistently displayed in classrooms.
- Although the use of scaffolds such as the identification of key vocabulary words, the use of technology, purposeful grouping, and use of translated materials, were seen in some classes, these practices were not consistently seen across classrooms, limiting some student's ability to access and engage in higher-level tasks. Teachers provided translated materials for English language learners to use in social studies, English language arts, and career in technical education (CTE) classes. In math and science classes, assignments showed little evidence of multiple entry points for English language learners, accelerated learners, or students with special needs.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills across grades and subjects.

### Impact

The school's purposeful curricular decisions build coherence, and data-driven task refinements promote cognitive thinking and college and career readiness for all learners.

### Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum design and revision is ongoing. For the 2014-15 school year, the principal met with department teams and individual teachers to review assessment results and course curricula to ensure alignment to Common Core Learning Standards. During Regents week in January, department teams met with the principal to analyze assessment data and adjust Spring unit plans. Each week teachers meet in department teams to analyze student work samples and further adjust their curriculum to meet any learning deficits. For example, after reviewing student work samples, teachers across disciplines noticed students struggle with reasoning and speaking skills. Math teachers revised curriculum to include routine writing activities, requiring students to justify answers by reasoning. In social studies, students struggle with on-demand writing tasks. The curriculum now includes more time for writing instruction.
- The principal and faculty have built coherence between the school's instructional focus; developing students' capacity for reading, writing, and speaking, and the overall school mission; preparing students for both college and career pathways. Across grades and subjects, unit plans reviewed include methods to develop logistical thinking skills. Logistical thinking skills include big picture / macro-level thinking, critical and creative thinking, collaborative problem solving, strong communication, and precision in thinking and doing. Lesson plans and units are designed to incorporate all logistical thinking skills. For example, in an English language arts unit titled, *Rap as Modern Poetic Form*, evidence of big picture / macro thinking is demonstrated through students seeing art as a reflection of the greater society. In a career-in-technical education (CTE) unit titled, *Supply Chain Management Systems* critical and creative thinking is demonstrated through students using a set of criteria to evaluate a system's effectiveness and alignment to organizational objectives.
- Curriculum documents reviewed incorporate the instructional shifts associated with Common Core Learning Standards. For example, units and lessons include a deep focus on building content vocabulary, accessing knowledge through texts, writing within content area classes, and reading fiction and non-fiction texts. For example, in math, curriculum documents reviewed showed lesson plans that include writing activities designed to build content area vocabulary.

**Findings**

Teachers create assessments and use rubrics aligned to the school curricula to provide students with actionable feedback. Data from student work products is used to adjust curricula and instruction.

**Impact**

The school's use of common assessments and data analysis, allows teachers to determine student progress toward goals and adjust instruction accordingly to meet the needs of all students

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers across grades and subject areas develop rubrics that are aligned to curricula and Common Core Learning Standards, and utilize these common rubrics in tasks and projects to help guide specific feedback provided to students. Teachers review rubrics with students sharing clear expectations regarding the criteria for demonstration of mastery. For example in a tenth grade science unit on weathering, students received actionable rubric-based feedback for a rock cycle project. Feedback included specific ways student outcomes could be improved. In a social studies mock-trial project students received feedback on their active involvement, preparation, attitudes, and work products. In a ninth and tenth bilingual argumentative writing rubric, students receive feedback on their claim, structure, supporting evidence, analysis and language. All criteria are aligned to specific Common Core writing standards. Students articulated that they were provided with rubrics for all of their assignments and that these rubrics and specific feedback provided by teachers helped them understand what they have to do in order to build and demonstrate mastery.
- Teachers collaborated with school leaders on the creation of a school-wide grading policy. All teachers use an online grading system and teacher advisors meet daily with students to provide individualized feedback on academic performance and help them set long- and short-term goals.
- When planning, teacher teams analyze assessment data to align skills needed in the curriculum. For example, in a teacher team meeting, formative assessment data was reviewed for struggling students. Teachers across subjects determined that students writing skills benefit from lessons where teachers use think-aloud and models when teaching the use of text evidence to support a claim.
- Students are given the Degrees of Reading (DRP) Progress reading assessment three times a year. The results help teachers understand students' level of reading and make adjustments in differentiating instruction in content areas. Teachers share DRP results with students to monitor progress within the school year. The school uses DRP results to evaluate student progress and impact of the instructional focus on student performance. In addition to the DRP, the school administers and analyzes data from a variety of assessments including PSAT, mock Regents' exams, and Measures of Student Learning assessments, at strategic points throughout the year.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, professional collaborations that promote achievement of school goals. Distributive leadership structures are in place so that teachers have developed leadership capacity.

### Impact

Teacher teams are aiding in the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. Teachers are included in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- The principal stated the school's theory of action holds that adult teamwork and collaboration directly impacts children. Teachers spoke to the school's emphasis on building coherence and alignment of adult teamwork around school-wide goals and instructional foci.
- Grade level teams meet each Wednesday, in five week cycles around a particular topic. Topics are inquiry based and focus around school culture and instructional coherence across subjects. For example, during the second cycle, grade team teachers evaluated argumentative writing samples to make adjustments to daily instructional practices aligned to the school's goal of improving writing with text evidence. Teachers across disciplines discussed the importance of modeling writing strategies before transitioning to independent or group practice.
- Collaborative teacher teams include grade level, subject area, professional development, student intervention, and operations, attendance, and Learning Partners committee. Team leaders facilitate all meetings and attend bi-weekly team leader meetings with administration. Department team meeting topics and agendas are planned collaboratively to address school goals, student data, and teacher practice trends based on administrator feedback.
- The professional development committee uses mock learning environment survey data to evaluate the impact of professional development, instructional feedback, and teacher teamwork on teacher's instructional practice. For example, in response to the first mock survey, the team in collaboration with administration, made adjustments to school-wide structures to raise expectations for students and better support teachers in the classroom. Teachers implemented the use of a common lesson planning structure to ensure instruction is differentiated to meet the needs of diverse learners.
- Teachers stated that they have voice in designing authentic curriculum and in selecting professional development opportunities. For example, the professional development team collaboratively developed the school-wide instructional expectations and classroom policies.