



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**Urban Assembly Gateway School for Technology**

**High School M507**

**439 West 49<sup>th</sup> Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10019**

**Principal: April Mckoy**

**Date of review: May 18, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

## The School Context

Urban Assembly Gateway School for Technology is a high school with 471 students from grade 9 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 11% Asian, 29% Black, 51% Hispanic, and 6% White students. The student body includes 2% English Language Learners and 18% students with disabilities. Boys account for 79% of the students enrolled and girls account for 21%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 89.6%.

## 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>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</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>Additional Findings</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>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based collaborations that strengthen school-wide practices and promote the Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams analyze key elements of their practice and assessment data for students they share.

### Impact

The work of teacher teams results in school-wide instructional coherence, increased student achievement for all learners, and mastery of goals for groups of students.

### Supporting Evidence

- During the school's weekly Power Academy professional learning, all teams look at student work, at progress for students they share, or at students who have not yet met learning targets. Teachers receive feedback and fine-tune their practices to increase student performance. For example, during the English Language Arts team meeting a teacher presented data reflecting an 80% increase in her seniors' progress in writing with authenticity because of their use of *Turnitin*, and more one-on-one conferencing. The teacher then posited her focus question regarding improving students' use of transition words to link evidence and ideas. Colleagues suggested that to reach college readiness, students might need a bank of transition phrases and words. It was also agreed that the team would model the use of transition words in class discussions for added exposure.
- Teachers present practice to their team colleagues ten times a year using a tuning protocol to get feedback on their practice. For example, in department minutes reviewed, a science teacher presented a body system task that yielded poor results. In the ensuing discussion, teachers recognized that in asking students to explore all of the body functions independently there was a missed opportunity for students to become experts on one or two and learn about others from each other. Another teacher shared that a task to design a unique building structure resulted in students either not using time wisely or restarting their work several times. Although the teacher thought students needed time for discovering techniques, after the team's feedback he realized the necessity for students to receive ongoing feedback and a rubric for self-assessment, thus, ensuring less variability in student engagement. As a result of this protocol and teachers providing feedback to each other to improve instruction, teachers discussed the improvements they made. One teacher pointed out that this also had an impact on her students' progress in research writing; 19 of 23 seniors met the long-term target for originality in research writing. This included students with disabilities and English Language Learners.
- In addition to departments presenting problems of practice, teachers also analyze and present interim assessment data to their teams to identify misconceptions such as subtracting numbers without consulting reference tables, or vocabulary confusion. Teams then develop re-teaching plans, or agree to visit each other's classroom to "hold ourselves accountable." Additionally, the guidance team provides data on the bottom 30 students to all teams, resulting in teachers mentoring two students from this group. One teacher shared that this adds a "human touch."

## Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

### Findings

Across classrooms teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into curricula for most learners, and student work products reflect high levels of student thinking.

### Impact

Most students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks, however, less consistent were equitable levels of student thinking and participation.

### Supporting Evidence

- In most classrooms visited students collaborated in predetermined groups indicated on all lessons plans. For example in an algebra class, students were grouped based on prior Regents' questions to practice solving problems relative to evaluating functions. Several students checked in with each other prior to asking the teacher for help. In one group, when a student proposed a solution, his peer asked "How would we show the work, should we rewrite the table or just annotate it?" However, several students reached out to the teacher for help first, or worked independent of their group. In a science class where the group task was to arrange a set of species images chronologically to reflect the evolution process, only one or two students took charge, while others observed.
- In a history class students engaged in rounds to present what they learned after researching a political system such as Iran under Khomeini or China under the rule of Tse-tung. The task to share research engaged most learners, provided opportunities for students to ask each other clarifying questions, and offered support for the culminating task to compare two political systems in an essay. However, due to pacing there was a missed opportunity for students to synthesize or discuss each presentation.
- In an English class students shared their research papers in roundtable discussions. To highlight the skills needed to engage in high-level discussions, students first read the article, *Survey: Most Profs Find High School Grads Unready for College or Work*. The teacher noted that this surfaced two skills necessary for college-level discussions, teamwork, and verbal communication. Students were then grouped by topic and ability level, and extensions were indicated on the lesson plan for targeted students though not in evidence during the portion of the lesson observed. The topic's relevance inspired lively discussions, and some students grounded their ideas in textual evidence. Less consistent were all students participating equally, or pushing each other's thinking, during discussions of their research topics ranging from school shootings to cloning. However, in a twelfth grade English class, the teacher exemplified claim and counterclaim by asking students to stand near the most compelling evidence to support whether or not the Central Park Five were deprived of their rights. This process resulted in students calling on each other to sway his or her viewpoint, and prepared the students for the ensuing discussion regarding the greatest impact on a person, race, class, or gender. One student noted that this case had nothing to do with gender, and another offered, "Race and gender have nothing to do with class." All students actively participated in these small group discussions.

## Additional Findings

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

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula.

### Impact

Curricula and tasks across grades and subjects promote college and career readiness and are embedded in a coherent way so that all learners, including English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and higher performers, demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- Curricula tasks provide students with relevant contexts for research, presentations, and writing. For example, an algebra task requires students to calculate the costs of investing in a car. Students create a four-year action plan for purchasing a car based on a credit score, factors that influence a credit rating, and the impact this score has on interest rates. Students write responses to prompts such as, “If the bank allows the person to make higher monthly payments, how could this be a benefit?” Students also conduct online research to determine the three most affordable cars given what they learned, and present their research, calculations, and analysis in a financial gallery. Additionally, for a science Common Core aligned research task (CCART) students research the bonding patterns of atoms, choose and create a three-dimensional model of a molecule after researching how atoms form molecules, and similar to the algebra CCART, this study culminates in research writing.
- The school emphasizes a four-year curriculum grounded in reading, writing, speaking, and in-depth CCART’s across grades and content areas. Writing demands begin in freshman year where students write two narrative essays, four argumentative pieces, and complete a four to five-page research paper utilizing the *Modern Language Association* (MLA) format. The writing tasks and research work increase in rigor each year. Therefore, by junior year students write three argumentative papers and three literary analysis pieces, and a six- to eight-page research paper that culminates in a student-led Ted Talk regarding Martin Luther King Jr.’s and Malcom X’s activism. Students write, debate, and present speeches derived from what they learned. Seniors create a proposal for their senior research paper that includes an annotated bibliography on a topic related to race or politics. Additionally, freshmen composed argument essays to convince Chancellor Farina whether or not students should study Shakespeare. Such research writing across content areas ensures that all Gateway students are amply prepared for college or career, and resulted in 71% of this year’s senior class achieving college readiness in English Language Arts (ELA) with an average score of 84.2%.
- In an ELA CCART argument essay, students defend or refute Americans right to bear arms. To gather evidence, students view several videos such as Michael Moore’s *A Brief History of the USA–Bowling for Columbine*, and President Obama’s statement after the shooting in Oregon, examine political cartoons representing multiple perspectives, read texts that offer arguments for both sides, and review a time-line of gun rights in America before formulating a claim and defending it.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress toward goals across grades and subjects. Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

### Impact

As a result of teachers tracking student progress and adjusting curricula, all students demonstrate increased mastery, and are aware of their next learning steps.

### Supporting Evidence

- All curricula documents reviewed reflected the school's consistent use of formative assessments. For example, in a math class, students posted questions such as "How do you know if a table is a function?" on a chart paper marked "parking lot." At the close of the work period, the teacher returned to the questions to ensure understanding. The two exit ticket problems checked student mastery of the lesson's learning target, evaluating functions for whether they are explicit or recursive. Students explained their reasoning, "This is recursive because you need the prior answer to find the new one." The lesson plan also indicated the students who received targeted support with the start-up task based on the prior lesson's formative assessment. Additionally, all students self-assess their work using a rubric-aligned checklist before submitting and reflect upon their learning after all summative assessments.
- In a chemistry class as students worked collaboratively on double replacement reactions, the teacher recorded students' questions on the interactive white board such as "Do we determine soluble or insoluble?" This enabled the teacher to adjust instruction on the spot to address misconceptions as they arose, and to provide feedback to students so that they understood their next steps. At the close of the work period, the teacher assessed student mastery of the day's learning target with *Plicker* cards and 100% of the students reached mastery. Additionally, as a result of ongoing checks for understanding and the consistency with which the guidance team tracks students' learning target progress on the online grading platform, a minimum of 100 students who have not met daily learning targets get support in the school's Goal Oriented Learning Development (GOLD) class embedded in the school day. Students also meet with teachers over lunch to create "Collaborative Problem Solving Plans." Eighty percent of students who participated in this "lunch with their teacher" are on track for advancing to their next grade.
- The fall administration of the school's common reading assessment, Degrees of Reading Progress, (DRP), surfaced that many ninth grade students were reading below grade level. The information attained on individual student's text levels provided teachers the information necessary for leveling texts and grouping students strategically by skill or reading level. This was in evidence across classrooms and in curricula documents. The DRP data was also one of the factors in the school's decision to offer a Gateway to Literacy class to move students' reading levels over two years. As a result of this targeted work 16% of ninth graders moved from below- to on-grade level, the percentage of ninth grade students who were on or above grade level in the fall increased from 28% to 37% midyear, and although 82% of tenth graders were below grade level in the fall, by mid-year that number decreased to 69%.

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all staff and provide professional learning to meet expectations. All staff systematically communicates high expectations to all students.

### Impact

The entire staff contributes to a culture of mutual accountability for meeting expectations, and students, including high-need subgroups, are prepared for their next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- The Gateway Instructional Guide embodies the school leaders' expectations for curricula and instruction. The guide offers all teachers the necessary tools to meet the school's instructional emphasis on authentic literacy, engagement, and rigor, and is grounded in the research methods espoused in Schmoker's *Focus* and Marzano's *Designing Learning Targets*. The guide offers protocols, activities, and steps for mapping targets, utilizing Webb's *Depth of Knowledge* wheel. Additionally, the school's Power Academy provides a forum during which teachers engage in workshops targeted to areas of interest, need, or as a result of observation trends. The professional learning calendar, created by the instructional cabinet, indicates the myriad workshops available to all teachers, and all presentations are memorialized via a running Google document to serve as an ongoing resource for all teachers who hold themselves accountable for meeting expectations.
- In order to support students with meeting college level expectations and to keep them from taking remedial courses in college, teachers provide individualized support for struggling algebra students in Gateway to Numeracy classes. In addition to the targeted work in math practices, students get support with organization, and scaffolds to ensure engagement in higher-order thinking. Forty seven percent of the students are students with disabilities, however, their Algebra pass rates have moved from 60% in the first marking period to 92% in marking period four. All students receive academic counseling from a guidance counselor, and seniors partner with a "graduation guardian" in a College Knowledge class. The guardian provides additional support throughout the college process, and helps students set goals and meet deadlines. Teachers also hold themselves responsible for the success of their mentees. For example, one parent shared that her son's teacher provided ongoing guidance throughout the interviewing process for a four-year, full tuition scholarship; he was awarded the scholarship. Additionally, 90.8% of ninth graders, 89% of tenth graders, and 88.6% of eleventh graders, are on track to move to the next level.
- The school offers all students multiple ways to achieve college and career readiness and to meet or exceed academic expectations. The GOLD program provides a venue for all students to either get support with meeting learning targets, or, for students who are exceeding targets, to engage in additional extension activities in a small group setting. Gateway to Literacy classes target reading, writing, and speaking skills, to ensure success toward meeting the school's rigorous literacy expectations. Advisory classes prepare students for college beginning in freshman year, and by junior year the school's eleventh grade counselor serves as their college advisor. Additionally, students with disabilities attend Advanced Placement classes. To date 72% of eleventh grade students with disabilities are enrolled in Chemistry, and 89% of twelfth grade students with disabilities are enrolled in either Physics or Algebra II/Trigonometry.