



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

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

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2015-2016**

**Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice**

**Middle School - High School K609**

**4200 16 Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11204**

**Principal: Mariela Graham**

**Date of review: April 19, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor**

## The School Context

Urban Assembly School for Criminal Justice is a middle school - high school with 526 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 47% Asian, 21% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 12% White students. The student body includes 10% English Language Learners and 15% students with disabilities. Boys account for 0% of the students enrolled and girls account for 100%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 93.5%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Proficient</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and staff create a culture of high expectations for teaching and learning across the school. All staff members communicate high expectations to, and partner with, families to support all students in meeting the expectations.

### Impact

Effective communication of and support for high expectations result in strong partnerships among staff and families. There is a shared accountability for improving pedagogy and student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations through a school-wide instructional focus on all teachers setting 10 instructional goals for their classes based on student data, then using benchmark assessments to measure student progress towards mastery of each goal, analyzing the data, and implementing supports for students as needed. These expectations are reinforced via a “Critical Thinking Framework” document that indicates that all teachers are expected to deliver differentiated instruction that maximizes student thinking and engagement in lessons. School leaders use reviews of instructional plans, observations of lessons and analysis of student data, to hold all staff accountable for all expectations. Teacher reflections on data, from benchmark assessments illustrate that teachers hold themselves accountable for improvement in pedagogy and student achievement. Based on benchmark data, one teacher reflected that she will add “workshops on counterclaim” for students who are “struggling to refute a counterclaim”.
- School leaders distribute a staff handbook, weekly newsletter and bulletins that remind all staff of expectations for class work, homework and lesson planning. School leaders also utilize an assessment calendar and a variety of templates to underscore expectations related to ongoing analysis of student work and data, and the ensuing lesson adjustments based on findings from the data. Staff members receive training to meet the expectations via activities such as coaching by peers, workshops, lesson studies, and intervisitations. Through “Coffee Fridays” new teachers receive added supports and many teachers attend trainings at local and national conferences and turnkey their learnings to peers. Several teachers attended workshops on Socratic seminars and others attended conferences to strengthen instruction in English as a New Language (ENL), foreign language, and English.
- Families stated that they are regularly invited to workshops and conferences, where they receive an overview of curricula and learn about class work, homework, and graduation requirements for their children. They noted that staff members communicate expectations to them through text messages, telephone calls, a weekly E-Blast memo, and the school’s website. One parent reported that a representative of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) partnered with a guidance counselor, the college counselor, and parent coordinator, to present a “Road to College” workshop that informed families about college trips, financial aid, and requirements for college applications. Student performance data posted on Jupiter Grades, an online data portal, further support staff partnerships with families to accelerate student progress towards meeting expectations for the next level.

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

### Findings

Across classrooms teachers use data from curricula-aligned assessments to provide actionable feedback on student work. Tools used to analyze and aggregate data from assessments do not clearly illustrate student progress towards goals across grades and subjects.

### Impact

Although all teachers use data to provide actionable feedback, adjustments to curricula and instruction do not yet result in increased mastery of learning goals by all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Using task-specific rubrics in each content area, teachers provide students with feedback about their strengths and next steps for progress towards learning goals. During the meeting with students, they all exhibited work samples to which a task-specific rubric, such as a narrative writing or argumentative writing rubric was attached, with comments from the teacher. On one work sample, the teacher commended the student for excellent points in her essay and advised her to work on reasoning and explaining the evidence. Most samples of student writing seen in work folders in all classrooms illustrate similar rubric-based feedback. Some teacher comments on classroom bulletin boards and in student notebooks also reflect actionable feedback with clear next steps. On a work sample in one such classroom, the teacher wrote that the work showed “a well-developed counter claim with significant evidence” but the student needed to “cite the documents/sources”.
- The school leader presented an assessment plan that illustrated how teachers use assessments such as Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), Common Core-aligned Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) tasks, mock Regents, and benchmarks linked to instructional goals in all core contents areas, to assess student progress across grades and subjects. This includes teachers analyzing the results of assessments to identify areas for remediation and/or enrichment. For example, based on an English assessment which identified student weaknesses in grammar, the English team developed a scope and sequence document with new grammar topics to be introduced for each grade. However, there are missed opportunities to accurately measure student growth towards mastery of specific skills as teacher use of data to track and compare student performance and progress from one assessment to the next, is not yet clearly evident across all grades and subjects.
- Item skills data charts and spreadsheets, maintained by school staff, illustrate ongoing monitoring of student achievement. A review of assessment reflection reports from teachers also indicates that teachers complete data analysis logs as part of their review of data from the benchmark assessments administered to measure student progress towards mastery of the 10 goals set by the department team. However, an analysis of and teacher reflections on the data do not illustrate increased mastery of the goals by a vast majority of students, across grades and subject areas. For example, although DRP data reflects some progress in reading by many students across grades 6 to 10, the data does not reflect increased mastery by all students to whom the DRP was administered. As an example, the largest increase in reading achievement came from grade 8 students who moved from 45% reading on grade level in the Fall 2015 assessment of the DRP to 50% reading on grade level in the mid-year assessment.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

All curricula are strategically aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and illustrate the integration of instructional shifts. Through horizontal and vertical planning, teachers collaborate to develop highly rigorous tasks for all learners.

### Impact

All students have ready access to curricula designed to promote college and career readiness and academic tasks provide multiple opportunities for all students to demonstrate high levels of thinking, across grades and subjects.

### Supporting Evidence

- All units of study reflect alignment to Common Core and other relevant learning standards and instructional shifts. Curricula for middle school students include modules from *Expeditionary Learning* for English Language Arts (ELA) instruction and *Connected Mathematics Project 3* (CMP3) for instruction in math. *EngageNY* curricula supplement curricula in these core disciplines and content from the New York City scope and sequence and Common Core-aligned texts guide inquiry-based instruction in social studies and science. Each unit includes a Common Core-aligned rubric for assessing levels of student mastery of content and skills and differentiation strategies for all students to have full access to curricula and tasks across disciplines.
- In addition to units of instruction for day-to-day core content classes at the middle level, there are curricula with rigorous tasks for Regents' level work across a range of math, history, English, Spanish, and science courses, designed to prepare students for college and careers. Teachers create units and tasks linked to content from a variety of anchor texts for English and from *Integrated Math Program (IMP)* and *AMSCO* curricula for math. In addition, teachers develop and refine curricula and tasks for a college-writing course, a newcomer class for English Language Learners (ELLs) and advanced placement courses in English Literature, United States History, Calculus AB, and Environmental Science, which enhance student readiness for college and careers. Curricula for courses such as studio art, playwriting, drama, health, physical education, and writing, further infuse college and career readiness content and tasks for all learners.
- Driven by applications of *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)* principles and a "Critical Thinking Framework" that prioritizes close reading, critical discussion, and argumentative writing, curriculum maps and unit plans illustrate tasks designed for both enrichment and acceleration of students across diverse ability levels in all classrooms. A sample task from one unit required a mixed group of ELLs from grades 10 and 11 to use evidence from the text, *Walkabout*, to create an argument with claims and counter claims, about whether two of the characters, Peter and Mary, "survived due to luck or to the choices they made throughout the story." The plan included bulleted guidelines for the task, an essay outline with sentence prompts for each of five paragraphs, and a model paragraph with a guided writing frame showing students how to create their paragraphs with a topic sentence, evidence detail, analysis of the evidence, and a sentence to sum up (TEAS) their points.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, instructional practices illustrate strategic use of multiple entry points and extensions of curricula to immerse all learners in rigorous tasks and high-level discussions.

### Impact

All students engage deeply in challenging learning activities that result in high levels of thinking, participation, and ownership of learning, and high quality work products in all disciplines.

### Supporting Evidence

- In all classrooms, teachers challenge all students to learn new concepts and skills, working in groups or independently, with differentiated tasks and flexible groupings. In a mixed grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) Algebra class, students worked in groups on differentiated problem sets about how to solve quadratic equations. The task involved students examining the problems and choosing from one of four methods to arrive at a solution for each problem. Students debated their positions using academic vocabulary to decide whether a graphing, factoring, quadratic formula, or completing a square strategy would be the best way to solve the problems. Groups shared their solutions, the strategy used, and the rationale for their choices. In a grade 11 United States History class students worked with peers, using differentiated sets of primary source documents to support a position in favor of or against government assistance for the poor. As an extension of the task, they were invited to reflect on, “What would happen if the government didn’t help the poor?”
- All lessons demonstrated effective use of student-led questioning and discussion to engage their peers in making claims, presenting counterclaims, and refuting evidence cited in support of a position on a given topic. In a grade 6 ELA class students engaged in peer-to-peer questioning and discussion about the uses, benefits, and dangers of an insecticide, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), based on their reading of the novel, *Frightful’s Mountain*. The students first worked with a partner with whom they shared notes that they had already written about their views about DDT. Then all students moved to form a circle within which discussion was initiated by individual students who, without any prompting from the teacher, stated points from their learning about DDT and fielded questions from peers who challenged what was presented. The classroom teacher extended the lesson by inviting students to read articles about DDT to add to their learning from the novel.
- Instructional strategies challenge all students to take ownership of learning. In an advanced placement Environmental Science class, the teacher used an interactive white board to present photos of nail salon workers in an article titled, “Perfect Nails, Poisoned Workers”. Students read related articles and used a graphic organizer to take notes and record their own questions for a Socratic seminar protocol which they used to lead peers in a discussion of low wages and unhealthy working conditions for immigrant laborers. Students argued passionately about the plight of immigrants, making connections to their own lives, challenging their peers’ points of view, and questioning actions taken/not taken by America’s politicians in relation to the issues involved. Similar discussion practices and protocols led to equally high levels of ownership of learning in a grade 7 class where students read articles, expressed diverse points of view and questioned each other’s thinking about the benefits and disadvantages of and girls and women working in factories in the early nineteenth century. In both classes the students used a rubric to rate themselves and others on the quality of the discussion.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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**Findings**

Teachers meet regularly to analyze student work and data and share strategies for improving teaching and student achievement. Distributive leadership structures facilitate teacher collaboration with school leaders to make decisions about schoolwide priorities.

**Impact**

Through teamwork and shared leadership structures, teachers and other staff have a voice in decisions that contribute to improved teacher pedagogy and student achievement.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teacher teams meet weekly as grade teams, department teams, and/or Pedagogical Teams, engaging in activities such as examining student work and data, developing curricula, creating learning goals, designing assessments to measure progress towards the goals, planning curricular and instructional adjustments, and sharing best practices for improving teaching and learning. Teams use class level charts with both class and individual student data to identify topics and skills that need to be taught or retaught, based on findings from student performance data. Teacher reflections on their instruction and assessment loops indicate that they are focused on gathering additional data to assess the impact of strategies used to date.
- During the Quality Review, members of a math department team worked in groups of three to examine data and samples of student work for those who scored at a high-, medium-, or low-level on an Algebra 2 Regents benchmark assessment. Based on the goals targeted for the assessment, participants took turns sharing noticings, asking questions about the work, outlining learning needs evidenced in the work, and generating ideas for re-teaching. The team charted a plan for follow-up work with the students whose work samples were examined. Although they discussed students' scores and questions that were done or not done, it was not clear what specific skills were at issue for each student, and how interventions would be differentiated for students in each of the three performance categories.
- During both team meetings, teachers stated that colleagues such as the guidance counselor, special education coordinator, enrichment coordinator, dean, college counselor, and department chairs, who meet with school leaders, provide for shared leadership and teacher voice in school-level decisions. These teacher leaders provide input in decisions about activities such as the selection and development of curriculum materials and evaluation of instructional practices. They work directly with their colleagues and school leaders in helping to generate school goals, design assessments, guide data analysis, and develop and implement school improvement initiatives. The principal credits teamwork for the levels of growth by some teachers in relation to some of the targeted components of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, as evidenced in *Advance* observation data reports, and also presented data showing many students improving in levels of scholarship in several courses across the first three marking periods.