



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Frederick Douglass Academy II**

**Middle / High School 860  
215 West 114th Street  
New York  
NY 10026**

**Principal: Latasha Greer**

**Dates of review: December 7 - 8, 2006**

**Reviewer: David Taylor**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Frederick Douglass Academy II is a middle and high school serving 467 students in grades 6 through 12. It was founded in September 2000 with two 6th grade classes, as a replication of the well-established Frederick Douglass Academy. It was subsequently relocated to its current building, which is shared with another school. The move resulted in some parents withdrawing their children and the school had a period without an appointed principal. The present principal had been keeping the school going and was later confirmed in post.

The school has this year reached its intended size in each of grades 6 through 10. However, some further growth is still projected into grades 11 and 12. There is screening by parental choice for the grade 6 entry, but that to 9th grade is unscreened.

The dominant ethnic grouping (over four-fifths) is Black students, with a significant minority of Hispanic students and very small numbers of White, Asian and others. There are 59 (13%) special education students and ten (2%) English language learners. Attendance has normally been above 90%, compared with a City average of 87.4% in 2005. The school receives Title 1 funding.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school has a powerfully positive corporate culture and climate, well supported by the Frederick Douglass Academy philosophy.
- The principal is a person of high standards and integrity and she has exceptional commitment and passion for the school and especially its students.
- There is much very good teaching, with imaginative methods used to support student learning.
- There is a strongly supportive faculty climate and some good collaboration in grade and subject teams.
- The school carefully analyses the data it collects and makes thorough use of it.
- Students have an exceptionally high regard for the school, seeing it as a secure and warm environment in which they can flourish.
- The school tracks individual students extremely closely and intervenes effectively to support their needs.
- There are many remarkable stories of individual success among the students, which can plainly be attributed to the school's sensitivity in relationships and management.
- The school's clear focus on ensuring that its seniors graduate from high school has had notable success with the first cohort of students, who are on track to do very well in securing college placements.
- Communications with parents are extremely clear and thorough, with strong liaison through the work of the parent coordinator.

### What the school needs to improve

- Sustain the emphasis on professional development that enables teachers to tackle their challenges and interpret the results of data in their planning.
- Ensure greater use of differentiation in setting learning objectives and tasks for all students in the heterogeneous groups.
- Make a strongly concerted drive to ensure that consistent high expectations, especially of behavior and attendance, are set and enforced.
- Ensure that academic work has rigor and challenge, to allow students to aim for the highest possible achievement levels.
- Work systematically to ensure the full and effective transition to a successful grade 6 - 12 school.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school with some well-developed features**

Frederick Douglass Academy II has a number of strengths, although it also faces challenges. Foremost among the strengths is the passionate belief in the school's distinctive mission, driven by the Academy's founding spirit. The principal leads and inspires the school with her commitment, allied to an empathy with the students. The challenges stem especially from seeking to secure the school's stable corporate identity, based on high expectations for academic success and self-discipline. The first seniors are due to graduate this academic year and are on course to do well in securing college placements. Most students are very loyal and appreciate how well the school supports them. They often refer to feeling part of a family and speak about the personal and academic progress they have made since arriving at the school. They attribute this to the close individual attention and care that they receive.

The school has a clear sense of purpose, with very good use made of data to support individual students and much high quality teaching. On occasion, some lack of rigor in the expected learning outcomes contributes to a loss of full student engagement, but mostly they participate in their classes with relish and excitement, especially in the middle school, and make good progress. A number of inexperienced teachers have found class management and the imposition of firm disciplinary expectations hard challenges. As the school has accepted its first unscreened high school intakes, pressures have grown, where parents have shown less support for the Academy philosophy. The staff have developed a strong sense of collegiality and teamwork under the principal's firm guidance.

#### **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 has invested considerable effort into the collection and interpretation of data, using a wide range of test and other information, and it is skilled and effective at analyzing the academic progress of individuals, using electronically-generated and manually-produced results. The principal keeps displayed in her room the data on individual students. Scores for all students are monitored closely, with a particular focus on those who are credit deficient in terms of the Regents examinations and possible graduation for college. Class teachers are fully involved in discussions of class and student data, for which they receive clear print-outs as a basis for conferencing and recording. They complete diagnostic evaluation report checklists for their classes in English and mathematics, focusing closely on particular aspects of the assessment. There is scrutiny of individual students' and classes' performance on all test items, looking closely at strengths and weaknesses on individual topics. The principal gives a strong lead on this.

The school analyzes effectively the data on ethnic groups and English language learners. Special education students' individual education plans are produced by teachers working collaboratively, and additional support is made available as necessary, for example through the collaborative team teaching class in grade 9. Processes for making comparisons with past performance and with other schools are developing as data on successive cohorts become available. There is understandable preoccupation with the achievement of the current group of seniors. The school has an established tracking system for these, which is fully used by administration and teachers to seek to ensure good progress towards college goals. These careful systems are proving successful.

**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 with some well-developed features.**

The school has very clear and demanding goals, based on a mission statement which includes: high academic and personal standards, the successful pursuit of higher education, responsible citizenship, and effectiveness in all that students undertake in every aspect of life. There is also a strong emphasis on developing critical thinking skills and self-confidence, and the centrality of these ideas is apparent throughout the school's work and life. The goals are communicated extremely strongly in messages around the school as well as those sent home, and the aim is focused on helping all students to achieve at the highest possible levels. There is much parental support for this aim, especially from those parents who consciously opted into the Academy philosophy. This is not as strong for all students and parents however, especially in the high school, despite the persistent efforts of the school to share its goals. Communications with parents are extremely clear and thorough, with strong liaison through the work of the parent coordinator.

To support its aims, the school maintains a clear focus on learning and on what students need to do to improve. This is evident in the program of topics discussed by faculty, and there are good collaborative processes to ensure teachers' understanding of the goals. Teachers use grade conferences thoughtfully as a means to plan and set targets, with careful analysis of data on each student and consideration of interventions given and needed. Where progress is hampered by behavioral factors, students are recommended for intervention through the work of the dean and the guidance counselor, as well as external agencies if judged necessary. The school is concerned about some high school students whose attitudes are less positive, and it offers a range of support structures to seek to improve their motivation and commitment. Interventions with those students most in need of improvement are very effective.

**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 school's philosophy is to present to all its students the opportunity to aim for college entrance, particularly to colleges of high esteem. It seeks to accelerate learning opportunities, by starting work in the 7th grade which will lead as many students as

possible to take Regents examinations at the end of the 8th grade. It also encourages students to pursue Advanced Regents Diploma and take Advanced Placement courses. This aspiration to high status courses is supported strongly by the school's climate of raising expectations, but it is a constant challenge when applied to the unscreened high school population. It requires a continued focus on teaching quality, through collaborative professional development, especially in order to maintain all students' full engagement on tasks that present them with an appropriate and realistic challenge.

The school follows mandates for English language arts, including balanced literacy and reading and writing workshops. In mathematics, the middle school curriculum is based on IMPACT Math, again as mandated by the City. It places a strong emphasis on involving teachers in curriculum planning, and this has been apparent especially in the history and earth science curricula in the 6th grade, which reflect the initiative and careful planning of the school's faculty. There is increasingly strong accountability in the way in which teachers' work is kept under close review in relation to the performance of students, through the school's reporting structures. The efforts of the principal and other staff focus sharply on ensuring that resources are available to support the school's priorities for improving learning and behavior, for example through the appointment of the dean. The expansion of the school has presented difficulties, not least in providing appropriate and sufficient accommodation, student support and resources, but much progress has been made.

The school actively promotes high levels of teaching skill and collaborative working, and it has some well-established practice on which to draw. Very good models of teaching classrooms point the way to others. The effect of the focus on individuals' needs is apparent in the good quality of much of the work the students produce and their often extremely positive approach to learning. Not all students remain fully engaged, however, and teachers are sometimes taxed by the management of disruptive behavior. Students often show a real appreciation of how much the school has done for them and refer to their ability to confide in staff, whom they regard as 'family', offering a 'home away from home'. This sense does not yet extend fully to all high school students. The school gives particularly strong emphasis to behavior and attendance, and it has many developed systems for tackling these, where they fall below an acceptable level. It is especially aware of the difficulty of ensuring punctuality in the morning, and knows that this area requires further work if full consistency is to be achieved.

**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.**

The principal has put considerable energy into appointing staff of good quality, and there have been some very successful appointments, although some lack of experience is still evident. Applicants are expected to embrace the Academy culture and show commitment to children. The school's Comprehensive Education Plan has professional development as the key to giving teachers the support they need to develop their professional skills to the highest possible level. The focus of this is on subject-specific development, on which coaches in particular have done much effective work. The instructional quality in mathematics, for example, is clearly benefiting from the strength of collaborative and supportive working led by the coach. Teachers are growing increasingly skilled at using the results of data from tests to help them plan and teach in ways which are attuned to

students' varied needs, although practice is still developing in some areas of the school's work.

There is effective use of teacher observation, both in the formal assessments made by the principal and assistant principals and in the work of the coaches. Teachers are becoming much more adept at reflecting on their own and others' work, using the findings from observation as a stimulus to further improvement. Many students, staff and parents are unstinting in their praise of the principal, her qualities and her achievements. All comment on her tireless energy and dedication to the school and students. There are well-established school routines and procedures and although there are occasional examples of mild horseplay during changeover times, most students show great respect for each other and for adults in the school.

There is much effective use of a range of services and agencies to support the students. In particular, the school has harnessed various programs to offer students a preview of college life. These have included offers of tutoring, advice and college planning services. A federal partnership grant has also supported field trips to colleges and cultural events. The school has instituted a number of steps to reinforce to students that they are, or should be, college-bound when they leave the school. Some students are clear how their aspirations have been raised by the school's belief in their ability to succeed.

**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 strength of the school in this area is that both principal and faculty are strongly committed to the process of review and consequent improvement, as a strategy for achieving high aims. This epitomizes the openness to critical evaluation and modification of practice evident throughout the school. It is shown in the fact that plans are regularly revised in the light of the findings from data analysis, and that there is a regular use of diagnostic assessment to feed the next stage of planning and action. For example, teachers regularly complete individual student reports for communicating with parents, after collaborative discussion of students' progress. The findings of discussions are fully-documented and used in parent-teacher conferences. After reviewing these reports, the assistant principal discusses any significant trends and together staff look at how to improve students' performance in the light of the analysis.

The staff and principal keep each other on their toes; there is no complacency, but rather a willingness to take stock and respond creatively where innovation is seen as being required. Partly because the school is still so evidently in a state of change and development, it is still facing fresh challenges and seeking to meet these in a manner consistent with its high aspirations. It knows that it can achieve success only by the constant quest for further improvement. The school has a leader, and other administrators, who are determined to succeed and are energetic and resourceful in placing students' achievement firmly at the top of the agenda.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Frederick Douglass Academy II (IS/HS 860)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students*</li> </ul>		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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X