



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

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

Middle School 241

**1595 Bathgate Avenue
Bronx
NY 10457**

Principal: Ken Baum

Dates of review: March 17 - 18, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Christina Lewis

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Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School for applied Mathematics and Science is a middle school with 331 students from grade 6 through grade 9. The school population comprises 29% Black, 61% Hispanic, 4% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 95%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 93% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a strong sense of purpose that is communicated well to staff, students and parents.
- The very good analysis of data and an innovative curriculum have led to high academic achievement, particularly in math and science.
- The staff is very enthusiastic and works extremely well as a team, in an open and reflective environment.
- Students value the good range of opportunities available that prepare them for further education and for their role as citizens of the future.
- The school has created a positive learning environment with high expectations of work, attitudes and behavior.
- The school has established strong links with various organizations that offer enrichment opportunities to the students and supports the school's vision.
- The school makes excellent use of its state-of-the-art building and the many resources available, to provide a broad and stimulating curriculum.
- Parents are highly appreciative of the good opportunities available to their children, and the information that they receive about their child's learning.
- The school has an extensive after school program that enriches the students' learning experience.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop the use of data in differentiating instruction to improve the progress of students in developing writing skills across all subjects.
- Develop a strategic action plan, to include all of the school goals, with realistic time frames and clearly defined success criteria.
- Prepare for continued school expansion by defining leadership roles and further developing staff potential in this area.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The principal is a dynamic leader who has a very clear vision for the school. This is articulated well to the whole school community. The school has grown each year and now includes students in the first year of high school. The school is described as a pre-college prep school and its aims are to encourage the students to go to college, and instill in them a love and understanding for math. Students make good progress and enjoy their education. This is due to the high expectations of behavior, attendance and a positive encouragement to achieve the best. The strong focus on math and science has led to an innovative and exciting curriculum, which involves problem solving and investigative work.

Although the school has made a good start it has yet to fully develop a strategic action plan that specifies the responsibilities, realistic time frames and success criteria to hasten improvements in some aspects of students' learning. Towards this end, however, the school, through the work of the inquiry team, is focusing on the improvement of students' writing skills across all subjects.

Excellent links have been made with public and private partnerships that support the academic and personal growth of the students. Many of the eighth grade students are placed in companies to complete mini-internships. One student said, "It really helps you get to use your learning in the real world". Good support is also available for students who wish to take up employment during the summer vacations. The school also hosts and runs a yearly inter-school math tournament that the students are very proud to be part of and eager to share their successes within the school and wider community.

The school has made very good progress since the previous Quality Review in developing the use of data so that it is understood and used by all staff in meeting the needs of the students. As a result, lessons are well planned and differentiated, and the staff supports each other effectively in a reflective and collaborative manner.

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 the student's progress over time.

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

The very good collection and analysis of data gives a clear picture of the capabilities of each student before they even commence at the school. Data is gathered from students' previous schools and by informal home visits that are carried out by the staff prior to the students' entry into the school. Once enrolled, assessments are carried out in the key skills and these are shared with all staff. Consequently each member of staff has a clear understanding of their students' achievements and instruction is planned accordingly. The

school has identified a comparative lack of opportunities for students to practice their writing skills in a planned way through other subjects. As yet, action has not been taken to address this issue.

Throughout students are regularly assessed both formally and informally, including test results, moderation of work, and a student learning style inventory build into a comprehensive individual portfolio that is shared with students and parents at regular conferencing sessions. The school is rightly proud of the diversity of data collected and the way it is managed by each student's advisory teacher who takes responsibility for sharing this knowledge with the rest of the school community. This information enables teachers to plan extra support for lower-achieving students, by intervention and small-group work, and to provide challenge to high achievers. The progress of special education students is also tracked with equal care. The small group of English language learners are equally well supported.

The assistant principal has collected and analyzed the more formal data and has devised an effective program that tracks students' progress individually, by class, grade and subject. It enables the leadership team to monitor closely not only the progress of individual students, but also gives a measurement of performance in groups and grades, and enables the school to analyze its past performance. This information allows the school to adjust and modify the curriculum throughout the year. The school measures its performance rigorously with similar schools and is justifiably proud of its high success rate.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

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

The school sets realistic goals for student achievement that challenge everyone including staff to continually improve. Goals are taken from the Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal's own formal review document. Although they provide the necessary focus and the school has made a good start, it has yet to fully develop a strategic action plan that specifies the changes required in order speed up improvements to some aspects of students' learning. At the same time, the lack of establishing responsibilities, realistic time frames and success criteria hampers the school in evaluating the progress that it is making.

As well as setting goals for student achievement that are based on course and grade requirements, the school sensibly reviews students' prior achievement in setting targets across subjects. As a result of this, the students make very good progress in math and science. The school inquiry team is currently looking at strategies to improve progress in writing across the curriculum to the same high standard. There are clear procedures in place to apply intervention strategies for students who need extra support and to challenge those who are achieving at higher levels. Staff has a very good understanding of the needs of the students and this is reflected in their teaching and planning.

Parent value highly the successful way that they are kept informed about their child's progress. Their main point of contact is with a teacher-advisor who collects information about the student from all their classes and shares this with the student and parents in a conferencing meeting. As a result of this meeting student goals are agreed and formally recorded. This gives parents a very clear idea of how they can support their child at home. They have direct contact with the advisory teacher and any ongoing issues are

dealt with promptly through this excellent channel of communication. As a result, parents are confident that the school, “really knows and cares about our kids, and won’t give up on them”.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

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

The curriculum has been successfully developed in line with the school’s vision to provide an activity-based learning environment where the students are given many opportunities to develop their problem-solving and investigational skills. For example, grade 8 students are involved in researching genetic traits as part of a science project, and have devised various ways of collecting data from fellow students to support their research. As a result of such activities most students really enjoy school and are fully engaged in their learning. This is evident in the high level of attendance. The teachers use the data effectively to arrange the classes according to achievement level, as exemplified in math where a grade 9 class of high achievers work at grade 10 level. Teachers plan and differentiate their instruction well in most lessons, but there is a lack of consistency in English, whereby for lower achievers the structure to help scaffold their writing is underdeveloped. The school has already identified this as an area for improvement and is working through the inquiry team to develop frameworks to support this aspect of learning.

The schools offers an exciting and engaging curriculum both within the school day and in the varied program of after school activities. Within as well as extra to the school day, the curriculum provides interest and support for students’ academic growth. Excellent use is made of technology to enhance learning and the students’ skills are well developed in this area as seen by power point presentations that are used well as a way to share research with the rest of the class in social studies. Daily skills classes in math and English language arts across grades and within achievement level groups, are effective in ensuring that students develop the skills necessary to access all areas of the curriculum.

There is a strong recognition that the teachers are accountable for students’ learning and progress. Regular monitoring and effective feedback is an important part of the school culture. Teachers are well supported in improving their practice, but at the same time the senior leadership team has demonstrated the ability to take appropriate action when necessary. The principal has effectively promoted a learning climate that has at its heart, a strong emphasis of mutual trust and respect, which actively encourages personal and academic development. As one student said, “They just won’t give up on you; they just don’t believe in the words, ‘I can’t do it!’”

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of the leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

Professional development is an important priority for the school. It is planned around the identified needs of individual teachers as well as being focused on school improvement. The principal and his leadership team plan a rigorous program of observations and provide detailed feedback to develop instruction in the classroom. Staff has been fully trained in the effective use of data to plan and assess their students’ work. Time is built

into the school day where staff can meet together in grade and subject groups to discuss assessment information as well as to plan and share ideas to improve their teaching practices. As one teacher said, "We learn from each other and can work creatively together in an atmosphere of trust and challenge". Professionally, teachers act as critical friends and regularly observe each other in the classroom. They are enthusiastic and as a result are motivated to continually improve their instruction.

Due to its expansion the school has hired several teachers that are new to the profession. They are only hired after a rigorous interview process to ensure that their skills match the school's requirements. Intensive support is provided after an induction program when they are assigned a mentor to work alongside. As a result new teachers feel well supported and are fully prepared for the role. The principal is developing an advanced training program for experienced teachers to ensure that they also have opportunities to continue to develop their practice and assume leadership roles as the school expands further. The school has worked hard to establish partnerships with the private and public sector. These either provide additional sponsorship or offer exciting opportunities to enhance the students' social and personal development as well as build on academic skills.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

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

The school has good systems for monitoring progress toward achieving its goals. Data from a variety of assessments including national tests, school interim tests, and in higher grades, the students' own self-assessment is collected and analyzed. Individual student progress is monitored through the work of the advisory teacher assigned to each student. This is completed at the end of each marking period on a six-week cycle. Progress is also discussed at team meetings and reported to the cabinet. The assistant principal uses a program to track the progress of individuals and groups across all grades and the core curriculum. As a result both short- and long-term interventions are planned and implemented and because of the focused nature of these interventions, most students make rapid progress.

At the end of the academic year the cabinet meets to evaluate and audit progress in achieving the school goals. This leads to a thorough revision of curriculum programming by the subject leaders. New goals are identified for further improvement from the wide range of available data. The school has made a good start in developing mechanisms to record the goals into a strategic action plan that specify the changes required to bring about school improvement. The principal and cabinet have a clear vision, reflecting their high expectations of both their own, and of students' performance. Because of the clarity with which this is communicated, it is shared and understood by the whole school community.

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped