



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement

Middle School X366

**650 Hollywood Avenue
Bronx
NY 10465**

Principal: Mary-Anne Sheppard

**Date of review: April 2, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Dr. Karen Ames**

The School Context

Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement is a middle school with 160 students from grade six through grade eight. The school population comprises 16% Black, 74% Hispanic, 4% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 34% special education students. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 90.0%.

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	Proficient
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	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders have established a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff and families and which are connected to college and career readiness. These high expectations are consistently provided to teachers and families through ongoing communications and collaborations.

Impact

This supportive learning environment where school leaders and staff communicate high expectations to all results in students' progress towards those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- At the beginning of each school year, school leaders provide a professional handbook for teachers that outline clear expectations and professional obligations. The staff handbook also includes the school's vision, mission, core values, grading policies, and observation options for teachers. In addition, staff was provided a Staff Handbook Contract for their signatures that acknowledges their professional responsibility in acting in accordance with the Urban Assembly Academy of Civic Engagement and New York City Department of Education policies.
- School leaders meet with teachers early in the year to mutually discuss their professional learning goals for the year. Based on teachers' professional goals and classroom observations, school leaders provide professional learning opportunities tailored to meet the diverse needs of teachers as well as school-wide professional learning opportunities based on the competencies of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, the Professional learning Plan included a few math teachers working together to develop conceptual understanding and meaningful tasks while all teachers were required to participate in the professional learning workshop that looked and analyze students' work across the school.
- Ongoing feedback to families to understand their children's academic and social progress is consistently made via phone calls, newsletters, emails, progress reports, and monthly calendar. The calendar includes the various activities and events that are happening at the school each month. For example, April's calendar included the community carnival, New York state assessments, open house, and a trip to the NY Hall of Science.
- The school has incorporated a school-wide interactive online grading system, Jupiter grades, to provide communications with students and their families about their social and academic progress during the year. Students can view their attendance, work assignments, assessment data, and their current grades.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Developing

Findings

School leaders and teachers are still in the process of developing a coherent curricula across all content areas that are embedded with rigorous habits and promote higher order thinking skills for all learners, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

Impact

Students are not consistently challenged with high-level tasks that lead to rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills across all content areas for all students, especially for English language learners and students with disabilities resulting in missed opportunities to cognitively engage a diversity of students.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of curricula across all content areas revealed that the performance tasks required mostly short answer responses rather than extended writing. With the exception of ELA, there is little evidence of extended writing tasks required for students. For example, a social studies writing piece task instructed students to write 12 short written responses to the six documents that they read and reviewed. Several parts of the curricula did not demonstrate a clear pathway for increasing rigor and complexity among students to ensure rigorous habits and fostering higher order thinking skills.
- A review of curriculum maps across the different content areas revealed no targeted instructional supports for English language learners and students with disabilities. In addition, there is no written evidence suggesting modifications and revisions to curricula to address the leaning needs of English language learners and students with disabilities. During the teacher team visit, it was shared that they are still in the process of identifying targeted instructional supports that address the learning needs of English language learners and students with disabilities.
- All lesson plans reviewed during the visit revealed that classroom teachers group students according to their reading abilities. However, the scaffolding and differentiation included on the lesson plans were very general and with little specific differentiation to address the diverse learning needs of students. For example, a sixth grade social studies lesson plan stated that scaffolding and differentiation would include “turn and talk,” teacher assistance, and resources around the room. Another eighth grade math lesson plan stated that students will receive differentiated instruction in order to simplify the process of what they are doing. However, the plan did not mention what the differentiation of instruction would entail. Supports for struggling students during lessons are not always clearly defined nor differentiated to ensure all students’ learning needs are being met.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and instructional core and reflect an articulated set of beliefs on how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching. There is active student engagement and high-level discussions.

Impact

Classroom lessons were highly engaging and there were multiple opportunities to promote higher order thinking skills and high-level discussion for most students.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, lessons were aligned to the school's curricula and instructional focus, to incorporate the use of the Webb's Depths of Knowledge chart to promote rigor and increase student engagement. During the visit, there was evidence of the use of the DOK chart and questioning and discussions based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. For example, a seventh grade ELA lesson include essential questions that asked students, "How can I analyze a text using what he text says explicitly and my inferences to come to an understanding of a text's central idea or theme?" While in an eighth grade social studies class, the essential question asked during the lesson, "Was World War II justified by its results?" This was a teaching practice that was evident across classrooms where students were required to respond to the different levels of questioning from multiple sources, leading to high-level discussion and engagement among students.
- Across classrooms, students were provided the opportunities to engage in group and peer-to-peer discussion. For example, sixth grade students worked in pairs to "turn and talk" about what Buddhists believe and to use evidence to support their responses. Students shared their answers with their assigned partner and identified several resources from previous lessons to support their answers. In an eighth ELA classroom, students were paired with their classmates and assigned to read two narrative texts and to write two short responses. After reading the assigned texts, students were instructed to discuss their responses with their partners, using evidence from previous lessons. In a seventh grade ELA class, students were assigned to groups to discuss their claims using supporting evidence from the assigned reading texts. Each member of the group shared his/her claims to the group.
- Across classroom, lessons involved active student participation and high-level discussions. In an eighth social studies class, students were actively engaged in conversations related to analyzing four different historical documents from four very different learning stations related to World War II. Students were instructed to create a T-chart and record their reasons and answers after analyzing the documents as well as justifications to support their responses. In addition, teachers provided students with group discussion protocols for analyzing text evidence. In an eighth grade math class, the teacher provided students with a written word problem, involving a car rental company. As students worked in pairs, they constructed prediction charts displaying their answers to the assigned math problem. Students were also provided the opportunity to share with the class how they constructed their equations.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school curricula. The school's use of common assessments to determine goals across the grade and subject result in adjustments to curricula.

Impact

The school's use of common assessments, data analysis, and ongoing feedback allows teachers to make revisions and adjustments to instruction and curricula to address the diverse learning needs of students.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a grading policy that detailed a standard grading rubric for all subjects. There was written evidence of a 2014-2015 Grading Policies Chart across subjects. For example, the grading policy for math was as follows: exams accounted for 30%; performance tasks accounted for 30%; all quizzes accounted for 15%; classroom work accounted for 15%, while homework accounted for 10%. In addition, the use of content rubrics accompanied by meaningful feedback from teachers to students was evident in hallways and classrooms. In classrooms, many students' work samples included actionable feedback from teachers that was aligned to content specific rubrics.
- During the school year, school leaders assess students' reading abilities by incorporating a school-wide reading test, Degrees of Reading Power. This online independent reading program consistently assesses and monitors students' reading levels and abilities across the many different genres. Once students are assessed, they receive their independent reading scores that indicate the most difficult texts that they can read with a 90% or higher comprehension. Reading assessment data reports are shared with students, families, teachers, and school leaders. All students are expected to read on or above grade level by the end of May. In addition, school leaders use the DRP assessment data to differentiate instruction and curricula during the school year.
- In September, school leaders provided teachers with a 2014-2015 Assessment calendar, which included the MOSL, benchmark assessments, unit assessments, and performance tasks. Unit exams and performance tasks in ELA, math, science, and social studies are incorporated monthly followed by benchmark assessments to track and monitor students' progress throughout the year. On-demand writing assessments are embedded across the grades to also assess and monitor students' learning and progress. All performance tasks, unit exams, and on-demand assessments are collected and analyzed by school leaders and teacher teams.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers engage in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations during which pedagogical practices, students’ work, and common assessments are systematically reviewed and analyzed. Distributed leadership is embedded across the school.

Impact

The impact of shared leadership and teacher teams has strengthened teacher collaboration resulting in improving student learning outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams systematically analyze elements of teacher’s work, including teacher classroom practice, assessment data, and students’ work for students they share or on whom they focused. As the team analyzes the student work, they look for patterns and trends across the class as well as across the grades. Based on the findings, the teachers create and develop units of study to include interventions to support identified students’ academic needs and enrichment activities to support high performing students.
- School leaders have incorporated distributed leadership by providing opportunities for teachers to take on lead positions at the school level. Approximately, one-third of all teachers serve in some form of leadership positions. Teacher Leaders are part of the many lead positions that empower teachers to assume leadership roles across the school. Lead Teachers participate in weekly cabinet meetings, review and analyze curriculum products, provide input on school decisions, and work alongside their colleagues to help improve pedagogical practices and next steps. The school participates in the Teacher Incentive Fund, a pilot program designed to strengthen the roles of teacher leaders in schools as well as across the city.
- School leaders provide opportunities for weekly team meetings and professional collaborations for all school members to discuss and address the social and academic needs of all students. The school has incorporated five separate weekly team meetings for teachers that incorporate different approaches to addressing the academic and social needs of students. First, there are the Cabinet meetings that are held on Tuesdays led by Department Chairs and House Leaders. On Wednesdays, the House Leaders team, which includes the dean, guidance counselor, parent coordinator, and paraprofessionals, meet. The Student Intervention Team meetings, which include all special education teachers, are held on Wednesdays. The Student Success meetings, which include the principal, parent coordinator, and success mentors, are held on Fridays in the mornings.