



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Urban Assembly School for Wildlife Conservation

Secondary School X372

**2024 Mohegan Avenue
Bronx
NY 10460**

Principal: Latir Primus

**Date of review: March 20, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Renee Peart-Zachary**

The School Context

Urban Assembly School for Wildlife Conservation is a secondary school with 564 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 25% Black, 70% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% Asian, and 1% other students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 15% 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 83.0%.

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 | Celebration | Proficient |
| 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 | 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 | Additional Findings | Developing |
| 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 | Developing |

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

School leaders make certain curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks accentuate rigorous practices.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions result in all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and student with disabilities, having access to tasks that emphasize rigorous habits and promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of the curriculum maps revealed that unit plans across grades and subjects include unit themes, essential questions, instructional shifts with a focus on deep understanding, academic vocabulary, and text-based evidence, Common Core Learning Standards, and state standards. For example, a grade 7 lesson plan included specific activities for vocabulary building and reading text to support a claim. Furthermore, school leaders and teachers make purposeful decisions to ensure all unit plans across grades and subjects have college readiness skills, Danielson Framework Components, resources, assessments, and literacy strategies
- All students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, have exposure to rigorous tasks that enhance learners' critical thinking skills. For example, in a grade 9 English language arts (ELA) task, students were asked to create A Call to Action essay that introduces and explains a topic and then asks the readers to take on action the topic. Students were also asked to select articles that provide evidence to support their claim. In a grade 10, Earth science task, students were asked to create a model of ocean acidification and analyze the effects that it has on marine species. In a grade 11 ELA task, students were asked to analyze how the author develops central theme through making inferences. In a grade 7 science task, students were asked to analyze the parts and functions of the excretory system and articulate why this system is essential and how it contributes to cellular respiration.
- To promote college and career readiness through the curricula and to ensure diverse learners have access to engaging tasks, unit plans identify specific college readiness skills. For example, in a grade 9 algebra unit plans focusing on solving linear inequalities and graphing linear functions, teachers identified that learners will construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others, model, reason abstractly and quantitatively, and look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning as college readiness skills. In a grade 7 ELA informational and non-fiction unit plan, teachers identified that learners, including ELLs and students with disabilities, will annotate text, cite evidence to support inferences, analyze and evaluate information, draw conclusions, and explain various points of view as college readiness skills.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are beginning to reflect a set of beliefs that is informed by Danielson Framework for Teaching. Student discussions do not yet consistently reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

The emerging shared pedagogical practices are not yet yielding consistent student performance across subject areas as well as high-quality work products.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal stated teachers believe that students learn best by doing, engaging in discussions where they reflect on their progress, and by teachers asking high-level questions so that students enhance their higher-order thinking skills. The principal also stated that their shared beliefs are aligned to Danielson Framework for Teaching: 3b Questions and Discussions. These shared beliefs were evident in 4 out of 8 classes. The school is in the process of implementing their shared beliefs across all grades and subjects so that pedagogical practices are consistent in the middle and high school.
- In a grade 11 English class, students listened to the teacher read text from the novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain and then learners worked with their partners to identify text that showed imagery. The students engaged in a think-pair-share activity and the teacher used a cold-call technique to select students to share not only what they thought but also what they heard from their partner. In this lesson, students were observed engaging in high-level discussions. However, in a grade 9 English class, students shared iPads or cell phones to research evidence to support a claim in their essays. Students were not given opportunities to engage in high-level discussions on their findings. Most students worked independently without any interaction with the peers beyond sharing materials.
- In a grade 6 English Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class, students worked in cooperative learning groups where each student had a role as the recorder, speaker, checker, and presenter. The students were in four different groups and engaged in high-level discussions on the theme of the story. A student was observed asking his peers, "What do you think is the theme of the story and what evidence do you have to support your answer?" However, in a grade 7 English ICT class, students were given a do now on central idea and details. Based on students' reading levels, the teachers gave learners differentiated do now tasks. However, the students were not given sufficient time to complete the do now and the teacher-directed lesson had minimal opportunities for students to discuss their incomplete responses or clarify their thinking.

Additional Findings

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| Quality Indicator: | 2.2 Assessment | Rating: | Developing |
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Findings

Teachers use rubrics and grading policies, provide limited feedback to students, and inconsistently analyze common assessments. Teachers inconsistently check for understanding and provide opportunities for learners to assess their own work.

Impact

The school's assessment practices result in learners not always being fully aware of their next steps. The school's use of analyzing assessments results to determine student progress toward goals is not yet leading to consistent adjustments in the curricula and instruction.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers create mock Regents and New York State ELA and math exams. Teachers also create rubrics specific to the task. The school has a grading policy and each department has a modified version of the grading policy. Teacher-written feedback from teacher-created assessments are not always actionable as evidenced by a review of student work products across classrooms visited. For example, on a middle school English assessment, some students received feedback that said, "Good main idea. Next time, only put the most important details that make your idea true." Other students received less feedback that said, "Excellent, nice job." Furthermore, some student work products had a rubric attached to the work and other work products just had a score with no comments or attached rubric.
- Teachers administer the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) three times a year, mock ELA and math exams, mock Regents, and implement the use of LightSail Program, a technology-based ELA program that tracks student progress in literacy. Although teachers administer assessments, evidence of using data to determine student progress toward goals and adjusting curricula and instruction was inconsistent as revealed by a review of curricula maps and unit plans. For example, algebra unit plans were adjusted based on the January 2015 Regents data and middle science unit plans were expanded based on the New York City (NYC) Baseline Performance Task assessments. However, such adjustments were not evident in other subject areas.
- In a grade 7 science class, students described how the excretory system contributes to the process of cellular respiration. Students were observed using a rubric to assess their own work. Learners switched papers with their partner and gave feedback to their peers using the rubric. However, in a grade 8 science class, some students worked in pairs and some worked independently to complete an eccentricity lab. There was a self-reflective learning rubric posted on the board, although students were not using it. Students were not given opportunities to assess their own work.
- In a grade 6 English class, the teacher recorded her observations of students' strengths and struggles on the task. The teacher conducted a midpoint check where she discussed her findings and asked, "What are some things you are thinking about to identify theme?" The teacher adjusted the lesson based on students' responses. However, in a grade 10, global studies class, students worked in groups to analyze primary and secondary sources to describe the human rights violations committed by Hitler or Stalin. The teacher gave some students verbal feedback without recording data and conducting a midpoint check.

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| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: | Developing |
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and are developing systems of accountability for those expectations. The school communicates high expectations to students and advisement supports are beginning to inform students on how to prepare for the next level.

Impact

Teacher practice is not yet fully aligned with school-wide instructional expectations. Advisement supports are not yet providing clarity to students understanding on high school and college expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal reported that he communicates instructional expectations to staff through the staff handbook, meetings, and professional development that aligns to the school's instructional focus of Danielson's 3b: Questions and discussions. Teacher practices are becoming aligned to this instructional expectation of high-level questions.
- The principal reported he holds staff accountable for instructional expectations through observations where teachers receive written feedback on informal and formal observations, and data conferences with teachers where he discusses scholarship data with a focus on students who may be failing courses or students who have received a 75 or below on Regents. The principal said, "It is not acceptable that students are not doing well in a class. I have data conferences with teachers to review student grades in their courses." The principal provided evidence of observation reports but was unable to provide documentation of school leaders one-to-one data conferences with teachers.
- The principal reported that students attend advisory 2-3 times a week where they discuss college and career goals, review the Foley Square Plan for Student Success, an intervention plan for students who are in danger of failing for the marking period, and discuss how to prepare for the next level. However, during the student interview, students confirmed that they attend advisory where sometimes they have guest speakers from local colleges or they engage in reading novels. Some students reported that advisory period is not always used to help them understand graduation requirements. When asked what classes and Regents are needed to graduate high school, one student said, "I think we need 44 credits to finish high school." A second student said, "I'm not sure." A third student said, "I don't know."
- The school offers Regents classes to middle school students and high school students have opportunities to take credit bearing classes three times a week after-school and on Saturdays. Additionally, the school has partnerships with Fordham University, the Bronx Zoo, and Wildlife Conservation Society. The partnerships help the school begin the process of deepening the experiences of students by extending their learning on careers readiness. The principal reported that middle school students have opportunities to meet with high school students to discuss high school expectations. However, during the student interview, middle school students reported that they do not meet with high school students to discuss expectations. When asked, what is expected of you in high school, middle school students were unable to explain high school expectations, Regents class opportunities, or graduation requirements.

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| Quality Indicator: | 4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development | Rating: | Developing |
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations on teams that are becoming aligned to the school goals. Teacher teams review student work and inconsistently analyze assessment data.

Impact

The work of the teacher team is not yet leading to consistent improvement in teacher practice and consistent improvement towards goals for groups of students across grades and subject areas. The teacher team’s inquiry approach does not yet consistently impact teaching practices across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal reported that there are grade-level middle school and high school teams, department middle school and high school teams, special education team, graduation team, student support team, and department chair teams. Each team meets 1-2 times a week. The work of the teams do not always connect to the school’s 2014-15 goals of strengthening lesson design and assessments to improve pedagogical practice. Furthermore, the work of each team does not always connect to other teams within the same content. For example, the science middle school team reported that they do not meet with the high school science team to discuss school-wide science trends and gaps. One teacher said, “We met with the high school team once, at the beginning of the school year.”
- A review of team agendas and minutes revealed that most teams do not always engage in an analysis of assessment results. For example, a math team agenda identified that teachers implemented checks for understanding in their lesson, finalized grades for the second marking period, and administered a mock test. However, a social studies team agenda identified that teachers reviewed final grades and mock Regents results, and created student goals.
- During a science middle school team meeting observed, each teacher had a role of facilitator, presenter, documenter, and participant. The teachers reviewed the NYC Performance Base Assessment of a low, mid and high-level student. One teacher presented the assessment and each teacher provided their colleague with feedback and instructional next steps. Teachers discussed how they would re-teach graphing and help students understand how to support a hypothesis. Although the teachers discussed student work and analyzed data, they were not able to articulate how the work of the team improves their pedagogical practices beyond sharing different ways to teach lessons.
- Teachers reported that they use a Kid Talk protocol to discuss student work and behaviors. These professional collaborations do not always connect to the principal’s definition of inquiry work as outlined in the staff handbook that documents “teachers are placed in small groups, develop questions relevant to data, determine and implement action plans, and assess the effectiveness of the plan.” For example, the student support team agenda revealed that teachers met to conduct a case study on groups of students where teachers discuss student strengths, behaviors, data, goals, and interventions. However, a special education team agenda identified that teachers discussed the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) calendar, ICT collaborative sheet, and middle school students’ IEPs.