

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

**The Urban Assembly School of Design and
Construction**

**High School 300
525 West 50 Street
Manhattan
NY 10019**

Principal: Matthew Willoughby

Dates of review: March 4 - 5, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Elaine Gorman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School of Design and Construction is a high school with 367 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 24% Black, 65% Hispanic, 5% White, and almost 5% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and nearly 14% special education students. Boys account for 79% and girls account for 21%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 87.5%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 69.8% eligibility.

The school, established in 2004, saw its first graduating class in 2008, and the departure of the founding principal. An assistant principal was also hired. The school is located on the fourth floor of a building it shares with five other schools. The school shares the gymnasium and cafeteria. The design classroom resides in the basement.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Urban Assembly of Design and Construction offers a welcoming environment and relationships are respectful between all constituencies. There are strong structures for distributive leadership and staff collaboration by grade levels and departments. The new principal, in his first semester, has established himself as the instructional leader and a model of professionalism. A robust analysis of data exists and the school accelerates the learning needs of all students. Significant organizational adjustments ensure students get back on track for graduation and provide enrichment. Next steps include a greater focus on mastery of content and skills and inquiry into root causes for deficiencies in credit accumulation.

The special education and English as a second language departments tailor their programs to include push-in, pullout, and inclusion support for these students. The school reviews their performance and that of other groupings regularly and this is improving. Several teachers plan for differentiated instruction according to specific learning goals for students. However, this is not a consistent practice throughout the school. The current curriculum offers the foundation for further work, including greater use of formative assessment. Flexibility in grouping practices and products of learning and independent learning opportunities exists. All students participate in weekly design seminars and can continue their design studies through independent studies and internships. Several teachers effectively integrate design principles into student work, such as the urban planning project in economics. The flexibility within classrooms and in programming for extension opportunities results in higher student engagement.

The school is yet to focus professional development for teachers on broad needs and trends identified through classroom observation. The energetic staff seeks opportunities to work and learn together to improve the quality of their instruction. The school enjoys substantive partnerships with the Urban Assembly organization and additional businesses to support classrooms and individual students. The school communicates high expectations for all students in attendance, behavior and college readiness.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The new principal has effectively assessed the status of the school and established himself as the instructional leader and a model of professionalism.
- Distributive leadership and staff collaboration by grade and content teams enables regular review of student data and results in organizational decisions to meet the learning needs of all students.
- A smart and committed staff work diligently and are highly accessible to students and parents during the school day and through email.
- School leaders use teachers' professional development goals in providing written feedback to a staff keen to improve their practice.
- Strong partnerships with the Urban Assembly and with businesses in the community have a positive impact on instruction and student support programs.
- There is a welcoming atmosphere in the school and genuine respect and camaraderie among school leadership, staff, students and parents.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen data analysis to focus on mastery of content and skills rather than performance on tests.
- Ensure that there is well-established, differentiated instruction, throughout the school, which meets the needs of individuals and groups of students.
- Develop the use of formative assessment to inform students of their learning goals and to facilitate instructional modifications.
- Extend the work of the cabinet and inquiry team to determine the root causes of insufficient credit accumulation among many students.

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 do, and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The new principal, along with an effective cabinet of administrators and staff, accurately assessed the status of the school using robust and wide ranging review data. This review is continuing throughout the year in all subject areas. However, although there are models of promising practices in most subjects, strategic use and ongoing analysis of data, to develop and follow individual learning strengths and needs, varies by teacher and subject area.

The school effectively tailors programs for students with individual educational plans and English language learners, to include push-in, pullout, and inclusion supports. Teachers track student performance on key skills needed to develop English proficiency, as well as content performance.

The school keeps daily records for attendance and punctuality, and this year developed it further and started period attendance. Interventions for long-term absentees are in place to keep students in school, which is beginning to have a positive effect. The school started a procedure to collect discipline data and gain a clear sense of which students are committing behavior infractions and to what extent consequences work to deter misbehavior. The school breaks this information down by period, teacher, and infraction to determine teachers needing more training, and the need for leadership presence. It also analyzes school-wide trends and as a result, there is currently a reduction in behavioral infractions.

A committed staff work diligently and students and parents acknowledge them for their high degree of accessibility. Staff are responsive and the majority communicate regularly with students and families on progress toward reaching goals.

The school leaders astutely identify the school's next steps. They are aware that the data the school gathers and utilizes is at present too focused on performance on tests and not sufficiently based on the mastery of skills.

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 proficient.

The school invests resources to ensure structures are in place for leaders and staff to collaborate on curricula and individual and groups of students. Grade teachers meet weekly to discuss student performance and grade-level procedures. During grade

meetings, teachers share information about a few key students. The cabinet, which meets bi-weekly, engages into rich discussions about how to reach subsets of struggling students. Leadership often attends bi-weekly department meetings to set and adjust timeframes and clarify next steps toward goals. Each marking period, grade teams and departments also have a chance to review data on student performance to determine the direction for the coming marking period. This year the school is using C-PAS assessments, used by Urban Assembly schools, to teach college-ready standards to students and communicate high expectations. It has worked hard to be more explicit to students about graduation requirements, investing considerable time in explaining how to read a transcript. The school's data analysis does not sufficiently focus on mastery of content and skills, in addition to credit accumulation and performance on tests, in order to develop specific learning plans and next steps for students. The school is poised to build on current curriculum development and models of promising practices of several teachers to embed differentiated instruction that meets the learning needs of individual and groups of students. There are no interim checkpoints in place, to evaluate whether students are reaching their learning goals. The work of the cabinet and inquiry team involves almost half the teaching staff. Although the teams have identified insufficient credit accumulation as an area of inquiry, they have not yet determined root causes in order to develop a rigorous plan for instructional change strategies. Nor has there been an assessment of recently implemented organizational changes.

The school is highly collaborative and aligns the goals of grade and department teams, the principal's goals, and the Comprehensive Educational Plan. The new principal has drafted the next steps for the school. He plans to engage staff in verifying the direction through the lens of what knowledge, skills, and behaviors a graduate should possess. Teacher leaders of English language arts have initiated a valuable effort to develop a continuum of reading, writing, and thinking skills for grades 9 through 12. Teachers expect this work to be a means to further collaboration of content across grade levels and even further deepen their work.

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 proficient.

There is a standards-based curriculum for all subjects and there are good models with delineated, specified student outcomes. In some classrooms, teachers share these outcomes with students and follow progress throughout the marking period. The principal states, "leveraging faculty expertise has been crucial to allowing our staff the flexibility in their planning that meets our students' needs". This planning includes development of curricula, mock exams, student grouping, and to some extent the scheduling of elective and make-up classes. The school makes decisions about groupings because of a review of student databased test scores, diagnostic testing, and teacher-made assessments. Groupings are flexible in most subject areas. Students report that most teachers challenge them through flexible groups based on varied assignments, open-ended questioning, and the use of models, authentic assignments, and options for independent work particularly in design, internships, and professional

critiques. Eighty percent of seniors participate in an open advanced placement sequence.

The leaders and staff made the decision to make dramatic changes to the schedule for second semester to better use instructional time. An additional period enabled students in need of credits to get back on track to graduate and the school offered additional challenging and engaging electives. Teachers had the opportunity to write proposals for new courses, which they spoke about with enthusiasm.

The school does not yet consistently use formative assessment within the well-established lesson structure, to inform students of the intended learning and to facilitate instructional modifications. There are, however, existing models of promising practices in differentiating instruction to share with staff. Teachers are committed to furthering their practices. They push themselves to do more for their students and recognize that they can build on their high expectations to engage students to be more involved in their own learning both in and out of the classroom.

The school climate is important to all constituencies. They comment on its value and students and staff demonstrate a very high level of respect for each other. The principal stated, "We work hard to cultivate a culture of respect and achievement amongst our students and staff." The school handles breaches of cultural standards privately and immediately. Adults model professional behavior as a way of guiding the students, and the students respond accordingly. There is a genuine commitment to high expectations for all.

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 proficient.

The school grounds professional development in collaboration in curriculum writing and through content team meetings. This work has resulted in strong beginnings of vertical and horizontal alignment of curricula. Teaming is also meeting the needs of a young staff as they discuss their next steps in meeting the needs of their students. The principal states "teacher voice, through these collaborative teams, fuels plans for professional development." English and math teams meet weekly to discuss their practice, look at student work and performance data, examine and further develop curriculum. They examine and select classroom resources, and discuss individual and departmental goals. The social studies and science departments do the same work, meeting every other week. Grade-level teams devote time each week to discuss students and successfully develop instructional and behavior intervention strategies. The school makes effective use of cabinet meetings to determine patterns. Teachers value opportunities to do intervisitation and attend conferences. The school is making plans for teachers to visit other schools. This year there are two first-year English as a second language teachers. They receive effective mentoring from the English department and from Manhattan Bridges, another school in the complex that exclusively serves English language learners. Students and parents rightly comment that the staff is hardworking and energetic.

Teachers articulate their professional development goals in the context of a school-wide workshop on “What is Good Instruction?” During the first semester, the newly hired principal and assistant principal made use of informal observations with written feedback to promote teacher self-reflection and growth. However, they have not yet consistently scheduled formal observations and conversations, nor clearly align benchmarks for growth to defined goals.

Teachers and other support staff communicate regularly with students and families about performance, although there are plans to develop this area further. The school is correctly turning greater focus to further articulating school goals for student learning and developing professional development aligned to student outcomes.

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 proficient.

The school has firmly established structures to effectively monitor and flexibly adjust to student needs, particularly with organizational modifications. Grade teams identify students in danger of failing, the particular areas of difficulty, and the interventions required. Plans are in place for the reviews to occur across all content areas four to five times throughout the year and a summative investigation at year’s end. There are teachers in most subject areas that monitor more robustly at the classroom level and a few teachers engage students in monitoring their own classroom goals, but these are not universal practices throughout the school. Special educators and teachers of English language learners monitor student performance constantly.

The last progress report indicated the greatest need for improvement in the area of credit accumulation, particularly with students in the lowest third that are in their second and third years of high school. The school has made the most rigorous data analysis and modifications in this area. The administration analyses attendance and behavioral data daily and interventions are on going.

The school’s self-evaluation and additional plan for next steps provided an accurate reflection of the school as evidenced by conversations with teachers and students and documents provided. This includes further development of formative assessment to facilitate instructional modification and study of standards-based grading practices. This is a credit to the new principal and a smart and committed staff. There are plans to identify a vision for the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of a design and construction graduate, and staff see the process as an opportunity to improve their own practice and the outcomes for students.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Urban Assembly School of Design and Construction	△	➤	✓	+
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 understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
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.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
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, DY0, 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.

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
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.

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
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.

<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
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							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed