

Fact Sheet: School Improvement Scenarios for Grace Dodge Career and Technical Education High School

Summary

- Grace Dodge High School (“Grace Dodge”) has struggled for years. Graduation rates have remained in the 40% range for more than five years. The school’s four-year graduation rate was 46% (including August graduates) in 2009, significantly below the citywide 63% average.¹
- Grace Dodge staff and families have worked hard to improve the school. The Department of Education (DOE) also provided considerable support to Grace Dodge. In recent years, this has included: funding and support to restructure the school into smaller learning communities, support for the school’s career and technical education programs, extensive 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 Grace Dodge 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 Grace Dodge.

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 Grace Dodge 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 Grace Dodge 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 the four-year graduation rate on annual Progress Reports. It is similar to the State method, and typically there is only modest deviation between our calculation and the State rate.

Background

Grace Dodge High School Has Struggled for Years

Graduation rates at Grace Dodge have remained at very low levels—in the 40% range—for more than five years.

- In 2009, the school's four-year graduation rate was at 47% (including August graduates), well below the 63% citywide average.¹
- If Regents diplomas alone counted toward graduation—as will be the case in just one year—the four-year graduation rate at Grace Dodge would drop to just 24 percent. The Regents rate has shown modest improvement, fluctuating between 11.5 and 24 percent over the past five years, but it remains very low.
- In 2008-2009, only 59% of students attending the school earned at least 10 credits during their first year. This is a key predictor of future success because students who fall behind often have trouble getting back on track to graduation.
- Grace Dodge has made little improvement around school performance and progress. The school received a D grade on its overall Progress Report grade in 2008-2009, down from a C in 2007-2008. Additionally, in 2009 the school received a D grade in two critical sub-categories—Student Performance and Student Progress.
- Grace Dodge received a rating of Proficient on its most recent Quality Review in 2008-2009. During Quality Reviews, experienced educators spend several days visiting a school, observing classrooms, and talking to 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 82%, below the citywide average of 86% for high schools.
- Safety issues have been a concern at the school. On the 2010 New York City School Survey, more than one in three students—34%—reported feeling unsafe in the hallways, bathrooms, and locker rooms at school. Parents also reported concerns about the safety of their children, with 17% indicating that they did not feel their child was safe at school.

Demand for the School is Low, Suggesting that Families Are Seeking Better Options

- The total number of high school applications received across all seven programs has declined steadily in recent years. As a result, the number of incoming ninth-grade students at Grace Dodge has decreased by 22% since 2007.

Despite Our Best Efforts, Performance at Grace Dodge Remains Low

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

- Funding and support to restructure the school into smaller learning communities.
- Support for the school's career and technical education programs.
- Grants to support arts programs at the school.
- 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 other 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 Grace Dodge, 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

Grace Dodge serves a high-need population: 17% of students are English language learners, and 20% require special education services. But other schools serving similar students have achieved far better results.²

- At Belmont Preparatory High School, which is in Grace Dodge's peer group, 19% of students are English Language Learners and 19% require Special Education services. That school achieved a four-year graduation rate of 62% in 2009, with 52% of students earning Regents diplomas.
- At ACORN High School for Social Justice, also in Grace Dodge's peer group, 6% of students are English language learners and 20% of students require special education services. That school achieved a 75% four-year graduation rate in 2009, with 47% of students earning Regents diplomas. ACORN also had a 91% attendance rate.

We Remain Focused on Helping Grace Dodge Students to Succeed

Please be assured that the DOE will work closely with Grace Dodge 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 Grace Dodge High School community.

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

² Demographic data cited in this section is from the 2008-2009 school year to align with performance data from that same year. Information will be updated when 2009-2010 Progress Reports are released.

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:

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HS.Proposals@schools.nyc.gov

We also encourage you to visit the website created to serve Grace Dodge High School and interested members of the public at <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/planning/changes/bronx/GraceDodge>. We will update that website regularly with important dates, answers to frequently asked questions, and new information as it becomes available.