

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**The Urban Assembly School for Green Careers**

**High School 402**

**145 West 84 Street  
Manhattan  
NY 10024**

**Principal: Kerry Decker**

**Dates of review: March 25 - 26, 2014  
Lead Reviewer: Anthony R. Lodico**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Urban Assembly School for Green Careers is a high school with 395 students from grades 9 through 12. The school population comprises 25% Black, 71% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 79.4%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders and teachers align curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and content standards to foster cognitive learning. (1.1)
  - The school emphasizes key reading and writing standards aligned to the CCLS so that students deepen their knowledge of topics/content, engage in thinking, and increase autonomy as learners. The school's commitment to the *Learning Cultures* model focuses on the belief that curriculum is built around engaging in meaningful learning routines. For example, in all classes and core disciplines, teachers developed "Student Facing Maps" which are designed to shift student thinking from a task completion culture to one where students use the bulk of instructional time as work time. During work time, students immersed in learning tasks that include cooperative unison reading, conferences, independent learning, or responsibility groups. For example, a geometry lesson embedded learning tasks for unison reading while affording students' the flexibility of transitioning from working groups to developing their projects, use [khanacademy.org](http://khanacademy.org), [easycbm.com](http://easycbm.com), or engaged in a "breach resolver" activity to deepen their knowledge about the content topic. Furthermore, teachers concede students direct access to the curriculum and standards via the student-facing curriculum maps, use breach logs data to adjust the curriculum, and allocate numerous resources designed to give all learners access to the content and CCLS. Moreover, a review of the curriculum artifacts demonstrate how across grades and content teachers develop learning tasks that engage students in unison reading to bolster student to student discussion, questioning, and discovery. Also, teachers continuously analyze curriculum/student facing maps, review the Curriculum Based Measures (CBMs) and Degrees of Reading Power (DRPs) to ensure that individual student progress is measured, monitored, and aligned with curriculum revisions and decisions. As a result, the school wide commitment to the *Learning Cultures* model for curriculum coupled with the integration of the CCLS has resulted in increased learning tasks that require higher order thinking, thus preparing students for college and career readiness.
- School leaders and teachers use data to monitor students' progress and provide actionable feedback, thus increasing learning for all students. (2.2)
  - Teachers and school leaders ensure that assessment practices are designed to inform classroom instructional decisions, drive students' progress, and equally develop and revise goals for the school and teacher teams. This ongoing process includes the use of DRP assessments, mock regents, and CBM formative assessments to adjust curricula and ensure that student needs are met. In addition, common assessments are complementary to the Cooperative Unison Reading and conference records which are reviewed regularly to inform instructional decisions and academic interventions. Moreover, teachers use team meeting findings and outcomes to adjust learning tasks, revise supplementary materials, and develop necessary scaffolds in order to meet the needs of struggling students. For example, regular analyses of the DRP scores afford teachers opportunities to develop targeted interventions and meet students' individual needs, thus resulting in improved student reading levels. Furthermore, students consistently use teacher and peer feedback, and self-assessment to identify their next learning steps. For instance, in a reading class, one of the students shared how she uses personal reading strategies and self-assessment to improve her work,

thus increasing autonomy and higher order thinking skills. Teachers also provide additional scaffolds that include posting of progress and data charts outlining academic progress. These thoughtful decisions and practices have resulted in effective structures that support students' academic needs to improve student academic outcomes.

- School leaders established a system of providing meaningful feedback and targeted professional development to nurture teachers' professional growth. (4.1)
  - The *Learning Cultures* formats are aligned to the Danielson *Framework* to ensure that the observation process addresses the school's belief of creating classroom opportunities that provide social emotional learning, an engaging curriculum, appropriate academic interventions, and positive peer to peer interactions. Moreover, school leaders conduct regular classroom observations and provide teachers with actionable feedback that include next steps for planning and professional development. Observation reports reviewed demonstrate how feedback aligns to the *Learning Culture* format and the Danielson *Framework* rubric, thus supporting school wide instructional practices. For example, in an observation report, feedback to a teacher outlined key strategies ensuring that feedback given to students during conferences and unison reading were based on notes gathered from student breaches. In addition, school leadership schedule regular meetings with the professional development team and curriculum leaders to discuss observation data and trends. These meetings initiated the development of residencies and lab sites to ensure that professional development was differentiated and targeted. As an outgrowth of this work, the principal was able to conduct nine lab sites and four residencies coupled with Cynthia McCallister, New York University Professor, who conducted more than ten lab sites and five residencies aiming to further increase professional development supports for teachers. Consequently, teachers were afforded additional opportunities to conduct intervisitation, and enabled teachers to receive feedback from other teachers as well as school leaders. This resulted in a collaborative professional community which ensured a system for honing experienced and new teachers' instructional practice and growth.
- Structured teacher teams across grades and content areas promote teachers' capacity to support students' academic progress and goals. (4.2)
  - School leadership ensured that teacher teams are organized to address the unique needs of students and the school, which included the creation of various teams and teacher leader positions to collaborate with leadership and develop plans for academic interventions and next steps. Teacher leaders also assist in meeting the school's instructional goals by looking at curriculum, data, student work, and participate in the decision making process as well as professional development planning. This school year, for example, all core teachers committed to consistently and effectively use the *Learning Cultures* lesson model. This lesson model includes the components of work time, cooperative unison reading, learning conferences, learning groups, content writing, and share-outs to increase students' thinking. Furthermore, in addition to grade teams the school developed structures to create additional teams for attendance, "Code Blue," special education, and English language learners. Teacher leadership opportunities were also created to support teachers' leadership skills and participation in school wide planning for professional development, school culture, youth development, curriculum, and assessments. In the teacher meeting, teachers described a number of initiatives and strategies that were an outgrowth of their collaborative work and follow-up meetings with school leadership. For example, in the grade 10

team, teachers developed strategies to strengthen the student “breaching process to create more effective opportunities for deeper student thinking, discussion and discovery.” Teachers also shared that the structure of sentence starters and a breach log organizer enabled students to be more concise in outlining their claims, citing evidence, and/or sharing ideas and questions. Teacher teams also worked in keeping consistent practice across grades by emphasizing on classroom environment and expectations; as well as revising and analyzing the curriculum and the student facing curriculum maps. Moreover, teachers and school leaders also evaluate student work and assessment data results to ensure that skill building and reading interventions are consistent and effective. As a result of the work of teams across grades and disciplines, students’ DRP scores and English language arts Regents pass rates increased. This is evidenced by how 47.4% of the students who took the English language arts Regents in January 2014 scored 75% or higher, hence meeting the college readiness benchmark.

## What the school needs to improve

- Build upon the school’s common belief of how students learn best and strategic use the *Learning Culture* teaching practices to ensure increased levels of student thinking and meaningful work products. (1.2)
  - Teachers and administrators articulate a common belief that students learn best when they are active participants in the classroom, and who are able to take responsibility for their own learning process. Therefore, the principal, school leaders, and teachers committed in fully implementing the *Learning Cultures* model across all subjects and grades to warrant students’ engagement in rigorous learning. Moreover, the *Learning Cultures* model relies on a curriculum that is rooted in a set of social practices which, if used effectively, will ensure that students are meeting rigorous and engaging learning. The expectation is to organize all classrooms in a format that include ten to fifteen mini-lessons followed by forty minutes of student work time. During work time, students have the flexibility to engage in cooperative unison reading, conferences and/or learning, or responsibility groups, thus abetting student engagement and discussions. Also, the last ten to twenty minutes of class instruction is dedicated to student sharing their work. For example, in a math class, as the teacher conducted a conference with a group of students, other groups engaged in learning activities specifically designed for the work time. In addition, classrooms visited conducted share-outs which is used to reinforce the school wide DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) initiative. Moreover, across core classrooms the practice of unison reading, breaching, and conferences were used to promote student to student interactions. However, across subject areas learning opportunities are not yet strategically planned with unison reading process, breaching, and conferences to engage students in higher levels of thinking and discussions, thus hindering even higher levels of work products.
- Strengthen structures and opportunities that promote active student leadership and voice to bolster students’ personal and academic behaviors. (1.4)
  - An integral part of the school’s commitment to the *Learning Cultures* model is to ensure that the school environment and classroom social norms are conducive in creating responsible-based classrooms to foster students’ personal and academic behaviors. The principal rolled out social norms and expectations aligned with the New York City Department of Education’s Citywide Discipline Code and the Students’ Rights and Responsibilities documents to support students’ growth. As a result of this initiative, the

school developed a Classroom Responsibility Ladder which outlines the progressive steps used to address behaviors that are detracting from student progress and learning. In addition, as an outgrowth of this process, there is also a more clear process for monitoring referrals, conferences, and the Behavior and/or Academic Conference Contracts. In the student meeting, for example, students shared that the “new principal” enforces the rules and wants students to be successful. The *Learning Cultures* formats and Classroom Responsibility Ladder afford students opportunities to participate in their learning. However, there is not yet a formalized process for which student voice is welcomed and valued, thus hindering collaboration to abet students’ academic and socio-emotional behaviors.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Urban Assembly for Green Careers	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
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>X</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>X</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>X</b>				
<b>School Culture</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults?		<b>X</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>X</b>				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</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>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>