



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Freedom Academy High School

High School 509

**106 Nassau Street
Brooklyn
NY 11201**

Principal: Alyson Forde

Dates of review: January 10 – 11, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Shehz Ali

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Freedom Academy High School is a high school with 317 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 77.6% Black, 14.5% Hispanic, 2% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 1.5% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 50.5% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49.5%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 79.6%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 64% eligibility.

The school facility is located on three, leased floors of an old warehouse building that does not have science labs, an auditorium gymnasium or infrastructure for up-to-date phone and Internet functions. Due to the small nature of the school, most staff members were several “hats” of responsibility which may often make excessive demands on them.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and administration have set high expectations for all students and faculty.
- Students respect and admire the principal and teaching staff for their hard work and determination.
- The administration has correctly identified the areas needed for improvement and has set forth plans to implement quality changes
- Raised expectations have been clearly communicated to students and are beginning to bear fruit.
- The school effectively establishes measurable academic benchmarks for students at the beginning of the year.
- Professional development is structured effectively linked to school goals and individual needs.
- Teachers collaborate regularly in department meetings and during common planning time to set goals and track progress.
- Literacy is integrated effectively into most of the school subjects.

What the school needs to improve

- Promote greater consistency in teaching, including the development of differentiated instruction, to ensure higher levels of student engagement and achievement.
- Analyze trends and patterns in student progress to determine the impact of the curriculum and instruction.
- Create a shared vision for the school to foster staff cohesiveness and improve the quality of decision making.
- Further develop the guidance department program so it is more effective in meeting all student needs.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

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

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Freedom Academy is a school still in transition but one that is moving in a positive direction with newly implemented plans. Staff increasingly examine student data on performance and progress in collaborative meetings and in scheduled common planning time supported by well directed professional development. Academic rigor is improving throughout resulting in a confidence in students that their education will support their success in the future. There are indications that the school's efforts are promoting better rates of progress, although achievement is still not high enough.

Although some strides have been made in improving the quality of data gathering and analysis, particularly in relation to individual students, not enough is done to determine school wide trends and patterns so that timely action can be taken to remediate weaknesses. The school is more effective in monitoring and modifying individual student intervention strategies that are in place when teachers pinpoint a specific problem. There remains inconsistency in the quality of teaching and the impact of interventions is variable. Inconsistencies also exist in classroom and hallway management resulting in mixed expectations and students' indicate that conflicts between students still arise.

The principal establishes high expectations for teachers and students. Students respect and appreciate the improvements she has brought to the school. Since the last Quality Review, improvements have been made in using data to assess student progress and in using pacing guides. An administrative and instructional handbook has been created to promote greater consistency in the school community. The roles and responsibilities of the cabinet members have expanded but needs more work needs to be delegated to increase teacher leadership in the building. The school has instigated plans to improve teacher practice through training in differentiated instruction and consistent monitoring. The school was initially slow in forming inquiry teams, but progress is now being made in collecting and analyzing data and providing remediation for group of students identified for intensive monitoring and support in math and social studies.

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 collects a satisfactory range of data, both internal and external, to determine levels of student achievement and school wide success. Regents exam data coupled with diagnostic testing at the beginning of the year determine class groupings and create an effective initial benchmark for measuring rates of progress.

The central collation and analysis data is not rigorous as effective or efficient as it could be to highlight patterns and trends at grade, cohort, subject and whole school level. The principal has a box of transcripts that she uses for data analysis. Her analysis is mainly based on standard gender and ethnicity groupings. Her findings have resulted in single sex classes throughout all grade levels in English language arts to take account of different levels of skills and interests. Department meetings look at data beyond single classroom performance, but without regular minutes to meetings, it is unclear how effective these departmental meetings are in analyzing data and disseminating information. Attendance is monitored closely, and the school has recognized that the average attendance figures are attributed to repeat offenders as opposed to illustrating a school wide issue.

The special education department works in a newly integrated structure with a now compliant program and ensures that mandated individual education plans are implemented. While the school is too small to have a specific teacher for these students, it looks carefully at the data and ensures that these students receive an English skills class and informal tutoring. However, the newly initiated programs for special education students and English language learners have yet to show quantifiable progress for students.

The school monitors and analyzes past performance with specific references to State tests and success in Regents exams. but does not extend this comparison to all subgroups. The school does not compare itself to similar schools, but importantly, does visit other schools to share and see best practice. The principal recognizes that the school has a lot more work to do to enable teachers to fully understand the potential of data to accelerate progress and raise achievement.

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 proficient.

The school has begun to put various improvement plans in place that effectively support the new direction of the school. However, with the majority of plans still in their infancy, and without real depth, the school has not been able to measure the impact of these plans on achievement. The school is raising expectations for its students. As its top priority, the school plans to increase rigor throughout the school community. The school has set a goal that 25% of incoming freshman will complete Advanced Regents diplomas toward graduation. As a result, the school is currently adding more Advanced Placement classes to its school calendar. The heightened expectation for all students to complete and pass the Math B regents exam resulted in a 74% pass rate last year compared to a single student passing last year. The school has also created and implemented a good plan to begin to increase consistency in classes through a focus on literacy, note-taking and the Blackboard configuration model. In addition, the school has enrolled in AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) training for the summer in order to raise note-taking skills as well as to continue the focus on rigor for all students. Regents exam results showed a weakness in essay writing skills. As a result, staff has

integrated literacy, and specifically essay writing, into social sciences, law, math and English classes and have begun to integrate literacy in science.

Class groupings are adjusted each semester based on grades and teacher observations to create homogeneous classes in some departments. Preliminary ARIS data analysis showed students at level 1 and 2 students were not progressing as expected. As a result the school has a good idea to expand the role of the inquiry team by creating an inquiry team for each grade. While the plan was created to ultimately target and support more students, the teams are just beginning to collect data on students they may wish to target and, therefore, the inquiry teams have yet to impact on student achievement.

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 proficient.

The school curriculum focuses on law and provides a strong base for the school curriculum. The school also realizes that the school’s law focus encourages boys to read more than before, in order to advocate for themselves in the community. The administration has recently broadened the curriculum with a good, full-time arts program that offers music, art and dance. The after school activities include ‘College Now’ classes focused on college information and readiness. The physical education classes however are limited and largely ineffective due to the lack of a gymnasium, but, through a grant, provide some useful workout facilities. As a result of the positive changes, parents, students and teachers rightfully feel the school is now beginning to offer a well-rounded curriculum despite limits from the physical facility.

The principal makes her expectations for teaching and learning clear, but teachers are not held consistently accountable to these expectations. While the principal monitors teachers regularly, the response to her expectations is patchy. As a result, students receive an inconsistent program throughout the school. Differentiated instruction was not evident in classroom observations despite professional development sessions offered this year. Due to inconsistencies, students display mixed engagement in classes and mixed behavior in and out of classrooms. In response to these inconsistencies, the school hired an insightful staff developer, who recognizes that he has a lot of work to do to improve consistency in teaching practice.

Attendance is about average for similar schools, but not enough is done by administration or guidance to effectively improve this rate and repeat offenders continue to be the real cause of the problem. While security is present in the building to help clear the halls, students walk into class late without teacher intervention or remedy.

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 proficient.

Despite a limited budget, professional development choices are good at Freedom Academy. The principal does regular walkthroughs and knows her teachers and departments well. These observations lead to targeted development opportunities to

teachers. Teachers feel sessions are valuable and effective in supporting their practice. They visit each other's classes to share best practices, and visit other schools to determine alternative ways to increase their effectiveness.

The school's guidance department is not effective enough. Students clearly indicated their dismay at the value and help offered. Many indicated they felt much more comfortable going elsewhere for information and help regarding course and admissions choices. Students with specific transcript issues or those of specific concern to guidance are not pulled for individualized programming in a timely fashion. Therefore, programming does not change until well after students have begun a course or well after students have begun their senior year.

Partnerships with outside organizations provide good courses for students. The Rites of Passage program brings in speakers in gendered groups to openly discuss cultural, social and community issues with students. In order to augment the Rites of Passage program the school rightly plans to create a scheduled advisory program next year in order to increase the level of community and cohesiveness within the school.

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 underdeveloped with proficient features.

The school does not include interim goals and measurable time frames in its planning and, as a result, cannot effectively revisit and adjust school wide plans. Nor has the school effectively ensured implementation of or measured the impact of training. However, it has identified and responded effectively to weaknesses through increased literacy integration and a compliant special education program, but there has been no measurement of impact as a result of these changes. One way the school did effectively attempt to measure the current improvement plans was through a student survey. The principal cumulated results and has begun a discussion with staff regarding student concerns and targeted professional development in response.

Teachers successfully establish an interim database, with regular in-class assessments, and notify the assistant principal of specific student issues that arise from an effectively implemented, weekly assessment schedule. Each subject has a scheduled day during the week where assessments are given. As a result, teachers react quickly to specific student need. Much of the other data available is end-of-semester and end-of-marking period grades that make it too late to make adjustments for students currently in those classes.

Despite work with teachers, the principal has not yet established a shared mission or vision. This has resulted in isolated and insular work among staff. Teachers recognized that a quality, succinct mission and vision would aid in the unified direction of the various plans the school has begun to implement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Freedom Academy High School	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, 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 . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
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?		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?			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