Quality Review Report

2019-2020

The Urban Assembly Unison School
Junior High-Intermediate-Middle 13K351

170 Gates Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11238

Principal: Emily Paige

Dates of Review:
January 8, 2020 - January 9, 2020

Lead Reviewer: Debra Tasioudis
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

The Urban Assembly Unison School serves students in grade 6 through grade 8. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

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 State standards and/or content standards</td>
<td>Additional Finding</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 State standards and the 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>Developing</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>Developing</td>
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</tbody>
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### School Culture

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Celebration</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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<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>Additional Finding</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the schools instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate schoolwide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Proficient</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>Proficient</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 State standards</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.4 Positive Learning Environment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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</table>

Findings

Guided by advisory that promotes strong relationships between students and adults, structures are in place which promote safety, culture-building, restorative practices, and social-emotional supports for students.

Impact

The school is safe, inclusive and conducive to student and adult learning. Each student is known well by an advisor that helps coordinate attendance, social-emotional learning, and guidance activities that address student learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- In a meeting with parents, all shared that their children are safe at school because of the close relationships that students enjoy with teachers and staff, including school safety agents. Parents appreciate that the school is small, and that there is an open-door policy with the parent coordinator, school leader, and teachers, so that parents are always welcome. Several parents shared that the open-door policy and ease of communication with staff makes the school feel very family oriented. Similarly, teachers and other school staff praised the collaborative and trusting environment that the principal fosters. Teachers appreciate that they can be open and honest with each other about their professional learning needs, and spend a lot of time in one another's classrooms in intervisitations and planning lessons together.

- Students also shared that the school is safe because the staff and principal are nice, and work hard to make sure that students feel welcome. As one student shared, “The teachers make you feel safe and if you are going through problems, teachers support you.” Students also noted that there has been a great change in student behavior in the building over the last year, and through restorative practices, and the leadership of the school’s dean, there is a focus on students resolving issues when they are still small, rather than waiting until problems lead to fighting. Students shared that there are fewer suspensions and fewer incidents than in past years; statements supported by data shared by the school leader. Students appreciate that there is now adult-led and peer mediation to help students solve conflict. Students also shared that this year, students no longer carry their phones with them throughout the school day and this has led to a reduction in cyber bullying.

- Schoolwide values, known as Collaboration, Appreciation, Responsibility, Engagement, Self-Determination (Unison CARES), are reinforced in daily advisory. Advisory groups of ten to fifteen students meet every morning and Friday afternoons for 23 minutes for social-emotional instruction, restorative circles, and academic guidance. The advisors use a specific advisory curriculum that ensures that students are taught to name and discuss their feelings, role play, reframe responses to stress and difficulty, and resolve conflict, leading to close relationships with students in advisory, and with their advisors. As a student shared, “My advisor knows me well, and understands how I feel. They have known me a long time. When I go to them with a problem, it always turns out better than when I handle it alone.” Parents appreciate that advisors reach out to them often, creating an open dialogue about how to support their children, at home and at school.

- There is an attendance team in place, supported by staff and a community school partnership that monitors daily attendance, and meets weekly to support advisors and teachers in reaching out to students and families about attendance and tardiness, leading to an increase in students with 90 percent attendance, already up eight percentage points from this time last year.
Findings
Across classrooms, teaching practices and scaffolds are beginning to reflect alignment to the belief that students learn best through explicit modeling, discussion, independent and small-group work.

Impact
Instructional practices, scaffolds and supports offered to students lead to uneven levels of student engagement, thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching practices are beginning to align to shared beliefs that students learn best when teaching begins with whole-group instruction, leading to a class discussion and reflection, followed by explicit modeling, and time for independent or group work. In an English Language Arts (ELA) class, some students engaged in small-group instruction with the teacher, who provided explicit instruction; other students read independently, some with a focus on theme, others simply reading. For students reading independently, there was criteria for students on the board, though students did not have a model of what their responses to reading should look like, leaving some students unclear about their purpose for reading. Similarly, in a science class, students watched a video, and experimented with hands-on tools to understand force and motion, but there was no model about what student notes on concepts should look like. Some drew models, others wrote sentences, some wrote one-word responses, leading to uneven levels of student thinking. In an ELA class, the teacher spoke to students about how to conduct a Socratic seminar, and reminded students about events in their reading from the previous lesson, but students did not have an opportunity to share their thinking with one another. In a social studies lesson, students engaged in a focus question, discussing ways that they adapt to their environment, but students went into independent work unclear about the differences between adaptations and modifications to the environment, unable to complete the second half of their worksheets, leading to uneven levels of student thinking in their work products.

- In classes, teachers provided students with scaffolds and supports, though students were sometimes unaware that the supports were there, or were unsure how to use them to support their thinking. In a math lesson on determining solutions to inequalities, the teacher modeled a few problems for students at the board, but wiped the models away before students began their independent practice. Some students were able to copy them into their notebooks and use as they worked, others were not. In a science class, students were asked to engage in a debate about which of two heating systems would best heat a school. Students shared their hypotheses and rationale for their choice in a class debate, but students were not given a discussion protocol for agreeing and disagreeing with one another’s ideas, thwarting some students’ ability to share their ideas. In an ELA class, students were given models of how to annotate text on a chart paper, but some students did not know it was there, and thus, were unable to use the support to guide their thinking.

- Student discussions and work products demonstrated uneven levels of student thinking and participation. In one science class noted above, students engaged in partnered discussions about adaptations to the environment, yet were unable to complete their task that asked them to distinguish between adaptations and modifications, as only adaptations were made clear during the mini lesson. In some math and ELA classes, students had few opportunities to share their thinking in teacher-led instruction, in which a few students gave one-word responses. In a few classes, some students participated in a partnered discussion; other pairs sat in silence. In a math class, several students were finished with their independent work with correct answers, and waited for their peers to finish before engaging in a review of work, reflecting uneven levels of student thinking and participation.
Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
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<td>Rating:</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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Findings

Pacing calendars, units, and lesson plans are growing in their purposeful alignment to the State standards. Curricular documents reflect uneven planning practices to engage all students in rigorous tasks.

Impact

Curricula inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and tasks that promote higher-order thinking for all learners, including students with disabilities and Multilingual Learners (MLLs).

Supporting Evidence

- In meetings, the school leader and teachers shared that there is a schoolwide focus on students using discussion to build reasoning for inferencing skills, and students using text-based evidence in literacy, as well as a focus on students explaining their mathematical thinking. However, these purposeful decisions to promote college readiness were not evident as connected ideas across curricular documents shared. In pacing calendars for ELA and math, there are topics and standards listed, but not yet evidence of purposeful decisions to build coherence in fostering student discussions, using text-based evidence or explaining mathematical thinking. A sixth-grade math unit on numerical expressions and factors includes a description of unit concepts, key understandings, but no State standards. Similarly, an ELA unit includes the text to be read by students, and prioritized standards in the full unit, but the State standards and focus are not carried through in the teacher-created overview and lesson plans. In lesson plans shared throughout the review, some clearly align to State standards, such as a sixth-grade math lesson plan on defining, evaluating and comparing functions, and including tasks that asked students to explain their mathematical thinking. Other lesson plans, including an ELA and a science lesson plan, do not clearly show alignment to State standards.

- One eighth-grade math unit includes revisions to better align the unit to expectations that students explain their mathematical thinking with models and sentences, and prioritize State standards on the State math exam. The unit includes a statement about how the unit was reorganized from the published curricular resource to better serve students. Included in the statement and evident in the unit are: more opportunities for students to explain their mathematical thinking, added supports, a vertical line test, and a clear visual representation of functions that support student understanding. While this unit demonstrates purposeful decision making to align to the State standards and additional supports for access for all learners, this work is not evident across the curricular documents shared for all grades and subjects.

- Some units and lesson plans include descriptions of content that the teacher would cover, or what the teacher would say and do, but did not include academic tasks for students or ways that rigorous habits and higher-order skills would be emphasized for all learners, including students with disabilities and MLLs. In an ELA and a science lesson plan, students are assigned to groups, but it is unclear how the task or instruction would be different for those student groups. In a social studies lesson, the lesson plan calls for the task to be changed to a sorting activity for students, yet all students engage in the same task. A science unit includes concepts, understandings, and anticipated misconceptions, but includes no tasks, or ways that the learning would be made accessible for a variety of learners. In a meeting with teachers, some shared that “help resources,” as scaffolds and supports are known in the school and are included lesson by lesson, and do not always make their way into the online curricula. It was also shared that there is a folder of supports for MLLs for ELA teachers, but connections between the folder of supports and lesson plans provided for classes observed were not evident.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings

Common assessments are in place across the school. During instruction, checks for understanding and student self-assessment are sometimes a part of teachers’ assessment practices.

Impact

Results of common assessments are inconsistently used to adjust curricula and instruction, beyond the creation of student groupings. Teachers inconsistently make adjustments to meet students’ learning needs in the classroom.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers and students were able to talk about ways that the leveled reading assessments are administered across the grades to measure student reading progress, inform student groupings in ELA and social studies, and match students with texts at their reading levels. However, the use of other common assessments to make adjustments to curricula and instruction was not as clear and consistent in other subject areas. For math, students take online assessments that teachers are able to use to measure progress and inform instructional groups, though it was unclear from curricular documents shared how teachers use this data to make adjustments to the curricula or instruction for different groups of students. The school leader was able to demonstrate ways that online math assessments and the instructional report from the State math exam are used to provide interventions and enrichment outside of the math blocks, but not how this data is used to adjust the curricula and instruction in math. Similarly, there are common assessments in science and social studies, but it is unclear from curricular resources and lesson plans shared how these common assessments are being used to measure student progress or make adjustments to curricula and instruction.

- In classrooms, teachers checked for understanding during lessons by asking students questions, or using a mid-workshop interruption, or in a lesson summary. These checks for understanding sometimes led to on-the-spot adjustments for students, and other times, did not. In a science lesson, the teacher used a mid-workshop interruption to try to provide students with clarity about the task, but some students were still uncertain about what to do. In a math lesson, the teacher attempted a lesson summary to gauge student understanding and help students make adjustments, but few students shared their thinking, and others already had correct answers, making the adjustment ineffective for some. In a math lesson, the teacher checked for understanding by asking students questions, but some students were still unable to demonstrate their thinking in the work thus, leaving some student’s learning needs unattended.

- In meetings with teachers, several shared that lesson plans are adjusted using what teachers learn from previous lessons. In most classes, teachers and other educators asked questions to gauge student understanding, but did not take notes, making it unclear how teachers would make adjustments to future lessons based on what students shared. In one class, the teacher asked students questions about their understanding of the lesson’s vocabulary, but took no note of which students understood the important concepts and which did not. In two ELA lessons, the teachers worked with a small group of students, and took notes on what they knew and were able to do, but did not check for understanding and note student thinking for students working independently. In some classes, some students had success criteria and were able to use it to self-assess; others did not, as seen in an ELA class on theme.
Additional Finding

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

Parents receive monthly progress reports and ongoing communication through an online platform about expectations connected to college and career. Advisory and student-led conferences ensure that there is a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to students.

Impact

Ongoing communication between families and staff helps parents understand student progress. Students receive detailed guidance that prepares them for high school and beyond.

Supporting Evidence

- Parents appreciate that communication with teachers and staff is ongoing, through the school’s online grading and communication platform, and in monthly progress reports that keep caregivers informed about student progress. The online grading system is updated by teachers every week, and parents appreciate that grades are posted on Fridays. Parents also shared that teachers and staff are always available to meet in person and that there is an open-door policy that allows parents to sit in on classes, and better understand instructional expectations. The parent coordinator also sends a monthly newsletter to the home to keep parents informed about expectations, and all letters to the home are translated for families who need it.

- Through advisory, students and caregivers receive support in selecting high schools that most meet their needs, and help students and families to understand the application process. As one parent shared, “My son’s advisor reached out to me personally. He made sure I was able to sign in, helped me to navigate the site and helped me to understand what we should be looking for in a school.” Similarly, a student shared that her advisor talked through all of the choices with her, and ensured that she prepared for, and took the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test. Students also shared that there are lessons in advisory, across the grades, about preparing for and applying to high school. There is also guidance about how to complete the applications and what schools to choose, based on student interest, attendance and grades. Students also shared that they go on field trips to other schools, helping students to understand what life and academics are like at different schools.

- Several times per year, there are student-led parent teacher conferences where students guide the discussion with caregivers and teachers about their progress. Performance tasks given across the content areas are housed in student portfolios. In these student-led conferences, students share their work for the semester, and explain their grades to their family. The expectations for students, and preparation in class for these student-led conferences, creates a culture for learning that communicates high expectations for students and prepares students for the next level.
Additional Finding

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

Findings

Teachers engage in inquiry on teams focused on the school’s goals for improving instruction, equity, and bolstering staff and student relationships. Distributed leadership structures are in place.

Impact

The work of teacher teams strengthens the instructional capacity of teachers, promotes shared leadership, and focuses on improving academic and social-emotional learning for students.

Supporting Evidence

- During the review, the school’s Instructional Leadership Team engaged in inquiry reviewing the data from a schoolwide reading assessment. The team reviewed the schoolwide data that included student reading levels, progress from the last assessment of student reading. Teachers across the grades, a related service provider, and the school leader, all of them part of the team, also discussed the performance of subgroups, including students with disabilities, MLLs, and students at, above and below grade-level expectations for reading, with a focus on professional learning needs of teachers across the building. This review of student reading progress with an eye toward teacher professional learning aligns to the school’s goals of increasing the number of students at proficiency, including students with disabilities and MLLs, as well as strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. As the team discussed possible next steps, they decided to focus on building strong relationships with students to increase engagement, one of the school’s goals, and began to plan the next instructional round of professional learning for teachers around this topic. The team also began planning a schoolwide professional learning session for teachers to see the schoolwide data for themselves, to ensure that department and co-planning teams also use the data to improve teacher instructional practice. Team documents shared demonstrate that this inquiry process is ongoing, with the team organizing each week’s work around student progress monitoring, family engagement, and planning and curricula.

- Similarly, grade-level teams also engage in inquiry aligned with the school’s goal of increasing engagement and attendance. Teachers from the sixth-grade teacher team shared that their team routinely looks at academic and behavior data captured in the school’s online grading platform, to look for patterns and trends across the grade, as well as for individual students, and create action plans for improvement. Team notes shared demonstrate that this work also aligns to an inquiry process, in which teachers review data, plan interventions, and monitor student progress. The school also has an equity team that focuses on equity and implicit bias, and ways that they have an impact on student learning and engagement. Last year, the team focused on engagement of African-American male students with disabilities, tracking engagement data, and implementing strategies to build stronger personal relationships between students and teachers. For this group of students, there continues to be an increase in positive behaviors, such as students being on task and engaged during lessons noted in the school’s online tracking system.

- The school is small and has one administrator, and relies on the work of teacher leaders to guide much of the school’s work, including the development of curricula, and restorative practices across the school. There are four model teachers, and each teacher team is led by a teacher, ensuring that teachers have a voice in key decisions across the school, including those about instruction, discipline practices, advisory, and hiring thus, affecting student learning across the school. Teachers take a lead in guiding the school’s restorative practices, providing professional learning for new teachers in restorative practices, and culturally-responsive practices in the classroom.