



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Urban Assembly School of Design and  
Construction**

**High School 300  
525 West 50 Street  
New York  
NY 10019**

**Principal: Lawrence Pendergast**

**Dates of review: March 21 - 22, 2007**

**Reviewer: Mike Sutton**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The school is in the West of Midtown Manhattan but students come from a much wider area with some traveling very long distances. There are 292 students enrolled from grade 9 through 11. Next year the school will be grade 9 through 12.

Of those enrolled, 62% are Hispanic, 26% Black, 4% Asian, 4% White and 4% are of other ethnicities. There are considerably more male than female students although the distribution is more even in the lower grades. Around 8% of the population is special education students and 9% are English language learners. Some 62% of the students are Title 1 eligible which is substantially higher than in similar schools and City schools overall. Around 9% of the students are at early stages of learning to speak English which is lower than for most City high schools. Attendance is at 89% which is comparable to similar and City 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, which are a group of schools within the empowerment network.

The school opened in September 2004 and occupies the same building as five other schools, sharing a number of facilities such as the gymnasium and the cafeteria. It has moved location three times in as many years.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is exceptionally well led by the principal during its first three years and towards the next phase of its development.
- The school has successfully established its overarching aims and aligned its curriculum well with its thematic focus of construction and design.
- A positive and successful climate for learning has been established through a very hard working and dedicated teaching and administrative staff.
- The staff know the students very well and use this knowledge to meet their individual needs.
- The school is orderly, daily routines run smoothly and the behavior of the majority of students is good.
- The students like school, enjoy their work and are making sound progress.
- There are secure systems to support those students who need extra help with their learning, have personal problems or low attendance.
- The quality of teaching is good and the school has a clear focus on developing pedagogic skills.
- There are good links with outside organizations to support the thematic work of the school.

### What the school needs to improve

- Hiring of an assistant principal and key staff vacancies as soon as possible.
- Improve the development planning and strengthen the current management structure to more closely match the needs of the school, which has grown in size and complexity.
- Improve the arrangements for professional development so they are rigorous and match the key needs of the school.
- Ensure there is more depth to the analysis of the information on the students' achievements particularly to check for differences in performance between genders and ethnic groups.
- Ensure strategic long-term planning for future development with clear targets and interim markers to gauge students' progress.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

Under the strong, direct leadership of the principal the school has evolved well since it opened. It has created a positive climate for learning and strong mutual trust and respect between students and teachers. The students feel safe and secure and are well cared for. Behavior is good and attendance is improving steadily.

The school has devised a curriculum which meets its thematic focus and makes good use of a wide range of specialists and other institutions. There is a focus on academic success with teachers planning in grade teams to meet the needs of individuals. Teaching engages students' interest. As a result, students' achievements are improving and most make at least satisfactory progress. The school has successfully targeted support at under-performing students who are now making much better progress. The special education students and English language learners receive specific support which enables them to address areas of difficulty and improve their performance.

The school makes sound use of data on an individual student level and to address specific issues such as attendance levels or those students where slippage in credits is jeopardizing their chances of graduation. Although the principal has a good understanding of the relative performance of different grades and subjects, there is not yet enough analysis of other aspects of students' performance such as the achievements of different genders, ethnic or ability groups.

The school established a narrow management base to steer it through the initial years of its development. It has grown in size and complexity and there are now too many tasks for the principal to manage alone. Planning for school development, staff professional development and subject improvement lack rigor because too little responsibility is delegated. The school has appraised this situation itself but has yet to complete the hiring of an assistant principal or identify key subject leaders.

### **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 proficient.**

The school has a wide range of data on students. Most of this is from teachers' assessments of individuals but, as the school has grown, greater use is being made of other assessment tools for each student, classroom and grade level. Most recently, new pilot materials have been used well to measure the improvements that students make during the year.

The information which teachers gather on individuals gives them an accurate and frequently updated view of each student's progress and allows them to plan work appropriate to their needs. Likewise for special education students and English language learners. Grade teams have a good overview of the relative performance of their classes

but neither they nor senior leaders analyze such information to look at other factors or potential differences in performance such as between genders, or different ethnic groups.

The school has made good use of data and particularly new data, to examine the performance of particular groups causing concern such as those with poor attendance or those where credit accumulation was below the rate needed to ensure graduation. Important improvements have resulted from the measures put in place as a result.

In its first two years, the school had no secure comparative data against which to evaluate its own performance. The data recently made available to the school on performance relative to similar schools has been analyzed to determine what successes have been achieved and where more work is needed. The information shows that the school has moved the students' achievements in the right direction and these compare solidly with those of similar schools.

**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 proficient.**

The data which the school collects is not aggregated sufficiently to give a bigger picture of student achievement that would enable the school to set longer term improvement goals or construct plans to achieve them. This is because there are insufficient personnel at senior leadership positions to ensure sufficient directional guidance at subject level. The principal has rightly focused on establishing a new school with a particular curriculum theme, which runs smoothly. The weaknesses are acknowledged and strategic appointments are in hand to address them. The school has yet to re-focus attention on what is needed in the longer term to sustain and maximize existing improvements.

The school has focused on gaining a secure view of individual student's progress and achievement. It identifies and gives good attention to those students who need extra support. Those with individual education plans and those who have particular personal problems have ready access to a team of supportive personnel. They work well with teachers to provide the assistance these students need. The school, through its analysis of data, identified a group of students at danger of not graduating because they were failing to gather enough subject credits, often because facilities to undertake study at home was an issue. The school's response was to make arrangements for them to study at school and this has produced measurable benefits to their progress.

The school sets high standards and expectations of students. There is a constant focus on the standards needed for Regents examinations and the requirements for graduation. Long term development planning is not yet securely established to provide a strategic steer to the school's work. The teachers establish clear expectations in their classrooms to promote a strong work ethic. The school has worked hard to ensure that parents are as fully involved in their children's education as possible. It uses a range of strategies to raise attendance at parent-teacher conferences. The school has made good use of external consultants to survey students' views to promote a continuance of education at college.

**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 proficient.**

In most subjects, the school has constructed a curriculum that works systematically towards the requirements for Regents examination. There are sufficient check points along the way and teachers make good use of frequent tests and quizzes as well as more formal assessments to monitor their students’ progress. Much of this development work is intuitive and utilizes the teachers’ existing and growing knowledge from their previous experience. It is not sufficiently guided by over-arching school aims and quantified goals.

Teachers are held fully accountable for their work and strive constantly to improve on what they do. They work well in subject teams to plan work which meets the needs of the individual students. The quality of teaching is good. It is pitched at the right level of difficulty and challenges most students sufficiently. As a result, students are engaged in their lessons and make good progress.

The use of financial resources, scheduling and staffing decisions take adequate account of students’ performance data. There are examples of really good practice as in the funding of additional facilities for the after school homework study groups. Where possible, the least experienced teachers have been placed alongside more experienced colleagues and schedules are adjusted to enable planning to take place in teams. The analysis of individual student data has led directly to the regrouping of 10th grade students. This has enabled teachers to meet the varying needs of the students more accurately, resulting in significant credit recovery and fewer students falling short of the graduation requirements.

The teachers and administrative staff know the students very well as individuals. The staff are vigilant in looking for signs that all is not well with individuals. There is a strong sense of mutual trust and respect between students and staff and the students say they always have someone to turn to for academic or personal advice. The school has prioritized attendance as an issue for improvement and coordinated its efforts well by using guidance counselors and the parent coordinator as well as external authorities. The attendance rate has improved as a result. The school’s assessment data shows that the students whose academic performance is of greatest concern have the worst attendance records.

**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 proficient**

The school has a rigorous approach to hiring staff. Teachers are hired on the basis of secure subject knowledge and on their abilities to engage with the students. Senior staff are assessed on their abilities to understand and evaluate key data on school performance. The school’s attempt to hire an assistant principal was unsuccessful because it was not prepared to compromise the standards it set for the leadership qualities needed for the post.

Professional development has yet to take a strategic direction because the school is still in early stages of development and sufficient data has yet to be gathered and analyzed to indicate where more professional development is needed. The trial process of resourcing teachers for their own personally identified development as an interim measure has had

mixed success. Many teachers and particularly those new to the profession have grasped the opportunity and engaged in a range of training and development which has significantly improved their teaching skills. However, a significant number of teachers have not used the opportunities well. The development needs of different subjects have had inadequate attention because there has been little guidance on how professional development should be used to effect wider improvement. The principal has a very clear overview of the quality of what happens in classrooms. Daily visits, together with regular formal observations of teachers enable accurate helpful and developmental feedback. Teachers observe each other where they can but this aspect is less commonly used largely due to scheduling issues.

Well organized office procedures ensure that the school is orderly and runs well on a day-to-day basis. The principal is very highly regarded by the whole school community and his huge input into the creation of the school is widely recognized. As one student said 'He is always here, totally dedicated – sometimes too dedicated.' Given the positive progress to date, there is every indication that the school has a strong capacity to continue to improve.

The school has gathered a wide range of external support and consultancy to match the thematic focus of the school. An architect in residence, links with commercial design institutions and an ambitious and successful visit to architectural centers in Europe all contribute strongly to this developing aspect of the school's work.

**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 undeveloped.**

The school has weak and undeveloped systems for the ongoing evaluation of its work. In its first two years, the school resources allowed for very modest numbers of senior leaders and the principal had numerous responsibilities. This structure still exists and the needs of the growing school have overtaken the effectiveness of this management structure. Too much responsibility and work now falls on the principal. There are no English or mathematics coaches, for reasons beyond the school's control, and this compounds the problem of establishing coherent fit-for-purpose management structures. No subject has an established leader and it speaks volumes for the professionalism of the teachers that curriculum development still takes place in all subject areas.

There is some useful work taking place to make comparisons between classes or groups of children. For example, the mathematics team has a good understanding of what the range of assessments is showing about progress and data has been well used to address some of the issues of under-achievement. However, such work tends to be piecemeal and lack strategic coordination or direction. Similarly, the Comprehensive Education Plan does not contain clear enough targets for improvement in the medium or longer term because the information on existing achievement levels has not been analyzed sufficiently. The current plans do not address all the key areas of the school, or project forward to anticipate what areas might need attention next. The school has shown its ability to respond quickly and decisively in matters such as re-structuring the 11th grade in response to the analysis of student performance. It needs more consistent information of this sort to ensure that achievement continues to rise.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: The Urban Assembly School of Design and Construction (HS 300)</b>			
	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			
		<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>			
	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		<b>X</b>	
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"> <li>ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	<b>X</b>		
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"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>	<b>X</b>		
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.		<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			
		<b>X</b>	

\* 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.

<b>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.</b>			
	∅	✓	+
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.	<b>X</b>		
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.	<b>X</b>		
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
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.	<b>X</b>		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			
		<b>X</b>	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>	X		