



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

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

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

The Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice

High School K483

**283 Adams Street
Brooklyn
NY 11201**

Principal: Suzette Dyer

**Date of review: December 4, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Gary Knight**

The School Context

The Urban School for Law and Justice is a high school with 462 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 72% Black, 21% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 1% English Language Learners and 15% students with disabilities. Boys account for 45% of the students enrolled and girls account for 55%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 91.6 %.

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	Well Developed
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 <i>Framework for Teaching</i> , aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Focus	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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	Well Developed
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:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and parents connected to college and career readiness and successfully partner with families.

Impact

Consistent communication results in a culture of mutual accountability and supports student progress toward high expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- There are high expectations for all members of the school community. These expectations are communicated via weekly Principal's Update newsletters that include reminders regarding teachers' goals, parent outreach, academic supports, grading, dissemination of faculty handbook, professional development, and parent meetings. Administration developed an advisory team that helps to set expectations. In addition, the principal leads grade and department meetings in order to reinforce the mission and vision of the school. Teachers work over the summer planning for professional development workshops based on goals and setting structures and expectations school-wide. Teachers create goals for themselves, reflect on goals throughout the year and plan for the following year.
- Through grade team and department structures, the staff holds themselves accountable. Teachers create goals for themselves, conduct peer observations and feedback and reflect on where they are currently with practice and what they are still seeking. Teachers revisit goals and progress and regularly refine goals to improve practice.
- The school effectively communicates and partners with families to support student progress in multiple ways. The school invites parents to "accepted student night" for incoming students and parents as a culture-building opportunity around academic expectations, with current parents participating as ambassadors to incoming families and current students participating in a fashion show to model the school's dress code.
- A back-to-school barbeque is sponsored by current parents as part of the Parent Teacher Association's efforts to engage all families in expectations for the coming school year and to reiterate the importance of school and home connections in supporting student progress. The parents also work with the school to create agendas for Teacher Appreciation week, Multicultural Celebration and Black History Month Celebration.
- In addition to Parent Advisory night, several workshops were conducted for parents, on topics such as the grading policy, and how to access and effectively use the online PupilPath interactive grading system. The College and Career office also presents the college application process to parents. The workshops are to better inform and equip parents with the tools necessary to help and support their children academically and prepare students for the next level. The overarching goal is, "to shift the mindset of parents and students, from passing to mastery." Similar parent workshops are held for parents of children with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students with IEPs are now increasing passing rates on Regents exams and credit accumulation.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions, and student work products reflect high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.

Impact

Almost all students are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and produce high quality discussions. However, there are some instances where teachers are not providing targeted lessons and strategies to meet the needs of all students, especially higher-level students.

Supporting Evidence

- In a grade 12 English class, students were observed being seated in inner and outer circle formation, engaged in a Socratic seminar, articulating their stance based on an article about the roles of males and females in society. Students were using real world evidence to support their argument and to make connections to the text.
- School-wide, students demonstrate higher order thinking skills. For example, in a grade 10 psychology class, students were presenting their perspective of genetics and the environment and evaluating the relationship between genetics, the environment, intelligence and policy. As a part of the lesson, students questioned each other on information presented and provided feedback to each other. Some of the questions that drove this activity included, "How does our understanding of the balance between genetics and environment shape our world?", and "How does it influence our policies, institutions and perceptions of others?"
- Lessons in the classrooms provide multiple entry points and high quality supports and extensions. For example, students in an Advanced Placement (AP) English course worked on citing textual evidence to support analysis and draw inferences. Once they were done with the activity, as an extension they had to complete a reflection on their discussion, with very specific guiding questions. In a grade 9 English class, students were analyzing literature, working on annotating strategy and provided a graphic organizer. However, during observation of lesson, extensions were not provided. Some students were done working on the task and sat waiting for further directions. Consequently, there were missed opportunities to challenge them to push learning outcomes.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school leader and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards, and strategically integrate instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized and embedded in curricula across grades and subjects.

Impact

The alignment of curricula and strategic integration of instructional shifts results in coherence across the school promoting college and career readiness for all students.

Supporting Evidence

- Leadership created a schedule for teachers to work within department and subjects, in addition to common planning time that aligns vertically and horizontally so that teachers may work together to refine curriculum. The special education teacher team also meets as a department once a week and are a part of content teams, allowing them to not only meet as a team but with other departments as well. Common school-wide templates are used for curriculum, unit and lesson plans. Teachers embed higher order thinking questions and discussions into the plans. For example, the use of Socratic seminars and leveling of questions are embedded into plans pushing the cognitive load back to the student. Teachers use curriculum and unit maps, the Common Core Learning Standards and the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to guide vertical alignment.
- The school strategically plans classes and develops curriculum to include instructional shifts and specific student needs based on identified deficiencies. For example, a math support course was created for 9th and 10th grade students who did not demonstrate the grade level requisite skills needed in numeracy. Remediation courses are created to support the high need students and Advanced Placement curricula is in place to meet the needs of the higher performing students.
- Ongoing professional development workshops are provided to teachers to strategically integrate shifts and build coherence. For example, one of the workshops topics was specific to building text complexity.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use common assessments, rubrics and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula to create a clear picture of student progress towards goals across grades and subjects and teachers make effective adjustments to meet the learning needs of all students.

Impact

The analysis of assessments and use of rubrics provides actionable and meaningful feedback and allows teachers to track progress, adjust curricula and make instructional decisions for all learners so that they demonstrate increased mastery.

Supporting Evidence

- All content areas and grades create aligned interim assessments. These interim assessments, along with Degrees of Reading Power assessments, are used to measure and respond to student growth. The data from interim assessments, common assessments and classroom student data are used as a mechanism to make the necessary revisions to the curricula in an effort to meet the needs of students to achieve mastery. It allows for teachers to reteach and provide additional supports. For example, item analysis of student data revealed that making inferences and identifying key details are areas of struggle for students. Leadership met with teachers to implement practices to address identified deficiencies. As a result, a computer adaptivity program is being implemented to help students practice skills. In addition, leadership provides professional development workshops on teaching strategies to staff.
- Mock Regents are also administered twice a year. The data is analyzed and differentiated strategies are implemented for students. Six weeks snapshots of student data is also tracked and used to make adjustments to curriculum based on student performance. In addition, students are charged to analyze their own work and set goals for themselves.
- School-wide rubrics are used to provide actionable feedback to students. Leadership, staff and students were able to clearly articulate the use of these rubrics. During the student meeting, every student stated they use rubrics in every class, with a grade 12 student adding, "even in theater class." Another grade 12 student articulated that in a Global Studies class she was given next steps on how and where in her essay to insert her thesis statement. It was also recommended by her teacher on the rubric that she should use an outline to guide her writing.

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

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based structured professional collaborations. Teacher teams systematically analyze classroom practice and student work.

Impact

Inquiry based structured professional collaborations that occur within grade, department, leadership and the School Leadership Team have allowed for school-wide instructional coherence, shared improvements in teacher practice, and increased student achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade 9 teams use assessments from the eighth grade in conjunction with incoming baseline assessments to identify areas in need of development, requiring additional support. Student groupings are created as a result. Teachers also use the information that data revealed to adjust curricula and lesson plans, incorporate Academic Intervention Services, and to provide additional out of class support time.
- Across subjects and grades, teams analyze results of the Regents exams and student work to inform advance placement decisions, selection of students for the College Now program and additional support for struggling students so that they might achieve academic success. The most recent English Regents exam data reflects a 100% passing rate for the 2016 cohort.
- In one math teacher team observation meeting, they targeted mid-level student performance in grades 9 and 10. The specific questions that teachers used to guide the meeting included, “What do I see in the student work?,” “What can I infer from the student work?,” “What might the student think is going on?” and “What are the implications for teacher practice?” The icebreaker question for the meeting was, “What is a piece of feedback or a strategy that you received from a colleague that is helping you think about/make change to your usual teaching routines?” These are just some examples of the various ways in which teachers systematically analyze their practice.
- One member of the teacher team articulated that she has been a teacher for several years. However, since being a part of the teacher team’s collaborative inquiry process, she has received effective support and development to improve her practice.