

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I    [X] Charter    [ ] Magnet    [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Andrea d'Amato

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name University Prep Charter High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 600 Street Ann's Avenue 4th Floor

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Bronx                      State NY                      Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 10455-2800

County Bronx

Telephone (718) 585-0560                      Fax (929) 220-8110

Web site/URL http://upchs.org                      E-mail adamato@upchs.org

Twitter Handle \_\_\_\_\_ Facebook Page \_\_\_\_\_ Google+ \_\_\_\_\_

Other Social Media Link

YouTube/URL \_\_\_\_\_ Blog \_\_\_\_\_ http://instagram.com/uprepnyc

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Ms. Andrea d'Amato                      E-mail adamato@upchs.org

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name University Prep Charter High School                      Tel. (718) 925-6435

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mr. Steve Barr

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 938 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 305 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 438 High schools
  - 72 K-12 schools
- 1753 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	61	58	119
10	44	68	112
11	43	42	85
12 or higher	35	48	83
<b>Total Students</b>	183	216	399

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0 % Asian
  - 34 % Black or African American
  - 65 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 1 % White
  - 0 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 2%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	376
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.024
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 9 %  
37 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, French, Afrikaans, Bambara, Fulani, Hausa, Niger-Congo, Soninke, Swahili, Twi

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 81 %  
Total number students who qualify: 321

8. Students receiving special education services: 17 %  
67 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 1 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 2 Emotional Disturbance
- 3 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 4 Other Health Impaired
- 35 Specific Learning Disability
- 22 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers	21
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	12
Paraprofessionals	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1     19:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	94%	95%	96%	93%	93%
High school graduation rate	99%	100%	100%	98%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**  
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2015.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	83
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	70%
Enrolled in a community college	30%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes      No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

University Prep Charter High School's mission is to prepare students for success in college, career and beyond.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend. University Prep Charter High School uses an open lottery system with priority given to students within our district and siblings of current and former UPCHS students.

## PART III – SUMMARY

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University Prep Charter High School (UPCHS) is committed to the growth, development, and preparation of young minds for the rigors of college academics. Founded in 2008 as Green Dot New York Charter School, the school followed a model based on a network of California schools of the same name. Founder Steve Barr, was anxious to show that teachers who are respected, appropriately compensated, and allowed to be valued voices within the school, will cultivate a powerful culture of learning. Barr partnered with Randi Weingarten, then President of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) to unionize the newly formed school. The teachers of UPCHS are proud members of the UFT and enjoy of the privileges, responsibilities, and protections the UFT affords. Our board of directors, and the school's founding principal, Ashish Kapadia, opened the school with the mission to prepare students for life, leadership, and college. Since its inception, UPCHS has produced superb graduation rates and excellent scores on state assessments. The class of 2016 has achieved 100 percent college acceptance, eighty-eight percent of whom have been accepted to four-year programs. Most significantly, our school graduates young men and women capable of critical thinking and problem solving.

One of the key ways in which we have achieved success is through the planning and development of our curricula. UPCHS offers a challenging range of courses with an eye toward college readiness. In addition to their core classes, our students are enrolled in a supplemental writing class, a variety of AP courses, and a robust arts program. Each teacher designs detailed and meticulous curricular materials for the school, which are then provided to our charter authorizer, The State University of New York. These materials are replete with: course scopes and sequences, unit plans, lesson plans, presentation materials, resources, and exams.

UPCHS is able to function at a high level because of its earnest leadership, its dedicated staff, and its energetic student body. The staff enjoys an excellent blend of insightful direction and autonomy to develop activities, lessons, and curricula. Teachers are treated as professionals and enjoy the respect that educators demand universally. There is an emphasis on ensuring common planning time for teachers to develop lesson plans and curriculum. This built-in time facilitates the bulk of collaboration between co-teachers to make the Integrated Co-teaching model effective at our school. In addition to time and a degree of autonomy, the teachers of University Prep work closely with administration in many other key areas.

The teachers at University Prep wield no small measure of influence over decision and policy. The teachers serve on committees that are largely responsible for decisions regarding hiring, budget, programming, and many other aspects. These committees, along with several others meet weekly and collaborate with the administration and students to make the best decisions for our school community.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy facets of our school is that teachers hold office hours daily to meet additional needs of students. This practice is intended to model the college experience but is also an opportunity for enrichment as well as remediation. During office hours students receive feedback on their work, complete missing or incomplete work, and generally improve in areas where they are deficient. Students are encouraged to attend teacher office hours with questions about their work and preliminary work for essays and projects. As a concept and in practice, this allows teachers to provide individualized attention to the school's population.

High student achievement is paramount to our school's core, and preparing students for college is the ultimate goal. UPCHS is committed to ensuring that students are able to enter an institution of higher learning with the knowledge to excel in their academic pursuits. To aid in student acceptance into college, our school has a college counselor on staff. The addition of a college counselor allows our students to have access to a trained, knowledgeable, and resourceful staff member who is dedicated to supporting students' college needs. The role of the counselor is to advise, facilitate the application process, and to guide students through options for financial aid. This model has seen millions of dollars of scholarships and acceptances to many prestigious universities.

Our school endeavors to serve the under-served. Almost in its entirety, University Prep Charter High School is comprised of students who receive either free or reduced lunch. Our school provides a unique opportunity and path to success for our lottery-admitted students. UPCHS has been noted for our ability to bridge the achievement gap, receiving high scores for this category on our annual state report cards. UPCHS remains committed to serving the community around us. Students residing in our community and district receive priority seating in our freshman cohort. Also, it is important that our school's Special Education and English as a New Language population ratio be consistent with that of neighboring schools. To date, the ratios have been relatively consistent, supporting our belief that all students can achieve success.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

With appropriate academic supports, students of all abilities learn more in classes with highly challenging content than in those with low academic rigor. The administration and staff of University Prep Charter High School (UPCHS) is forward focused, making sure that we are working to achieve long-term longitudinal academic goals for our students. Regardless of the age group, teachers and administrators are striving to ensure that all students, by twelfth grade, have the appropriate credit accumulation for graduation and the preparation necessary to excel in post-secondary school. To achieve this goal, University Prep has focused heavily on common core initiatives and given teachers access to appropriate professional development and support in these efforts.

UPCHS is purposeful in employing a curriculum and instructional model that logically cohere: The instructional model (how we teach) best supports the school's curriculum (what we teach). The curriculum identifies the content and skills that comprise the foundational knowledge that all students need in order to master content, think and read critically, and solve problems and ultimately gain admittance to college. The content is taught to students, grade-by-grade, year-by-year, in a coherent age appropriate sequence. In this way, ideas and concepts have a related set of language that can be logically shared between classes and among grades. Teachers are encouraged to use outside resources to enrich their lessons and all teachers post their planning documents to a public forum so that other staff members can learn from their colleagues' approaches as well as consider opportunities interdisciplinary units of study.

UPCHS students enroll in a scope and sequence of courses aligned to the New York State and Common Core Learning Standards and will take the full complement of Regents exams necessary to earn a Regents Diploma or an Advanced Regents Diploma. Students also benefit from a variety Advanced Placement courses and early-college courses at local universities. Our elective courses, such as technology, drama, and life skills, support and complement our core academic classes by reinforcing academic skills and providing outlets for creativity.

Because many of our students enter our school performing significantly under grade level, our core academic intervention begins before the start of the school year. Incoming 9th grade students participate in a month long summer program where they are given diagnostic testing and remedial instruction in foundational skills.

English: UPCHS allots a significant amount of learning time to English Language Arts (ELA) and aligns its courses to the Common Core Learning Standards. Ninth graders receive two courses in English. One course is focused on the development of argumentative and expository writing skills and the other is a traditional ELA class, which emphasizes literature and informational texts. The ELA department collectively adopts a unified approach to writing as a process and meets at regular intervals to vertically align curriculum. Independent Reading is stressed in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grade ELA classes, and significant time and emphasis are placed on helping students develop as critical readers, writers, and thinkers. Texts within the independent library range from contemporary to classic and are of various lexiles and genres.

Math: In the 9th grade, the mathematics program at UPCHS has two strands: one that focuses on mastering foundational procedures and another that focuses on algebraic problem solving and mathematical reasoning. First, in order to build the vital foundation necessary for success in high school and college, we dedicate much of our math instruction to solidifying procedural knowledge. We emphasize the development of strong number sense, excellent mental-math skills and a deep understanding of place value. As students progress in their math education the subject matter becomes increasingly abstract: studying Geometry in 10th grade, Algebra II and Trigonometry in 11th grade, and Pre-Calculus in 12th grade. Students who demonstrate aptitude in mathematics often take college level courses in their 11th and 12th grade years. Our sequence of courses is based on curricular resources from EngageNY and refined designed to allow for meaningful connections between topics and real world applications are used to extend conceptual understanding.

Science: Students take four years of laboratory science, the first three of which culminate in a New York State Regents exam. In 9th grade, students take Earth Science, which examines environmental issues and addresses concerns under the lens of applied science. Students take Living Environment in 10th grade. This course covers ecology, cells, genetics, evolution, microorganisms, plants, invertebrates, and the human body. Eleventh grade students take Chemistry and 12th graders have the option to take either Advanced Biology or Forensics.

Social Studies / History: Students at UPCHS enroll in the following course of study: 9th grade Global History and Geography I; 10th grade Global History and Geography II; 11th grade U.S. History and Government; 12th grade Government and Economics. Additionally, our charter ensures that we offer a course on the History of New York, making use of New York City as a valuable cultural and educational resource. There is a particular emphasis on creating critical connections between current events and the history as they encounter it. In general, the crux of the instruction is geared towards shaping informed and involved global citizens.

College and Career Readiness: As a college preparatory high school, UPCHS makes it a mission to adequately prepare all students to be successful in their post-secondary endeavors. We promote college readiness by:

- Setting achievement expectations on state exams to match the City University of New York's college readiness benchmarks and providing multiple testing opportunities as necessary
- Enrolling students in early-college courses starting in the 10th grade and offering a full complement of Advanced Placement courses
- Integrating college research assignments and campus visits into our advisory curriculum
- Devoting substantial time to preparation of the PSAT and SAT.
- Having a dedicated college counselor
- Developing academic and socio-emotional skills that promote independence and post-secondary success

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Visual Arts (Drawing/Painting): In visual arts class, students are given the opportunity to explore matters of self-expression by way of technical discovery. Through critique and historical research, students become familiar with a wide range of concepts and terms which they are able to employ when engaging in higher order discourse. Visual arts class serves as an excellent means of teaching with an interdisciplinary approach. For example, the sciences are addressed in the use of new materials; mathematics is addressed through shape and form; history is addressed in the study of important works by artists from past and present; and language is addressed through the very nature of artistic communication. Visual arts class is taken by all 12th grade students and meets for a total of 230 minutes each week.

Drama: Drama class is an opportunity for students to explore their inner voices and develop into young adults who are able to express themselves competently and confidently. Drama can be exciting, and frightening, mainly because it is based on emotion and experience. During the course of the year, students become familiar with dramatic history, acting theories and exercises, and the art of improvisation. They act out monologues, dialogues, and larger scenes; write short scenes and skits; learn blocking and to choreograph movement; and learn how to use their bodies to enhance their expression. Theater is taken by all 10th grade students and meets for a total of 230 minutes each week.

Physical Education: Our physical education (P.E.) program offers a diverse curriculum that focuses on activity and academics, and centers around the creation of student fitness journals. This student-specific project creates an awareness of one's own well-being and instills accountability for one's health. UPCHS has access to a gymnasium, an outside schoolyard, and a fitness center equipped with a variety of strength training equipment. Classes occur in each location, depending on the activity. The target of our P.E. program is to inspire a lifelong understanding of and interest in the habits required to lead a healthy and active lifestyle. Physical education is taken by all 10th and 11th grade students and meets for a total of 230 minutes each week.

Health: Health class is intended to provide vital wellness information and ideas to students in an effort to improve their everyday lives. The curriculum includes a sequence of essential topics such as sexual health, stress management, suicide prevention, and drug and alcohol abuse. Health is a half-year course, taken by all 9th and 12th grade students and meets for a total of 230 minutes each week.

Foreign Language (Spanish): Our Spanish classes afford students the opportunity to make linguistic and cultural connections across content areas. Grammar and cognates inform studies in English class, studying various Spanish-speaking countries relates to knowledge of history and geography, and the arts are addressed when learning about celebrated artists, musicians and performers. The majority of our students sit for the Languages Other Than English (LOTE) exam, which qualifies students for an Advanced Regents Diploma. Approximately one quarter of our students continue further to take the Advanced Placement Spanish Language and Culture course in their fourth year, more than 90 percent of whom score well enough to earn college credit. Spanish is offered to all grade levels and meets for a total of 230 minutes each week.

Technology: Our technology curriculum is designed to allow students to develop intermediate computer literacy by targeting specific skills: internet navigation, professional use of email, presentation ability, and mastery of commonly used software. Crucial issues are addressed in the course, such as digital safety and etiquette, information privacy, and cyberbullying. These topics are of particular importance to our students as technology is an integral aspect of personal and professional life and digital accountability is paramount. Technology is a half-year course and is taken by all 9th grade students and meets for a total of 230 minutes each week.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

To ensure high levels of student learning and achievement, University Prep Charter High School (UPCHS) employs a number of proactive strategies and intervention practices. From the start of their time as UPCHS students, our ninth grade classes are enrolled in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Composition classes to firmly establish the reading and writing literacies essential to academic success across curricula. The focus of our ELA class is to build reading skills through literature and related non-fiction; to teach literary analysis, interpretation, and critical thought. Our Composition class addresses similar skills through challenging non-fiction texts which serve as the basis for a range of writing tasks. Teachers of these courses collaborate during scheduled co-planning time to align expectations and content as well as to ensure that Common Core Learning Standards are being met.

To assess individual student needs in reading and math, UPCHS uses the Scantron Performance Series test. The resulting data has helped to inform instruction in both areas. In particular, the information has helped to appropriately target our Office Hours in Common Core Algebra and has resulted in the creation of a remedial course for our most struggling readers outside of the students' existing schedule.

Additionally, our school employs an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) model in our core classes to reach our Special Education and English as a New Language students in a least-restrictive environment. Lessons and materials are co-planned and created in an effort to provide the most meaningful access to content to the widest range of student abilities. Our ICT models include but are not limited to team teaching, parallel teaching, teach and assist, and station teaching.

We also employ the flipped classroom model in our Geometry course. Students view short video mini-lessons on their own with class time devoted to practice and discussion of course concepts. Students receive a pacing guide to track their progress and are thus able to learn at their own pace, motivated by a student-teacher developed reward system. This model offers a unique opportunity to assess student achievement rapidly and therefore, to reteach difficult concepts to students one-on-one.

In an effort to help our students achieve the college readiness benchmarks on Regents exams, they attend our targeted Saturday Academy. Students are selected by teachers and school counselors based on individual need to attend prep sessions in a series of Saturday classes taught by our own faculty.

#### 4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

University Prep Charter High school (UPCHS) relies on quality assessment as a keystone to student achievement. Assessment comes in many forms at our school, and the data from all forms of assessment are used to inform any necessary changes to our school's curriculum or instructional practices. Our school works to deliver a balanced system of assessment that provides multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate learning. This system includes assessments administered at the state level, the school-wide level, and the classroom level.

State level assessments, or New York State Regents Exams, are criterion-referenced exams that occur annually or semi-annually, depending on the student population. These assessments hold our school accountable for student performance. In order to prepare our students for college, our benchmark for success in the state exams is determined by the City University of New York (CUNY) college-readiness score guidelines.

Benchmark assessments are administered at school-wide level three times annually to monitor our students' growth and progress in the areas of mathematics and literacy. We employ the use of a nationally normed testing system that gives us data about our students' specific areas of strength and weakness, and shows us progress made in each testing interval. These tests are used to help teachers refine curriculum, adjust instructional techniques and provide targeted intervention to students showing inadequate growth.

Classroom level assessment occurs most frequently and can come in many different forms. Formative assessment occurs continuously and is used immediately by teachers to adjust instructional approach. By using constant formative assessment in the classroom, students receive meaningful feedback about their learning process and are trained to advocate for their own understanding in the moment. Teachers also use classroom summative or curriculum embedded assessments to audit the students' level of mastery of a unit of study. This data allows us to monitor progress of a cohort of students. It also helps us make determinations about how to direct our remedial attention, form instructional groupings, and it informs our curricular and instructional design for the future.

Students receive feedback regularly so that they can assume ownership of their learning. With their advisory group, UPCHS teachers train students to use assessment information for the purposes of reflection and setting personal goals. Students and families have immediate access to assessment results by using our online grade portal, which details up-to-date performance data along with teacher comments. Parents are also invited to participate in formal parent teacher conference nights four times during the academic year or to make an appointment with their child's teachers, advisor, or guidance counselor at any time. State level and school-wide level assessment data is reported to our school community at our monthly board meetings.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

University Prep Charter High School (UPCHS) has several systems in place to support the needs of our students, particularly those who are considered to be at-risk. We employ a team of highly qualified individuals to help identify and service the academic, social, and emotional needs of our diverse student body. This team includes four guidance counselors, a college and career counselor, six Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) Specialists, and an English as a New Language (ENL) Coordinator. In addition, most teachers serve as an advisor to a small group of students in their grade level to closely monitor their progress and strengthen personal relationships. In an effort to foster a close sense of community, UPCHS holds monthly Town Hall meetings. Town Hall meetings are a way to acknowledge student work and to celebrate their successes. Students demonstrating the Four Core Values of UPCHS (accepting personal responsibility, discovering self-motivation, mastering self-management, and creating interdependence) are recognized as well as academic and athletic achievements.

Staff and Administration at UPCHS work diligently to identify students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). All matriculating ninth grade students participate in the Summer Bridge Program where teachers assess students' academic levels. To improve basic abilities, we assign students who have scored below grade level on standardized assessments to a reading intervention class. In addition to this class, we also offer a wide array of academic supports outside the classroom that include teacher office hours and after-school and weekend Regents preparation classes. UPCHS employs one guidance counselor per grade level to monitor the academic and socio-emotional progress of at-risk students. Counselors meet regularly with low-performing students and their teachers to plan additional supports.

From our school's inception, teachers have been a valued voice in school decision-making through our committee structure. All staff members are required to serve on a committee and participate in curricular, budgetary, staffing, and a myriad of other decisions. Through regularly scheduled grade team meetings (in which guidance counselors participate) and department meetings, our expertise regarding students, curriculum, and school culture is used to assess our progress and make decisions for the future.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

University Prep Charter High School (UPCHS) endeavors to fully utilize our families and community to support our school. Our school has done exceedingly well in parent and teacher feedback on citywide surveys as it relates to climate and culture. UPCHS recognizes there is a strong positive relationship between a student's success in school and the level of engagement by his or her parents with the school. Therefore, to encourage parental involvement our school engages in the following practices: Back-to-School Night, quarterly parent teacher conferences, collaboration with the UPCHS Parent Association, parent workshops (parent /child communication and recognizing emotional development and distress in adolescents), appointment of a parent to the Board of Directors, monthly logs tracking parent contact, online access to student grades for parents, monthly outreach with calendars, announcements, and general updates and student handbook clearly outlining expectations and responsibilities.

As a school, we are conscious of the fact that support from the community is integral to our school's success. Our school partners with and seeks the aid to myriad community based organizations, businesses, and universities. These efforts to incorporate the community include working closely with SoBRO, a South Bronx community based organization that provides enrichment to school-aged students; The City College of New York, which invites our students to attend workshops, forums, symposiums, and other enrichment opportunities; St. Mary's Park Recreational Group, which offers internships, summer employment, and volunteer opportunities; middle school recruitment events to advertise educational opportunities at UPCHS; SAT preparation at various community-based organizations; and toy and food delivery to those who are less fortunate.

One of our ad hoc committees, Community Outreach, is an important liaison between our community and UPCHS. Due in large part to this teacher led committee, valuable contacts are made for Career Day. This committee also organizes opportunities for community service hours, which are mandatory for all students.

Our parent involvement and community outreach efforts enhance the environment of UPCHS immensely. These factors augment student experience and encourage them not only develop into strong academicians, but also into contributing members of their communities at large. When students recognize that their achievements are not theirs and their teachers' alone, that they are supported by a community of invested parties including parents and members of the broader community, the impact of their successes are compounded. In this way, they may begin to see themselves as valuable members of a society and seek unique ways to contribute their talents and perspectives to the world.

### 3. Professional Development:

Professional development (PD) of teachers is one of the cornerstones of the University Prep Charter High School (UPCHS) model. It is our belief that ongoing adult learning is paramount to student achievement and that teacher support and collaboration are essential to the growth of our school community. As a result, three hours of PD time are built into the weekly instructional schedule, and an additional eight dedicated professional development days are distributed throughout the year. Opportunities for development are provided in four ways: through teacher-generated sessions, workshops facilitated by school administrators, visiting consultants, and off-site conferences.

The teacher-led PD committee offers professional development by designing and leading a series of workshops in response to student data analyses. Teachers are provided a menu of PD options from which to choose and attend based on self-identified needs and interests. These sessions are focused on addressing the needs of students with Individualized Education Plans by strengthening teacher relationships in Integrated Co-Teaching classrooms, and of English Language Learners (ELLs) by using the inquiry process to refine ELL instruction. This need was identified through Regents data and by analyzing quarterly reports. These sessions offer opportunities for teachers to collaborate around curricular and instructional planning, as well as the successful integration of technology in the classroom in a focused effort to establish and maintain student engagement. The teacher-led PD supports a distributed leadership model by developing the capacity of teachers to lead their peers. It also supports teachers in the continuation of their own professional learning.

The PD led by our school's administrators addresses our instructional focus, questioning and discussion techniques, as was identified by the State University of New York (SUNY) in their renewal of the UPCHS charter. Noting areas for growth through classroom observation, administrators lead whole-group sessions where teachers refine targeted pedagogical strategies. Additionally, guest presenters are frequently invited to offer expertise and new perspectives on teaching methods and materials. Off-site PD opportunities are either recommended for specific teachers by the administration or sought out by individual teachers for professional growth.

### 4. School Leadership:

The success of a school can only be defined as the collective successes of the school's student body, teaching team, operational staff, and administration. University Prep Charter High School's (UPCHS) leadership team strives to achieve these successes by focusing on six core principles. They are:

1. High Expectations for Academics
2. Rigorous Curriculum with Incorporation of Common Core and State Learning Standards
3. Great Teachers and meaningful, strategic professional development
4. School Culture that Promotes Positive Character Development
5. Accountability for Achievement
6. Family and Community Involvement

Our administration relies heavily on an effective system of distributed leadership, where each member of the staff participates in school decision-making, has membership in one or more collaborative learning groups, and takes responsibility for the harmonious accomplishment of school-wide goals.

To achieve this system of distributed leadership, the UPCHS leadership establishes staff collaboration in many different configurations.

Each UPCHS staff member participates in a school committee which functions to govern and monitor many of the six core principles listed above. Every Wednesday morning, UPCHS dedicates ninety minutes of work time to meet in these committees, which range in purpose from professional development to finance and budget. Committee representatives report to the principal, who oversees their progress toward school-wide goals and offers guidance and intervention when necessary. Committees are heterogeneous groups of staff and membership fluctuates annually. This system secures staff members' full participation in the overall success of the school.

On Friday afternoons, students are dismissed earlier than usual so that staff may collaborate in grade teams, department teams, or participate in a full staff professional development aimed at addressing the academic needs of our students. The agendas and objectives of these meetings are largely dictated by the UPCHS administration and reflect the needs of the students.

It is the role of UPCHS administration to create an atmosphere where this type of distributed leadership takes place. The principal and assistant principal teach, coach, motivate and inspire the staff of UPCHS. They share professional research and expertise to support organizational improvement and increased student achievement. They work together with the United Federation of Teachers and the UPCHS Board of Trustees to create in the staff a sense of security, strong self-esteem, and positive morale.

The principal also has the responsibility and authority to evaluate all staff members or delegate part of that authority to the assistant principal. The leadership at UPCHS values teachers who are self-reflective and diligent about improving their practice. Data from teacher observations are used to generate topics for targeted professional development. School leaders spend much of their time in classrooms evaluating instruction using a clearly defined framework. This observation data is used in creating targeted improvement strategies for teachers.

Staff members receive regular communication from administration and feel safe voicing their opinion on school matters. Because of this regular communication, all staff members can articulate school-wide goals and initiatives and feel as though they can make a meaningful contribution to these efforts.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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University Prep Charter High School (UPCHS) functions at a high level due largely to the fact that teachers are involved in all matters of school operations. Teachers are not only entrusted to produce and implement high quality curricula, but are also expected to participate in critical decision making for the school. Our school employs a system of teacher-led committees that are responsible for virtually all aspects of school operations. All teachers and counselors are members of at least one standing committee. Hiring, budget, professional development, leadership, calendar and programming, and stipends are all controlled by their respective committee members.

The unique nature of our committee structure sets us apart from other schools, where faculty voice is at a minimum. School administrators are de facto members of each committee and, as such, are included in all vital decision making. Our current principal and assistant principal were selected by the UPCHS Hiring Committee, composed solely of teachers from various content areas. Such an empowered role is unique and underscores the value of teacher voice at UPCHS.

This sort of professional recognition promotes a culture of respect and pride in our school and increases staff buy-in. With autonomy over curricula, teachers feel ownership and are more likely to be excited about what they teach. This, in turn, directly strengthens the educational experience and positively impacts motivation for our students.

In addition to our standing committees, UPCHS has a number of ad hoc committees aimed at involving students in our processes and fortifying the overall school culture:

Events: solicits participation from students and staff to organize school-wide activities such as dances, trips, and fundraisers

Senior Events: collaborates with the senior class to plan and fund activities such as the prom, yearbook, senior breakfast, and trip

Recruiting: coordinates outreach to local middle and elementary schools at high school fairs and hosts open house events to recruit prospective 9th and 10th grade students.

Community Outreach: organizes efforts to enrich school and community relations through programming which includes Career Day and holiday food drives

Town Hall: coordinates a monthly celebration to recognize student and staff accomplishments in academic excellence, athletic achievement, and extracurricular successes

Built into our weekly schedule is a ninety minute block during which committee members gather to address matters at hand. This time allotment provides sufficient meet time and facilitates group efficacy. To ensure collaboration among committees, all developments and decisions are shared with the school community via a universally accessible drive.