



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**Urban Science Academy**

**Middle School X325**

**1000 Teller Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10456**

**Principal: Patrick Kelly**

**Date of review: May 10, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Daisy Concepción**

## The School Context

Urban Science Academy is a middle school with 293 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 29% Black, 68% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 35% English Language Learners and 25% students with disabilities. Boys account for 58% of the students enrolled and girls account for 42%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 90.0%.

## 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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Developing</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>Focus</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</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>Developing</b>

## Area of Celebration

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

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured professional collaborations that are loosely connected to school goals. Teacher teams analyze assessment data and student work for students they share.

### Impact

The use of the inquiry approach is developing across teams and, while teachers analyze student work, this has not yet resulted in improved teacher practice or progress towards goals for students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet weekly to look at student work to plan instruction or plan upcoming units. In one meeting, teachers used a protocol to look at a mid-unit assessment from a literary unit involving the use of figurative language. Teachers listed some of the observations about student work. One of the observations that they made was about the level of concrete thinking that they were seeing demonstrated in the student samples. In particular, they found that many English Language Learners (ELLs) struggled with this task the most. Teachers stated that this was because ELL students lacked the vocabulary to understand or express figurative or abstract ideas. They stated that while the students could often identify evidence for their writing, they were unable to explain it or they were unable to go beyond the literal observations. For example, while reading Shel Silverstein's poem *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, students literally thought of the road ending. As a result of this discussion, the teachers decided that they would include more visuals as a scaffold to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all learners.
- Teachers shared that there is a structured protocol for visiting each other as part of observational rounds that is led by the school coach. They shared that this is a new procedure that is part districtwide expectations to have teachers look at each other's practice. Teachers shared that they have completed several cycles of observations focusing on looking at delivery of lessons. These intervisitations are planned and facilitated by the school coach who observes teachers informally and provides them with suggestions. A review of the notes from these rounds demonstrates that the rounds focus on a problem of practice. The notes reveal that teachers present their problem of practice with each other and they problem solve, however, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that this has impacted teacher practice.
- Teachers shared that looking at student work is a protocol that was introduced in a workshop in January. Another newly adopted practice across the school was the use of a teacher-centered graphic organizer called the *Analysis of Work*. Teachers use this at the end of units. They stated that this allowed them to group students into the categories of far below standards, approaching standards, meeting standard and exceeding standards. When asked how this had impacted their instructional practices, they stated that this allowed them to see who needed scaffolds.

## Area of Focus

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

School leaders inconsistently communicate high expectations on professionalism and instruction to staff. Teacher teams and staff are not developing feedback systems and guidance or advisement supports to help prepare students for the next level.

### Impact

As a result, staff do not have a clear focus on the school's expectations on instruction and students are not consistently supported on their path toward the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- In the leadership meeting, the principal shared a list of goals that included increasing rigor, looking at data, improving teacher teams, as well as increasing checks for understanding and student engagement in challenging tasks that “require students to burn more calories than teachers.” However, there was no detailed information about how these goals were going to be implemented at the school. A review of memos and communications with teachers focused on issues such as arrival and dismissal times, uniform policy, attendance plan, social, emotional and at-risk services, and various professional development articles. In a teacher meeting, teachers stated that the school was focused on increasing rigor and improving differentiation, but they were unable to share how they were implementing this in their lessons or pedagogy.
- Observations are aligned with the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. A review of observations reveals that teachers are provided with anecdotal feedback that reference tasks, rigor and student conversations. These observations do not reference a school focus or goal nor do they provide teachers with clear next steps for improvement. For example, one observation read, “Please review your submitted lesson plan. I appreciate that the standards are explicit and applaud the prepared grouping. However, I am concerned with the absence of rigor.” The observation goes on to say “Please review the supporting materials I shared today” and it ends with “I’ll be back within a week to see what steps you are taking to advance on this front.”
- While a review of documents demonstrates that the school distributed high school applications as well as flyers on preparing for specialized high schools, there was limited information for students about how to proceed with this process. During a meeting with students, one student stated that she had wanted to go to a specialized high school but did not know how to apply for the exam. She then added that it no longer mattered because she had changed her mind about attending a specialized high school. When asked why, she stated that even if she had been told how to apply she would not have been able to attend since she had never received preparation for such a rigorous exam. Other students stated that while they had received the high school applications, they had been provided with limited directions and limited supports. Many students had not been accepted into the high school of their first choice and did not understand how they had been matched with another high school.

## Additional Findings

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

Across classrooms, teaching strategies inconsistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula. Student work products and discussions reflect uneven levels of student thinking.

### Impact

As result, student engagement is uneven and a lack of challenging tasks limits opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- In an English Language Arts (ELA) class students read the first chapter of *The Pearl* silently. The objective on the board read, “To gain an understanding of the relationship between the setting and the major characters at the beginning of the story.” In a conversation with students, they stated that this novel had been introduced to them more than a week ago, but this was interrupted by preparations for the state exam. They stated they had walked into class and had been instructed to read the first chapter and write a summary. Students read silently while two teachers walked up and down the aisles. There were no scaffolds visible and no student discussions.
- In an Integrated Co-Teaching class on civil rights, students practiced annotating a text with the goal of completing a graphic organizer and writing a summary about an important figure in the Civil Rights Movement. The teacher used a document camera to model her annotations in her writer’s notebook. She showed the students how she had underlined the most important ideas, used a question mark next to a confusing idea, annotated with the letters BK for background knowledge, and used emoticons or other symbols for ideas that she liked. She then had the students engage in partner reading. While there were many scaffolds and directions in this lesson, students were unable to complete the graphic organizer given to them. Many students sat in front of blank organizers waiting for the teacher’s help.
- In an ELA class the teacher provided students with directions in both Spanish and in English for reading the poem *The Delight Song of the Tsoai-talee*. The objective on the board read, “Students will learn that imagery in poetry is when a poet uses their description to access the senses of the reader.” The poem was available in both Spanish and English to students. The teacher directed students to read the poem and pick their favorite line. Students were observed discussing the poems with their partners. When asked in Spanish what were the images that had the greatest impact on them, students went to the poem, lifted a line and explained how the sensory details impacted them. For example, one student stated that the line “I am a feather on the bright sky” created an image of an open expanse of the sky and a feeling of freedom. Another student selected the line “I am the shadow that follows a child” and said that this line made her feel that one is never really alone. Another student explained the line “I am the glitter on the crust of the snow” reminded her of how the snow sparkles and sometimes makes rainbows on the surface on crisp days. While the teacher went around to groups asking them to write down their favorite line, he did not listen to the rich conversations in order to continue to push student thinking.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### **Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics that are loosely aligned with the school's curricula. The school is developing in their use of common assessments to measure student progress.

### **Impact**

There is limited feedback to both students and teachers regarding student achievement and the use of common assessments has not yet resulted in effective adjustments to curricula or instruction.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- In a science class the rubric attached to a worksheet measured vocabulary use, understanding of scientific concepts, as well as whether or not explanations are accurate. However, teacher feedback referenced additional criteria that had not been made explicit to the students, such as including a variety of evidence, thus limiting the student's ability to demonstrate this understanding. In addition, lack of actionable feedback limits student understanding of how to move towards mastery in regards to the other rubric indicators.
- Much of the student work that was shared during a student meeting did not have a rubric or teacher feedback. Students stated that while a rubric was referenced during the activity or lesson, they saw rubrics at the end when their work needed to be graded. For example, in one classroom, students worked on their essays independently with no criteria for their work at their table. A review of their student work folder in the back of the room revealed a clean, blank copy of the essay rubric in each of the student folders. Students stated that they believe that not having rubrics available to them while they work on their essay or activities is intentional in order to increase the rigor at the school. One student stated that the school does this in order to see how well they can remember the rubric and apply it to their work.
- The school is still in the process of developing their assessment practices. There is inconsistency in how the school uses data from common assessments. For example, while teachers use the *Analysis of Work* graphic organizer to list student performance after end of unit exams, in many classes they have not yet determined what adjustments or scaffolds need to be in place to impact the data that they have collected. Additionally, the school receives analyzed data reports from the District Office. These reports provide the school with student performance data on key standards. While the data shows that students are at low proficiency rates in argument writing, a review of ELA units shows that there are minimal adjustments made to the units. For example, the adjustment in one unit listed at the bottom of a map was "to pull out students who need help." In another unit the adjustment was to add a graphic organizer that had a boxes for writing the quote, the topic sentence and the evidence. Similarly, in mathematics, the District report showed that only 11% of the grade 7 students were on level. A review of the data-adjusted lessons showed that the lesson was being repeated and the differentiation was for a group of students to watch a video tutorial.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Developing</b>
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### **Findings**

School leaders and faculty use curricula that are aligned with the Common Core Learning Standards and are in the process of integrating the instructional shifts. Academic tasks inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits.

### **Impact**

As a result, the instructional shifts that promote career and college readiness are not yet consistently reflected and there are missed opportunities for learners to develop higher-order skills.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The school recently adopted the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project for ELA. It uses *CMP3* as its math curriculum and the New York City Scope and Sequence for science and social studies.
- The task in a grade 6 lesson on weather and climate is for students to identify their favorite season. While this unit plan cites Common Core Learning Standards such as citing specific textual evidence to support analysis and writing an explanatory text to examine and convey complex ideas, the lesson plan only calls for students to watch a video and work with a partner to identify their favorite season. Follow-up lessons have students work with partners to fill in the blanks in a cloze paragraph about weather, complete a graphic organizer on weather and complete a Venn diagram. There was no evidence of texts or a task that required students to produce an essay.
- In a grade 8 social studies lesson, students are introduced to various Civil Rights leaders such as Malcolm X. This lesson is aligned to the instructional shift of close reading as it requires students to look at excerpts of speeches from John F. Kennedy, John Lewis, and Malcolm X to identify the most important detail from the text. However, the focus of the lesson is on the process of annotating and not on how using annotation helps the reader collect information about the text.