NYC
Department of Education
Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

The Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science

Middle School - High School 241

1595 Bathgate Avenue
Bronx
NY 10457

Principal: Ken Baum

Dates of review: November 19-20, 2008
Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science is a middle school - high school with 412 students from grade 6 through grade 10. The school population comprises 29% Black, 63% Hispanic, 2% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 96%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 88% eligibility.

Overal Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The school is well led by a dynamic and talented principal. His enthusiasm and energy provide a motivating force in generating commitment amongst the staff and the local community to his vision for the school. He is ably supported by a dedicated group of assistant principals who effectively promote the practical realities of this vision. Teachers are hard-working and fully committed to the personal and academic development of their students. They are proactive self-learners who are professionally supportive of each other. The school is managed efficiently but some action plans require more detail in relation to interim reviews of progress towards specified objectives.

The school monitors the achievement and progress of most of its students well apart for higher achievers in English language arts. It has a clear analysis of the specific needs of students through its comprehensive and detailed assessment procedures. This results in very effective support for particular groups such special education students and English language learners. The achievement levels of most students are high. The school has innovative and detailed systems for communicating with parents about the progress of their children. Discussions with parents are extensive, open and supportive. Parents are encouraged to be proactive partners in the education of their children but the response is markedly low. Parents are appreciative of the mutual respect and trust which has been created between students and staff at the school.

Collaboration and support are strong features of the school's culture. The creation of curriculum units, assessment processes and resultant action plans are enabled through extensive commitment of all members of the school community. This process successfully promotes their identification with the aims and objectives of the school. In accordance, parents and students are fully aware of the high expectations the school has in relation to attendance, behavior and academic performance.

The curriculum is challenging and stimulating. Enrichment programs stimulate students' interest and learning. For example, they successfully raise students' awareness of mathematics in real contexts. Students enjoy their lessons and are able to explain in detail what they are doing and what they have learnt. Resources are used well to promote the learning opportunities of students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The leadership of the principal is dynamic and motivating which successfully elicits a shared commitment to school values and goals.

- A strong collaborative culture has been created which promotes self reflection among staff and sharing of professional expertise.

- The positive, supportive relationship between parents, students and teachers promotes a productive learning environment for students.

- There are effective systems for collating data and monitoring the work of the school which enhances differentiated instruction and facilitates productive learning among students.

- Professional development and individual support for staff from the administration and mentoring programs make a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the school.

- The school has developed innovative, challenging curriculum which promotes student engagement and achievement.

- The progress made by students with special education need and English language learners is particularly strong because of the effective intervention strategies.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop strategies and utilise current data to promote the achievement of higher-achieving students in English language arts at grade 8.

- Sharpen action planning by specifying interim benchmarks so that the monitoring of progress of specified groups has greater robustness.

- Develop strategies for securing greater parent participation in the life of the school.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can to do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

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

The school has systematic data collecting processes in relation to student performance and progress and effective procedures for analyzing this information. This is particularly productive for establishing baseline and diagnostic assessments for each student in the core subjects. The school has successfully established innovative procedures for assessing the achievement of students in physical education, dance and art. In general, the levels of achievement which students have shown in all grades and subgroups is attributable to the informed way that staff utilize the accumulated profiles of student data. This is especially relevant in identifying and addressing the needs of special education students and English language learners. Students in these categories make better-than-expected progress. The school has identified a pocket of relative underachievement amongst higher-achieving students in English language arts, specifically in grade 8. The school is effectively utilizing its assessment data for this cohort to identify trends and formulate a strategy for improvement. The development work has become the focus of the Inquiry Team. In a broader context the common assessment procedures and rubrics which have been developed through collaborative discussions between respective grade teachers have created a consistency of practice.

An individual portfolio of personal information, assessment outcomes, specified goals and commendations is compiled for each student. This detailed information is compiled by an advisor who helps students reflect upon their progress. The student/parent/advisor (SPA) plan forms the basis of all formative and summative data held about students. It is supplemented by anecdotal evidence provided by class teachers who provide suggestions for improvement. This portfolio forms the basis of detailed discussions with parents at conference meetings which are individually scheduled for at least an hour. The supplementary progress reports not only identify whether expectations in subjects have been met but also exemplifies the effectiveness of students study habits. The range of information provided enhances a productive reciprocal relationship with families who are encouraged to become proactive partners in supporting the next stages of learning. Parents routinely receive a monthly synopsis of grades so that they are able to track the progress of their children.

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 has well-established review and planning procedures which effectively engage the faculty and parents in determining development goals for the school related to instruction and achievement. In response to the analysis of 2008 data the school

identified a need to enhance progress in reading and writing in aspects of curriculum. This led to an action plan relating to extending the writing component in math which is now an integral part of all lessons. In a broader context the school has formulated a comprehensive strategic action plan which is used by the cabinet to monitor progress towards the achievement of all school goals. The plan is insufficiently precise in identifying outcome indicators particularly with reference to interim checkpoints. A synopsis of the overarching objectives is shared with teachers so there is a clear understanding by everyone about the direction of the school. Staff confirm that the open communication process promotes a shared commitment to the aims of the school.

The administration pairs teachers to work together on specific curriculum units and utilize the same lesson plans. The subsequent split schedules maximize collaboration between teachers who work on identical assignments. This innovative process ensures that on a daily basis, lesson goals and unit goals are being systematically established for students. Formal meetings are held for grade teachers on a weekly basis to accommodate a review of progress and coordinate activities. The weekly advisory meetings which are held with all students ensure that there is a context for students to establish a clear understanding of their goals in all subjects and what strategies can be used to improve achievement.

Expectations about attendance, behavior and academic performance are very effectively communicated through newsletters, parent-teacher conferences and e-mails. The detailed and carefully arranged entry application procedure and subsequent interview is a significant part of the process in establishing a clear understanding of the school's expectations. Through the SPA plan process parents are given very clear guidance as to how they can help the children in relation to the next steps of their learning.

A feature of the unit planning is to incorporate a self-reflective component for students. In this way the school is very actively promoting processes for students to be involved in their own self-assessment of learning goals. The engagement of students in their learning is evidenced by the significantly above average attendance levels of 96%.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

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

The curriculum is innovative and challenging. In the middle school students have a range of electives which enable them to study mathematics in a variety of different contexts such as math and architecture. The science curriculum is project-based which promotes research and independent thinking. The needs of visual and kinesthetic learners are well met through challenging programs in physical education, dance and art. The respective programs are carefully aligned to the curriculum requirements and state standards. A high proportion of students successfully complete the algebra 1 Regents examination in grade 8 indicating the high expectations the school has of students.

The regular composition of formative assessments in all core subjects ensures that lessons are differentiated to meet the needs of students. For example, the profile of skills and competencies in dance enables the teacher to precisely identify the area of dance which the student needs to work on in order to sustain their progress. The formulation of curriculum units conforms to a standardized design which ensures that

students deepen and extend their learning. The rigor of this process is reflected in the identification of an activity summary which is associated with content objectives and process objectives. The latter is particularly innovative in as much that it focuses upon the identification of study skills or as students would articulate it as "habits of mind". Staff are adept at using their assessment data to create groups which accommodate different learning capabilities of students.

The school uses its budget effectively to promote the learning needs of students. The curriculum is enhanced by a significant range of enrichment activities. For example, students enthusiastically refer to programs provided at the Hall of Science relating to astronomy or rocket propulsion. The administration has been creative in its scheduling to ensure that students have a suitably creative and stimulating learning experience across a range of core subjects.

The Learning Environment Survey responses indicated high levels of mutual trust and respect between parents and the school. This was endorsed by the positive attitudes expressed at the parents meeting and reflects the parental opinion at conference meetings. The school is mindful of promoting greater parental involvement from a community which is reticent to be involved in broader aspects of the school's life. Despite the low attendance at parental workshops which are designed to raise awareness about curriculum issues, they nevertheless turn out in significant numbers to take advantage of the extensive conferencing about their child's progress.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

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

The school effectively provides a differentiated approach to professional development through a systematic program of lesson observations and analysis of data related to student outcomes. The relatively small size of the school enables the principal and assistant principals to work with individual teachers on specific issues. A strength of this position is that most of the professional development draws upon the expertise which is evident in the school. The organizational systems based upon the collaborative arrangements between pairs of teachers are a productive medium for promoting staff development. The common planning related to unit development provides the context for discussion about effective teaching strategies. The staff working in their respective teams have delegated responsibility to ensure that their planning of the curriculum delivers relevant and challenging learning opportunities for students. The autonomy inherent in this process is indicative of the principals' commitment to distributed leadership. This process is very productive in building the capacity of the school for improvement.

New staff are supported well through a mentoring program. The collaborative arrangements ensure that they are part of ongoing dialogue, on a daily basis, about how they can improve their instructional practice. Part of this process is the numerous opportunities for them to visit colleagues' classrooms and to be involved in activities such as the grading of student work through the application of the rubrics. New staff enthusiastically confirm that these activities are supportive and enhance their professional competencies.

The commitment of the administration to engaging staff in decision-making is reflected in the productive work of the Inquiry Team. The composition of the group not only draws

from the administration and aspiring principal's staff but also teachers who are relatively new to the profession. The Inquiry Team meets regularly twice a week to discuss strategies, organize data collation and reflect upon next steps to enhance the learning of students in their sample of high-achieving grade 8 students. The processes and procedures being used are effectively shared with other members of staff so as to enhance their expertise.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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, through its innovative scheduling arrangements and subsequent collaborative systems has effectively created a process which rigorously identifies strengths and areas for improvement related to the curriculum and instruction. In all core subjects teachers have created comprehensive systems to regularly assess and monitor the progress of students. The outcomes of this formative process are part of the regular discussions after each unit at work. The subsequent decisions to promote improvement are efficiently synthesized in action plans. Regular meetings are held with individual teachers and with teachers in respective grade levels to reflect upon the progress of action plans and whether subsequent data needs the revision of these plans so as to address student need more fully. This process of data review highlighted the need to provide more support for students to help them develop more effective reading strategies. To that end the school schedule was changed to implement a school-wide reading program which included literature electives in the middle school and specified reading time in the advisory session. In general action plans are insufficiently robust in the identification of interim reviews.

The collation assessments through the SPA plan provide data on performance levels and indicate next steps in students' learning. This information enables teachers to modify their instructional goals and adjust teaching strategies to meet the specific needs of students. They use of rubrics designed to assess the outcomes of specific curriculum units effectively supplement this analysis and review. The regular discussions between individual staff and the administration about their work have significantly promoted the confidence of a relatively inexperienced staff on the use of data and the tracking of student progress.

The school is self reflective and proactive in generating its own data. The faculty is routinely engaged through grade meetings in regular discussions about instruction and how it can be improved. The drive for improvement which is evident in the purposeful commitment of staff is generated by the vision and infectious enthusiasm of the principal.

School name: The Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science.	Δ	➢	✓	+
Overall QR Score				**X**

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to uderstand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student's progress over time.				
To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly…	Δ	➢	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				**X**
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			**X**	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students' learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?				**X**
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student's progress?				**X**
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				**X**

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.				
To what extent do school leaders and faculty…	Δ	➢	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?				**X**
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?				**X**
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?				**X**
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			**X**	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				**X**

DEFINITIONS

"Analyze" or "analysis" includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:
- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school's Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

"Assessment results" include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school's curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

"Core subjects" are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

"Data-informed processes" include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

"Groupings of students" include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

"Organizational decisions or strategies" refer to a school's use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school's structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

"Sub-groups of students" include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.				
To what extent do …	Δ	➢	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?				X
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?				X
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?				X
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.				
To what extent do school leaders…	Δ	➢	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher's instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?				X
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?				X
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 and its strategies for improving each teacher's instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?				X
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?				X
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X

Quality Review Scoring Key			
Δ **Underdeveloped**	➢ **Underdeveloped with Proficient Features**	✓ **Proficient**	+ **Well Developed**