

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

The Frederick Douglass Academy
Middle- High School 499
2581 Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard
New York
NY 10039

Principal: Dr. Gregory M. Hodge

Dates of review: December 7 - 9, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Richard D. D'Auria

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Frederick Douglass Academy is a middle-high school with 1,520 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 73% Black, 25% Hispanic, less than 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 6% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 93.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Frederick Douglass Academy is a successful school with a dedicated administration and staff. Their collective leadership and hard work enable the school to remain focused upon its core mission of effectively preparing students for college and beyond. The school employs a uniform dress policy and continually conveys high expectations for achievement through posted honor rolls, college admissions results and non-negotiable rules. The entire staff expects, encourages and supports hard work as students strive for excellence. The school abides by a posted quote, evident throughout the school from its namesake, abolitionist Frederick Douglass, "Without struggle there is no progress."

The school offers a broad, rich and engaging curriculum with many opportunities for acceleration through advanced placement, college-level classes. Partnerships with many colleges and private benefactors support a variety of curricula enhancements and student supports, including tutorials, international travel and weekend access to the building, which is always bustling with activity. Teachers use instructional technology well and collaborate regularly to discuss data and share best practices through structured team meetings. The school uses a web-based grade book system and many teachers host their own websites and blogs for both parent and student information sharing and interaction. Parents like the richness of the school's curriculum, its rigorous expectations, and the accessibility and responsiveness of administration and staff.

Differentiation of instruction is not yet consistent across grades and subject areas. While some teachers use a variety of methodologies to meet the individual needs of students, whole-group instruction is currently the primary modality used. While classroom environments are generally conducive to learning, many primarily use commercial posters for student reference. While some teachers post charts of class-generated concepts and processes, there is little student work posted within classrooms. Although improved student writing is a school-wide goal, there is little evidence of the use of student writing process or product as an instructional tool to enhance learning environments. While founded as a grade 6 through 12 school, there are currently clear distinctions in terms of both belief systems about teaching and learning and pedagogical practices between teachers of the middle and high school grades, thereby diminishing the coherence of practice across the school. Current work of teacher teams is quite broad, examining trends in large segments of the student population rather than focusing more deeply upon the learning needs and specific skills of manageably sized groups.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's strong, visionary leadership supports the dedicated staff's achievement of the school's mission to prepare all students for college success.
 - The tireless principal leads by example, contributing toward coherent, systemic practice by all. This supports the school's mission to prepare all of its students for college and success. Students shared, "He wears the school uniform himself and follows the school's non-negotiable rules. He abides by his own rules and is not a hypocrite." Another said, "He cares about us, but don't mess with him. His presence demands respect." Assistant principals, teachers and staff convey similar messages of caring with high expectations. When a student had to return home for an overdue paper, a loaned metro-card enabled him to fulfill that expectation.
 - Teachers share that while the principal is demanding, he is very hands-on and visible. One teacher said, "We are all a community of learners." When many of the current seniors' writing skills were not meeting expectations, the principal opened a large class that he teaches himself.
- The school has a deeply embedded culture whereby rigorous academic and social expectations are the norm, resulting in high levels of student achievement.
 - The staff's alignment in support of the school's culture sets the tone. High expectations for all are the norm and students are the ultimate beneficiaries, as noted by their enthusiasm to progress and excel. The school proudly celebrates achievements through displayed honor rolls, college admissions, photographs and trophies. A vibrant student council provides a meaningful venue for students in school decision-making, including community events like the highly successful "Mentors in Medicine" program, the senior trip and the cafeteria's menu. This voice reinforces the culture of responsibility, high expectations and success.
 - Students are highly respectful and maintain a scholarly decorum through both their social interactions and by proudly wearing their navy blue and white uniforms. They enjoy their school and their smiling faces and warm, welcoming greetings to visitors are evident. Students are comfortable confiding in adults, and teachers continually encourage them as they strive toward meeting their goals and going to college.
- The school offers an extremely diverse and enriched curriculum that provides students with many opportunities to explore interests and maximize potential.
 - Despite a challenging budget, the school has a rich curriculum aligned to State standards, including the arts, music, dance, chess and robotics. Data supports a correlation between these opportunities and improved critical thinking skills. A wide array of advanced placement courses enable students to earn college credits by the time they graduate.
- Teachers gather and meaningfully analyze a wide array of data that enables them to strategically plan lessons and collaborate on best practices.

- Teachers are adept at collecting and analyzing a variety of data. Uniform diagnostic, mid-term and final assessments regularly enable them to analyze effectively the trends in student performance. The schools' focus on Hispanic and Black male students and on those students whose performance is within the lowest third, places emphasis on improved critical thinking and writing skills. These efforts, alongside improved credit accumulation are an initiative across the school.
- Teachers carefully track data using a variety of computer-based tools and are able to articulate patterns and trends they find over time. Teachers came to a team meeting, each prepared with a laptop illustrating spreadsheets tracking student skill performance over time, referenced to a State writing rubric. This enabled them to have collaborative discussions on classroom strategies and to share best practices.
- The school utilizes a variety of strategies and venues to effectively communicate with parents and keep them well informed.
 - The school hosts well attended monthly parent teacher association and grade meetings to keep parents effectively informed of student progress and next steps toward meeting goals. The school strategically uses web-based technology that enables parents to readily access class grades and related information. Many teachers host their own websites and blogs where they post class related materials and assignments.
 - Parents indicate that both teachers and administrators are readily accessible. One parent shared that "Honest attempts are made to address concerns; what more can you ask for?" Parents like the school's curricular rigor and the expectation that all students are college bound.
- The school's many vibrant and committed partners enable it to provide a rich array of additional supports and learning opportunities for students.
 - The principal's entrepreneurial spirit and business prowess enable the school to benefit from many lasting private and corporate partners that are committed to its mission. They provide funds that underwrite many worthwhile student activities. Resulting trips to diverse countries like China, Japan, Egypt, Africa and others provide phenomenal opportunities for students to see the world and expand their horizons internationally.
 - Many colleges and university partners support and host numerous programs. This support enables the school to serve as a community resource seven days a week, well into the evening, offering tutoring and many extracurricular activities, including sports like lacrosse and fencing.

What the school needs to improve

- Differentiate instruction more consistently across grades and subjects to enable all students to have their individual learning needs met more effectively.
 - Teachers regularly use technology such as SMARTboards as an instructional tool. However, whole-group instruction is currently the most evident pedagogy. Some teachers use differentiated approaches whereby they flexibly group students based upon data, or provide multiple

entry points through choices in class. However, these practices designed to address students' individual learning needs are not yet consistent.

- The lack of a coherent set of beliefs is evident in the differences in pedagogical strategies used across the grades, particularly in terms of understanding and beliefs around the efficacy of differentiated instruction.
- Utilize posted student work, evaluated using standards-based rubrics with constructive feedback, as an instructional tool within classroom environments to guide both students' next learning steps and faculty professional development.
 - Although improved student writing is an established school goal, this is not evident within classrooms. While class writing occurs, the school currently files the work. Most classes do not currently use posted student work, resulting in the loss of insights into the writing process such work could provide as both an instructional and professional development tool.
 - There is currently little evidence of applied standards-based rubrics within classrooms. These enable students to see work assessed against a uniform standard and clarify next steps toward improvement. Use of posted work with critical feedback is required to further align the school's instructional practices with its goals.
- Align pedagogy within the middle and high school grades based upon a coherent set of common beliefs, to enable more consistent school practice.
 - Although the school has a nearly two-decade history as grade 6 to 12, conversations with teachers reveal a lack of coherent belief systems on how students learn best. A middle school teacher said, "I can't speak for my high school colleagues," while several high school teachers shared, "What works for the middle school doesn't work in the high school."
 - The school does not currently have an effective system to evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration. As a result, the work of teacher teams is currently too broad and is not strategically focused.
- Refine the focus of teacher teams to enable members to engage in action research to identify effective strategies and monitor their impact on a manageably sized group of struggling learners.
 - While teachers across the school meet regularly in teams to discuss data and share materials and best practices, the focus of the teams is broad, looking at the performance of one third of the school. Teams do not currently identify a nominally sized group of about twenty students, representative of the larger population, to enable deeper action research.
 - Although teachers collaborate to share and employ strategies, teams do not currently engage in action research where they link data analysis to drive the implementation of specific instructional strategies with a target student population. Teams do not yet closely monitor and evaluate the efficacy of strategies to address the needs of the identified students. The large group size inhibits the ability of teams to determine what works best for individual struggling learners and then apply that information to larger groups.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Frederick Douglass Academy	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X					
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?				X			
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X					
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed