



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The Facing History School

High School 303

**525 West 50th Street
New York
NY 10019**

Principal: Gillian Smith

Dates of review: February 7 - 8, 2008

Lead Reviewer: John Cassidy

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Facing History School is a high school with 318 students from 9 through grade 11. The school population comprises 31.7% Black, 61.9% Hispanic, 2.20% White, and 3.10% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 53.6% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46.4%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 82.0%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 85.9% eligibility.

The school was established through the New Visions small school initiative in its present location in the North West High School complex in September 2005. It shares the complex, including some common amenities, with 6 other schools.

The lead partner for the school is the Facing History and Ourselves organization which brings the 'Understanding by Design' approach to curricular planning and ongoing planning, professional development and resource support for all students. Other partners include New Visions and the New York City Performance Consortium which support professional development and provide additional resources for students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a very effective and charismatic leader who communicates and lives the vision of the school in her daily interactions with students, staff and visitors.
- Whole school structures and processes have successfully established among staff and students a strong sense of belonging to this small and very caring community.
- The balanced curriculum provides all students with a range of experiences and opportunities to establish their own identity and to relate effectively to each other as well as with the wider community of the school and beyond.
- The insightful, sensitive and effective management of change supports improvement in all aspects of the life of the school.
- Strong, productive relationships are characterised by mutual respect, openness, trust and collegiate working among leaders, faculty and students.
- The internal school committee and team structures promote distributed leadership, capacity building, efficient communications and inclusion.
- Students are actively involved and make a significant contribution to many aspects of in the life of the school.
- The academic and personal development of each student is well progressed and monitored by the regular, focused use of both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Volunteers and student teachers are effectively encouraged and supported in their work in the school and in particular in assisting learning in classes.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop improved strategies to identify and tackle issues of attendance.
- Establish a readily accessible, comprehensive electronic database to simplify the management and use of data to understand student progress and inform planning.
- Undertake a systematic review of the extent, effectiveness and impact of strategies in use to differentiate instruction in all classes.

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 well developed

The principal is a charismatic leader who uses data very effectively and lives the vision of the school in her daily interactions with students, staff and visitors. Her skills in managing change in all aspects of the life of the school have effectively supported its strong growth. Professional confidence and competence are high among the staff. This is evident in the collaborative work of the inquiry team which reflects the school's commitment to using research and generating data across the school to support improvements in instruction. Lessons learned generate reflection and discussion of effective practice across teams and with the inquiry students. The whole school buy-in to supportive and caring structures and processes benefits students who experience changes which are well managed and support their learning. The distributed leadership roles of the vision and facilitators' committees result in changes in the curriculum and in instruction being well understood and implemented consistently. Relationships are characterised by mutual respect, openness, trust and collegiate working among leaders, teams, faculty and students. The well-conceived and implemented team structure gives students a strong sense of belonging to this small and very caring community. However, attendance rates remain an issue.

All students experience an interesting and exciting range of learning opportunities. These enable students to establish their own identity and to relate effectively to each other, the wider community of the school and beyond. Students actively apply their critical skills to events and situations in contexts beyond the school. They develop as confident individuals through opportunities to engage both emotionally and intellectually with their studies, by undertaking interdisciplinary studies of historical moments, by learning independently and by sharing their contributions to the advisory program. The structure of staff teams, subject teams and the vision and facilitators' committees is inclusive, coherent, collaborative and enabling. It is a dynamic structure which generates strong relationships and facilitates productive communications, the sharing of good practice in using data and the collective monitoring and review of performance. Staff use data skilfully to support and accelerate student learning. As yet, however, there is no easily accessible comprehensive electronic database. This makes it more difficult for all members of staff to have a clear picture of the progress of all groups of students. The school has made good progress since the previous quality review. Data is used effectively to monitor and review the progress of specific groups of students. Teachers receive regular structured feedback on the lessons which are observed by the principal and a range of approaches are in place to differentiate instruction.

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 well developed.

The principal provides direct support and training on the use of data. Teachers develop their instruction by using data to monitor and review students' progress, set goals, plan interventions and decide on appropriate teaching approaches. Decisions on learning needs and future goals are consistently made on the basis of detailed qualitative and quantitative data. This includes data on contacts with parents and teacher narratives. However data is in a range of electronic databases. This reduces the ease with which it can be collated, analyzed and communicated to users. As a result it is more difficult to maintain a constantly updated understanding of the progress and performance of all groups of students. Teachers' assessment binders are used effectively to support planning and review of students' learning. In each semester a major review of the achievements and progress of every student is undertaken. As a result the whole school position is able to be presented and discussed and student progress reviewed. Each year teachers use performance data very carefully to identify the populations of students considered to be most at risk. Similarly, each department analyzes the previous year's performance data to compare performance and progress.

Assessment rubrics developed by teachers include detailed descriptions of performance standards. These ensure consistency and fairness in assessments. Students' portfolios and projects are presented to a panel of teachers and their peers who rigorously evaluate and grade them. Students see these well developed learning experiences as both challenging and exciting. The use of assessment rubrics for portfolio presentations provides reliable formative data to plan next steps in learning and improve instruction.

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

School committees and teams successfully engage all staff in handling data and in producing individual learning plans. Well planned, collaborative activity ensures the evaluation of learning and teaching and the review and development of the curriculum is systematic and consistent. Performance data is well used to plan and implement special arrangements to support students who are most at risk. Students who have failed a Regents test more than twice benefit from a math or Global regents prep class to replace their scheduled core class. The school chose to enroll self-contained special education students in its second year. The number of special education teachers increased to six this year and extra support classes for students with special needs have been established. The English department has created a credit recovery class to support students underachieving in English language arts. Parents of students with special needs confirm that the additional support has had a very good impact on the academic and social development of their children.

Students, parents and staff support the high expectations of students' achievements and academic performance. As a member of the New York State Performance Standards Consortium the school has successfully developed performance-based graduation assessment tasks that will exceed the State's Regents examinations and commencement level skills standards. The school is also a successful lab school creating partnerships with various teacher education programs. Many parents actively support the school and respond positively to the regular communications about their children. They consider the school to be "an extension of their family". Teachers and specialist staff use information from parents in setting goals and producing support plans. However parents are not yet formally involved in shaping decisions about instruction.

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

A rich and stimulating curriculum and very good instruction engages and motivates students. The variety and range of experiences and opportunities enable them to develop as individuals and to relate effectively to each other, the wider community of the school and beyond. With the active, practical support of the lead partner, the Facing History and Ourselves organization (FHAO), the school has developed a four year curriculum which thoroughly prepares the current grades 9 to 11 students for the ethical and moral decisions of adulthood. The school's four themes, identity, caring and responsibility, decision-making, and choosing to participate are evident in all curriculum activities and in displays of students' work. Students are motivated by the building of skills round the 'four habits of learning', consisting of voice, interpretation, independence and interdependence. Each of the habits provides an effective focus for skill development in reading, writing, math, and artistic and technological skills.

As the number of students enrolled has increased department and team structures ensure students feel they are still in a school where teachers know them well. Students respond positively to the high levels of personal interest and caring from adults. Teams of teachers share data and plan collaboratively so learning and instruction is consistently successful across the team. The school has yet to review all the differentiation strategies used across the school to identify the most effective. Increasing rates of attendance remains a priority for the school. In discussions, parents referred to difficult home circumstances, patterns of absence established in middle school and to the disengagement of students who have been held over and who are over-age. The school is not complacent about attendance and has actively sought out examples of good practice in order to develop its own practice.

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

The high quality of professional development is the engine which drives the school. Teachers play an important part in the school's key committees. The vision committee provides strong strategic planning and includes the principal and teachers from teams

and specialist services. The facilitators' committee plays an important role in communicating strategic proposals to all staff and ensuring teachers are ready to implement new developments. Involvement in the processes and procedures of these collaborative committees provides teachers with unique and stimulating professional development experiences. Professional confidence and competence is increased and this has an excellent impact on the quality of learning and instruction.

There is also an extensive program of carefully targeted professional development for staff. This reflects the high priority the school attaches to continuously reviewing and developing instruction. The Facing History and Ourselves organization provides expert support for curriculum development. Staff participate in retreats on team building and collaborative working. The special education department offers professional development in collaborative team teaching. Good support is also in place for the more than 40 volunteers who are regularly timetabled to support instruction. The principal has developed an approach to formal classroom observation based on a well-structured rubric. Feedback on performance is given in terms of performance levels agreed with the staff and leads directly to improvements in instruction. The principal also meets individual teachers every two weeks to provide advice and to discuss progress towards goals set earlier in the year.

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 well developed.

Collaborative approaches to using data are a strength of the school. Collaboration is evident in, and adds value to, the processes used to set goals, monitor and review progress and to develop the capacity for continuous improvement. Individual teachers and subject and department teams rigorously monitor and review academic goals. Teams are accountable for setting goals and tracking the progress of their group of students and for producing and implementing individual intervention plans for students. The practice of using detailed rubrics to evaluate performance on school goals and interim goals is well established and contributes to the rigor and reliability of evaluations. Commendably the principal responds quickly to justified requests for changes in practice identified in reviews, including the establishment of new classes. The collaborative approach to inquiry involves all four staff teams. They meticulously track the effectiveness of interventions for a cohort of students performing at different levels. The cohort includes higher- achieving students, students with special needs and English language learners. Student progress as measured by interim assessments is improving as a result of these well-planned interventions.

Parents, teachers and students are firmly committed to achieving the school's vision of student intellectual growth, emotional engagement and ethical deliberation. The school is pursuing these aims with skill, enthusiasm and considerable success.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SCHOOL NAME: The Facing History School | 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 | |

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