



**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 Media Studies

High School M307

**122 Amsterdam Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10023**

Principal: Cordelia Veve

**Date of review: February 9, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

The School Context

The Urban Assembly School for Media Studies is a high school with 405 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 3% Asian, 38% Black, 54% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 8% English Language Learners and 20% students with disabilities. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 84.1%.

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	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	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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	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:

1.1 Curriculum

Rating:

Well Developed

Findings

Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks. Curricula and academic tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

Impact

Students are engaged in rigorous tasks that are refined through student data to ensure that all students are demonstrating their thinking, thus preparing them for career and college readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Tasks and lessons across all grade and subjects require students to read, write, speak and think to read through the annotation of complex texts in preparation for classroom discussions. Discussions and writing require students to provide reasoning with evidence, make connections, build explanations and consider different points of view with tasks requiring an argument essay. The argument essay is embedded in all grades across subjects except in math where writing is focused on short extended responses. Units across grades have also been modified to focus on analysis and central themes. For example, in one unit, students were required to read *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins and Stenson's *A&P* and write a well-developed essay in which they identified an idea in the text and analyzed how the author uses one of the literacy techniques or rhetorical devices to develop the central idea while using strong and through evidence from the text.
- As a result of looking at student performance on Earth Science Regents, some units have been re-sequenced so that students build background to have a broader understanding of the concepts. For example, in the NYC High School Science Scope & Sequence, topography was in unit 1 and landscapes was unit 4. The school moved these units together so that students were able to understand topography in relation to land formation. The school also denoted scientific understanding into concept and process strands and added more laboratory work to ensure that students had opportunities to increase their conceptual understanding. There has also been a focus on providing students with explicit vocabulary, picture supports, guided notes and, where available, videos that provide further explanation or visual support. As a result, pass rates for the June 2015 Earth Science Regents shows an increase of 35 percentage points for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and a 37 percentage point increase for English Language Learners (ELLs) compared to the previous year.
- A review of unit maps across curriculum have been revised using the Understanding Map from *Project Zero* which focuses on having student uncover complexity by making connections through discovering and questioning. Maps list strategic partnerships as support for thinking and discussion, selected skills and content for pre-teaching, audio and visual supports, and abridged texts as supports for IEP students and ELLs. As a result, the June 2015 Earth Science Regents shows a pass rate of 71% for students with IEPs and 69% for ELLs and the June 2015 Living Environment Regents shows a pass rate of 86% for students with IEPs and 84% for ELLs.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use or create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Assessments and checks for understanding result in efficient and effective adjustments to instruction and students receive actionable feedback. However, inconsistent data tracking limits teacher feedback regarding the larger picture of student achievement and hinders the potential to make effective adjustments to unit maps, plans and lessons.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use various types of rubrics aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards, such as the New York State Regents Common Core English Language Argument Rubric. Self-assessment charts including "free response" reflection in math require students to self-assess and explain their answer. Students also used a rubric for teacherless talks which is the school's Socratic Seminar. Rubrics and grading policies were observed in all classrooms visited and provided students with actionable feedback. For example, a NYC Performance Assessment Rubric student feedback stated, "Clarify how evidence from the counterclaim opposes your argument."
- Across classrooms teachers consistently use checks for understanding; however, the data from these checks is not always recorded. Checks for understanding happen in the moments through working with small groups of students and they result in adjustment. The lack of formally noting these adjustments prevents this information from being analyzed for trends that inform adjustments at the teacher team level. For example, in an English class reading Macbeth, students had to select a quote and unpack it and tie it to the class objective. Various groups were observed struggling with the task. Although the teacher went to the groups and provided assistance, she did not record student data. Similarly, in an Integrated Co-Teaching Earth science course, teachers circulated to student groups with a focus on questions about the key ideas about erosion. While the teachers addressed misunderstandings about these in groups they were not observed recording any information.
- One of the school assessment practices is to have students self-assess on their understanding of the concept before the lesson and after the lesson. Teachers have identified look-fors in each lesson and these are the basis for self-assessments. These assessments serve as information for both the student and are monitored by the teacher for adjustments. These were observed in most of the classes as the 3 column organizer "See, Think and Wonder," where students make predictions and cite evidence for their prediction. In math classes, this practice looks different. For example, in one class, students assessed themselves on a small, 3 column chart on the top of their worksheet that listed "LT (Learning Target) #1 and #2, Beginning, and End." In this lesson, students had two learning targets to assess, one was defining variable in a word problem and the other was writing a system of equations from a given context. All students scored themselves and as the teacher wrapped up the mini-lesson, she asked students to rate themselves again. The teachers were observed reviewing these self-assessments for accuracy.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula and student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking and participation.

Impact

Entry points into lessons provide opportunity for high levels of student thinking in both discussion and work products; however, there are missed opportunities in some tasks to further deepen student learning and for students to demonstrate high levels of ownership of learning.

Supporting Evidence

- In keeping with the school philosophy of improving student analysis of textual evidence through discussion and making thinking visible, high levels of student discussion and participation were observed in all classrooms. However, not all instruction was purposely structured to maximize thinking and lead to student ownership. In a United States history class studying the influence of United States in Latin America, the teacher created an atmosphere of student ownership by having students read and annotate the text to discuss with a partner. She then called on pairs of students who commented on one of the various texts. By calling on students in a strategic manner, the teacher built levels of understanding that created greater opportunities to engage more students. This discussion, along with annotated texts, prepared the class to discuss claim and counterclaim leading to students owning the conversation. However, in a class studying Islamic texts, students were paired for discussion and the large group discussion was dependent on students having read all the texts. Students answered basic recall questions leading to a teacher-student conversation focused on factual understanding of the text instead of analysis.
- Across classrooms, subject areas and grade levels, lessons offered multiple opportunities for supporting student thinking such as flexible students grouping, Lexile level differentiated texts on the same topic, the use of varied graphic organizers, and talk stems to support student thinking. For example, in an Earth science class on weathering, students worked with clay and other manipulatives to explore the concepts of erosion and glacial deposition changes to land formations. ELLs were strategically paired with students who helped support their conversation. The unit vocabulary was front loaded and ELLs were observed working with a teacher-created picture glossary of terms as a support.
- Tasks and lessons across all subjects required students to stop, develop a thesis or mathematical argument based on evidence, and to be able to defend their answers and justify their thinking by going back to the text. For example, in a Socratic Seminar students debated Obama's approach to racial issues. One student stated that "Obama does not inspire people." Another student responded that the article says that people needed to work with the government on issues like this. Another student challenged with "Who do you think the government is? It is made up of people!" In a math class studying how to write algebraic equations with multiple variables, students supported their answers on how to represent the variables. Once done one student suggested to the other, "Let's go backwards to ensure that this equation really represents the word problem and not our idea."

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide training. School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations that are connected to college and career readiness to families.

Impact

School leaders and staff are supported in their focused on student ownership through cognitive engagement and have a system of accountability. Parents understand the path to career and college readiness and can support their students.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal reviews unit and lesson plans, and analyzes student work to hold all staff accountable for the school’s high expectations around increasing student cognitive engagement to support ownership. Lessons must include an opportunity to actively engage and include the school philosophy of “See, Think and Wonder” to activate inferencing and make thinking visible. In addition, teachers reported that the principal sits with the vertical team and shares teacher team data as well as observational trends to focus teacher team work, as well as set and adjust goals. The principal allots time to instructional rounds as follow up to vertical team decisions in order to monitor for impact. Teachers stated that the principal regularly meets with them to review teacher team work and progress and offer teachers support and feedback.
- In supporting student cognitive engagement, the principal focuses the teachers on one of their guiding principles which is “never work harder than your students in order to increase their engagement and the caliber of classroom discussion.” Teacher feedback from one observation shows actionable feedback such as, “The lesson has a recognizable structure; however, the pacing of the lesson may not provide students the time needed to intellectually engage them.”
- Parents shared that there were many forms of communication with the school regarding student achievement including Pupil Path, Family Engagement Tuesdays, 4 progress reports as well as formal report cards to share student academic progress. Communication happens through phone calls, emails, and flyers, but parents state that the touchstone for communication is the advisors who communicate formally with parents about student achievement. Parents state that advisors meet weekly with students and conference with them about performance, grade point average and attendance and they receive academic update phone calls from the school. Parents shared that the school has provided them with numerous career and college readiness workshops and parents attend with their students. Workshop topics include completing and understanding college applications, applying for student loans, resume writing, and internship opportunities. Parents stated that as a result of their request, the school will now be offering PSAT and SAT testing on site.

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations and distributive leadership structures are in place.

Impact

Teacher teams are empowered through involvement in school-level decision making that promotes the achievement of the school goals and strengthens teachers' instructional capacity.

Supporting Evidence

- Every teacher is a member of at least two teacher teams (vertical and grade level) and are led by teacher leaders. Teachers also have weekly content meeting time, which is used for collaborative planning for Common Core-aligned instruction, in keeping with school goals. Grade teams also focus on the implementation of social and emotional learning which supports the school goal of creating habits of mind to fully engage students. Vertical teams review student data, adjust curricula to address student need, and develop lesson plans and learning tasks that will promote student thinking to allow all students to engage with rigorous curricula. In a teacher team meeting teachers shared that each teacher team has a special education teacher that collaborates with the team. As a result of this work, teachers stated that they have a better understanding of scaffolds, resulting in a 30% increase in the English Language Arts (ELA) pass rates for students with an IEP.
- At team meetings, teachers examined the work of students who had just passed their ELA class, but not the Regents exam. Teachers used a protocol to examine student work, assess student skills, and analyze gaps in learning to determine next steps for follow-up with the student. For example, teachers looked at the work of an ELL and noticed that he understood the literature read, but paraphrased and summarized the story rather than interpreting or providing analysis. The next essay was from a student with an IEP and it had similar patterns, but the issue here was time management. As a result, the teachers selected a series of mentor texts for explicit instruction on analysis as well as scaffolds to support thinking. While these findings were aimed at students who did not pass the Regents exam, teachers stated that these findings would be used to modify the curriculum maps so all students would pass the Regents exam the first time. Additionally, they revisited IEPs to look at how to develop goals to support time management for those students with processing difficulties. Similar Regents adjustments made in September have resulted in an improvement of 40 percentage points in ELLs data for the January ELA Regents.
- Distributive leadership is evidenced through teacher surveys and in teacher teams, teacher leaders are responsible for guiding the work of the team and working with the administration to determine next steps. Teacher leaders participate in instructional rounds to gather data on teaching practice and student performance and then lead meetings with their teams to determine next steps based on the data. Teachers are free to sign up for peer observations and have the option of sitting in on verticals to offer insight and support the work. Teachers also coordinate intervisitations to each other's classes and they model lessons for each other. Teachers meet with teacher leaders to create agenda items for meetings with the principal who holds an open space in the agenda for teachers to add last minute items.