



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

**The Facing History School
High School 303**

**525 West 50 Street
New York
NY 10019**

Principal: Gillian Smith

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Reviewer: Carol Foresta

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Facing History School is located in mid Manhattan and currently serves 217 students in grades 9 through 11. The school opened in 2005. The majority (62%) of the students are Hispanic, 33% are Black and the remaining 5% are of various ethnicities. Eighty-two percent of the students are known to be eligible for Title 1 status. Approximately 17% of the school population are special education students which is higher than similar and City school averages, and 13% of the students are English language learners. Attendance is almost 90% which is about the same as similar and City schools.

The lead partner for the school is the Facing History and Ourselves organization which brings the Understanding by Design approach to curricular planning and ongoing planning, professional development and resource support for all students. Other partners include New Visions and the New York City Performance Consortium, which support professional development and provide additional resources for students.

As an empowerment school, the Facing History School has more flexibility to make key decisions and control resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is highly visible, provides excellent leadership and is respected by the students and teachers.
- The school functions as a community where staff and students support each other.
- The staff are hard working, reflective and passionate about teaching and learning.
- The students believe their teachers and principal treat each other and the adults in the building responsibly and respectfully.
- The curriculum is planned thematically and linked across grades providing students with seamless access to content and instruction.
- The school's partnership with the Facing History and Ourselves organization provides particular expertise in curricular planning and ongoing professional development.
- The advisory program knits the fabric of the school together and provides students with a space to analyze their academic as well as social and emotional needs alongside caring adults.
- Teacher designed rubrics engage students in active learning and self assessment.
- Teachers inspire students by modeling collaboration and meaningful communication in community building.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide more formal and systematic feedback to teachers on lesson observations.
- Raise teachers' expectations and ability to differentiate instruction more accurately to meet the needs of all students in English language arts and mathematics.
- Build on the good work that has been started on the analysis of performance data by providing more focus on particular groups.
- Increase the focus on attendance and punctuality, particularly in regard to the significant number of students whose frequent absence is preventing them from achieving educational success.
- Continue the work with parents to engage them as partners in their children's education.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The Facing History School is well organized and is well-placed to continue to grow and support student learning. The active and ongoing participation of its partners is helping to build a learning community that meets the needs of students. The principal is an experienced educator whose vision guides the school. She understands all the intricacies which connect staff to each other and with students. Teachers are hard-working, support the school's mission and are passionate about its vision. The extensive student advisory program and community building activities are valued, and support the school's mission effectively. These programs enable teachers and students to meet in small groups and to establish a positive relationship where students are known well both academically and personally. Students feel able to talk about the forces at play in their lives beyond the classroom walls as well as how they are doing in classes. There is a relevant and thoughtfully designed curriculum. As yet, parents are not involved enough as partners in their children's education. Attendance and punctuality are still a concern and teachers do not always have high enough expectations and do not differentiate learning sufficiently well to meet the full range of students' needs in all classes.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school uses data efficiently to monitor and analyze student progress. As a result, teachers have a clear understanding of each student's performance. Although teachers work together to design assessments and keep portfolios of students' work, this data is not always used to inform the school's instructional planning. The advisory program generates a wide range of data about students' academic and personal achievements. A detailed spreadsheet system enables the school to monitor the full range of data such as internally produced academic results, standardized test results and attendance data. All teachers use this information to help make decisions about student performance, such as who is going to need summer school and/or be part of the merit role. Teachers and advisors compare performance in different subjects and so know who is passing mathematics but failing English. This informs specific interventions to support and match student need.

The school tracks the progress of a focused group of students against which to compare other students' achievements. This new system enables the school to keep an updated and objective understanding of ethnic and gender groups, English language learners and special education students. Comparisons across class and grades are made but not yet fully established in practice. Currently teachers in grade 9 and 10 meet together regularly and use data to compare rates of student progress. Teachers will move up with their team to establish continuity in practice and to ensure they know their students well. Comparisons with other similar schools are made with the assistance of the school's Empowerment Network.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school’s goals are detailed in the Comprehensive Education Plan and focus on what the schools needs to improve most. They are measured by student performance. The whole school has met and planned together where they want all students to be when they are in the grade 12. Every teacher knows the goals and refers to them when planning for their classes. During weekly staff meetings and common planning time, teachers set grade, subject and class goals and write them up into curriculum maps. Teachers give students consistent feedback when working with them on individual skills and provide students with accessible and clear rubrics that identify and guide their next learning steps.

Particular attention is given to those students who are most in need of improvement. Work is planned so that it meets the needs of all students, including special education students and those struggling to reach grade standards. It is too soon to see the impact this will have on student achievement because systems have not been in place for long enough. English language learners and special needs students are taught by specialists who meet together every Friday to discuss those who are at high risk. Each teacher has the same small group for several weeks and so is able to build up a detailed picture of their progress and needs. There are high expectations set for students in advisory classes. Students know they are going to have to present their portfolios in order to move to the next level. These portfolios are important and students are told how challenging it will be for them to be able to enter the Senior Institute of the school when they get to grade 11. Although the school is new, and students have not actually been part of the Senior Institute, the school still points to this goal with pride.

The school has reached out to involve parents and encourages them to come into school and be part of all conferences alongside their children. There are four parent/teacher conferences scheduled each year and four mandatory phone conferences for each mid-cycle. During these conversations teachers talk about each student’s progress and outline the expectations and goals for the coming marking period. However, the majority of the parents have not felt engaged or connected to the school or its vision and there is more work to do to build parents’ participation in their children’s education.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The curriculum is designed by teachers with the support of the Facing History and Ourselves organization using the Understanding by Design process. The school’s approach for building students’ skills is organized around ‘four habits of learning’, which are voice, interpretation, independence, and interdependence. Each of these habits of learning identifies the skills in reading, writing, mathematical computation and artistic and technological expertise to be developed. All classes are project-based with a rubric that focuses on the habits of learning. The result of this type of learning style is that students find themselves more engaged in a collaborative process of learning. For example, in mathematics class students did a smoking project where they interviewed relatives who

smoke and charted how much money got spent by their relatives on cigarettes. The habits of learning are used in all classes and represented in all of the rubrics teachers use in each department leading to a consistent approach and unified vision.

Teachers hold each other accountable. The principal ensures that teachers are doing all that they can to help students be successful by keeping a record of formal discussions and the strategies they need to develop. Every department has tutoring hours after school for all students who need support. In professional development meetings, the special education teachers model how to scaffold lessons and customize lessons to meet the needs of all students. Although the school has worked hard to ensure that teachers plan lessons which meet the needs of all students, inconsistencies remain in the degree to which this occurs in practice.

The budget is linked to data in order to raise achievement. There is a small administrative staff, which enables there to be more instructional staff and so smaller class size. Teachers feel they are part of the administration because they help make decisions about schedules and the way classes are organized. Students have the opportunity to work independently, individually and in small groups with teachers and/or volunteers. Teachers have designed task and unit specific rubrics to involve students in assessing their own work. These rubrics help to customize the curriculum to fit the needs of individual students and whole classes. In all classes there are relatively few disruptions because students are fairly well engaged. Students value the enrichment opportunities such as yoga, Tae Kwan Dow, drumming, video and gym.

Teachers know and care about students' academic and personal needs. As one student says, "Teachers treat us like we're their own kids. They get 'on' you because they care." The advisory system groups students together in small units with advisors who are familiar with all of the data for each student for whom they are responsible. Every student has an advisor and so has an adult they can talk to confidentially. The advisors are responsible for calling home when students are late or absent from school. Despite the school's best efforts and good systems that are in place, there are still issues with lateness and attendance.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Teachers are selected for their appropriate qualifications, a passion for working with students and a willingness to support the student advisory program. In this way, the school ensures that teachers get to know the students in a more holistic way, and not just as participants in whatever subject area they teach. This type of work at the school puts a personalized face on the data and allows the teachers to know their students well.

Professional development takes place in a culture of collegiality and challenge. Workshops include providing assistance in how to plan differentiated curriculum, and how to design effective rubrics. The principal visits classes regularly to informally observe teaching and learning. This is not a formal process and teachers do not receive written feedback. Instead, the principal meets with teachers individually and records the outcomes of any discussions. In these meetings teachers set goals for improvement and identify strengths as well as how they will develop any weaker areas. Teachers informally observe each other's classes, which has a positive impact on developing particular

elements of practice. Teachers work together in weekly planning meetings to design and agree the rubrics that will be used in all classes to guide learning and assessment.

The principal has high standards and expectations for both students and staff. As a result she is highly respected. In recognition of the fact that its engagement with some parents is not as positive as it would wish, the school has instituted a number of systems which are improving communications. The school runs smoothly because procedures are communicated clearly and followed consistently. Teachers are happy with the level of collegiality that exists and students like the culture of the school.

The lead partner organization, Facing History and Ourselves, provides volunteers both as speakers and classroom assistants so that most classes have at least two adults working in it. As a result, students feel cared for, respected and assisted in achieving their learning goals. Outside agencies, such as Writers Express, the Lehman Mathematics Program, Working Playground and Educators for Social Responsibility, are routinely used to support the school's goals relating to the creative and performing arts. Project Stay works with students to learn about healthy relationships both physically and mentally.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

A range of committees monitors and reviews the school's work and its progress towards reaching its goals as detailed in the Comprehensive Education Plan. Every month, staff analyze student work closely in order to measure the effectiveness of programs. The school's vision committee takes a broad picture of the school's work and reports on the goals and how they are being met. Each summer, teachers meet to discuss student outcomes and review progress of plans and goals. At a weekend retreat attended by most staff the whole school goals are revisited and new ones set that build on the previous year's evaluations.

The school's goals are reviewed as part of the quarterly planning cycle and adjustments made to programs and action plans. For example, after looking at writing levels and finding grade 9 students were more skilled than those in grade 10, the school decided all students would keep journals in every subject area to ensure students could practice their writing skills more regularly. Monthly meetings with relevant staff ensure any individual education and behavioral plans are discussed and interventions adjusted in response to the data gathered. Interim assessments about student achievement are used to plan and deliver additional interventions. In response to an identified need to improve the completion of homework, the school set up extra tutoring time at lunch to provide a flexible way for students to follow through on the work they must do to succeed. There is a clear plan to assess, re-visit and re-assess to see if progress has been made regarding the delivery of instruction and student engagement and achievement. The teachers examine what the curriculum does to support the targeted group of students used as a benchmark against which to measure the success of initiatives and interventions. Plans are re-visited at the end of the cycle to re-evaluate whether goals are still relevant.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The Facing History School (HS 303)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.	X		
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	