Quality Review Report

2016-2017

Urban Scholars Community School
Elementary 12X463
1180 Tinton Ave.
Bronx
NY 10456

Principal: Debra Jones

Dates of Review:
May 11, 2017 - May 12, 2017

Lead Reviewer: Edward Hazen
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>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent does the school...</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</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>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 Celebration</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Focus</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>Proficient</td>
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</table>

**Additional Finding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Focus</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<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>Proficient</td>
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</table>

### Systems for Improvement

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Focus</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>Proficient</td>
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**Additional Finding**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<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>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
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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>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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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>Proficient</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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices align to an articulated belief that students learn best when provided academic supports. Teaching strategies including scaffolds, such as graphic organizers and written prompts, provide access to academic tasks for all learners.

Impact
Practices aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* ensure all learners have access to high levels of thinking and the development of meaningful student work products across classrooms.

Supporting Evidence

- Across classrooms, instructional practices align to the schools articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. The Renewal School Comprehensive Education Plan (RSCEP) states the belief that lessons must include academic supports such as scaffolds and tasks that generate challenging discourse to intellectually engage all students, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, struggling students, and the highest achieving students. The instructional cabinet identified the Teachers College Reading and Writing Program's (TCWRP) workshop model as the way to align their instructional practices and ensure that all students are engaged in rigorous academic tasks. Across classrooms, most teachers were observed using the workshop model.

- In most classes visited, teachers provided multiple entry points for students through the use of various scaffolds including T-chart graphic organizers, mini charts, and leveled texts or worksheets. During a kindergarten reading lesson in which students had to describe the relationship between the words and illustrations in a text, the teacher modeled the skill first and ensured that students could apply the procedure prior to having them practice it in data-based groups. The teacher provided students with leveled texts to practice guided reading with paraprofessionals, while the teacher provided explicit instruction in blending letter sounds for groups of students who required more intensive intervention, including students with disabilities. Teachers across classrooms used small group instruction to engage students in appropriately challenging tasks.

- In a fourth grade English Language Arts (ELA) class, students were observed working in purposeful groups in differentiated academic centers. The teacher provided direct explicit instruction to five of the lowest performing students on how to identify a thesis statement and provide the textual evidence to support their claim. A middle level group worked independently on ELA instructional software, while a high performing group created an opinion thesis statement. The high-level group accomplished their task before their peers and then worked on an extension activity while the other groups finished their task. The use of differentiated tasks across classrooms supported students in demonstrating higher order thinking skills in their work products.
Findings

School leaders partner with community based organizations to provide professional development and family outreach and offer students learning experiences that ensure that each student is known well by at least one adult.

Impact

Student learning needs are supported through an umbrella of services that include attendance outreach, social-emotional learning, and guidance advisement. While supports and services have resulted in positive changes in student data, some programs are in their first year, and are not yet strategically aligned to result in the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors schoolwide.

Supporting Evidence

- Attendance data is tracked through heat maps that allows careful tracking and monitoring of both attendance and lateness. This information is central to providing academic intervention and social services for students providing academic intervention and social services. School leaders have developed tiered services that provide intervention in small groups allowing for students to be known well by adults. Student support services at the school include small group counseling by at least two licensed social workers, reading recovery, attendance outreach, mentoring, and peer mediation. Additionally, individual student goal setting with students provides time for students to be known well by at least one adult.

- The school identified fostering student independence and resiliency as the academic and personal behavior focus for this school year. To that end, teachers stated that they have received professional development focused on social emotional development. Teachers also stated they are in the process of developing resiliency in math by helping students write individual math goals. Teachers also apply a strategy that is already in use in ELA called strategy cards which help students stay focus on their areas of needs. Teachers are using their professional development time to develop student work folders with differentiated supports to help students recognize and address common misconceptions and promote independence. While the school promotes the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors, the results of this work is not yet evident across the school.

- Parents stated that school Town Hall meetings reinforce the school behavior expectations, and serve as a forum for student voice. Families stated that they have participated both in school ceremonies, as well as, parent workshops professional development supporting positive academic and personal behaviors for students offered both by the school and community based organizations. Parents stated that the school offers intensive supports and intervention services for which have impacted their children’s behavior. One parent added that student goal setting has allowed both her and her child to understand how to improve and to be prepared for college.
Findings
School leaders and staff use a common planning template and instructional outcomes to align the curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards and implement the instructional shifts. Rigorous academic tasks are planned for all learners.

Impact
Curricula documents reflect purposeful planning that builds coherence across subjects and grades, and rigorous tasks supports college and career readiness for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Curricula are planned to align with the Common Core Learning Standards using a common planning template. To implement the instructional shifts school leaders require that unit and lesson plans include sequenced learning tasks that convey clear instructional outcomes that require students to think, problem solve, and engage in purposeful discussions and reflections on concepts and skills learned. The instructional shifts were evident in a review of unit plans and lessons plans. Across grades and content areas, teachers plan tasks that require students to cite text-based evidence, make claims, and use accountable talk when participating in group discussion.

- The school has opted to use supplemental programs and materials to ensure that all students are engaged in rigorous tasks that require them to practice higher-order skills. To supplement the school's use of ReadyGen as the English Language Arts (ELA) curricula, the instructional cabinet adopted the TCRWP. Through this program all students are exposed to a wide range of texts, across a variety of genres. Teachers plan for additional literacy instruction for struggling students that require additional support or immediate intervention, using supplemental programs such as Reading Recovery in first grade and Reading Rescue in second grade, as well as support with programs such as Leveled Literacy Intervention.

- As its core math curricula teachers use A Story of Units modules from EngageNY, which incorporate the instructional shifts and demand that students develop a conceptual understanding of essential mathematical concepts. Math lessons routinely require students to practice core functions while they develop key mathematical concepts. In order for all groups of students to correctly apply their mathematical knowledge, most teachers plan to use manipulatives, visual aids and worksheets in dual languages as needed. A fifth grade math lesson requiring students to calculate the volume of various objects identified math strategy cards with key terms defined and the formula for volume stated on them as a scaffold. Teachers across most classrooms create a variety of tasks to ensure that all student practice rigorous habits and higher order skills.
Findings
Across classrooms, teachers use a variety of English Language Arts and math common assessment data to set classroom and individual student achievement goals and plan next steps for most students.

Impact
Teachers provide students with actionable feedback and next steps that lead to improved student work products. Adjustments to curricula and instruction are made at the team and classroom level.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use common rubrics and have adopted a schoolwide grading and feedback policy across most grades and subject areas that aligns to the school’s curricula. A review of student work samples indicates that most teachers provide students with actionable feedback and next steps for improvement. Specifically, when providing feedback to students, teachers include an area in which the student met or exceeded the criterion for proficiency and an area in which they need to improve including clear steps to get to the next level. The majority of students indicated that they value and appreciate the feedback provided to them by teachers and noted that it helps them focus on the next steps they need to take to in order to improve their work. A fifth grade student whose feedback suggested that she use direct quotes shared that it strengthened her evidence “because it would make it more believable to the reader.” The student further explained she has improved her writing as a result because she has become mindful of including quotes when citing evidence from texts.

- Teachers use TCWRP rubrics and checklists to assess student writing at the completion of each unit of study along with teacher-created on-demand writing prompts. Teacher and student use of rubrics and checklists, running records, performance assessments and writing exemplars, coupled with timely teacher feedback serve as the school’s system to monitor and foster writing development. On-demand writing rubrics, student conferences, and student work products are all referenced to provide students and teachers with actionable feedback to advance learning at each grade level.

- Teachers across grades and content areas use common assessments in reading and writing to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses, plan small group instruction, interventions, and identify new reading and writing targets for students. For example, students weak in annotating text received direct small group instruction from the teacher in which the teacher modelled how to annotate accurately. Independent reading levels are updated every four to six weeks following the initial administration of running records that is conducted during the first month of school. A summary sheet of students’ reading levels is collected every two months to determine which students are assigned to literacy intervention services such as Reading Recovery and Reading Rescue or additional intensive interventions or supports.
Additional Finding

| Quality Indicator: | 3.4 High Expectations | Rating: Proficient |

Findings
The school provides ongoing, clear lines of verbal and written communication to staff and families that serves to further their joint understanding of college and career readiness expectations for all students.

Impact
Clarity of expectations for all staff, including participation in professional learning opportunities to support their practice, hold teachers accountable for student learning. Clear communication to families helps them to understand their child’s progress toward college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leadership team consistently communicates high expectations to faculty and has developed a system of accountability through an observation cycle that includes formal and informal feedback to teachers based on the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Teachers reported receiving support through professional development opportunities, instructional coaching and classroom intervisitations. Teachers stated that the professional learning and support provided has improved their professional practice and holds them accountable to the schoolwide goals. A teacher new to the profession noted that being supported with a mentor was extremely helpful to her in her first year of teaching and added that the mentor assisted her in meeting leadership’s professional and instructional expectations.

- The school uses both traditional and social media tools to communicate its academic and behavioral expectations to students and families. A school code of conduct is issued to all students and families. Additionally, a school calendar written in both English and Spanish is sent home each month. The school also utilizes social media platforms including a school web site, Facebook page, and Twitter to communicate expectations and upcoming events. Report cards are distributed four times a year and an individualized progress report is provided during the months that a report card is not generated. A review of progress reports demonstrates that they provide students and families with assessment results, information on students’ progress towards learning goals, next steps, and teacher comments regarding their child’s academic and social-emotional progress.

- Parents identified events that were available to them at the school to better understand the instructional shifts and the Common Core Learning Standards. Workshops specific to assisting their children at home such as Teamwork Tuesdays and curriculum night pot-luck dinners were offered this year. Although some parents stated that they were unable to attend the workshops due to the timing of the events and workshops, many parents could articulate how the Common Core is adequately preparing their child for the next level, including a path to college and career readiness. Parents reported that the school’s focus on the acquisition of literacy skills and interventions for struggling learners are helping prepare their children for the next level. Overall, most parents shared that the school has helped them to understand their child’s progress toward expectations.
### Additional Finding

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<thead>
<tr>
<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 collaborations on grade level and content teams that align to the school's goals. Teachers consistently analyze assessment data and student work.

#### Impact

Collaborative analysis of student data has increased instructional capacity, improved teacher practices, and positively affects student learning across grade levels.

#### Supporting Evidence

- School leadership provides scheduled common planning time for collaborative teams to meet on grade level, math, reading, writing, and dual language teacher teams to review student work samples and data. Analysis of running record assessments, on demand writing tasks, mid-module assessment results and exit slips are used to revise curricula and academic tasks using a protocol to look at student work. Teachers report using their professional collaboration time to identify specific instructional strategies such as modeling and the think aloud that can be used during intervention time to help struggling students understand a concept. Modeling practices were observed across most classrooms visited.

- Teachers and school leaders reported that grade-level teacher teams have a mandatory formal meeting once per week during their daily common prep period. Teacher teams also meet formally during weekly professional development sessions, and informally during common lunch periods. A review of meeting agendas and minutes indicate that teacher team meetings are used to analyze data and student work products, and create materials and instructional resources that support students’ content knowledge and skill development, such as scaffolds, including graphic organizers, writing prompts, sentence frames and visual aids. Teachers have created math strategy cards that contain formulas, number lines, definitions and multiplication charts to provide support for students in grades kindergarten through five. School leaders provide professional development and on-site coaching that address the characteristics of effective teacher teams through consultation with an outside educational expert. Across teams teachers have developed practices and tools that have impacted their teaching practices. *Advance* teacher evaluation and development system data indicates that teachers are rated higher than the citywide average in the Danielson Framework for Teaching domains for planning and preparation and instruction.

- A fourth-grade team was observed analyzing common assessment data from an on-demand writing prompt in which students had to write a short literary essay based on the theme of a book they found to be important. Teachers looked at sets of work samples from low, medium and high performing students and identified patterns and trends in order to adjust their instruction. Teachers noted that many students did not have a problem identifying the theme of the book. They believed this was because the concept of theme had been recently taught and they had spent sufficient time learning how to identify a theme prior to the state assessment. The team also noted that some students were struggling with sentence structure and the use of appropriate transition words. The team decided to use exemplars to review the appropriate use of transition words with students as next steps. A review of team notes reveals similar practices across teams. The percentage of students scoring at a Level 3 or Level 4 on the fourth grade New York State English Language Arts assessment increased from 6 percent in 2015 to 15 percent in 2016.