

Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School

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High School 682

1021 Jennings Street

Bronx

NY 10460

Principal: Nancy Mann

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School opened in 1994 as one of six small schools which restructured a large previously existing high school. The school serves a Bronx neighborhood population, working closely with its feeder middle school and the Children's Aid Society Community School program.

The school has 465 students in grades 9 through 12. 50% of students enrolled are overage for grade and more than 90% enter below grade level. More than 100 students have individual educational plans. A particular feature of the school is the mixed-age classrooms for 9th and 10th grade students.

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Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has created a strong vision for the school and communicated this in a manner which encourages staff to buy-in to the fundamental aims of the school.
- Many students make good progress having entered the school below grade level.
- The school places emphasis on the development of the whole student, and is effective in achieving this. The priorities of the school combine an appropriate emphasis on academic progress together with the development of social, cultural and life skills.
- Much of the teaching is imaginative and effectively structured, and engages students in effective intellectual challenge.
- There is a commitment to improvement. Staff collaboration and professional development are at the heart of the school's culture.
- Students value the range of extra-curricular opportunities provided.
- Social work activity makes a strong contribution to the creation of an effective culture for learning.
- Students benefit from a well conceived program of internships.
- Portfolio assessment is rigorous, demanding of students and effective in accelerating progress.
- The advisory system ensures that all students are well known by the staff and challenged to achieve appropriate individual targets.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue current programs of curriculum development to ensure coherence and progression in the experience of every student. Ensure that the curriculum in each subject makes clear the next small steps for improvement for each student.
- Continue to develop teachers' understanding of differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of all students.
- Continue to develop the analysis of assessment data to drive up students' attainment and achieve consistency in teaching and learning.
- Create further opportunities for collaborative planning, including peer observation of teaching with structured feedback. Use these opportunities to broaden the repertoire of teaching and learning strategies available to all teachers.

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Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well developed school overall, with a good awareness of areas which require further development.

Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School believes that “students engage in academic work if sufficiently supported, challenged and respected”. It is successful in achieving this vision. The school’s strong tradition of staff governance ensures that all staff are actively involved in a process of continuous reflection, identifying areas for improvement and addressing these systematically.

How well the school meets New York City’s evaluation criteria.

Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student’s progress over time.

This area of the school’s work is proficient with many well-developed features.

The school has effective procedures for collecting data about individual student performance. Teachers have access to an individual grade record for each student. This information is interrogated to identify progress towards graduation. There is a good awareness amongst the staff of students’ grades to date and areas requiring further attention. The electronic records demonstrate how well students are currently performing, and details their individual progress over time. The use of grade data is supplemented by the effective use of rubrics to assess students’ performance in a range of assignments. Students understand the language of the rubrics and are able to identify the next steps required to improve their performance. The rubrics cover subject-related criteria and both ‘habits of work’ and ‘habits of mind’. Students use this language in the analysis of their own performance.

The data is currently used extensively to support a dialogue with individual students about their progress. Advisers also use the data to inform regular conferences with parents, at which performance in individual subjects is discussed, together with attendance records and any issues causing concern. The further analysis of the data is at an early stage of development within the school. No comparisons are made at present of the relative performance of different ethnic or racial groups. However, the school has a good awareness of the progress and learning needs of special education students who form a significant part of the student population.

Whole-school data analysis is also undertaken. The data indicates that current mid-year performance is ahead of the annual targets for attendance, English, social studies and science. The school recognizes the need to improve performance in math but is confident that students are making sufficient progress to meet year-end targets. Similar performance data for the previous school year demonstrates that almost all year-end targets were met, including those for English and math Regents. The number of students gaining college acceptance was about 2% below target.

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Appropriate use is made of the data to compare with the school's past performance. As a result, areas for improvement have been identified and included in the school's program for development. The school also makes use of the City system for tracking against the NCLB requirements. Current statistics emphasize the challenge for the school in meeting the required standard in math, but strategies are in place to ensure success. Comparisons of performance with similar schools are available to the school but the external data currently available is not considered reliable or informative enough to guide future developments.

Quality Statement 2: 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 culture is student-centered. All members of staff have a commitment to the total well-being of students. Strong relationships have been developed with many families which extend beyond the academic progress into the social and emotional development of students. The students refer to the family atmosphere in the school and appreciate the extent to which they are known and understood by their teachers. Students receive individual attention, strengthened by organizational strategies including mixed-age classes in grades 9 and 10, and looping of teachers between grades 11 and 12. Within these strong class units, teachers develop a very good understanding of the needs of individuals. Portfolio assessment is an aid to progress for many students. The dialogue between teachers and students around the various shared rubrics, ensures that they understand how to make progress. The well-established portfolio working is also subject to constant evaluation and development. These approaches result in effective formative assessment within which students are guided and encouraged to improve their individual performances.

A staff group focusing on 'using data' has been established by one of the assistant principals. Whilst in its early stages of implementation, this group is already identifying connections and comparisons within the recorded data, and ways in which the data needs to be extended to facilitate further research. It is intended that the electronic systems will provide thorough information for advisers to assist them with the analysis of student performance and the identification of strategies for improvement.

Areas in need of improvement, including performance in math, have been identified as areas of focus for staff development. The school is also aware of the challenges facing overage students, who disproportionately fail to accumulate credits. This awareness has resulted in classroom research to identify effective strategies for teaching and learning with this target group of students.

The school has agreed challenging targets for performance and is increasingly aware of the approaches needed with individual and groups of students to achieve these aggregated targets. Advisers have a significant role to play in analyzing data, supporting students to achieve their personal targets, and ensuring that parents are engaged appropriately in the process. Students comment on the high expectations set for them by their tutors and appreciate the support which is provided to enable them to succeed.

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An additional strength of the school is the manner in which the role of the social work team is integrated effectively. Students value the opportunities available to discuss personal issues on a one-to-one basis. They understand the role of peer mediation and the contribution made by these services to their academic progress.

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

This area of the school's work is well developed overall.

Decisions about the grouping of students and the deployment of staff are based on a clear rationale concerned with developing secure and supportive relationships to accelerate learning. The curriculum is designed to take account of the state Regents in English and math, whilst also creating imaginative inter-disciplinary approaches. Students in grades 9 and 10 benefit from the development of close relationships with a limited number of teachers. The integration of subjects and the mixed-age groups ensure that students have a clear focus on the essential content and concepts require to work towards successful graduation. The school recognizes the need for many students to focus on basic skills of literacy and numeracy, and these are appropriately accommodated within the curriculum structure. Students retain a supportive relationship with core teachers as a result of the arrangements for looping teachers across grades 11 and 12.

There are opportunities for collaborative planning and development, supported by external agencies, which are assisting the school with a greater focus on differentiated learning and the sequencing of learning experiences. Additional classes are provided through an extended day, targeting students in need of additional support. The principal visits classrooms regularly and works with groups of teachers on collaborative projects to increase understanding of learning and assessment. Much of the teaching is good, with well-planned lessons involving a variety of strategies designed to capture students' imagination. The best lessons are often broken down into a sequence of learning activities, well paced to retain attention and interest. Students respond well to questioning which requires them to analyze, reflect and offer personal views and opinions. Learning opportunities within individual lessons are not always sufficiently differentiated to ensure that all students can access the learning successfully. The school is aware of the need to continuously work towards greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. Attendance targets are being met but the school commits extensive human resources to strategies to ensure that attendance continues to improve and parental awareness is raised.

Very good opportunities are provided for the extension of learning, and the development of essential life skills through the school's internship program. Students talk enthusiastically about their experiences and how internship is helping them to clarify their personal aspirations. A similarly imaginative approach to extending opportunities for students is provided by the school's six-year partnership with the Studio Museum in Harlem which focuses on the integration of arts into the curriculum for grades 9 and 10. This project aims not only to provide education in the arts but also to develop core skills of literacy and critical thinking. The school uses its resources in a reflective and imaginative manner to exploit a full range of opportunities to accelerate learning. The identified need for more extensive provision beyond the classroom, for example, is being addressed by new developments in partnership with the Children's Aid Society.

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Quality Statement 4: 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 school places a strong and effective emphasis on research at a number of levels to guide improvement. There are a number of initiatives in place which involve teachers working in collaboration with higher education college staff to identify issues for improvement and strategies to address these. Examples include work with the National Academy of Excellent Teaching (Nafet), the MAT program of Bard College, and the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM). Current project groups include teachers working effectively on improving classroom practice, revising the math curriculum, calibrating outcomes from portfolio assessment and improving the use of electronic data. The school has a number of relatively inexperienced staff members who are benefiting from these collaborative strategies. The Autonomy Network and Small Schools Movement provide a focus for sharing of practice and the development of collaborative practice. The school makes good use of these partnerships through, for example, an annual small schools conference and monthly practitioners' collaboratives.

The school is creating an effective learning community for staff as well as students. There are a number of opportunities during the normal school week for teachers to work collaboratively. Professional development sessions on two afternoons a week are supplemented with a yearly retreat. Teachers have pooled planning time to team meetings and advisory groups of teachers met to consider the particular needs of grade cohorts of students. The combination of classroom-based research, collaborative group work amongst the staff, and the intellectual rigor provided by external agencies, illustrates the school's commitment to staff development. There is a shared awareness that the school community can always do better and a commitment to ensure that all are engaged in the process. The planning committee makes an effective contribution to the identification of priorities and preparation of plans for improvement.

The school is developing its use of data, in a manner which encourages teachers to reflect on the impact of their teaching strategies. In addition, a collaborative evaluation of samples of students' work, is contributing to a greater awareness of what works well and what needs to be improved. The school is well led by the principal who has a clear vision for how the school needs to develop, strongly supported by an effective leadership team. The school has the capacity for continuous improvement and has identified the need to develop more second line leadership as an area for enhancement.

Quality Statement 5: 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.

The school is strong in its use of intuitive, collaborative team work to identify issues and strategies for improvement. Data is being used with increasing effectiveness to inform the constant dialogue. The principal has a reflective approach to all aspects of the school's

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work and engages senior staff in meaningful evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's policies and procedures.

There is a strong sense within the school of where students are succeeding and in need of additional support. Individual students' performances are well documented. At present there is limited comparison of the performance of different groups within the school, for example on the basis of ethnicity or race. There is an awareness that boys generally underachieve. There is a need to put in place strategies for the identification, at a more fine-grained level, of strengths and weaknesses in classroom practice and how this relates to success for individuals and groups of students.

Approaches to collaborative planning and analysis of student outcomes are developing well. Staff would benefit from systematic opportunities to observe good practice in teaching and learning. This in turn would inform comparisons of progress within and across classrooms within the school. Similarly, current work to establish consensus on the scope and sequence of learning in individual subjects should be maintained as a strategy to encourage consistency of expectations amongst all teachers. Opportunities to analyze comparative data and strategies from similar schools could also usefully inform the school's self evaluation of how well its students achieve.

The school has accurately assessed the need to develop more second line leadership. The school is well placed to involve staff in the creation of plans for improvement, identifying success criteria and interim goals against which the relative success of initiatives may be measured.

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Part 4: Evaluation Criteria Grade Summary

Final Evaluation	0	✓	+
Overall Quality of the school			✓
Quality Statement 1: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor and facilitate the student's progress over time.	o	✓	+
<p>1.1 The school uses available data (e.g., diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, students work products, standards-based portfolios, attendance, descriptive review, security data, etc.) and generates its own to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of how well each student, classroom, grade level, and other important categories of students and the school are:</p> <p>(1) currently performing, and (2) progressing over time, on English Language Arts, math, and other important academic subjects.</p> <p>Criteria for measuring student progress are "objective" when they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standards-based, • consistent across students, • capable of revealing progress or a lack of it over time and ways to close the gap between current and expected practice, <p>and when they allow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the performance of different students to be compared, and • learning activity to be broken down into component parts so strengths and weaknesses on each sub-activity may be identified. 			X
1.2 The school makes effective use of the data to assess the performance and progress of students by racial and ethnic groups, English Language Learners and special education students, and all other categories of interest to the school.		X	
1.1 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, racial and ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Quality Statement 2: 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.	o	✓	+
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 it develops 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 warranting attention.			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. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. That information is central to setting reasonably 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

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Quality Statement 3: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	o	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with the school's high expectations and improvement plans and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals.		X	
3.2 Decisions about the use of teacher and student time are based on the organization of the day and week needed to inform teachers about each student's performance and next learning steps, set goals and plans for improved student learning, and implement and continuously improve plans for reaching stated goals.			X
3.3 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.4 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.5 Teachers are accountable for student outcomes. 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
3.6 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
3.7 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
3.8 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.9 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
Quality Statement 4: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	o	✓	+
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 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 Leaders, faculty, and staff share the same goals and frequently evaluate themselves, their interventions and each other's plans and interventions, including, when possible, by comparing outcomes across classrooms and schools. The school monitors its performance and tackles weaknesses. Even in areas where the school is successful, leadership is not complacent, but aims to improve further. The goal in all cases is to improve student and school performance and progress.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results and revision of plans takes place in teams.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear and are generally followed.			X
Quality Statement 5: 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.	o	✓	+
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 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 interim 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 each successive phase of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve students' academic outcomes.		X	