



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Frederick Douglass Academy

Public School 499

**2581 7th Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10039**

Principal: Dr. Gregory Hodge

Dates of review: December 6 – 7, 2006

Reviewer: Barry King

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Frederick Douglass Academy opened in 1991 and currently serves grades 6 through 12. Its overriding goal is to prepare all students to enter a college of their choice after they graduate. It has approximately 1500 students, 90% of whom live in Harlem. Almost 80% are Black and a little over 20% are Hispanic. Asian and White students are present in small numbers. About 20% have home languages other than English, with Spanish and Creole the main ones, but the proportion of students learning to speak English is very small. Some 6% of students are on special education programs. The school receives Title 1 funding. Attendance is broadly average taking one year with another, but it dipped to 89% in 2005.

Students joining the school are expected to attend summer schools before admittance to acclimate them to the school's expectations, and they must wear a school uniform. The school has extended day and weekend provision to supplement the scheduled daily classes.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is very successful in its core mission of ensuring the graduation and college placement of its students.
- Staff are highly disciplined in meeting the school's high expectations for academic progress and the behavior of its students.
- The principal's clear vision and relentless energy provide the school with exceptional leadership.
- The principal and his senior team have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- The teachers and other staff are highly committed to the achievement and welfare of the students, and to their own professional development in pursuit of this.
- The curriculum is well aligned to the school's goals.
- The enrichment programs provide students with a wide range of opportunities, after classes and at weekends, in which students participate well.
- The students are very well motivated and respond positively to the wide ranging opportunities at school.
- The school provides excellent support for struggling students.
- Strong partnerships exist with parents and many organizations, which support the work of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that students have clear, shorter term, measurable goals to aim at and be accountable for reaching.
- Use the abundant information on student attendance to formulate programs to raise it.
- Align instruction more closely to the range of learning needs in the classroom.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school with outstanding features

The school has an impressive record of promoting the achievement of its students, whatever their background and starting points. The work of the whole staff is united behind a common goal, that of getting the students into the college of their choice, and in this they are especially successful. The principal is a remorseless driving force behind the school's performance. He is ably assisted by a highly committed staff who share the same values and are sharply focused on making a reality of the school's mission.

The curriculum and the instruction are well aligned to the students' needs. The school provides extensive enrichment programs, not only through normal school hours, but also in the evenings and at weekends. Classrooms are places where scholarly activity can take place and the teaching is expert, although not consistently differentiated to meet the needs of all students in the class. Frequent assessment of the students' progress provides the school with a good understanding of each student's needs and it adapts learning programs flexibly and often in the light of this. The students thrive in a climate of high expectations, knowing what they are aiming for by the time they leave, but most of them are not given clear, shorter term goals to which they can work. Students generally enjoy school a great deal, and are found there in large numbers during the extended hours, but a minority does not attend regularly.

This school makes a profound difference to the life chances of its students. As one said, speaking for many others, "We are lucky to be here".

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 well developed.

The school generates and analyzes data at many levels to give itself a good understanding of its performance. In the classroom, teachers regularly assess the students individually and communicate their progress to them and their parents through frequent progress reports and, six times a year, report cards. The principal has formal meetings with teachers to discuss the progress of whole classes. At a more general level, the school aggregates and interprets data to know well how different groups of students are performing. Comparison of its performance with the best schools in the City is at the heart of the school's mission to provide a high quality education for its students. The data is used effectively to place struggling students on support programs and to extend the higher achievers by placing them on more demanding courses. The school also charts, and displays, the outcomes for students in pursuit of the school's overriding goal, namely their success in gaining offers from colleges to which they have applied.

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 well developed.

The school’s central goal of getting all students into a college of their choice drives everything that it does. It provides a framework for its curriculum and instructional programs and is the central motivating factor for all staff and students. The commitment to this goal is total for, as one teacher said, “If one student fails, we all fail”. The school has other aims that complement this, for example ensuring that students turn out to be responsible citizens.

The school has clear, measurable goals in its Comprehensive Education Plan but seeks to go beyond these in what it achieves at a whole-school level by, for example, providing Advanced Placement courses. The principal’s reviews of class performance give rise to goals for each class. Teachers, on the basis of these conferences and other data, formulate targets that they wish their students to reach, although there is not for most students a formal process for documenting and communicating these goals. In contrast, the individual education plans for special education students are timeframed and precise.

On a day-to-day basis, when teachers assess work they give helpful feedback to students so that they know how to improve. In a climate of high expectations there is also an expectation that each student will do as well as possible, and this is something to which the students are signed up. But those in general education classes are not given clear interim goals that would form the stepping stones to the final destinations of graduation and college. Some students would welcome having interim goals shared with them, so that they might know what they are aiming for and whether, in the shorter term, they are successful.

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 well developed.

In the words of the principal, “All that the school provides derives from the vision”. The curriculum and the schedule that delivers it cover all mandated provision and provide more demanding courses to stretch the higher achievers, such as the Advanced Placement courses. Students who struggle are encouraged to attend tutoring out of normal school hours to catch up. The school also provides programs to develop a wider range of skills that will be useful in college and beyond, such as how to eat sensibly. The school’s extended program, involving over 30 sports and clubs, is very well aligned to the goal of nurturing good citizens who adopt decent values and compete effectively at the highest levels. The school is at the heart of its community, open all evenings and on Saturday and Sunday, offering support and enrichment to its parents as well as its students.

Teachers are extremely hard working and committed to both the students and their professional development. Teachers value the trust placed in them to find creative ways to teach but know that they are held tightly accountable for what they do. Classrooms are well organized and studious environments, in which learning can be effective. Lessons are well focused, teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and students learn at a good

pace. The stronger teaching encourages students to participate and involves techniques that match the level of work to their starting points, so that they can make good progress. But the differentiation of work is not successfully achieved in a number of classes, which slows the learning of those who are not fully engaged. Teachers extend the students by setting regular and demanding homework.

The school budgets prudently, allocating its funds carefully to match the needs of the students. The public funding is augmented by sustained efforts to attract resources from the wider community, for example for special projects such as the equipping of the workout rooms.

The relationships between students and staff, and between each other, are strong. The school asks a great deal of the students but cares for each one of them deeply. The students are given, in the words of one teacher, "relentless encouragement", and they work very hard. The tone is set at the start of the day, as a member of staff greets students at the single entrance and the principal ensures that they enter school in the approved manner in terms of dress and behavior.

The school has well developed procedures for contacting home on the same day that any student is absent. It is well aware that despite this practice, and the rewarding educational experience it offers, attendance is below its demanding target of 95%, largely due to a minority of students who, for a variety of reasons, find regular attendance difficult.

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 well developed.

The principal provides outstanding leadership for the school. His passionate commitment that all students will do well is the driving force behind the sustained high performance of the school. He has assembled a team of like-minded colleagues who share the school's aims and values, and who provide strength in depth in their pursuit. Teachers are selected for their support of the school's mission, their subject mastery and their willingness to engage in extra-curricular activity.

The professional development of the staff is well planned, with weekly collaborative sessions within departments and monthly interdepartmental meetings. These activities are well supported by the literacy and mathematics coaches. The senior team has a thorough understanding of the strengths of the school and what needs improving. This stems from a good understanding of performance data and close oversight of the quality of classroom activity. Formal lesson observations and informal walkthroughs are frequent and valued by staff, who also observe each other. The records of observations are diagnostic and make clear where there are areas for improvement. Follow up visits are made within a short time span to ensure that necessary improvements have occurred.

The school has well established procedures and expectations for its daily life. For example, students are required to adhere closely to a published code of behavior. When an emergency occurs, there is a prompt response. Lessons begin punctually. Much of the routine administration passes through the principal's hands, adding to his detailed knowledge of the school, but also at times diverting him from other tasks.

The school has very strong relationships with parents, who are often in the school. It has built an array of partnerships with other organizations that support it and help to provide good role models for the students. For example, during the review a team of outside volunteers was decorating the school and a representative from Columbia University was in school to negotiate a technology project.

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 well developed.

The school has very well developed routines for assessing students, evaluating whether their progress is good enough in relation to their own and others' track records, and communicating outcomes to them and their parents. Where students are falling behind, the school is quick to install support programs. The progress of classes is monitored to see that they are on course to meet the targets agreed with the principal. Teachers are targeted for support on the basis of ongoing lesson observations. The school adjusts support well to the needs of individuals, for example through counseling where a student may be having personal problems, and provides well-judged remedial intervention. The support can be extensive as well as flexible. As a member of the staff said, "Once kids enter the FDA family, we don't give up on them". The school's diligent response to an area of perceived weakness is evidenced by the principal finding that the assessment of English writing was not consistent enough. He then implemented a cross-school program, which has improved it. There is no let up in the school's striving for its ultimate goal of getting all students into college but it does not, in the light of the data emerging about their performance, crystallize the next steps into shorter term, measurable goals for each student.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Frederick Douglass Academy (PS499)	∅	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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.	Ø	✓	+
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