



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The Urban Assembly School for Applied
Mathematics and Science**

**Middle School 241
1595 Bathgate Road
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Ken Baum

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Reviewer: Mike Sutton

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school opened two and a half years ago and is in the South Bronx where it was relocated into a new building in September 2006. The school enrolls students from a wide area and many travel considerable distances. There are currently 239 students from grade 6 through 8. Of these, 60% are Hispanic, 30% Black, 6% Asian and 4% White. There are significantly more boys than girls.

Special education students make up 13% of the student population. The proportion of students of English language learners is around 7%. For these students their main language is Spanish which is also spoken by a significant minority of the students in the school. English is the main language for the remainder. The proportion of students who receive Title 1 funding is very high at 95% and significantly higher than the average for City schools and similar schools. Levels of attendance, consistently around 96%, are extremely good and much better than for most other schools.

The school is an Empowerment School. Empowerment Schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment Schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. The school is also a member of the Urban Assembly group of schools. These schools are a group of schools within the empowerment network of schools.

The school shares a new campus complex with two other schools and is scheduled to expand its age range over the next three years to grade 6 through 12. It shares cafeteria, gymnasium and library facilities with the two other schools in the building.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is extremely well lead by the principal, his cabinet and other leadership teams within the school.
- The school sets rigorous, high standards in all that it does.
- Teaching actively engages students and results in very good relations between staff and their students.
- There is a strong collegiate approach amongst teaching staff and teamwork is a strong feature of the school.
- The school regularly gathers a wide range of good quality information about students' achievements, which it uses very effectively to check on their progress and to steer wider developments.
- There are strong systems to support all students academically and socially, particularly those who need extra help in mathematics or English, or who need additional challenges.
- The school works extremely well with parents and the quality of information that parents get about their children's progress is exceptional.
- The school is forward thinking, innovative and has established excellent links with outside organizations.
- The school has made very good use of its freedom and flexibility as an Empowerment School.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that planning for age-range expansion and associated curriculum development takes full account of the wide range of expertise and ideas, which the school is developing amongst its staff.
- Continue to build knowledge and understanding amongst all staff of the increasing quantities of data on students' performance available to the school.
- Continue to develop the depth of analysis of data to look more closely at particular school issues such as potential gender differences in achievement amongst students.
- Strengthen the involvement of faculty in every stage of school improvement planning.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

Since it opened, the school has established a very secure base from which to build. A strong, determined leadership and a supportive hard-working faculty have put their energies into making systems and processes work well. The range of data gathered is growing steadily and is put to very good use. It has a thorough grasp of the achievements of individual students as well as classes, ethnic groups, subjects and grades, although it does not evaluate sufficiently the relative performance between genders.

Because its grasp of data is secure and well organized, the school has a very clear picture of its strengths and areas for improvement. As an Empowerment School, new assessment tools have been used well and information extracted to look at progress and improvement across the school year. Adjustments are quickly made where evaluation shows it is needed. The needs of groups of students are very well met. Lessons are imaginative and engage students well. Teachers constantly seek ways to do better still. Professional development is secure and underpinned by a strong system of observation and mentoring.

The school works exceptionally well with parents and provides high quality information on their children's progress. High expectations are made clear from the outset and parents and students are supported well to help everyone live up to these. The school is not afraid to try the imaginative or innovative. It has made some excellent links with local businesses and enterprises. The school works well in teams. Much work has been accomplished at senior levels of management in planning for and setting up the school and establishing a direction for development. There is an energetic and enthusiastic staff, eager to learn and build their expertise in analysis and critical evaluation. They do not always have sufficient opportunities to be involved in or contribute ideas to strategic school development.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school gathers a wide range of data on students' achievements and progress. This starts with evaluation of achievement data from previous schools and continues with thorough assessments of key skills when they start at the school. Regular teacher assessments are interspersed with more formal progress checks and tests to provide a growing portfolio of evidence on each student, class, subject and grade. The school makes very good use of the information that results from these assessments to look at the progress of different classes, grades and groups of students. It uses data effectively to check the progress of the English language learners, special education students, and those students who have already reached good levels of achievement. It also looks at

data disaggregated by ethnicity but does not check as thoroughly for any differences between achievements of male and female students.

The school makes innovative use of other data. The teachers gather informal information from daily exchanges between staff to supplement general observations on students' personal, social, emotional and academic development. They use the information to create 'Teachers' Anecdotal Reports' for each student. These form a key part of the appraisal of each student's performance and feed directly into conferences with parents. The school makes good use of the information provided through its empowerment team. Information on its performance compared to a City schools is checked carefully as a litmus test for its own performance. The school is also effective in monitoring trends in performance over time and is establishing benchmarks in planning for its expansion.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

School leaders have a strong understanding of data and are well placed to analyze and evaluate new data which is being produced. The cabinet use the data well in planning incrementally as the school grows and develops. The construction of classes at the start of the year is steered by knowledge of the students' prior attainments. New data is used to set goals for improvement. The school establishes targets for subjects and grades, with mid-year markers to gauge progress. Additional targets are set for specific aspects of the curriculum, such as such as students' involvement in particular programs or electives.

Using the information on student progress, the school identified a group of higher achieving students who were not making sufficient progress. This led directly to the establishment of specific teaching groups for them and their progress subsequently improved. Those students who need more help with their learning or who are learning English as a new language get good support because systems are clear and work well. From the information gathered on student progress, the school has targeted a specific group of lower achievers. This group has shown significantly better progress as a result.

The school sets high standards in all aspects of its work. From the outset, standards of discipline, dress, and work are made clear to students and rigorously followed up where there is any sign of slippage. The school supplies students with a free set of uniform as a welcome to the school. The initial visits, which staff make to students' homes prior to the students starting school, establishes a close working relationship. It provides the foundation for good communications which the school then uses to the full in keeping parents informed of their children's progress. There is a ready two-way exchange of information enabling teachers or parents to respond quickly to any particular issues.

The school has made very effective use of surveys of parents' views on the school to obtain firm information about many aspects of its work. The analyzed results show that the parents see the first few years of the school's existence as very effective. The staff have detailed information about the progress of the students for whom they have teaching responsibility. They have a less secure overview of the information about wider aspects of the school's performance, as this information is discussed largely at cabinet level. There is

understandably a strong desire amongst staff to know more about such information to help them review, plan and develop further aspects of the curriculum as the schools grows.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school's curriculum aligns with the required standards. An outline plan maps out the curriculum for the completed school in three years time. Staff plan and develop specific elements of this each year. This planning allows for regular classroom and more formal periodic tests to assess progress towards the standards students are expected to achieve. The information which results lends itself well to regular analysis of students’ progress.

The teachers have clear accountability for what happens in their classrooms. They support each other well in subject teams and there is a constant search to find still better ways to teach certain knowledge or concepts. Their understanding of each student’s achievements and areas of strength or difficulty is put to good use in planning. Work is demanding but not inaccessible. It has a high interest level and often contains practical tasks or requires students to work in groups. As a result, students find their work interesting, like school and make good progress. In most cases, the tasks which teachers set are differentiated well to suit the individual needs of groups of students.

Good use is made of the funds available to the school. Financial considerations are well to the fore in planning for future expansion of numbers and age range. Scheduling takes close account of students’ achievements. Adjustments to their schedules are made on a regular basis to reflect changes in their achievements. Assignment of staff is flexible in response to student need and impacts on the progress they make.

All staff have thorough knowledge of the students through analysis of data on academic progress and the collection of anecdotal information. This information is used very well by the different support services. As a result, students say they always have someone to turn to for advice, feel safe and part of a strong school community. Levels of attendance are exceptionally good. This reflects the quality of teaching which students experience, their very positive relations with their teachers, the support and help they and their parents get and the rigor with which any issues or problems are followed up.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

Staff are hired primarily on their abilities to teach well and their abilities to contribute imagination, innovation and a willingness to discuss and where necessary challenge accepted orthodoxies. In addition to good pedagogic skills, staff at cabinet level, are increasingly expected to have the capability to analyze information on students’ progress and make regular use of this in discussions and planning.

The needs of an expanding school drive professional development. Much takes place in subject teams steered by the English and mathematics coaches. In this forum, teaching issues are shared, discussed and resolved. There are rigorous observations by the principal, together with strong and well-coordinated mentoring arrangements. Teachers take opportunities to observe each other teach, particularly when they teach in pairs. These measures ensure that all teachers, particularly those new to the profession, have good opportunities, to evaluate their own teaching, discuss how to improve further and observed others teach.

There is good teamwork and curriculum planning at all levels. This is strongly focused on revision and adjustments of subject plans in light of students' progress and teachers' evaluations. Development planning for the expansion of the school is still very largely at cabinet level. Class teachers and key administrative staff do not have a forum in which to contribute ideas or understand how their rolls may evolve or contribute to a larger school.

The principal is highly regarded by the school community. He has orchestrated a well-conceived and well-executed initial development phase for the school. He maintains an approach that encourages innovation and which enables staff to learn from their mistakes. Many new and exciting initiatives with outside organizations have been introduced. Daily school procedures and office routines run well. Communications are well organized and there is a strong sense of team work. There is undoubted capacity across the whole school for continued growth and development.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

Planning is strong. The Comprehensive Education Plan is broken down well into smaller units. These take very good account of information on student progress to set demanding medium and longer-term targets for improvement. Recent test results show that of the range set, most but not all were met and the school has adjusted and refined its approach in certain areas as a direct result of thorough analysis.

The school adheres well to its curriculum direction, emphasizing science and mathematics. It ensures that these subjects permeate the curriculum and has bolstered their position through careful choice of external partners. Innovative ideas, such as external mentoring for female students or the experimental intensive teaching of life sciences to Regents level, are further hallmarks of the school's willingness to try new initiatives.

Information is analyzed to show where particularly strengths lie and where students' improvements may have stalled. As a result, the school knows accurately where students are in need of more demanding work and this information is already steering decisions about which advanced program courses the school needs to provide. Similarly, the school has a close eye on the performance of those students who are not yet achieving the level they should be and which students are hovering on the boundary of that level. Small but regular adjustments to students' classes or schedules then follow to ensure individual needs continue to be met. The cabinet is making good preparations for expansion of the school. The key development issues have been scoped and the school is well placed to construct the next phase of its plan, taking account of a wider range of perspectives.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Urban Assembly School of Applied Mathematics and Science (MS 241)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score			X
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 			X
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			X
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.			X
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.			X
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.			X
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X