

Testimony by Hudson Roditi  
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American Museum of Natural History  
to the Education Committee  
New York City Council, Council Chambers, City Hall  
Thursday, September 20, 2007

**FOR THE RECORD**

**The Urban Advantage Middle School Exit Project Initiative Aligns with, and Enhances, DOE Parent Engagement Initiatives: Structures and Opportunities for NYC Parent Coordinators and Families**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the Urban Advantage initiative's alignment and support of DOE Parent Engagement Initiatives.

Urban Advantage is a citywide science education initiative funded by the NY City Council since 2004. UA's goal is to support teaching and learning of science in New York City public middle schools by making better use of the unparalleled resources of eight of New York City's science-rich cultural institutions. These institutions include the American Museum of Natural History, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York Hall of Science, New York Botanic Garden, Queens Botanic Garden, Bronx Zoo, New York Aquarium and the Staten Island Zoo. The NYC Department of Education has collaborated with these eight science-rich cultural institutions to connect middle schools, their teachers, students, and families with the excitement and process of scientific discovery and learning.

Since 2004, UA has made big strides in extending its coverage. In FY2007 UA reached 129 middle schools, 205 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, and over 21,000 students.

Among other initiatives to achieve the UA goal, Urban Advantage also works with the Parent Coordinators in Urban Advantage schools to enhance parent involvement in their child's science education, to increase parent awareness of the Science Exit Project and to increase family participation in and interaction with scientific exploration and discovery.

**The following are UA structures and programs that enhance parent engagement:**

**Family Science Sunday**

The UA partner institutions host an open house "Family Science Sunday" to welcome families to the museums, zoos, gardens and aquarium with free admission, fun science activities, and refreshments. Flyers, good for free admission for UA students and their families, will be mailed to UA teachers for distribution to students the end of September. In 2007, Family Science Sunday will be held on October 14<sup>th</sup> at the Bronx Zoo and on October 21 at the American Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the New York Aquarium, the New York Botanical Garden, the NY Hall of Science, the Queens Botanical Garden and the Staten Island Zoo.

**Parent Coordinator Workshops**

Workshops for Parent Coordinator and parent guests are held at the eight UA partner institutions beginning September 28th. The workshops are designed to:

- increase access to the institutions
- discuss how families can support the student work on the science exit project
- model visits to the museums, gardens, zoos and aquarium
- understand the benefits of the UA program to the students and their families

**Family Field Trips**

Free admission vouchers for family groups and a free bus are provided to UA schools. Using the vouchers and the free bus, Parent Coordinators organize weekend or school holiday trips to the UA institutions.

**Student & Family Vouchers**

Free admission vouchers (good for student and up to three additional guests) are distributed to the UA students. Vouchers, and accompanying Family Guides, available in nine languages, will be distributed by the teachers.

**PTA Meetings**

Representatives from UA will attend PTA or other similar parent meetings to talk to parents about the benefits of the Urban Advantage Program, and how they and UA can support their children's work on the science exit projects.

**Family Science Nights and Science Fairs**

UA partners host Family Science Events and Science Fairs in collaboration with UA Demonstration Schools.

**Urban Advantage Science Expo**

In June 2007 Urban Advantage's year-end Science EXPO showcased the work of almost 500 students and was attended by over 1000 families from schools in all 5 boroughs. This exiting family event provides an opportunity for the student to display their exit projects to family, friends, and the public. The next UA Science Expo will be held on June 14, 2008 at the American Museum of Natural History. On behalf of UA's grade 8 students and families, we hope the Education Committee will accept the initiative's invitation to attend UA Science EXPO this year.

While I have enumerated the various UA programs that encourage parent engagement, we are always open to new suggestions and look towards the parent coordinators to provide constructive feedback that will help make parent engagement more successful.

**I thank the Speaker, the Chairman and the Committee for the continued support provided to the UA initiative.**