



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Frederick Douglass Academy VIII

Middle School 452

**1400 Pennsylvania Avenue
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Brooklyn
NY 11239**

Principal: Tamara Thomas

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Lead Reviewer: Martin Weinstein

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Frederick Douglass Academy VIII is a middle school with 142 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 85.2% Black, 11.3% Hispanic, 2.1% White, and 1.4% Asian students. The student body includes 0.7% English language learners and 1.4% special education students. Boys account for 40.1% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59.9%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 96.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 74% eligibility.

Frederick Douglass Academy VIII is a College Preparatory Middle School located on the fourth floor of a shared building.

The school refers to students as scholars. All scholars are under the charge of a cohort advisorship comprised of eight teachers and one guidance counselor responsible for 14 to 16 scholars.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal works collaboratively and supportively with her staff in order to provide clear direction for the school.
- Staff have a very good knowledge of the performance and progress of individual students, classes and grades.
- Cohort advisories enable staff members to know students well, supporting academic and personal development.
- There are clear and effective procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning and appropriate behavior.
- Professional development activities, identified through data, help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers.
- A wide-ranging, broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, enhances learning both within and outside the school day.
- The school manages their limited budget well and creates a wide range of academic and extracurricular programs for the students.
- The school provides very effective intervention support for students who require extra help with their work.
- The impressive environment of mutual trust and respect between all teachers and students greatly supports their personal and academic development.
- Attendance rates are extremely high due to the students' enjoyment of school coupled with very effective systems for monitoring absences.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the use of data analysis to understand the performance and progress of pertinent sub-groups and work to eliminate differences in achievement between boys and girls.
- Ensure that teachers set specific, measurable, targeted goals for individual students in each subject, based on previous performance.
- Ensure teachers use assessment information more effectively to inform planning and differentiate activities in order to meet the individual learning needs of the students.
- Create a fully integrated, whole school improvement plan, which has clear priorities, action plans, success criteria and monitoring arrangements.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient

Frederick Douglass Academy VIII continues to improve. The principal and her instructional team have provided the drive in the last year to ensure that the school is well placed to help students do better. The school provides a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, which enhances learning within and outside the school day. These activities for students and staff enable them to pursue their interests effectively and accounts for the school's high attendance figures for both groups. The principal and her instructional team are very visible, approachable, supportive and collaborative. As one student said, "We are a family here, I love coming to school and being part of a cohort advisory...everyone knows me in this school." Teachers reflect a similar view of the principal. One teacher said, "She came on very hard at the beginning of the school year holding all of us accountable and now, she has grown to be a true leader who embraces our input and provides us with flexibility in our teaching strategies." Parents made similar comments such as, "She is a stern leader and this attribute is tempered by a nurturing approach to everyone she encounters."

School progress is reflected in improved student outcomes in Acuity results and school-developed testing and reporting systems. Since the previous Quality Review, the school has developed good data systems to keep check on the progress of most students. Students feel they have an integral part to play in school life and make steady academic progress. Teachers plan collaboratively and this ensures that many lessons are interesting. As a result, students often respond to school experiences with enthusiasm. The principal and her instructional team know what they need to do to make further improvements. The inquiry team as well as cohort advisory groups work proactively in developing an understanding of the most current student test data as well as the students' psycho-social profiles. These efforts place the school in a good position to accelerate student growth further. Professional development opportunities are an outgrowth of cohort advisory and inquiry team findings and they are more abundant and purposeful than last year. Outside consultancies and organizations, and the Teacher Center run by the United Federation of Teachers, provide one-on-one mentoring for staff as well as training and support for administration and staff on a wider scale.

Data is not used consistently to plan differentiated activities to meet student need fully. Although the school uses data to analyze individual performance, the principal and her team do not analyze the performance and progress of pertinent sub-groups or compare performance with similar schools in sufficient depth. School-wide efforts using previous performance data to set specific target goals for individual students in each subject are not fully in place. Similarly, whole-school planning lacks clear priorities and monitoring arrangements.

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 the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient

The school has developed and instituted a comprehensive data gathering, interpretation and intervention recommendation system. The school gathers data from a variety of sources including Acuity, monthly assessments and a range of teacher evaluations. The school then utilizes this good information to develop a clear understanding about the performance and progress of individual students, classrooms and grades. In turn, information about student performance and progress allows the school to establish clearly whether its strategies and improvements are adding maximum value to the students' education. The school shares data with parents so they understand their child's progress.

Although the school studies data relating to pertinent sub-groups, analysis is not in sufficient depth to determine the reasons anomalies in the performance of boys and girls, in particular. As a result, the school is not in a strong position to see where development may need to take place. Professional development in the analysis of data for these subgroups has not been undertaken. Similarly, the school also does not actively seek information regarding similar schools in order to compare performance and enhance their vision for best practices.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

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

Since last year's review, the school has made marked improvements relating to the setting and the actualization of high goals. The institution of a school inquiry team and cohort advisories has ensured the ongoing evaluation of student progress and targeted student support. This is particularly effective in helping students who need additional support. This team and advisory ensures that students undergo a large amount of periodic assessment such as Acuity, predictive and unit tests and a myriad of teacher- developed evaluations. This means that teachers are able to monitor student goals continually and evaluate them monthly. However, the goals set do not cover all subjects and are not always based upon prior performance.

Progress reports inform students, parents and caregivers of students' academic and social development on monthly basis. This ensures parental involvement and good sharing of information. Teachers conference with all students on a monthly basis and share their findings with parents and caregivers through phone conversations and private meetings. Current Acuity results, monthly assessments and a variety of teacher evaluations are included in these reports. Credit alert forms are also disseminated and discussed with parents and caregivers indicating the teachers' concerns for the students' failure to meet learning standards. In addition, concerns relating to the student's attendance and lateness and conference anecdotes detailing intervention strategies and outcomes are addressed in these forms. Parental involvement in the process of goal setting during monthly progress report conferencing has been improved.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school pays great attention to both the breath and depth of the curriculum. The school uses a wide range of sources to ensure it meets the City’s mandated curriculum and uses a myriad of ancillary resources to augment these offerings. Use is made of student data to monitor and evaluate the curriculum, which is amended or adapted as necessary. Despite the school’s limited budget, drama, dance, step, strings and orchestra programs flourish. These programs serve the school well and act as a motivational catalyst in sustaining high student attendance and limiting tardiness.

School procedures to maintain the high attendance rate are good. It is not uncommon for parents to receive a phone call if a student is several minutes late to school on any given school day. A school climate based on mutual respect between all staff, students and parents is firmly in place, supporting personal and academic progress. One student said, “The principal and teachers allowed us to create a student government club and my friends at other schools wish they were here in a club such as this.” One parent stated, “The cohort advisories really work and we don’t have to be waiting outside a teacher’s classroom for hours during open school night, in order to speak to a teacher.”

Teachers are held to account. Information about student performance and progress allows the school to establish clearly whether its strategies and improvements are adding maximum value to the students’ education. The principal expects staff members to maintain meticulous documentation pertaining to the students under their charge and the school administration review these records on a regular basis. In most classes, differentiation of instruction takes place but differentiation is not used consistently in all classes. At times, teachers miss opportunities for greater differentiation due to limitations of in-depth scrutiny of these records and comparisons made to other students when grouping students. As a result, student work is not always accurately matched to their skill level or the abilities of the group. There has been progress in developing this area of the school’s work the last year.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

There is a strong sense of a professional learning community within the school. Meetings between administration and teachers always contain an element of good news and acknowledgement of what has gone well. Many staff members understand what the school is doing to secure improvement and how professional development is being used to make the necessary improvements. At the same time, the administration is continuing to cultivate a good climate and culture for self-improvement among staff and students. This collegial spirit has created an atmosphere where teachers feel comfortable seeking assistance from administration and their peers. The cohort advisory system is very effective in providing support and guidance for the students. This contributes to the smooth running of the school and good student behavior.

The school offers professional development opportunities prior to the start of the school year, which are well attended. Administrators and staff have inculcated the belief that the

key to raising student achievement lies in securing relevant professional development activities for all staff members. The review of data trends, staff surveys, one-on-one conversations between administration and staff, instructional walkthroughs and staff member requests have been the basis of professional development selection. Outside consultancies in tandem with an in-house training team and Integrated Service Center are addressing the need for staff to meet the increasingly intensive demands arising from Acuity's predictive and diagnostic indications effectively. All professional development sessions culminate in extensive feedback sessions and classroom visitations to ensure the infusion of best practices gained from these sessions.

Lesson modeling led by administration and the support of new and veteran teachers is commonplace. These efforts also reflect a marked improvement since last year's review in professional development outcomes leading to improvement in teacher's ability to match work to student need.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's strategic planning contains inconsistencies in setting goals for improving student achievement. Some subject areas have clearly defined, challenging and measurable goals for improvement, making monitoring precise to support school development. However, other subject areas have more general improvement goals for student growth. This inconsistency in setting improvement goals within the subject areas makes it more difficult for the school to track progress consistently in all departments. The majority of subject area teachers have clearly defined and appropriate action plans and timeframes for achieving their goals.

Teachers make good use of periodic assessments to review the curriculum and their instruction. For the most part, they differentiate instruction based on academic skill data and plan individual and group interventions for identified students. The school has good programs to assist students in addressing their greatest areas of need, which is effective in raising their performance. However, further in-depth study for the school's highest achievers and the ethnic and gender groups remain inconsistent.

All members of the school community talk about a vision for the school but it is not yet a clear, shared vision articulated in a concise or meaningful way. This impedes shared ownership by, and clear direction for, all students, parents and staff. However, the principal and the school community are working hard to develop the school's vision and "achievement", "progress", "potential" and "success" are common words used in this context. They are developing a clear strategy for the future developments of the school and are striving to implement cohesive and comprehensive systems to effect change in student achievement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Frederick Douglass Academy VIII	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide ...	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?			X		
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty ...	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school ...	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

To what extent does the school ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					X

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped