



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts**

**High School M369**

**509 West 129 Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10027**

**Principal: Meghan McMahon**

**Date of review: March 25, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Richard Cintron**

## The School Context

Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts is a high school with 358 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 55% Black, 42% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 21% of the students enrolled and girls account for 79%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 80.0%.

## 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>Additional Findings</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>Celebration</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

Teacher teams consistently analyze assessment data for students they share. Distributed leadership structures allow teachers to have a voice in key decisions across the school.

### Impact

The work of teacher teams has strengthened teacher collaboration resulting in improvements to pedagogical practices and a stronger voice in key decisions affecting supports for student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet four times a week in various teams, including grade teams, content teams, ICT teams and the instructional leadership team, to analyze student work, discuss instructional strategies related to increasing student achievement for targeted students, and discuss specific students' social/emotional needs. In addition to regularly scheduled meetings, teachers also meet in small groups, engage in intervisitations, and have agreed to be videotaped in order to improve their practice and support each other's professional growth. Teachers spoke to how these practices have empowered them to establish a strong culture where improving teaching and learning for students is the norm across the school and the expectations for all staff members.
- Grade teams have identified seven to ten inquiry students to focus on for the year and consistently analyze their work products to help improve their literacy skills. During a grade team meeting, teachers were engaged in analyzing a math teacher's lesson plan and the accompanying student work for the identified inquiry students, continued to norm writing expectations, and identify supports that can be put in place so that the school wide instructional focus of increasing students' ability to create text-based oral and written arguments is accessible for all students. Teachers referenced a school wide writing strategy call CREED (claim, reason, evidence, explanation, and document) and discussed specific ways to further support these students with using the strategy. Teachers and the principal shared that during the Fall, all targeted inquiry students showed increases in their Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) levels and all inquiry students who took Regent exams showed increases in their scores, with 14 students passing 23 of the 27 Regent exams they attempted.
- The principal regularly meets with all teachers and team leaders to discuss student data, observation trends, and to plan professional development. For example, teachers spoke to how they worked with the administration to design the school's new lesson plan template to improve planning for struggling students, to design targeted professional development based on observations data related to school wide writing strategies observed during the Fall semester, and helped to create a new literacy class based on fall DRP scores. In addition to meeting with teachers, team leaders meet weekly to build their leadership and facilitation skills. Examples of sessions include how to give peer feedback, analyze and share outcomes of intervisitations, and how to prepare for professional development as a facilitator. This practice of collaboratively seeking teacher input and supporting teacher leadership has led to a change in culture and contributed to teachers having a more active role in the direction of the school.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Developing**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide entry points into the lesson and student discussions reflect uneven levels of student understanding.

### Impact

School wide there are missed opportunities to engage all learners in consistent challenging tasks and higher order thinking, thus hindering students from exhibiting their work at high levels and being integral to their learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- In a Geometry class where students were learning how to create points of concurrency for a triangle using perpendicular bisectors, students could not explain why they were learning this skill and how they would use it in future lessons. In a Global History class where students were learning about the causes of the Protestant Reformation, although students were working together to determine why the selling of indulgences was controversial, most of the students asked could not define controversial and could not explain how this lesson related to previous lessons.
- In classrooms visited, questioning strategies to promote higher levels of student thinking were inconsistent. Some teachers asked only low-level recall questions that did not require students to strategically think or extend their thinking. For example, in a Geometry class, as the teacher modelled how to solve a problem for the entire class, the teacher asked several questions requiring simple one or two word answers from the students, accepted the first answer that was given, and repeated the students answers to the class. When the answer was not correct, the teacher provided the answer.
- Although students worked in pairs or groups there were several missed opportunities for teachers to assume a facilitator role to further encourage student discussion and ownership. For example, in a ninth grade science class, as students worked together to determine how the body maintains glucose levels, when questions arose from students, instead of pushing their thinking to further investigate the documents they were working with, or forwarding the questions to the rest of the class, the teacher answered the questions. In a theatre class, as a student performed a dramatic reading, although students took notes so that they could eventually provide the student with feedback, the teacher interrupted the student several times during the reading to provide his own feedback, precluding students from owning the entire process. In a ninth grade English language arts class, when students were asked to summarize their groups' work at the end of the lesson, instead of asking other students to comment on each groups summary, the teacher repeated what each student had said and then moved on to the next group.

## Additional Findings

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

Curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards and academic tasks are refined using student work to provide access to curricula for all students.

### Impact

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

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has created templates for unit plans and lesson plans that specifically ask teachers to identify targeted Common Core Learning Standards, Depth of Knowledge questions to be asked during the lesson, strategies that will be implemented for inquiry students, academic vocabulary to be covered, and to explain the connection to the performing arts, that have been adopted by the vast majority of teachers. All teacher work products are stored on one central online site to allow access for all staff members. In addition, a process has been developed that allows all teachers, administrators, and network support specialists, to peer review all teacher work products and offer targeted feedback. Feedback is discussed with individual teachers and teacher team leaders and professional development is planned as needed. The principal spoke to how these collaborative decisions have built coherence across grades and content areas and ensured curricula are aligned to the Common Core Standards and/or content standards.
- During a teacher team meeting, teachers spoke to how they regularly analyze student work products in an effort to embed supports for struggling students in curricula, specifically with regard to the school's instructional focus of increasing students' ability to create text-based oral and written arguments. Curricula documents in all content areas showed evidence of purposeful planning to allow all students access and ensure cognitive engagement. For example, a ninth grade English language arts lesson was planned to allow students to select scenes to analyze and write about based on their interest. A ninth grade algebra lesson was planned to provide specific students with the use of technology and a graphic organizer to help them organize their writing. A tenth grade global studies lesson was planned to provide specific students with sentence stems and model handouts of highlighted text already annotated in different colors to support them with organizing their writing.
- A review of written lesson plans across all content areas revealed that in-class summative tasks are aligned to the Common Core, integrate the instructional shifts, and consistently emphasize higher order thinking skills such as evaluating a speaker's point of view using evidence, developing logical arguments, analyzing information from multiple sources, and applying concepts in real world situations. In a global history unit on revolutions, the summative task asked students to select a character from a revolution and use evidence gathered from various texts to create a script to perform a trial. In a science lesson, students used evidence from a range of science texts to communicate the distinction the authors were making about homeostasis. In a global history lesson, students used evidence to evaluate if ancient Greece experienced a Golden Age.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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### **Findings**

Teachers create assessments and use rubrics aligned to the school curricula providing students with actionable feedback. Data from common assessments is used to adjust curricula and instruction.

### **Impact**

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

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Students spoke to how they regularly use rubrics in class and with homework assignments and how teachers confer with them to provide them with feedback to improve their work. Students explained how it is a regular process at the school for teachers to allow students to use this feedback to re-submit work in order to show growth in their learning. Students also spoke to how they use rubrics during in-class writing assignments to peer- and self-assess, and how this process has helped them to become better writers by being able to give other students feedback. In classrooms visited, students were consistently seen using rubrics in their groups, with other students, and during one-to-one conversations with their teachers. Student work displayed in the classrooms and corridors consistently included rubrics as well as targeted next steps for students to take to improve their work.
- The school has developed a comprehensive assessment plan that includes baselines, benchmarks, and end-of-year assessments, for all literacy, core content, and arts classes. Three times a year, in September, January, and June, the school administers the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), the English language arts Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) assessment, interim assessments aligned to Regent exams, as well as interim assessments aligned to the Arts Exit exam. In addition to these school wide assessments, all teachers administer common end-of-unit assessments, and the results from all of these assessments are used to drive curricula and instructional decisions. Examples would be the creation of a literacy class and additional math classes to support all students in ninth and tenth grade as well as the adoption of common school wide instructional practices such as ReadonPurpose and CREED to support students with engaging with complex text and crafting a written argument.
- Teachers in all subject areas work with students to examine data from baseline and benchmark assessments, reflect on areas of need, and then create individual goals aligned to learning targets. Students spoke to how this process has helped them to focus their efforts on specific areas where they feel they need additional support. Additionally, teachers spoke to how this has allowed them to adjust instruction based on larger student trends as well as to plan individual support for struggling students. The principal explained how this practice has helped to drive student achievement across the school. DRP scores have increased from September to January across ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade. January Regent passing rates have also increased in all subject areas.

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

During professional development high expectations are consistently communicated to the staff relative to the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Leadership and staff successfully communicate expectations connected to college and career readiness with families to help them support their children's progress.

### Impact

Collaboration between all community stakeholders fosters ongoing communication of high expectations and accountability linked to supporting student achievement and in understanding and meeting expectations.

### Supporting Evidence

- Parents shared how the school does an excellent job of informing them of all upcoming events and provides regular updates about their children's academic progress. Parents mentioned how teachers contact them to inform them of how their children are doing in class, remind them of upcoming exam dates, alert them of missing assignments, and inform them of when their child has outperformed expectations. Parents spoke to how teachers provide parents with on-line resources, provide model work samples for difficult problems, and regularly answer emails and phone calls when students or parents have questions regarding work at home.
- Parents commented that they believe the school does an excellent job of helping them navigate the college application process and that it works closely with students from ninth grade until they graduate to ensure they are college and career ready. The principal explained that the school is partnered with College Bound Initiative and has a full time guidance counselor who works very closely with students and parents to ensure they understand the entire college application process. Parents spoke to how students begin visiting colleges as early as ninth grade and college and career exploration is a regular conversation that happens both formally and informally between all staff members, students, and parents. Parents spoke to how this constant focus has helped them to fully understand how to best support their children. A review of the school's High School Quality Snapshot revealed that the school's four year college readiness index and their six year college readiness index with persistence have increased steadily for the past three years.
- The principal has met with staff as a group and then individually to discuss school wide and individual expectations for classroom teaching practices and interactions with students. Examples include common practices aligned to the school's instructional focus, how the classroom environment should encourage students to take pride and ownership of their learning, working with school-based partners to maximize student learning, how to align student behavior with the school's core values, and roles and responsibilities for teacher team meetings. These expectations are aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching and detailed examples have been created and shared with teachers by the principal and at teacher team meetings. Professional development is aligned to support staff and is experienced in whole group, small group, and individual settings, and conducted by the administration, outside consultants, network specialists and lead teachers, to allow for differentiated targeted support. Examples include sessions such as write-pair-share, my role in shifting student culture and behavior, my role in peer intervisitations, and providing peer feedback.