Office of Innovative School Models
Persistently Lowest Achieving (PLA) Schools
School Improvement Grant (SIG)
Monitoring Report

School:	Unity Center for Urban Technology High School - Transformation Model	School District:	New York City Department of Education – Community School District # 2
Date of Site-Visit:	January 6, 2011	Members of Site-Visit Team:	Kathryn Ahern, Sharon Holder

STAFFING	
Collective Bargaining	*Negotiations are continuing regarding revision of the collective bargaining agreement in order to support: development of a teacher evaluation system, removal of staff based on the evaluation system, and changes in work day, duties and hours.*
Teacher Evaluations linked to Student Performance	*Teacher evaluations linked to student performance have been put into place. The system and data used must be consistent with State APPR system.)*
Identify and Reward staff or Remediate/Remove Staff	*A clear and transparent process for identifying staff for rewards and remediation is in place (A process must be in place immediately upon the development and implementation of the Teacher Evaluation System).*
Implementation of Strategies to Recruit, Place, and Retain Qualified Staff	*Activities are funded to recruit, place, and/or retain highly qualified. Name and describe the activities.*

Findings:
- The administrative team reported the collective bargaining agreement is still under negotiations, conversations continue around the area of the teacher evaluation system. The union and New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) have agreed that 2010-11 school year evaluations will be based only on use of a four-tiered rating system and will not include student growth. The elements of the rubric focus on four domains of the Charlotte Danielson Model which are:
  - Planning and Preparation,
  - The Classroom Environment,
  - Instruction, and
  - Professional Responsibilities.
- The administrative focus group indicated the NYCDoE worked to develop the rubric and scoring guides for the teacher evaluations.
- The administration attended a workshop at NYCDoE on December 1, 2010 that provided professional development on the teacher evaluations and rubric and the Danielson method.
- The administrative focus group reported they received a calendar and final rubric from NYCDoE on December 22, 2010. The calendar displayed the time line for implementation of the teacher evaluation system. The administrative focus group said this rubric was much clearer than the one presented on December 1, 2010.

- The school is creating performance tasked assessments that will be piloted in the spring. The administrative focus group expressed concern relating to the time line for implementation.
- Merit bonuses or remediation processes linked to the teacher evaluations were not yet in place.
- Many of the district level positions were not hired at the time of the visit. At the time of the visit, the only positions filled by NYCDoE were the Director of Turnaround and Transformation Schools and the Deputy Director of Turnaround and transformation. The following positions had not been filled:
  - o School Improvement Manager
  - o Director for Partnership Development and Capacity Building
  - o Director for Pipeline Development
  - o Associate Director for Pipeline Development
  - o Associate for Business Operations
  - o Analyst/Administrative support
- At the school level, the master teacher for English and turnaround teacher for social studies have been hired. The administration reported they were afforded minimal opportunity in the hiring process.

PLANNING	
Implementation of Timeline	*The district/school is on track to complete activities in accordance with the approved timeline for implementation, or to submit an approvable School Improvement Grant (SIG) application. Identify elements that are off-track.*
Performance Targets	*The district/school is implementing activities which will help them meet the school's performance targets. (Performance targets are tied to the school's achieving "In Good Standing" by the end of the 3 year grant period. Refer to the school's Performance Plan Template, as available.)*
Implementation of JIT Recommendations	*The district and school are implementing the plan based on the JIT recommendations. The recommendations of the JIT are addressed as delineated in the SIG application or Restructuring Plan, as applicable.*

Findings:
- The School Implementation Manager had not been hired at the time of the site visit. As per the NYCDoE Turnaround Office staff members interviewed, the job description for this position is currently being revised to access a broader range of candidates.
- The master teacher and turnaround teacher have been hired. The master teacher was hired to teach English language arts (ELA) and social studies. The turnaround teacher also teaches social studies.
- The school has vendor/partner relationships with SanJae Education Resources, with Symphony Consulting Services, The Door, Unite It, Inc. and Children First Network (CFN) 305.
- Evidence regarding Performance Targets was not requested at this time. Currently, a Performance Plan Template is under development by the NYSED.
- The school did not receive a Joint Intervention Team review. According to the SIG application, NYCDoE central office staff, network and school staff conducted a comprehensive review of the school's education program. Key findings included:
  - o Need for the school to develop and implement a focused strategy to address the school's very low graduation rate and high student drop out rate;
  - o Need for the school to develop and implement a strategic action plan to motivate students to attend school on a daily basis;

- Need for school-wide review, analysis and effective use of a broad spectrum of data to set school, class, student and student subgroups interim and long term goals aimed at raising student achievement;
- Need to improve instruction and intervention programs for students with disabilities and students currently or previously enrolled in English as a second language (ESL);
- Need to improve instructional programs for English language arts (ELA), social studies and science; and
- Need to support teachers with analyzing student performance data to design instruction accordingly to motivate, encourage and engage each student.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	
Quality, On-going, Job-embedded Professional Development	*Implementing job-embedded professional development, as defined by the USED, and as approved by NYSED.*
Supportive of Instructional Needs	*All professional development is researched based and supportive of the instructional needs of the school.*
Monitoring and Analysis	*Professional development is monitored and analyzed to ensure staff participation and classroom implementation.*

Findings:
- The administrative focus group reported the professional development plan was created in September, 2010.
- A professional development offered by CFN 305 in response to teacher and principal requests was Kaleidoscope Learning Styles survey given to all students at the beginning of the year. The survey information is being used to guide teachers in differentiating instructional activities based on students' visual, auditory, tactile and/or kinesthetic learning preferences. The survey results for each class as a whole were posted prominently in each classroom.
- Teachers use a daily common planning time for ongoing professional development. This planning time is used regularly to collaboratively study student performance and pass rates.
- English language learners (ELL) have a daily pull-out session. Teachers meet during the common planning time to strategically plan for instruction.
- The administrative focus group reported the professional development for this year has been selected by identifying areas of concern along with their root causes.
- Teachers indicated professional development is evaluated through oversight by the administration and CFN 305, as well as through conversations during common planning times.

DATA ANALYSIS	
Data to Inform Instructional Programming	*Data is used to identify and implement research-based instructional programs that are aligned with state standards*
Data for Instructional Decisions for Student Achievement	*A system is being implemented which allows for the continuous use of data to make instructional decisions for students.*

Findings:
- Unity Center for Urban Technology High School is in an active stage of data analysis. Evidence of the *SnapGrades* program in use was seen in the school. Administrators and staff members indicated an initial training on how to use the system was conducted early in the fall.
- Cohort transcript information is analyzed and credit recovery options are provided to students based upon this analysis. The *OpenBook* program by SanJae Education Resources is used for credit recovery in English language atrs (ELA).
- According to teachers the following data analysis occurs on a regular basis:
  - Each student goes through a cycle of individual counseling with the guidance counselor to discuss current grades and progress;
  - This results in the setting of specific short-term goals by individual students for progress during the upcoming grading period;
  - The guidance counselor shares the student's goals with each teacher;
  - Teachers give each student regular and specific feedback on progress toward individual goals;
  - Teachers post student grades on *SnapGrades* regularly with student and parent/guardian access;
  - At the end of each grading cycle, the results for each student are graphed for analysis and planning by the teacher; and
  - The guidance cycle then begins again for each student.

CURRICULUM AND TEACHING	
Increased Learning Time	*The school has implemented a longer school day, week, or school year to significantly increase the total number of school hours to provide additional time for instruction in core academic subjects, or in enrichment subject areas, or added time for teacher collaboration.*
Mapped and Paced Curriculum	*The written district/school level curriculum is aligned to NYS standards, performance indicators, the core competencies and is being implemented. Pacing guides are developed, used and monitored.*
Instructional Programming is Linked to Needs Assessment	*Curricular decisions have been made to meet the needs of all students.*
Effective Teaching	*There is evidence of rigor, relevance, pacing, alignment of curriculum to State Standards, and student engagement from Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT).*
ELL/SWD	*The necessary instructional programs and highly qualified staff are in place to support the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) and students with disabilities (SWD).*

Findings:
- According to the administrative focus group, the school day has been restructured. Common planning times for teachers have been incorporated into the schedule at the middle of each day. The duration of the school day has been increased by one period on Monday through Thursday, but the length of the school year has not changed.
- According to the administrative focus group, students who are in danger of failing or who have fallen behind are invited by their classroom teachers to participate in tutoring on an individual basis.
- The SED site visit team observed evidence of instructional programming linked to needs assessment.
- The SED site visit team observed inconsistent differentiation of instruction throughout the building, with some evidence of rigor, relevance, pacing or

alignment to curriculum standards. Some lessons seemed below the level of what might be expected in difficulty for the grade and course.
- Students worked in small collaborative groups on tasks in most classrooms.
- One class observed was engaged actively in a science investigation that required high-level collaboration to achieve and analyze an outcome. Students in the class were focused and attentive to the work at hand.
- The nature of many of the small group tasks did not appear to warrant the extensive use of a collaborative grouping, as some students simply ignored the group and worked individually on identical parallel activity sheets, or students talked about non-academic topics while engaged in "hands-on" but not "minds-on" activities.

STUDENT SUPPORT	
Additional Support	*Students are receiving extra academic and developmental support based on student need (AIS, character development, PBIS).*
Counseling	*Student support services are in place to provide students in need with additional social support (education/career counseling, social work, drug/alcohol/violence counseling, school psychologist, health/mental health professional)*
Enrichment Opportunities	*Students have opportunities to participate in academic and social enrichment activities during and after the school day and during the summer.*

Findings:
- The administrative focus group indicated a social worker is on site everyday. These social workers give support to those students who are eligible by providing individual and group counseling, as well as conducting home visits when necessary.
- Teachers provide extra tutoring support to students during and after school. Advanced Placement classes are available to students who have earned an 85 or higher on the regent's exam. A credit accumulation program is in place to keep students on track.
- An attendance teacher is in place to deal with all persistent student attendance issues. Partnership for Children counsels students with attendance issues. They conducted a raffle to help improve student attendance at the school.
- The Leadership Program provides opportunities for after school enrichment such as the leadership council, fashion club, dance club, and spirit squad.

TRANSFORMATIONAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP	
Effective Leadership	*The school leader has the experience and skills needed to successfully implement a turnaround model and to act as a change agent for the school.*
Leadership Development	*School leaders receive appropriate and timely professional development. Mentoring or coaching programs are in place and effective.*
School Improvement Manager/External Providers	*The school is being guided and informed by its partnership with its School Improvement Manager or external provider.*
Building Level Leadership Team	*The school is utilizing its Building Leadership Team to implement the turnaround model.*

Findings:
- The administrative focus group indicated the principal works very closely with the team and shares leadership with them in addressing school needs.
- A school improvement manager has not been hired by the district. The school is represented by staff from the newly-developing turnaround office.

- The principal stated he works in collaboration with the teachers, parents, and students to improve student achievement.

SCHOOL CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	
Environment is Conducive to Learning	*The school is safe, orderly and academically-oriented. Supervision is sufficient, respectful and consistent.*
Shared Vision	*School staff understands the focus/ vision of the school's improvement efforts and supports them in a consistent and effective manner.*
Collaboration	*Administrators, teachers and staff communicate openly, positively and effectively. Professional learning communities exist and affect improvement efforts.*
Parent Involvement	*Strategies are being implemented to increase the involvement and contributions of parents.*
External/Community-Based Partners	*Strategies are being implemented to increase the involvement and contributions of community partners.*

Findings:
- The SED site visit team observed an environment that was conducive to learning. The school was safe, orderly and academically oriented. Students were observed engaging in off task conversations in some collaborative tasks and some teachers did not redirect unproductive student behaviors.
- Teachers indicated the vision of the school's improvement efforts is to increase test scores and graduation rates.
- Common planning times provide for open communication amongst staff. Teachers reported they feel the communication with the leadership is "excellent" and expectations are communicated clearly.
- The school does have a parent coordinator on staff as well as a PTO president who are both striving to increase parent involvement in the school.
- The school did complete an analysis of why parents do not come to the building. Results showed distance from the school as a major issue.
- The school is currently offering parent workshops in conjunction with PTO meetings. It was reported by the administration attendance is getting better. United It, Inc. provides workshops for students with attendance problems. A parent newsletter is distributed to parents on a regular basis.
- The *SnapGrades* program has been growing in use by parents/guardians to check on their child's homework and academic progress.
- External/community based partners are active and present throughout the school.

OTHER FUNDING SOURCES	
Use of 1003(g) or 1003(a) grant funding	*The LEA is using School Improvement Grant (SIG) funding to support the implementation of or planning for school intervention models.*
Use of Other Funding Sources besides 1003 (g)	*In addition to SIG 1003(g) and/or 1003(a) funds, the LEA is using a number of other resources to implement the school intervention models or the Restructuring Plan, as applicable.*

Findings:
- At the time of the visit school leaders indicated they are using an integration of funds to implement the intervention model. They have received a $68,000 loan for 1003(g) monies from NYCDoE for salaries only.

DISTRICT SUPPORT AND PLANNING FOR DEVELOPMENT	
District Support Provides Operational Flexibility to the School	*The LEA provides or is planning to provide the school operational flexibility (such as regarding staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting).*
District has a systemic plan for intervention and improvement	*The LEA has incorporated all JIT recommendations and requirements of the SIG Application into the improvement plan for the school.*
District has a plan to identify, recruit, place, and retain effective leadership	*In accordance with SIG requirements, the LEA has a plan for hiring and retaining leadership.*

Findings:
- The administrative focus group indicated they feel they are afforded flexible means for implementation by NYCDoE.
- As previously stated, Unity Center for Urban Technology High School did not undergo a Joint Intervention Team visit; therefore, they did not have JIT recommendations to incorporate into their SIG application.
- The district made the decision to retain former Unity Center for Urban Technology High School principal because of the short length of his tenure.

Summary:

The State Education Department two member site visit team conducted a full-day visit to Unity Center for Urban technology High School on January 6, 2011. Although the visit was brief, the team was able to ascertain information about the schools efforts to begin the implementation of their reform model for improving student learning.

The master teacher and turnaround teacher have been hired. However, at the time of the site visit, the School Implementation Manager had not been hired. In addition, there was no job description specifying what this person would be doing.

The administration as well as teachers reported professional development is a primary focus for the school. Teachers use a daily common planning time for ongoing professional development. These planning times is use regularly to collaboratively study students performance and pass rates.

According to students, the leadership of the school is both supportive and effective. They reported, although the school is small, the learning environment is positive. However, the students indicated that more enrichment opportunities and more challenging courses would improve their skills.

During the next full day site visit, the team will also focus on findings outlined in this report and will again conduct document reviews and interviews in the following areas: staffing; planning; professional development; data analysis; curriculum and teaching; student support; school leadership; school climate and community engagement; and district support and planning for development.