



**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 Green Careers

High School M402

**145 West 84 Street
Manhattan
NY 10024**

Principal: Kerry Decker

**Date of review: February 26, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

The School Context

The Urban Assembly School for Green Careers is a high school with 333 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 2% Asian, 28% Black, 66% Hispanic, and 3% White students. The student body includes 14% English Language Learners and 27% students with disabilities. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 84.2%.

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	Additional Findings	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	Focus	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	Additional Findings	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	Celebration	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

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

Distributed leadership structures are embedded across the school community. The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based, structured professional collaborations.

Impact

Teachers have an integral role in all decisions supporting student learning. This has resulted in school-wide instructional coherence and increased student achievement for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to the school as evidenced by the fact that this review opened and closed with a large teacher team wanting to share the story of the school's formation. An important change was that teachers wanted to implement an instructional shift toward student ownership. They researched and selected the student centered Learning Culture philosophy currently in place today.
- Professional development is teacher generated, selected and supported. It involves cross-department inter-visitations, and visiting lab-sites in order to ensure curricular and pedagogical school-wide coherence. For example, in one teacher team meeting, the English Language Arts (ELA) team was discussing how the Physics and Earth Science teachers were giving them feedback on their lessons and how they were planning the implementation of the instructional shifts. When asked how the science team can provide feedback to the ELA team, the ELA team stated cross-department feedback is to ensure that the lessons and objectives are clear and easily understood by students. They believe that the science team gives them a clean perspective on their lessons. Additionally, since they use a protocol for how lessons are prepared and delivered, they can give each other feedback aligned to the protocol. Both teams also shared that giving each other feedback strengthens the Learning Culture protocols for each team and it is adopted school-wide.
- Departments meet weekly and use a Looking at Student Work (LASW) protocol to analyze and format records, Curriculum Based Measures (CBMS), pre-tests/post-tests, and synthesis narratives, in order to determine student need and refine curricula accordingly. As a result of looking at student work and data, 25% of students, including sub groups, who were 3 or more grade levels below national reading standards in the fall of 2015 are now on or above grade level standards in January 2016.
- The principal stated that "School-Wide Academic Interventions" has strengthened teachers' instructional practice. In this forum, teachers work with administrators and guidance counselors to look at student data to create a Workout Plan for each student, a minimum of four times a year. The data analyzed includes the student transcript, attendance records, credit accumulation, DRP and CBM data, Regents pass needs, and where applicable, behavioral or social-emotional needs.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula. The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects.

Impact

The school-wide assessment practices result in clear adjustments to instruction and provide all students with meaningful feedback and a clear portrait of student mastery. Although the school tracks data and students are making progress, disaggregated data is only available at the end of the semester.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses several common assessments to track student progress. The school administers the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), a nationally normed literacy diagnostic three times per school year to measure students' literacy growth. Students complete a written Curriculum-Based Measure (CBMs) across each content area to measure growth in literacy, writing fluency, content knowledge and vocabulary on a monthly basis. Within their classes, students complete a monthly Responsibility Team Self-Survey (RTSS) to provide their peers with performance feedback on their behavior and its impact on group process. This has resulted in school wide credit accumulation and promotion from grade to grade. For example, in grade 9 the student pass rate is 93.2% up from 60%. With regard to the CBM, recently one class moved from below the bottom 10th% to above the 50th% over the course of one year. Since disaggregated data is only available at the end of the semester more detailed understanding of each student's performance is not available thus preventing more specific student supports to be provided.
- Students are provided with various tools such as rubrics and checklists that provide them defined expectations for scholarly behavior, expectations for group work and a clear picture of mastery for the contents. For example, a "Breach Resolver" a school based worksheet where students pose their questions, guides the expectation for the "breach" or questioning, for the research to be done and for the practice to which students are held accountable. This is accompanied by the unit plan, peer feedback and the "Breach Resolver" rubric where students receive points for the "breach" or question, the resolution, and the practice. Similarly, there is Target Math rubrics, and rubrics for preparing a brief. Students are charged with working both individually and as a team. In one class, students were observed in a huddle providing each other with feedback on the quality of the research question being explored. In another class students were giving a peer feedback on engaging the reader's interest and about the validity of the research.
- During student interviews, students shared that meaningful feedback is given and received in all aspects of student life at the school from proper academic behavior to feedback on content and on thinking. There are numerous checklists and rubrics that guide their work and they receive feedback from peers and from teachers. Students believe that one of the most meaningful forms of feedback is peer feedback related to on-going research, projects and essays using the school's many rubrics. They stated that peer feedback is honest and helps push student thinking and leads to refinement in work products and their thinking.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and content standards. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and academic tasks.

Impact

Students are prepared for career and college readiness through direct interface with the common core standards. All students including ELLS and students with disabilities demonstrate their thinking as a result of their work with rigorous academic tasks.

Supporting Evidence

- Through a curriculum tool called “student facing maps” students interface directly with the Common Core Learning Standards in all subjects. These maps list the standards being studied and the instructional shifts. They include lesson inventories, and standards’ checklists that cover the entire scope of the Common Core Learning Standards across all subjects. Students examine multiple standards for the same topic because classes are multi-grades. For example, a unit on United States History and Government listed various topics such as, the expansion of slavery and the America Civil War, the end of Slavery and the limits of the Reconstruction period. This unit listed all the vocabulary and key academic terms needed for understanding the content and to be used in the grade appropriate end of unit writing assignment.
- Across all disciplines, students are required to engage in close reading through a protocol called *Unison Reading* (UR) where students engage with domain-specific complex texts central to the instruction. During Unison students are supposed to read chorally paying close attention to the language. Students are asked to list words and phrases that are breached during UR and explain the different levels of understanding achieved. Tasks require that students read from various sources and annotate all texts including mathematics and prepare class discussion notes and “briefs”. These ‘briefs’ exam both the content, the instructional shifts and the standards in preparation for rigorous text based conversations that address both the conceptual understanding on the topic, and how the standards informs the topic. In Mathematics, tasks focus on concepts prioritized by the standards as well as foundational skills.
- Mathematical concepts are studied through a process called “breach resolver”. This “breach resolver” requires students to understand the standard, the mathematical concepts and provide an explanation. Students use diagrams and labels to demonstrate understanding of the skill and standard, as well as, mastery through getting a certain portion of examples correct. A recent “breach resolver” required that all students including ELLs and students with disabilities, provide explanations for their thinking, connections to the language of the standards and provide correct answers for 20 or more problems related to each concept.

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate a uniform and well-defined set of high expectations to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that systematically communicates a unified set of high expectations for all students and provide clear guidance to students and their families.

Impact

A mutually inclusive culture of high expectations and accountability exists where all members work together to support student ownership of learning and student academic progress assuring students are prepared for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate high expectations to staff around instructional and student learning outcomes through regular and school-wide use of the Learning Cultures rubrics, which are aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. The school website provides complete transparency into curriculum, pedagogy, assessment practices, and school-wide policies. It includes the staff handbook, which provides students and parents' access to all subject websites, school policies and grading practices. The principal meets weekly with lead teachers on the Steering Committee where the teacher prepares a form with priorities and actions. The principal writes a weekly newsletter to the staff about school-wide trends in observations and professionalism. These protocols have resulted in a culture of mutual accountability. Teachers rely on these observations and their meetings with the principal and each other as the basis for professional development and the adjustment of school norms.
- Students are aware of their academic progress and next instructions steps through the 1:1 Work Plan that is developed for each student that looks at all academic data towards graduation and career and college readiness. A 'Gold Team' is in place where staff, including a college counselor, meets weekly with parents and students who are off track and may not graduate on time.
- Students play an integral role in holding each other accountable for successful academic behavior. All students are trained on how to use the NYC Code of Conduct ("Blue Book") to identify their responsibilities. Leadership is exhibited by peer mentors called "Keepers of the Culture" (KOC) who provide student centered behavioral interventions. Students help to identify students they feel are not exhibiting academic drive in class or those with social behaviors that impede learning. "Keepers of the Culture" hold counsel with peers identified as needing intervention. In this student led conversation, peer mentors support the student in examining social or academic behaviors that may be impeding full participation in class. KOC assist in the development of Promise Cards that outline ways the student will promise to change behaviors. At a student meeting students were asked why they participate in this process. One student said, "Look at rule #23, it is about us showing leadership by being responsible for fellow students." A grade 9 student added, "When I got here I had a poor attitude and did not care. I was failing my classes. Some of the students sitting here are KOC and helped me. I have changed my attitude and know that I am responsible for my own learning and I am doing well." All the students present then shared their plans for college and how this process will help them.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. Student work products and discussions reflect high levels of student thinking.

Impact

The use of the Learning Culture philosophy results in students being at the center of their own learning and engaging in high-level discussions reflecting student inquiry and ownership.

Supporting Evidence

- In an English Language Arts class students were engaged in Unison Reading and read the article on the Food Industry aloud. After the first paragraph, one student had a question he wanted to “breach”. His question was about Monte Santo being referenced in the article. He proceeded to tell others in his group that he wanted to deliberately stop there because by the tone of the article it appeared that this name was an authority. Others agreed. One student used his cell phone to research the name and shared that this was a company that supported genetically modified foods and promoted them as safe. One student then stated that if this person had a financial interest then the article was prejudiced and they had better read the article more carefully because it had a bias.
- In a Global History class, students were involved in preparing their briefs for group conversation and the final essay. This class was using the peer feedback session for briefs that is standard in English Language Arts and is only now being used in social studies. One student stood in front of her group and began to make a presentation on Feudalism. She kept repeating that the Feudalism system involved a lot of hard work with little leisure. One of the students gave her feedback stating that she never explained what Feudalism was or what was its purpose and cited the checklist protocol for preparing briefs. Another student stated that while she heard the viewpoint being stated that this brief did not seem to be positioned to become an argumentative essay and the student should think about the point and counter point to be presented.
- In a Geometry class students sat with the math common core standard in front of them and they were deconstructing the understanding and the skill and connecting it to the math problem they were looking at and deciding if the math problem created opportunities to see and understand the elements of the standard. One student stated that she understood that the standard involved dependent and independent variables and their relationship to each other. Another student isolated the variables in the math problem and then shared that they should all focus on doing the problem and taking notice of the changes to those two variables through the solution. When asked why they asked all those questions and did not solve the problem, one student stated, “How can I be responsible for knowing this math standard if I don’t understand it or why it is important? I need to understand this, so that I can understand all of the other lessons. If I understand how this math works together, I can pass the Regents and be prepared for college.”