



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Urban Scholars Community School

Elementary School X463

**1180 Tinton Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Debra Jones

**Date of review: January 7, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Renee Peart-Zachary**

The School Context

Urban Scholars Community is an elementary school with 309 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 44% Black, 54% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. 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	Additional Findings	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	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

School leaders consistently convey high professional and instructional expectations to the staff and have a system for holding staff accountable. Parents receive ongoing feedback that allows them to support their children at home.

Impact

The staff is fully aware of the school-wide instructional expectations through written and verbal feedback aligned to Danielson Framework for Teaching. Parents have access to Common Core aligned resources that connect to a path of college and career, as well as information that helps them understand their children's academic progress.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders lead learning sessions every Monday, provide regular check-in's where teachers norm their understanding of the framework, and evaluate teacher progress toward meeting set pedagogical expectations.
- The staff binder, administrative memos, and observation reports provide the staff with written school-wide instructional expectations. These Danielson for Framework aligned documents coupled with post-observation conferences allow school leaders to hold staff accountable for instructional expectations.
- The grade-level curricula newsletters, monthly calendars, School Messenger service, and monthly progress reports keep parents apprised of curricula expectations, monthly assessments, and students' academic progress.
- Parents reported that the Teamwork Tuesdays Workshops that are led by teachers and the parent coordinator provide parents with information about Common Core Learning Standards, curricula expectations, and strategies that help them support their children at home.
- The principal's monthly "Coffee and Conversation" sessions provide parents with additional information on how to support their children. During these parent sessions, the principal discusses topics such as increasing involvement in your child's education and understanding services listed on an Individualized Education Program plan. Furthermore, parents report that the principal's open door policy allows them to meet with school leaders at least once a month to discuss their children's academic progress. One parent said, "This school is a community that improves lives and children love to come to school." Another parent said, "Because of this school, my child is talking about going to college".

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Developing

Findings

Teaching practices are becoming aligned to a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. Across classrooms, pedagogical practices inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

School-wide, a lack of multiple entry points is hindering all students, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities from demonstrating higher-order thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal stated that the school's core beliefs align to "teachers differentiating content and student activities to raise student achievement". However, these core beliefs were not consistently observed across classrooms visited. For example, in a third grade dual language class, all students of varied reading levels were given the same content and completed the same three-column graphic organizer on character traits. The school's core beliefs were observed in three out of seven classes.
- In one third grade class, students, working in assigned groups led by a student leader, identified transition words from the story "The Year of Miss Agnes" by Kirkpatrick Hill and were asked to use these words in their writing pieces. Based on their Fountas and Pinell reading levels, the teacher gave each group different materials and different writing prompts to support them in their writing. The higher-level reading group received no writing prompt and their task required them to create their own transition words. However, this practice of providing multiple entry points into the curricula was not consistently observed across classrooms visited.
- Teachers reported that they use Fountas and Pinell assessment results to plan strategic and purposeful English language arts (ELA) lessons and that students know their reading levels. Student interviews confirmed that learners are aware of their reading levels. However, across classroom visited, some teaching practices did not include scaffolds such as guided groups, tapping into prior knowledge, think-pair-share, use of visual aids, time for the strategy of pause-ask questions-pause-review, and other specific strategies to address students' various reading levels and skill sets. For example, in one of the Integrated Co-Teaching ELA class, teachers asked low-level recall questions. One teacher asked, "Can you tell me what is a character? What kind of things helps you know the characters?" Diverse learners were given the same graphic organizers about character traits. Additionally, even though students' reading levels varied, diverse learners had the same task with the same materials. Some students were observed struggling and others quickly finished their tasks with no additional assignment.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school adopted curricula that align to Common Core Learning Standards and include the instructional shifts. Furthermore, students have access to rigorous tasks.

Impact

The school's curricular decisions are resulting in diverse learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities having access to increasingly engaging tasks that require higher-order thinking skills and promote college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school selected the curricula of Ready Gen for ELA, Engage NY for math, FOSS for science, and Harcourt for social studies and created curricula maps that include various components. All curricula maps reviewed included the components of essential questions, enduring understandings, objectives, goals, Common Core Learning Standards, key ideas, use of centers, instructional shifts, differentiated instruction for ELLs and students with disabilities, vocabulary, resources, revisions, and assessments.
- Academic tasks allow students to develop rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills that promote college and career readiness. For example, in a fifth grade math lesson, all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities were asked to use the Read Draw and Write (RDW) method to analyze two multi-step fraction problems. Additionally, students were asked to share their partner's mathematical two-step solution to the problem. Moreover, in a fourth grade ELA unit of study, students were asked to compare and contrast points of view and write about the experiences and lives of others. Students wrote an essay about a day in the life of a scientist and researcher where they researched careers, provided detailed facts, and contrasted how life as a scientist is different from their life as a student.
- The principal reported that based on feedback from the latest Quality Review and the 2014 New York State ELA exam results, the ELA units of study now include the instructional shifts of academic vocabulary, text-based answers, and staircase of complexity. In September 2014, school leaders met with teacher teams and made purposeful decisions to ensure ELA unit plans across all grades promote skill development and prepare students for college and careers. Additionally, teachers plan lessons that include questions that promote higher-order thinking. A review of the current ELA units of study revealed that teachers have included more vocabulary as compared to previous Fall 2014 units and have added Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge level three and four questions.

Findings

While teachers are increasingly creating assessments to align to curricula, assessments and rubrics are not yet precise enough to provide teachers and students accurate feedback across all subjects. Furthermore, teachers' use of checks for understanding and students' self-assessment skills are inconsistent across classrooms.

Impact

Use of assessments that are not always fully aligned to standards hinders teacher and students' accurate understanding of progress toward achievement. Inconsistent teacher checks for understanding contribute to a lack of effective adjustments so that improvement in student performance and progress is minimal.

Supporting Evidence

- Student work displayed on the hallway and classroom bulletin boards included task descriptions, assessment results, and evaluation rubrics. Teachers wrote rubric-based comments and clear, actionable next steps. However, across classrooms visited, a review of student portfolios revealed that some student work products had no teacher comments regarding next steps and no rubric, and that other pieces of student assessments had just a check mark to note completion of the task. Additionally, a review of student portfolios revealed limited student work products in social studies and science.
- Students reported that teachers give rubrics in ELA to help them understand how to achieve a high score. Students discussed how they needed to add details with supporting evidence to obtain a high score on a task. Students shared that they receive ELA rubrics before they complete the task. However, this practice is not consistent in other subject areas. Students reported that they are not given rubrics in social studies and science. One student said, "I have science once a week and it is taught by the science cluster, and I don't get rubrics in that subject."
- School leaders reported that teachers check for understanding by taking conference notes and using that data to adjust instruction. This practice of adjusting the lesson to address students' strengths and areas of concern was not consistent across classrooms observed. In a 3rd grade ELA general education class, the teacher-recorded learners' common misunderstandings with transition words in their essays and conducted a midpoint adjustment based on the findings. However, in a 3rd grade ELA dual language class, as students grappled with reading text from the story "The Year of Miss Agnes" by Kirkpatrick Hill and created character trait graphic organizers, the teacher took no conference notes to record students' struggles and made no midpoint assessment or adjustment.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations that provide opportunities to share best practices. Teacher leaders have input into instructional changes across the school.

Impact

Teacher teaming contributes to teachers taking on leadership roles and influencing key school-wide instructional decisions. Additionally, on-going inquiry has supported teachers understanding and strengthened professional capacity in implementation of Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts.

Supporting Evidence

- Each teacher is in a professional learning community (PLC) that meets twice a month where teachers share best practices and review student work products in a specific content areas. During an ELA PLC meeting observed, teachers discussed how students answered questions about predictions, character traits, and author's purpose from the book "Sand Castles and Guitars" by Jane Hearn. The team created different low, mid, and high-level end of the book assessments questions to assess learners' understanding of the text.
- Each teacher is assigned a small group of students to work with during an academic intervention service period. Grade-level teams meet once a week to discuss the selected students. Teachers reported that they have a common prep every day and they meet formally once a week and informally three times a week. During these meetings, teachers use a protocol for looking at student work and develop next steps for selected students. For example, the ELA team looked at student writing and noticed that students missed key details. They determined that individuals and groups of students needed more work with close reads and vocabulary development. Furthermore, a review of teacher team agendas, minutes, and sign-in sheets revealed that teachers consistently meet weekly to discuss student work products and progress for individuals and groups of students.
- Every grade has a team leader and teachers have opportunities to share their ideas about student learning with school leaders in monthly meetings. Teachers reported that their voice is appreciated and valued in making essential instructional decisions. For example, the math PLC team developed a different way for students to solve math problems. They developed the RDW method that is now implemented across the school. Furthermore, the writing PLC team developed a writing rubric booklet that consists of age-appropriate rubrics for each grade level that is used across the school.