Department of Education
Chancellor Richard A. Carranza

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2017-2018

Urban Academy Laboratory High School

High school 02M565

317 East 67 Street
Manhattan
NY 10065

Principal: Adam Grumbach

Dates of Review:
May 31, 2018 - June 1, 2018

Lead Reviewer: Lenneen Gibson

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

Urban Academy Laboratory High School serves students in grade 9 through grade 12. 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

Instructional Core		
To what extent does the school...	**Area**	**Rating**
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	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
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	**Area of Focus**	**Proficient**
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	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**

School Quality Ratings continued

School Culture		
To what extent does the school...	**Area**	**Rating**
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	**Area of Celebration**	**Well Developed**

Systems for Improvement		
To what extent does the school...	**Area**	**Rating**
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
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	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	**Additional Finding**	**Well Developed**
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 the CCLS	**Additional Finding**	**Proficient**

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

School leaders consistently communicate to staff high expectations for instruction via the new teacher mentoring guidelines, teacher collaboration on curricula, tutorial design, and executive functioning

Impact

Mutual accountability for expectations is achieved through intervisitations. Teachers and staff provide students feedback on next steps for their educational journey.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders have clear expectations for staff which are evidenced through structures such as new teacher orientations. Under the school's mentoring guidelines, teachers joining the staff undergo two years of mentoring. The mentee has a reduced teaching load and the mentor observes the mentee for every class and meets to discuss the practices, devise a plan, and analyze the progress of the mentee. The mentee sits in on every session the mentor teaches as part of the mentor-mentee relationship. Each year, the mentee's teaching load increases and the course selection for teaching a class is determined by the mentor and the mentee. The data is shared with the principal and frames the future work of the mentee. During the teacher meeting, a teacher mentioned that the feedback is valuable. Teachers are held accountable for these practices via the observation process and mutual accountability is through peer observations.

- Expectations for instruction such as curricula and tutorial (advisory) decisions are delineated and established during monthly staff meetings. Teachers work collaboratively or in pairs to work on a curriculum known as The Project that is adopted by the whole school for tutorial (advisory) classes for new students. Its purpose is to acclimate students to the school's culture while getting to know New York City. This year, The Project's focus was, "How does water affect New York City?" Teachers and administrators revisit the purpose of tutorial to ensure it is meeting the needs of students. The purpose of tutorial is to provide students with social-emotional support, monitor them day-to-day along the path to graduation and attaining "proficiencies," and college counseling. It was also established that students with special needs require additional support in organizing their assignments, tracking assignments, and organizing their papers. Teachers collaborated and established an executive-functioning support for students with special needs. As a result of these processes, students attested to learning more about New York City, and students with special needs have achieved a mean grade point average of eighty-two percent.

- Teachers and staff have set clear structures such as tutorial, college counseling, and academic intervention to prepare students for their educational journey. Tutorials meet twice a week with a mentor who supports students in attaining proficiencies, meeting graduation requirements, and meeting assignment obligations. During the student meeting, students attested that the tutorials help them to stay on top of their assignments. The information garnered in tutorials is shared with all teachers. During this time, students are recommended for additional academic support. Notes on student performance and social emotional needs are shared with specific staff members. Seventy-five percent of the students enrolled in math workshop as an academic intervention have improved in the completion and the quality of math homework. Students also receive individualized college counseling with a college advisor and a financial aid advisor as support in the college admission process including selecting colleges, writing resumes and college essays, and with internships. As a result of these practices, students have been accepted to a variety of city, state, and private colleges. Students also attested that the support of the college advising has helped them in selecting their career paths and helped them to be organized.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

Teaching practices consistently reflect the school wide belief that students learn best when they derive their own perspective, that is aligned to the school's curricula during discussions.

Impact

Across classrooms teaching practices foster student discourse; however, there were missed opportunities for students to show ownership of their learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school leader's espoused belief is that students learn best when they derive their own perspective and refine and modify those views through discussions with others. In an American Revolution class, students read Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* and in a quasi-Socratic Seminar, students discussed Jefferson's perspectives on race and slavery. Students engaged in discussions based on evidence from the text and responded to prompts such as, "Could he be against slavery?" "Could you be against slavery and still be a racist?" A student stated that, "Racial stereotypes empower racists/racism." Another student stated that there were people during this time period that were against slavery because of race, but wanted to profit from slavery. Similarly, in a political philosophy class, students engaged in a circle discussion about their text, "Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do." Students discussed the quote, "To whom we owe what?" in a hypothetical situation that assumed the school engaged in past exclusionary and discriminatory behavior. Students offered arguments on how the school should address and make amends for the behavior, such as issuing a formal apology to the school community. However, in a Poetry Workshop class, students read the poem "After" and answered questions posed by teacher during a discussion to help them craft their own poem; thus, impeding students from engaging in student-to-student discourse while working with a thought partner to craft their poem.

- Students engaged in discussions that reflected critical thinking and problem solving; however, there were missed opportunities for students to demonstrate ownership of their learning. In a geometry class, the aim of the lesson required students to apply the relationship between an inscribed and central angle to find the perimeter of a slice of a circle. Students in their groups were assigned to find the perimeter of a circle. In doing so, students discussed the rationale for their answers during a share-out, while other students either agreed or disagreed with solutions. In an Algebra II class, students were reviewing for a final exam using a tic-tac-toe strategy. Students worked in groups and shared their strategies for their solution during a whole-class share-out; however, the teacher placed the answers on the board and further clarified the students' answers instead of deflecting this process to the students so that they could further demonstrate ownership of their learning.

- Student-to-student discourse reflected critical thinking, innovation, and problem solving; however, demonstration of student ownership of their learning was uneven in the classes. In an Arduino programming class, students were building and programming robots to click a pen or broadcast the weather. Students constructed their own project ideas and were discussing the nuances of programming their robot to complete a desired task, all voices were heard in each group; whereas, in a Current Issues class, students who had previously interviewed two guest speakers about systemic and personal racism in America reviewed the transcript of the interview and discussed in a circle precipitous behavior for racism such as stereotypes connected to race. Although students were engaged in the discussion, the same voices dominated the conversations, thus impeding all voices from contributing to the discussion.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

Teachers strategically incorporate the Common Core Learning Standards into lesson and unit plans, and integrate the instructional shifts of citing textual evidence and constructing arguments. Rigor is embedded in curricula and academic tasks.

Impact

Curricula and academic tasks enable all learners to demonstrate their thinking and result in coherence across the subject areas, thus promoting college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards while strategically integrating the instructional shift of constructing viable arguments and counter-arguments that are grounded in evidence. A constitutional law scope and sequence outlines tasks that require students to analyze the arguments in landmark cases in their own words, construct legal briefs, and write their opinions about the landmark cases by addressing the best arguments made on both sides. A mathematics mirror project required students to discern how tall the ceiling was in their classroom. Using a mirror and a yardstick, students conducted an investigation by describing their problem, constructing a hypothesis, designing an experiment, and analyzing their findings to justify their hypothesis. Tasks share the common thread of constructing arguments, resulting in coherence across the subject areas, and promoting college and career readiness.

- Academic tasks require students including English Language Learners (ELLs) to consider multiple meanings, interpretations, and support positions. An ELA essay required students to choose the thesis, “Social media is destroying the creativity of children”, or is “Social media is saving children from the dangers of the street.” A scaffold details how to write a hook for the introduction through strategies such as a quote, anecdote, interesting fact, simile, metaphor, or rhetorical question. Additional scaffolds support the creation of an argument in the body paragraphs, and an explanation of a quote that connects the arguments. An American History task allowed students to select their own topic such as, “Did the American Revolution represent progress for American women?” Students were tasked with writing an essay that marshaled supporting and opposing arguments for their topic. A scaffold for ELLs deconstructed the supporting and opposing arguments for the essay; thus all learners have the opportunity to demonstrate their thinking.

- Rigorous habits are embedded in a coherent way across grades and subject areas. An ELA task required students to respond to the prompt, “Should parents use corporal punishment on children?” Students were tasked with constructing an argument and a counter-argument for the topic. ELLs were provided a scaffold to help plan their essay by providing prompting questions for each portion of the essay. Additionally, students were required to annotate their essay for argument, opposing argument, and their thesis. A science task required students to design an experiment to determine the water quality of bottled water. Students conducted water quality tests for impurity and the concentration of hydrogen.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

Subject specific trackers are used to monitor student progress on the completion of “proficiencies” to get a clear picture of student progress towards graduation and offer a clear portrait of student mastery.

Impact

Data from “proficiencies” demonstrate mastery for all students. Feedback to students is meaningful and actionable regarding student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers individually and as part of collaborative teams use graduation trackers across grades and subject areas as well as a proficiency progress report to analyze student performance data. This data is used to tier students who are either on track to graduate, qualify for graduation, or are in need of interventions and parent conferences. For instance in math, students may be referred for a program called pizza math, which provides students with one-to-one tutoring support during lunch periods or for an after-school math lab program. Similarly, proficiency progress reports denote student progress towards completion of performance based assessment tasks known as “proficiencies.” The progress report also tracks the courses needed in order to complete the “proficiencies,” as well as the supports that are in place to support students such as mentoring for “proficiency” completion. As a result of this process, 92 percent of the seniors have completed their graduation requirements, thus demonstrating a clear portrait of mastery.

- Teachers use trackers in ELA and science to continuously monitor student progress towards completion of “proficiencies” towards graduation. The science tracker denotes any prerequisite courses students completed, their progress toward completion of “proficiencies,” and program recommendations needed in order for the student to complete his or her graduation requirements. Similarly, in ELA, progress on “proficiencies” is monitored for graduation requirements. As a result of this progress monitoring system, 92 percent of the seniors are on track for graduation.

- All student work is assessed with the four point New York Performance Standards Consortium rubrics that are customized for specific content areas. During the student meeting, students attested that the feedback they receive from the teachers is meaningful, as they submit several drafts and revisions of their work using the feedback of teacher and peers to improve their final drafts. Students also mentioned that they use the feedback in other subjects, thus showing the feedback is meaningful. Students cited examples of feedback on their essays such as the need to include more textual evidence to support their claims and revise their thesis to make it clearer. In mathematics, students are required to explain their reasoning in their proofs. Students also receive feedback from their peers during in-class presentations. During an environmental science class, students devised an experiment to test the quality of different brands of bottled water. The teacher provided the students feedback on how to display their data in the report, using a table to show acceptable ranges in water quality. Lastly, the students were told to cite their sources.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision	Rating:	Proficient

Findings

School leaders provide feedback to teachers that include strengths and next steps. Trends in feedback are used to plan professional development to support student discussions in classes.

Impact

Feedback to teachers about instructional practices and professional development promote teacher professional growth.

Supporting Evidence

- A review of observation reports showed that teacher feedback is aligned to the instructional focus of using multiple sources of evidence to support an argument during discussions. Trends in commendations to teachers cited questioning and discussion. Teachers were commended for students using counter-arguments in their discussions to further demonstrate the multiple perspectives in an argument. Additionally, teachers received positive citations for their checks for understanding as they circulated among groups and posed questions, thus allowing the students to come to their own understanding. Trends in the next steps included ways to maximize student engagement and participation during a discussion. Recommendations mentioned students being able to track discussions by taking pertinent notes of important points in a discussion. Moreover, this would give teachers some insight into the student's thinking, add a layer of accountability during discussions, and provide the students with notes to refer back to support homework completion. As a result of the feedback, teachers' ratings swing back and forth between effective and highly effective across all components of Danielson.

- The school's observation process also includes feedback from peers. Prior to a peer observation, teacher pairs meet to discuss the focus of the observation which is typically an area of focus for both teachers. Trends in peer observation reports showed the focus of most observation visits was in the area of engaging students in learning. Teachers sought to find strategies to maximize student engagement during discussions. Examples of feedback to teachers cited the use of historical illustrations to show the parallels between modern day events and historical events. Additionally, teachers mentioned bringing into discussions the differences in student interests in order to engage the students. Lastly, teachers mentioned incorporating student questions into the discussions and having students summarizing their understanding of the lesson. During the teacher meetings, teacher mentioned that the peer evaluations support them in conducting discussions, and provide the teachers an opportunity to look at all of the observations holistically to note the recurring themes in the observations and how to address them.

- Professional development decisions are based on teacher feedback on observations. Trends in observation data showed a need for professional development in the area of student engagement and participation. To address this need a professional development session on using Google forms to survey students to provide them a voice by using the survey data during class discussions. Teachers noticed a change in student behavior that demonstrated lack of organization, and students' consistently missing work. In order to address this issue, professional development session on executive functioning was conducted in order to support teachers in working with students to better organize themselves.

Additional Finding

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development	Rating:	Well Developed

Findings

All teachers engage in inquiry-based professional collaborations and analyze student work using protocols. Distributed leadership practices such as the financial aid and college advisor are embedded in the school.

Impact

The professional collaborations on vertical teams has strengthened teacher capacity and resulted in school wide instructional coherence. Distributive leadership allows teachers to play an integral role in decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- A vertical teacher team was observed engaging in an inquiry process that looked at student work using a protocol. The team looked at samples of a student's writing, the student's transcript, and the student improvement plan to review the supports and interventions previously provided for the student. The team discussed their observations about the student's performance, and noted that while there was improvement in the quality of the student's writing in an argument class and the student was on-target in experimental work in science, the student was struggling in math class. The teachers discussed the next steps for the student such as implementing math tutoring in the student's schedule and using some course work to complete pre-requisites for "proficiencies". Teachers stated that the impact of teacher team work on their instructional capacity has been the opportunity to meet with teachers and support them in planning modifications in their lesson plans such as graphic organizers, planning curricula and working with teachers outside disciplines, designing courses, or planning for accommodations such as tutoring.

- A review of teacher team notes revealed a vertical team engaging in inquiry work by looking at a student's argumentative writing sample across the content areas. Using the Descriptive Review protocol, the teachers recorded their recommendations for the teacher and student, indicating that the writing sample needed more structure and organization, more self-editing, additional written and oral feedback from teachers, and more attention to the student's writing process as this was a similar recommendation for the student in mathematics. As a result of this collaboration, the teachers designed a color-coded annotation structure that differentiated the thesis from the evidence which has been adopted by other subject areas, thus resulting in schoolwide instructional coherence.

- In concert with the school's goal of 85 percent of teachers participating in two classroom visits or peer observations. Teachers conducted a round of intervisitations and based on their observations constructed a list of four questions as the focus for each study group. An example was, "How can we challenge and support each kid in class with a broad range of skills?" Teachers conducted another round of intervisitations and shared best practices such as using questions to pace the lesson to meet the needs of students who learn at different paces and strategic structuring of groups to allow peers to support one another, and differentiated activities for students with broad skill ranges. As result of the collaboration amongst the study group, the groups exceeded the goal by conducting four intervisitations by June.

- Distributed leadership practices are embedded and play an integral role in impacting student's next steps in their educational journey. Teachers serve in dual roles of college and financial aid advisor where they meet with students and their families to work on next steps in the college application process. As a result of this system in place, all students are receiving individualized support. As per the 2016-17 School Quality Snapshot, sixty percent of the students have enrolled in post-secondary institutions, and eighty percent of the students have increased success on the ELA placement test for the City University of New York admissions.