



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

**Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning**

# **Quality Review Report**

## **2014-2015**

**Urban Academy Laboratory**

**High School M565**

**317 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10065**

**Principal: Adam Grumbach**

**Date of review: May 5, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen**

## The School Context

Urban Academy Laboratory is a high school with 167 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 33% Black, 32% Hispanic, 27% White, 7% Asian and 1% multi-racial students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 2% special education students. Boys account for 40% of the students enrolled and girls account for 60%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 97.1%.

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	<b>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	<b>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

High expectations, aligned to Danielson's Framework for Teaching, are communicated to and embraced by all teachers. A unified set of high expectations is communicated to students in a systematic fashion.

### Impact

Teachers hold each other accountable to the school's high professional expectations. Students receive ongoing guidance and feedback resulting in ownership over their educational experience and preparedness for life after graduation.

### Supporting Evidence

- At the beginning of each semester, the entire teaching staff collaborates on the design and implementation of a school wide two-week project grounded in a central question, which itself is determined by the staff. Once the question is established, pairs of teachers collaboratively design specific tasks that are rigorous and inquiry based. Teachers vet each other's curriculum design to ensure alignment to the central question, as well as whether the task is appropriately challenging and engaging. This process also serves as part of acclimation process for teachers new to the school. The staff as a whole coordinates, facilitates and implements this school tradition.
- The school's tutorial program is designed to support students in their efforts to master skills embedded in their performance based assessments, known as proficiencies, which must be successfully completed in order to graduate. Tutorial teachers provide students with proficiency progress sheets that clearly present where students are in the process of completing the proficiency. The structure and culture of the school tutorial program also promotes professional mutual accountability amongst teachers. It is common practice for teachers to go to each other to clarify the presentation of tasks, make suggestions that might benefit student achievement and provide updates on how students are faring with the work. In addition, over the four years, all students are exposed to a wide variety of colleges by going on semi-annual colleges trips in their tutorial groups.
- Students spoke of a number of ways in which the school prepares them for the future. One stated that since the classes are more discussion based, they help build confidence. Another stated, "We have to give evidence and not just react to other people's ideas. We have to think about what they said. Everyone's opinion matters." Students also noted how the ability to select their courses is similar to what occurs in college. Lastly, students agreed that the performance tasks, known as proficiencies, require them to develop skills that will be useful beyond graduation such as interviewing others and writing long essays.
- Students are required to complete community service projects with schools, museums, community groups and non-profit organizations. A review of community service final evaluations showed that students were assessed on their ability to cooperate, complete assignments, show initiative and be present and punctual.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across classrooms, students were engaged in the school's instructional methodology, "inquiry pedagogy", however high-quality supports and extensions were not provided across the vast majority of classrooms.

### Impact

Though rigor and student engagement were embedded in learning activities, all students were not supported to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills.

### Supporting Evidence

- Students' voices and opinions were heard consistently as they grappled with information and ideas. For example, in a social studies class, though only approximately half the class actively engaged in the discussion, students were overheard discussing the role and impact of the Supreme Court and the manner in which justices are appointed.
- In a photography class, a student presented her work for critique, and with the teacher's guidance her peers interpreted, analyzed and commented on the work.
- In a science class, students were observed experimenting on materials. One student stated, "I'm trying to see which melts ice faster: milk, milk and coffee, or just coffee." Another student was exploring how the different sizes of heated rocks affect the water they are submerged in. All students determined what materials they would use, what would be measured and what would serve as constants.
- In a math class that was observed, students were seen engaging at various stages of a math project. While one worked at her own pace on the logic section, incorporating feedback that the teacher had given her, another was working on the application section where she was taking math concepts learned in class and applying them to real world contexts. However, such strategically assigned multiple entry points into a task were not provided across the vast majority of classrooms observed. For example, in a social studies class, students were grouped and assigned non-fiction text to read in preparation for a debate, but there were no apparent supports for diverse reading ability, nor were the groupings clearly strategic.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Using performance based assessments as a starting point; the school's curricula are designed to emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills as well as the strategic integration of Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts.

### Impact

The curricula coherently promote college and career readiness as they encourage students to demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- The performance indicators found in New York Performance Standards Consortium rubrics, which inform the backward design of the school's curricula, clearly outline skills aligned to the Common Core Standards such as: research to build and present knowledge, production and distribution of writing, and solve systems of equations.
- Curricular tasks coherently move students to exercise the instructional shifts: text-based analysis and writing from sources. For example, a lesson plan from an English language arts class revealed that students would discuss passages that they identified from the play *Fences* that captured important aspects of a character's personality. The design of a social studies unit shows an activity that requires students to cite the passage and appropriate page number they used to support their analysis of text that explained peoples' participation in the Holocaust.
- A task description from a Constitutional Law course showed that students would analyze ten controversial Supreme Court cases to develop opinions on the role of the Supreme Court in our history.
- The lesson plan from a physics class stated that students would design experiments to, "investigate how substances other than water absorb heat."

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

Assessment practices are aligned to the schools curricula and provide a clear portrait of student mastery while tracking student progress across grades and subjects.

### **Impact**

Actionable and meaningful feedback regarding student achievement is generated and used to make curricular and instructional adjustments, resulting in increased mastery.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- Reviews of sample proficiencies (performance assessments) from different content areas show a coherent use of rubrics that clearly highlight levels of student performance. Content teachers, students and outside evaluators all use these rubrics to assess and provide feedback on student oral presentations and written work.
- All students noted the role of revision (drafts) as being integral to how they work toward mastery, and more specifically the culminating presentations. A student stated, "Getting feedback on drafts is how we track our own progress over time."
- The tutorials structure is designed to support ongoing improvement in performance based tasks across content areas. Instructional adjustments based on student performance primarily take place via ongoing individualized support in tutorials, where when needed, teachers create support plans. To inform their efforts, tutorial teachers receive tutorial notes from classroom teachers regarding the progress of their advisees.
- Students consistently articulated next steps for improvement on tasks based on meaningful feedback. For example, they noted: the need for citations from the text, improving transitioning from one idea to another, connecting ones opinions and feelings to text evidence and effectively organizing one's writing.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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**Findings**

Teacher teams systematically analyze instructional practices, student work and data. Structures are embedded that ensure effective teacher leadership.

**Impact**

Instructional coherence and improvement as well as increased student mastery result from ongoing teacher collaboration. Teachers are integral in important decisions that impact teaching and learning across the school.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Staff meetings are periodically used to do a comprehensive review of the performance and behavior of targeted students. As a result both programmatic and instructional interventions are discussed, as well as the viability of the performance tasks being asked of the students. Such discussions have resulted in the: reformatting of assessment documents to increase accessibility to students with IEPs, redesigning of tasks to increase student interest, formation of intervention committees to reach out to parents, and sharing suggestions for the strategic support of students. A teacher noted that it was during such a staff meeting that some teachers realized that challenges that they were having with a student weren't occurring in other classes. "We agreed to try to replicate what our colleagues were doing and it worked."
- While in department meetings, teachers frequently discuss student performance on pre-requisite or proficiency tasks. During a science team meeting, a teacher was observed sharing the results of a pedagogical shift made at the suggestion of the team at an earlier meeting. At that meeting it was proposed that a modified pre-requisite task be created for a student that has challenges writing in an organized fashion. The student was tasked with doing research, making index cards for the oral presentation and executing the oral presentation. He then did the writing component based on how he organized and presented his talk. The written sample showed a marked improvement compared his efforts to produce writing directly after doing research.
- Teachers are the primary decision makers regarding the ongoing development of courses. Departments meet to discuss which old courses will be taught and what new courses will be offered in the following semester. For example, the math department developed a course for upper classmen with low skills, where students work on their projects while getting basic skill support.