Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts
High school 05M369
509 West 129th St.
Manhattan
NY 10027

Principal: Meghan McMahon

Dates of Review:
February 28, 2017 - March 1, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Clarence Williams Jr.
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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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does the school...</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<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>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</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>Additional Finding</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</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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</table>

## 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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator: 1.4 Positive Learning Environment  
Rating: Proficient

Findings
The school uses advisory and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) to build a positive school culture and to ensure that teachers and students are communicating with each other to address social-emotional concerns. Systems are in place to meet the social-emotional needs of students on a one-to-one basis.

Impact
Students and teachers have mutual respect for each other and students’ voices and opinions are valued. School staff uses advisory to ensure that students are known on an individual basis.

Supporting Evidence

- The school community began an advisory initiative called Resilient Scholars. Through advisory, every student has one adult that they can go to for support and advisement. This advisory program allows for students to express themselves in areas of academics, behavioral and social-emotional issues. Advisory meetings are held Monday through Friday for all students. The principal has stated the advisory program gives students an opportunity to share thoughts, ideas and discuss social issues in a small, safe setting with their teachers without being judged by their peers. During a student interview, a student stated, “Through advisory everyone knows your name because teachers have an opportunity to see all students in a small setting.” When asked about some of the topics covered in advisory, one student stated that he discussed the presidential elections and what it would mean to him personally. Another student stated, “Advisory is important because the teachers support us in our everyday lives.” Advisory also serves as a tier one intervention for students struggling in core instructional areas. A teacher stated that advisory allowed her to work with students who are struggling and need more academic support.

- The school leadership initiated the Urban Assembly School for Performing Arts ambassador program. This program requires students to represent the school during student recruitment fairs, fundraisers and open houses for new students and families. Each perspective ambassador fills out a form that requires him or her to explain the job responsibilities required by the program and learn the school’s rules and regulations. For example, one student wrote, “I have to be prepared and involved, to be responsible and kind. If I need help I will talk to my teachers.” One example of an ambassador event involved ambassadors being tasked with articulating the mission of the school and answering questions from incoming students and parents at a fall open house.

- Students have a voice in key decision-making. Two students serve on the School Leadership Team (SLT). In addition, students from the SLT participated in creating the goals for the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). Grade twelve students also requested adding theater tech and psychology to the course offerings and these subjects were added to the master schedule for this school year. One student explained that there was a need for theater tech because this was a career field that some students wanted to pursue and the principal understood and respected this need, then approved the addition of this course.
Findings
Unit and lesson plans demonstrate inconsistent supports for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs) and do not always include strategies to encourage cognitive engagement.

Impact
The needs of ELLs and students with disabilities are represented inconsistently in areas of differentiation, multiple entry points and scaffolds in unit and lesson plans.

Supporting Evidence

- In some classes, teachers use differentiated instruction to support students with disabilities and ELLs. A grade ten global studies unit included the Common Core Learning Standard of citing textual evidence to support a claim. The unit stated that students would be participating in a Socratic Seminar. The unit has a section for differentiation and integrated co-teaching (ICT). The section that describes differentiation strategies states that teachers will use talking stems in order to support students with processing delays and to increase participation in general. The ICT section states that one teacher will work with the students sitting in the outer circle of the Socratic seminar and one will work with students from the inner circle. Although the lesson provides an example of differentiation and the collaboration of the teachers, it does not provide scaffolds to assist students in the lesson or demonstrates higher order thinking skills.

- Some teachers use exit tickets that are adjusted to meet the needs of individual students. A living environment unit on cells provides an example of differentiation stating the following, “Exit tickets will be differentiated by content knowledge level.” Although it appears that the exit tickets will be differentiated, there is no evidence to show how the material will cognitively engage a diverse population of students, which this school has. Materials include student-guided notes and exit tickets. The unit does state that teachers will randomly select some students to participate but there is not a specific plan to foster further cognitive engagement.

- Some lesson plans demonstrated ways to engage a diversity of students into the curriculum. A grade eleven English lesson includes differentiation strategies for ELLs and students with disabilities. The lesson states, “ELLs and students with disabilities will receive complex texts that are shorter in length that may incorporate graphs to provide necessary information.” The lesson also states that students will be given handouts that list questions to assist in their reading to help identify the central idea. This level of differentiation was not evident in most other lesson plans. For example, a grade nine English lesson plan does not provide cognitive engagement strategies for a diversity of learners. Under differentiation it states that students with disabilities and ELLs have been pre-taught but does not include instructional practices that might impact how students learn or provide them with the supports they need. An additional example was seen in a grade nine geometry unit. Students were required to design a map of three city blocks. The lesson had multiple steps for students to follow, including placing a park at a corresponding angle and placing a post office at a vertical angle. This was a visual, hands-on task for all students, however the unit did not provide any differentiation or scaffolds for learners with diverse needs.
Findings
Teachers and administrators have stated that they share the belief that children learn best through discussion, peer feedback and engagement. Students produce work products based on discussions and collaborations with one another.

Impact
Teachers’ beliefs around how children learn best are aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. Student work products reflect understanding of the content and high levels of student engagement.

Supporting Evidence

- Students provide feedback to their peers to help produce stronger student work products. In a grade ten and eleven theater bridge class, students were performing dialogue from Marlowe’s play *Doctor Faustus*. Some students chose dialogue from the play to recite while other students gave them feedback on their performance. After one reading, a student stated, “Your movement helped us understand her situation. You objective was clear and you showed professionalism during your recital.” The student also stated that her volume and diction could have been better. The presenter said that she would use the feedback to her advantage and help her to prepare for her final presentation.

- Teachers have stated that students learn best by being engaged in discussion. Students were actively engaged in a grade nine global studies class. The teacher asked students to go over four questions with their partner that revolved around whether or not the fall of the Roman Empire could have been prevented. Students were engaged in a turn and talk. One student stated, “The Roman Empire lost power due to a weak military that dropped their guard.” The student cited the text to support his point, and soon another student stated that he agreed but used different textual evidence to support his perspective. Similar high levels of engagement were seen in most classes visited.

- Students were observed in a structured conversation that reflected high levels of participation and engagement. A grade ten-history class was engaged in a Socratic Seminar. Each student in the inner circle represented a US ally during World War I. Students took notes during the lesson and presented work products at the conclusion of the seminar that demonstrated their understanding of the content. A summative form on World War I detailed one student’s claim that Germany was not the only country at fault and that other countries were accountable for damages. A student counter-claimed that Germany started the war and should be held solely responsible. Student forums for dialogue and participation were evident in most classes visited.
### Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use rubrics and data that are aligned to the curriculum. Teachers consistently check for understanding to assess the needs of students.

### Impact

Teachers provide actionable feedback to students during instruction and make adjustments to meet all students’ learning needs.

### Supporting Evidence

- In most classes visited, teachers used different methods of instruction to allow students to demonstrate their understanding. One science class used data sheets that included the question, “What is one thing you learned better after doing the feedback/revision slips on day 5?” The student stated that they learned how to use context clues. Another question required the student to speak about a change that they would make to their study routine to perform better. The student stated that they would ask more questions for clarification when they do not understand something. In an additional example provided, a student stated that they would read the questions more carefully for clarity.

- Various rubrics are used in different classes to assess student learning and provide feedback. A student self-evaluation rubric for earth science provided the teacher with areas of strength and areas that the student feels need improvement. The reflections sheet also required the student to speak about how they can reach their goals. A memorization rubric was used in a theater class that gave students glows and grows in areas including volume, diction, memorization and professionalism. A student received a glow for using diction and volume in a presentation, and a grow for professionalism stating that the student needed to use their time more wisely. This was impactful as rubrics were used in most classes visited and teachers have stated that the use of rubrics for assessments have resulted in a clearer understanding of student learning.

- Teachers check for understanding in classrooms and make adjustments to the lesson based on student feedback. During a visit to a grade ten English class, the teacher stated that she was going to discuss challenges and strengths in the class. A student was observed writing on a rubric that they do very well in citing a claim and that they can improve on working on more in-depth writing with their points and analysis of the claim. The teacher checked for understanding by asking a student to demonstrate the page and chapter that the citation came from and to explain the citation. The teacher was observed stating that the next lesson will be modified to spend more time with extended response because most students cited similar challenges. This was impactful as a teacher team was observed discussing analyzing student work and looking for textual evidence that support their claims.

- Teachers have stated that they make other adjustments in teacher practices. During a teacher interview, teachers have stated that they regroup students based on Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) assessments. They found that students in English and social studies struggled with analysis of evidence. Adjustments included using the protocol, “Read on Purpose,” which requires students to read, discuss and write to demonstrate understanding.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>3.4 High Expectations</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

The principal uses the staff handbook and a needs assessment to articulate high expectations to staff and students, including expectations connected to college and career readiness.

Impact

School leaders provide professional development to meet high expectations and have a system to hold staff members accountable. Teachers and advisors prepare students for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The faculty list high expectations including incorporating Google Docs in the development of lesson plans and teacher minutes. The handbook states that lesson plans are required to be uploaded into Google Docs on a daily basis. Planning must also include a backwards design model in which teachers are required to plan based on assessments. This was impactful as teachers had available summative assessments that lesson plans were built from. The principal has stated that this allows administration to read plans and stay informed of all teacher meetings in real time.

- Teachers prepare students for the next level by having them take ownership of their academic performance. This is done through the use of student-led conferences. Students facilitate their own parent-teacher conferences with the assistance of advisors. Students have binders prepared with their work from different classes and participate in mock conferences with their advisor in advance of the actual conference. This was impactful as students have stated that the conferences help prepare them for college because they are able to speak about their strengths and weaknesses and gain a better understanding of how they learn and how they need to improve. Feedback to students included helping select the right college based on their academic performance and interests, and assistance in looking at college requirements compared to student scores.

- To support the expectation of providing rigorous instruction, the principal provided professional development on questioning discussion assessment and Regents data. An example was seen in the professional development calendar agenda from October. Teachers reviewed the learning target, “I can revise a lesson plan to include circulating with a purpose, inclusive of sharing the assessment criteria, circulating and providing feedback based on the assessment criteria and responding to the data.” Teachers stated they reviewed a video of a teacher practice and made connections to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers reflected and applied the share-out feedback to their practices. This was seen in most classes visited as they were utilizing assessments in class to check for understanding and to gauge students in discussion.
**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**

Teacher teams, including grade teams, look at selected students using a student work protocol. Teachers use leadership positions to promote distributive leadership throughout the school community.

**Impact**

Team meetings strengthen teacher pedagogy in order to promote student progress. Teachers make key decisions pertaining to curriculum and training.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers make key decisions that are supported by school leadership. Each grade has a teacher leader whose role includes mentoring other teachers by sharing methodology and best practices, leading professional development and chairing grade level meetings. A teacher leader stated that their goal was to support teachers in improving in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, including domains under questioning engagement and assessment. Mentors are assigned to new teachers. This was impactful as a mentor/teacher leader was observed working with a new teacher on questioning and discussion techniques. She was modeling asking higher order thinking questions to students.

- A grade nine teacher team was observed in a student work protocol meeting. Teachers individually read a student writing sample and then shared their observations, coming to agreement that the student writes in short sentences without detail. After reading the writing sample, teachers discussed which practices would support the student learning such as sentence starters and annotated text. Feedback to the teacher included scaffolding sentences and using sentence starters provided by the lead teacher. Teachers discuss a timeline of one week to reconvene and discuss the teacher’s progress with the student. Additional students were listed for future meetings.

- Teachers created a summer bridge program for incoming grade nine students. The purpose of the program is to acclimate incoming freshmen to the instructional expectations and cultural climate of the school. Teachers are responsible for the parent outreach, the organization of the program and the agenda. An agenda was presented that highlighted the events of the program. They included a “getting to know you icebreaker”, creating a vision board to highlight student goals and aspirations under the leadership of the teachers and instructing students to write a letter discussing what they will contribute to the school. This was impactful, as teachers have stated that this program was initiated by teachers and built by the teachers.