



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Urban Science Academy

Middle School X325

**1000 Teller Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Patrick Kelly

**Date of review: March 11, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Sandra Litrico**

The School Context

The Urban Science Academy School is a middle school with 381 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 31% Black, 67% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 33% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90%.

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	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	Focus	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	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

High expectations are consistently messaged to staff via the use of Danielson Framework for Teaching, in trainings and other modes of communication. Workshops and performance updates keep families apprised of student progress toward college and career readiness.

Impact

Structures that support the schools high expectations build buy-in and accountability amongst staff, students and their families, providing a clear path towards increased student achievement and college and career readiness

Supporting Evidence

- Grade level assemblies are held once a month to share and celebrate student work/ projects and to disseminate any pertinent grade level news. A recurring theme at these assemblies is the necessity of hard work and consistent attendance to support the achievement of student goals for high school. The principal also discusses the importance of developing intellectual and job related skills and habits that are needed for college and career.
- Guidance counselors support articulation and the application process to ensure students make appropriate choices. In addition, the school has formed a partnership with Resources for Children with Special Needs as part of their High School Match program. HS Match has successfully assisted their students with disabilities and their parents engage in the high school process and supported them in making informed decisions
- Student academic achievement is celebrated and recognized each semester through Honor Rolls. The school has an establish Student Council which gives students a voice within the school culture.
- Selected teachers and administrators were trained in the implementation of Restorative Circles, through the Morningside Center. The goal of circle is to assist students in the building of a healthy classroom culture, supporting achievement. This was evident in classroom visits where students were respectful and engaged in learning.
- The principal conducts frequent classroom observations, and assigns the coach to support teachers through modeling, co-teaching and lesson planning. He also sends a weekly memo to teachers reminding them of the nobility of their work and their accountability to students performance.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms teachers use common assessments that are aligned with the schools curricula. Teachers are beginning to use ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessments to provide meaningful feedback and make effective adjustments to meet students learning needs.

Impact

Students receive limited targeted feedback with clear next steps to improve their achievement. Teachers are beginning to use data to group students and to improve their practice to meet students' needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Some teachers use rubrics and checks for understanding such as exit slips to provide meaningful written feedback to students but this is not a consistent practice across the school. Data tracking charts are created by the school and teachers use data from common grad level assessments including Degrees of Reading power, IRLA, and unit tests.
- The Math department has created a uniformed "skill tracker" to record student progress as teachers confer with students during group and independent work time. Teachers are beginning to use this information to group students and provide targeted support.
- The principal has devoted professional learning time to developing their practice of analyzing and utilizing summative and formative data to drive instruction. Administrators and teacher leaders are currently supporting teacher team work in this area by providing them with protocols to analyze student work products. Thus far the approach is limited to identifying the needs of individual students and some teachers are not utilizing the data to make immediate instructional adaptations and/ or changes to their instructional practices.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Rigorous tasks that challenge all students including students with disabilities are not evident across classrooms and subjects. Planning for engagement and instructional coherence across the curricular using student data is inconsistent across the school.

Impact

The planned units are not consistently challenging to all students and limit student progress. School leaders and faculty are in the process of integrating the instructional shifts and designing tasks that challenge students to think, write and problem solve at higher levels. Therefore, there is inconsistency in rigor of what students do and learn.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has adopted common core aligned curricula including Expeditionary Learning and Connected Math (CMP). Teachers support the content and skills taught in CMP through the use of Exemplars. The social studies department utilizes New York City Scope and Sequence core curricula and some units integrate project based learning.
- Across classrooms, the lessons implemented by teachers demonstrate that they still do not have a clear understanding of how to merge the instructional shifts necessary in literacy and math with their curricular units. As a result, lessons do not always appropriately challenge students or support higher levels of thinking.
- Multiple entry points were noted in some teachers' lesson plans through scaffold instruction for small groups. However, the majority of teachers do not indicate specific plans for sub groups in their lesson. In addition, there are no extensions to challenge higher level students
- The science department has developed their own curriculum and continues to adapt their units to Common Core learning standards. Students engage in a minimum of one hands on laboratory experiment per week.
- Middle School Quality Initiative (MSQI) team partners with the school based staff to increase the overall percentage of 8th grade students who graduate reading on or above their grade level. They are also working on strengthening teachers' practices to improve literacy instruction. However, there is little evidence of impact thus far.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

Across classrooms teaching practices are becoming aligned to the curricula and beginning to reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best. Teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

There is uneven engagement in appropriately challenging tasks and uneven demonstration of higher order thinking skills in all student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- There was little evidence of student work products or discussions that reflect high levels of student thinking and participation. Most teachers did not promote meaningful discussions using team talk or text based discussions that are part of the curriculum. For example, there were missed opportunities for students to support their claims during the social studies lesson on John Adams and nationalism. Most of the lesson was teacher directed although students were working in groups with a student facilitator. Little time was devoted to student to student conversation.
- In an English language science lesson, students were observing and recording data on the phase change of ice to water to steam. The teacher’s questions did not engage students in deep questions around the essential question “How does change in energy affect the composition of particles in matter?”
- During the math lesson on estimating length using scientific notation, the teacher was completing the chart, doing most of the talking and asking all of the questions. All of the students completed the same worksheet “Size it Up” and were not actively engaged during most of the lesson. The group activity had students matching a card in the decimal notation with a card in the scientific notation was more interactive but did not challenge or promote high level thinking.
- There was strong evidence of vocabulary development in all classes across grades and subject areas. Small group instruction was also evident. Students are grouped by reading level during literacy and independent reading and to provide targeted support in mathematics. Teachers are conferencing with students, however, they need more support in using this time effectively to assess and reteach.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured inquiry based professional collaborations. Protocols are used and distributed leadership structures are evident.

Impact

These collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards. School wide structures and decisions to improve teacher practices and student learning are developed using teacher input.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal has allocated time for teachers to meet for common planning. They spend time looking at student work and adapt common core aligned units of study to meet the needs of students. Teachers identify patterns and trends in while class and individual student strength and weaknesses. The goal is to use this information to plan targeted lessons that incorporate differentiated instruction. These meetings are supported by instructional leaders.
- The school is building capacity of teachers around designing engaging classroom environments through inter-class visitations and establishing mentor teachers in these areas.
- Teachers said that meeting with their colleagues is very productive and has impacted their pedagogy by sharing best practices. They all agreed that they have a voice in school decisions as long as they have evidence to support their suggestions. The culture of the school is very supportive and the principal is open to new ideas.
- Teachers receive professional development both on and off-site. Teachers in the integrated co-teaching class attended training on different co-teaching models including parallel teaching that they are currently implementing.
- The math team reviewed the pacing calendar to ensure all teachers were on track and prioritized lesson topics in each grade based on assessments. They also identified skills that need to be retaught. One teacher shared a sample of a graphic organizer she used as a tool for students having difficulty solving math word problems. The 7th grade team is starting a lesson study group using Understanding by Design to jointly plan their lessons.