

Fact Sheet: School Improvement Scenarios for Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology

Summary

- Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology (“Fordham Leadership”) has struggled since it was founded in 2001. Graduation rates have remained below 50% for the last four years. In 2009, the school’s four-year graduation rate was 49% (including August graduates), well below the citywide 63% average¹.
- Fordham Leadership staff and families have worked hard to improve the school. The Department of Education (DOE) also provided considerable support to Fordham Leadership. In recent years, this has included: teacher training; guidance around curriculum planning; and working with teachers to better support high-need students. Unfortunately, our best efforts have not yet turned the school around.
- As you may know, the New York State Education Department named Fordham Leadership as one of the “Persistently Lowest Achieving” (PLA) schools in the entire state.
- As a result, the DOE is developing a plan to better support students. We need to take one of two aggressive actions:
 - Keeping the school open and continuing to support it, but even more intensively through:
 - Staff replacement;
 - Leadership change;
 - Bringing in mentor teachers at higher salaries; and/or
 - Introducing new programs.
 - Replacing the school by:
 - Phasing out the school over time by not accepting new students;
 - Supporting current students through graduation; and
 - Bringing in new district or charter school(s) to gradually grow in the building.

At this point, we have no specific plans in mind for Fordham Leadership Academy of Business and Technology.

We understand that many students, families, and staff members believe in the school’s potential, and we know that this is difficult news. At the same time, we hope you share our view that we can—and must—do better for students.

In the coming weeks, we will work with you to figure out how to help students. We will talk to parents, students, staff, and members of the Fordham Leadership community as well as people and organizations that work with the school. We are particularly interested to learn about things that may not be obvious on paper: What do you think is working well at the school? What is not working?

Based on that feedback, as well as a thorough review of school data, we will propose an action plan that we believe will best benefit current and future students.

Please be assured that the DOE will continue to work closely with Fordham Leadership staff and families to see that all students receive the support they need to succeed in school. We look forward to your feedback throughout this process.

¹ This figure represents the City’s calculation of graduation rate on the annual Progress Reports. It is similar to the State method, and typically there is only modest deviation between our calculation and the State rate. In 2009, the State rate for Fordham Leadership was 52% (including August graduates), a slightly higher figure than our calculation, but still well below the City average.

Background

Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology Has Struggled for Years

Graduation rates at Fordham Leadership have remained at low levels—below 50%—since graduating its first class of seniors.

- The school’s four-year graduation rate has recently improved – reaching 49% in 2009 (including August graduates)—but remains well below the citywide 63% average.¹
- If Regents diplomas alone counted toward graduation—as will be the case in just one year—the four-year graduation rate at Fordham Leadership would drop to just 35 percent. The Regents diploma rate has improved in the last year; however the overall graduation rate has remained flat.
- In 2008-2009, only 64% of first-year students earned at least 10 credits. This is a key predictor of future student success because students who fall behind often have trouble getting back on track to graduation.
- Fordham Leadership received a B grade on its 2008-2009 Progress Report, a C grade on its 2007-2008 Progress Report, and a C grade on its 2006-2007 Progress Report.
- Fordham Leadership was rated Proficient on its most recent Quality Review in 2009-2010. During Quality Reviews, experienced educators visit schools, observe classrooms, and talk with staff, students, and parents. Schools are rated on a four-point scale, with “Well Developed” as the highest rating.
- The school’s attendance rate continues to be low. The 2008-2009 attendance rate was 79%, far below the city’s 86% average attendance rate for high schools.
- Safety issues have been a concern at the school. On the 2009-2010 New York City School Survey, 29% of students reported feeling unsafe in the hallways, bathrooms, and locker rooms at school.

Demand for the School is Falling, Suggesting that Families are Seeking Better Options

- Demand for seats at Fordham Leadership has declined over the last few years. Although demand for the school remains fairly strong, demand for seats at the school dropped from 12.8 applications per seat for September 2008 enrollment to 8.4 applications per seat for September 2009 enrollment.

Despite Our Best Efforts, Performance at Fordham Leadership Remains Low

Fordham Leadership staff have worked hard to improve the school, but the school has not yet turned around. The DOE has also extended considerable support to Fordham Leadership, including:

- Extensive teacher training around issues including curriculum planning, improving teaching practices, and individualizing teaching to meet each student’s needs.
- Support for teaching teams focused on the needs of targeted student populations, such as English language learners, special education students, or students who are struggling academically.
- Fostering opportunities for teachers and administrators to connect with colleagues in more successful schools, allowing them to learn from one another, improve teaching, and better support students.
- Support in recruiting talented teachers.
- Facilitated partnerships with community-based organizations to support youth development initiatives at the school.

As we consider possible options for the future of Fordham Leadership, we will be analyzing past strategic improvement efforts at the school to help us identify what has been working and what has not. This information will guide our thinking about how best to support students and the community going forward.

We Know That We Can Do Better

Fordham Leadership serves a high-need population: 14% of students are English language learners and 18% require special education services. But other schools serving similar students have achieved far better results.

- Fordham High School for the Arts (“Fordham Arts”) is located on the same campus as Fordham Leadership. At that school, which is also in the Fordham Leadership peer group, 8% of students are English language learners and 21% require special education services. Fordham Arts achieved a four-year graduation rate of 80% in 2009, 31 points higher than Fordham Leadership. Also, 95% of students at Fordham Arts earned at least 10 credits in 2008-2009, 31 points higher than Fordham Leadership.
- Belmont Preparatory High School (“Belmont”) is also located on the same campus as Fordham Leadership. At Belmont, which is also in Fordham Leadership’s peer group, 19% of students are English language learners and 19% require special education services. Belmont achieved a 62% four-year graduation rate in 2009, with 52% of all students earning Regents diplomas.

We Remain Focused on Helping Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology Students to Succeed

Please be assured that the DOE will work closely with Fordham Leadership staff to ensure that students get the support they need—this year and in the future. In the immediate term, we will build on past efforts to support the school, including:

- Helping the school better support its highest-need students, including English language learners, special education students, and students who are performing below grade-level.
- Working to identify areas where professional development is needed and assisting the school in meeting those needs.
- Helping to create and enhance relationships with community partners.

What You Can Expect

Over the coming weeks we will carefully review school data as well as your feedback. As we move forward through this process and begin to shape a plan for the school, we will be able to provide additional details about how that proposal would impact students and the broader Fordham Leadership’s High School community.

Regardless of the outcome of this process, the DOE will work continuously with Fordham Leadership staff and families to ensure that students receive the support they need and the excellent education they deserve.

Sharing Your Concerns and Questions

The Department of Education is seeking your feedback. We will answer your questions and listen to your concerns as we develop a formal proposal for the school.

Parents, staff, and other community members may submit questions and comments at any time:

Izaak Orlansky
212-374-5159
HS.Proposals@schools.nyc.gov

We also encourage you to visit the website created to serve Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology and interested members of the public at <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/planning/changes/bronx/FordhamLeadership>. We will update that website regularly with important dates, answers to frequently asked questions, and new information as it becomes available.