Quality Review Report

2016-2017

The Urban Assembly Academy of Government and Law
High School 02M305
350 Grand St.
Manhattan
NY 10002

Principal: Alison Breedy

Dates of Review:
January 5, 2017 - January 6, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Adam Breier
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School


School Quality Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Core</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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 Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### School Culture

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

**To what extent does the school...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Evaluate the quality of school-level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
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### Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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**Findings**

Structures are in place so that each student is known well by at least one adult. The school community strategically aligns professional development (PD), family outreach, and student learning experiences and supports.

**Impact**

Personalized interventions, routines, celebrations and supports help students learn positive behaviors and result in the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Grade teams meet at the beginning of the year to assign groups of students to specific teachers. These teachers provide individualized attendance and academic support through regular contact with assigned students and their families. Teachers utilize an online platform to ensure that when students’ families are called, a wide variety of class-specific student information can be shared. Review of the family contact log maintained for all students reveals that in addition to comments about attendance and behavior are classroom-specific anecdotes. For example, one comment reads “can be a little too talkative, but also a very active participant.” Other comments discuss students’ timely arrival, praise for students’ catching-up on late assignments, as well as information about a student’s struggles not only with math concepts, but also in her willingness to share her struggles and take advantage of available supports such as tutoring.

- Grade teams also conduct kid talk sessions. At these meetings, all grade team members meet with a student and review that student’s attendance and behavior. In partnership with the student, grade teams use a protocol to guide their discussion around analysis of students’ strengths, areas of concern, the frequency of those concerns, and strategies that have worked in the past. The resulting action plans are then revisited at follow-up sessions during which up-to-date attendance and behavior are assessed and goals appropriately adjusted or modified. Analysis of kid talk session protocols and notes reveal conversations around students’ lack of focus, in-class cell phone use, and procrastination. Some examples of growth strategies are developing relationships, use of a calendar for time management, and speaking with the school’s social worker and guidance staff.

- The school community has implemented the BEVITAL initiative around promoting students’ effective academic and personal behaviors. BEVITAL stands for Behavior, Effort, Value, Initiative, Team player, Attitude, and Language. Students earn Breedy Bucks for a variety of positive behaviors such as improving attendance, taking leadership roles, returning lost property, earning student of the month, taking initiative, and earning high or improved grades. Students can periodically spend their Breedy Bucks on events such as trips to Broadway shows, admission to a buffet of teacher-prepared meals, mini-golf, and visits to a nail salon. All students at both student meetings shared not only the amount of Breedy Bucks they had already so far this school year, but also identified some high-priced menu items they hoped to purchase, inspiring them to work towards earning as many Breedy Bucks as possible. This initiative has been supported by presentations to families and students at assemblies and after-school presentations. PD sessions for teachers have included analyses of school culture data, goal setting, as well as deep conversations about all aspects of the BEVITAL initiative. One student reported and all present agreed, “Breedy Bucks have made all behavior better across the board!”
Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs that students learn best when students are cognitively engaged in activities that require them to explain their thinking, support claims with evidence, and have meaningful discussions with other students. Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Students across classrooms produce meaningful work products, though in some cases there are missed opportunities for students to engage in student-to-student discussions and deepen their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching consistently engaged students in challenging material, requiring them to think deeply and support their responses with evidence. During a grade eleven English lesson, students were asked which sex holds more power in society during a discussion of *Othello* and instructed to include evidence from the play to support their responses. Students supported their discussion of the benefits of selective breeding in a living environment class through identifying the value of seeing-eye dogs to aid the visually impaired and crops that are naturally resistant to insects. In a grade eleven U.S. History class, students explored the goals of W.E.B. Dubois, supporting their claims with textual evidence from the text *The Souls of Black Folk*. Further questions required that students explore W.E.B. Dubois' views on Booker T. Washington and support their findings with text-based evidence.

- In a grade ten English lesson, students were engaged in a Socratic seminar during which they conducted a discussion about the effects the main character had on other characters in the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Students in the inner circle conducted a discussion, supporting their claims with textual evidence, while students in the outer circle used information learned from the discussion as they answered worksheet questions. However, across all other classes there were either missed opportunities for student-to-student discussion or student discussion was teacher-directed. In an Earth science class, students were calculating the elliptical orbits of planets. The teacher answered two identical questions from students in different groups as to how a planet’s orbit should be calculated, instead of directing students to partners in their groups or to other students in another group. In a geometry class, the teacher elicited individual student responses to a question asking which careers make use of dilation and whether or not similar and congruent are the same. Additionally, a social studies teacher elicited individual responses to whether Winston Churchill was for or against appeasement of Nazi Germany.

- Across classrooms, teachers utilize a common strategy to differentiate supports so that all students can be engaged in challenging material. Teachers create what they call user guides that include a common text with vocabulary word definitions, paraphrases and questions designed so that students with different needs can reach the same lesson objectives. For example, students read *Othello* in a grade eleven English class and benefited from one of four user guides designed to ensure that all students would be able to make an argument as to whether or not women had power in the seventeenth century. Similarly, students in a Living Environment class used one of four user guides resulting in engagement in a lesson around determining the benefits and costs of selective breeding.
**Additional Finding**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and the instructional shifts. Curricula and tasks are planned and refined using student work and data.

**Impact**

Curricula promote college and career readiness for all students. Faculty members adjust materials through guides that make texts more accessible to the school's diversity of learners.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Curricular documents across grades and content areas evidence consistent alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards and the integration of the math instructional shifts. For example, a geometry lesson plan begins with a brief discussion of what happens when an eye doctor dilates a patient's eye. Students were then guided through a mini-lesson on the mathematics behind dilation as well as its different real world applications. In another unit, students are guided through an activity intended to deepen their understanding of triangles and determining their congruency by using a variety of methods.

- Curricular documents included assignments evidencing integration of the English Language Arts (ELA) instructional shifts. For example, a grade nine unit on the novel *Bait* includes multiple tasks for which students need to support answers to written questions with textual citations. The same is true for a grade nine unit covering *Of Mice and Men*. A grade eleven unit requires that students find evidence from both *Othello* and an article titled “The Role of Women in Othello: A Feminist Reading” in support of their argument as to whether or not women held any power in seventeenth century Europe. Additionally, reading materials in that unit represent an equal amount of information and literary texts.

- Across grades and content areas, curricula are planned and refined so that adverse learners have access to challenging materials through a common school-based tool called user guides. Teachers differentiate instructional texts by chunking the text, placing breaks in the text where the reader should pause and by inserting supports aligned for that section of text. These supports include vocabulary words, paraphrasing, vital textual statements, as well as leveled questions designed to increase in complexity and develop students' analysis of the text. Some examples of texts for which various leveled study guides have been created are an article about the roles of women in seventeenth century Europe, “The Souls of Black Folk,” by W.E.B. DuBois and Winston Churchill's October 5, 1938 speech to the House of Commons. Other examples of differentiated supports for students include a global studies lesson plan that includes additional vocabulary supports for each of the three classes in which the lesson would be delivered and a living environment unit supported by a transcript accompanying a video presentation as well as a user guide and leveled graphic organizers.
### Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics and checklists aligned with the school's curricula. School leaders and teachers use common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across grades and subject areas.

**Impact**

Teachers provide students with actionable feedback that students use to improve their work. Results from a reading level assessment administered across the school, as well as Regents exam data, are used to appropriately program students.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers use rubrics to rate personal and argumentative essays and provide actionable, written feedback to students. Some examples of feedback on students’ essays draw attention to the use of textual evidence to support of their arguments as well the depth of their analysis of that evidence and the development of clear thesis statements. Feedback offered to students in math concur that students answered a problem correctly but point out that they did not adequately explain the process taken that resulted in the correct answer. One example discusses how that student correctly identified two triangles as being congruent, but did not adequately explain the process used to arrive at that conclusion. One student reported that he is earning higher grades after his teacher offered both written and verbal feedback about how he could further strengthen his essay by writing a statement in the conclusion that is specifically linked back to the thesis statement. He said, “I’m getting much higher grades then before she sat with me!”

- In addition to the school’s use of disaggregated Regents exam data and performance assessment data, a reading level assessment is administered to students in grades nine through eleven three times throughout the course of the school year. A baseline is administered in September, a midpoint administration in December and there is a final administration in May. Data from these assessments was used to determine that grades nine and ten should be programmed for two class periods of English instruction, one devoted to reading and the other to writing. Additionally, the school has employed the use of an online reading program for all grade nine students during the day and in an after-school reading intervention program held during the first semester of the school year. Data from these assessments is also used to determine appropriate leveled texts to be utilized during classroom instruction as well as in the creation of targeted packets for the after-school and Saturday academic intervention programs.

- Data from the NYC Performance Assessment in ELA revealed that students are struggling with using evidence in support of argument essay writing. As a result, content area teacher teams are collaborating to create an argumentative writing rubric that can be used by all content area teachers. The grade nine math assessment was used to determine student placement in either a one or two-year Common Core algebra sequence. Mock algebra and geometry Regents exams are administered in January and in April. The results of these mock exams are used in making appropriate modifications to classroom instruction as well as in the creation of targeted learning plans for students in their academic intervention programs.
Additional Finding

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

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations and provide training to the entire staff. Teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning.

Impact

Communication and PD around high expectations results in a culture of mutual accountability. Grade level teams foster student ownership of high expectations through kid talk sessions.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders conduct frequent classroom observations and provide feedback utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching as the standard for professionalism and high quality instruction. Each rated item on classroom observation reports includes language from the Danielson Framework for Teaching rubric along with specific detailed evidence from the observed class to support the rating. Next steps for teacher improvement are included at the close of each observation report, often evidencing teacher growth. For instance, feedback in an English class observation advises the teacher to provide additional opportunities for student-to-student discussion. This recommendation is supported by review of the benefits of student discourse and specific strategies and resources to which the teacher should turn for further assistance. Another observation report includes feedback about increasing differentiated supports, specifically referencing the grade twelve reading-level article distributed to students in a grade nine class that included both English Language Learners (ELLs) and former ELLs. In addition to recommending lesson-planning strategies, two online resources were shared that assist teachers in scaffolding class texts.

- School leaders also communicate high expectations through a faculty handbook that contains information about the Danielson Framework for Teaching as well as sections connected to the different Framework for Teaching domains covering planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Some examples of handbook topics are unit and lesson planning, grading policy, and assessment and classroom expectations. Additionally, school leaders have provided PD sessions on the different Framework for Teaching domains. During PD sessions, school leaders facilitate a review of a targeted domain, analysis of a model through collaborative use of a protocol, and follow this with a discussion over the pros and cons of the analyzed model. For example, during a September 19 PD session, teachers reviewed lesson planning, analyzed a human rights lesson designed using the school’s lesson planning template, analyzed three pieces of student work that resulted from that lesson, and concluded this activity by sharing their findings as to the lesson’s effectiveness, suggestions for improvement, and thoughts about implementing this practice in their classrooms.

- Grade team kid talk sessions focus on students’ academic progress. At these meetings, all grade team members meet with a student and review that student’s academic progress. In partnership with the student, grade teams use a protocol to guide their discussion around analysis of students’ strengths, areas of concern, the frequency of those concerns, and strategies that may help. Students not only take part in the data analysis and action planning, they also record the notes from these meetings, as well as the steps that will be used to assess the action plan’s interventions. The resulting action plans are then revisited at a follow-up session during which up-to-date academic progress is measured against action plan goals which are then determined to be either met or strategies are revisited and adjusted as needed. Session notes reveal action plans that have students asking teachers for a greater variety of reading choices as well as well as considerations of new-seat requests and methods for increasing student focus.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote achievement of school goals and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards. Teacher teams consistently analyze data and student work for students they share.

Impact

Teachers' collaborations have strengthened their capacity in instructional design and delivery. Teacher team work has resulted in students’ reading level improvement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers have strengthened their instructional capacity through team collaborations. In one case, a teacher reported that as a result of a conversations about successful instructional strategies held during teacher team sessions and a subsequent intervisitation in which the implementation of a Socratic seminar was observed in action, the teacher is now beginning to implement student-to-student discussion protocols in her classes. In addition, other teachers reported that intervisitations resulting from teacher collaborations have resulted in an increase in implementation of formative assessment techniques, tools that increase students' writing, and questioning techniques.

- During the social studies teacher team meeting, teachers analyzed student work for the purpose of assessing students' writing progress as well as offering constructive criticism to regarding the task and how it might be improved. Analysis revealed further evidence of a schoolwide trend that students are providing evidence more successfully than they had before. However, students are not sufficiently analyzing that evidence. Teachers then devised a list of strategies, among them the use of sentence starters and a modified checklist that they would individually employ. The results these purposefully implemented strategies would be discussed at the next team meeting for the purpose of constructing a department action plan toward the goal of increasing students’ capacity for analyzing the evidence they provide in support of their written arguments.

- All teacher teams have analyzed data resulting from the common reading level assessment employed at the school. Using this data, each team has employed strategies designed to focus instruction, in all content areas, on their respective content areas while also infusing reading improvement strategies. As a result of this teacher team work, 68 percent of the students who scored in the well below reading level (WBRL) subgroup as a result of the benchmark assessment scored an increase in their reading level as determined by the winter assessment. Of the 68 percent of students who saw an increase in reading level, 64 percent saw an increase in grade by two points. Additionally, sixteen students’ reading level scores resulted in their moving up one category from WBGL to the somewhat below grade level (SWBGL) subgroup. Seven students’ reading levels resulted in their placement in the on grade level (OGL) subgroup. Assessment results reveal similar trends for grade ten students.