



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Frederick Douglass Academy III**

**Middle - High School 517**

**3630 Third Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10456**

**Principal: Rahesha Amon**

**Dates of review: April 3 - 4, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Helen Donnellan**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Frederick Douglass Academy III is a middle school-high school with 498 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 53% Black, 45% Hispanic, 0.4% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 46% of the students enrolled and girls account for 54%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 86%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 70% eligibility.

The school shares a site with an elementary school, where it occupies some of the third floor and the entire fourth floor.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal's high expectations of scholars and staff are achieved through robust systems she has established to improve instruction and learning.
- Staff and students show the highest respect for each other, which underpins positive and productive learning partnerships.
- Formal structures for sharing staff expertise are highly effective and so deeply established that staff now consider them informal structures.
- The principal has developed a sophisticated process linking observations to professional development that meets the needs of teachers and the school.
- New teachers receive in-depth professional development, which covers classroom management, school systems, curriculum and the use of data.
- The culture of reflection and changing approaches where necessary is evident in the work of administrators and staff.
- The school gathers extensive data on all students and uses analytical tools well to keep administrators and staff well informed about their progress.
- The school routinely uses data to identify students in need of improvement.
- The school plans the curriculum well to meet test requirements, reflect student interests and provide opportunities for their personal development.
- Students respond well to instruction and acquire skills for effective learning at school and in their future college and work locations.

### What the school needs to improve

- Use technology more extensively to enhance instruction.
- Continue to build the confidence and competence of staff to use data so that its use is consistent across the school.
- Explore formal ways of providing students with more detailed information on goals and areas for improvement.
- Continue the work on improving student attendance.

## 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 well developed.**

The school makes clear its high expectations for all students to do well and progress to college, even though many of them enter the school performing below their grade level. These high expectations are embodied in the way that students are referred to as 'scholars' and is a feature of a culture where young people show high levels of commitment to their studies. The weekly newsletter, S.P.I.R.I.T. reinforces the culture with its focus on success, progress, innovative teaching, rigorous instruction and teamwork. Using these values, the principal has transformed the school into an orderly and safe environment, where staff and students work and learn together.

The inquiry team is scrutinizing the performance of the lowest grade 12 students in social studies and the living environment courses to investigate possible reasons behind low performance. It is too early to see definite changes because of this work. The school has dealt systematically with the issues identified in the last Quality Review with a specific action plan setting out actions and the monitoring of them. The school rigorously pursues student absence. It is dealing with the significant social issues identified with a small number of students. The parent coordinator and teachers now use internet contact more extensively to supplement personal contacts and increase parental involvement. Extensive work has taken place to enhance staff confidence in using data, which is now widely used to monitor learning and plan instruction. Curriculum maps were in place at the start of the academic year. This means that the delivery of subjects in all grades is more integrated.

The school has developed a student assessment management system (SAMS), which provides robust processes to ensure consistency in gathering, analyzing and using data. Some staff remain in need of support in the use of data. The school uses data well to track student progress and identify the need for additional intervention. It keeps students well informed about their progress but they are not always aware of the goals set for them. The curriculum enables students to make good progress and provides them with extensive opportunities for personal growth. The exceptionally high regard students and staff have for each other is a notable feature of the school. The principal has established a sturdy framework, which links professional development, with observations and accountability and is highly effective in building the skills of the staff. The school continually reviews, evaluates, modifies or changes actions to ensure that it continues to refine its existing good practice.

## **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 school gathers extensive data in all subjects and uses analytical tools in sophisticated ways to provide administrators and staff with accurate and up-to-date information about student progress and performance. The SAMS system provides a solid cornerstone of information, which staff and administrators rely on to review and plan the next steps students need to make. The school tracks the progress of special students and English language learners with equal rigor and demonstrates the success of English language learners in 2007, when high numbers of them passed the NYSESLAT.

While most of the students join the school in grade 6, others join at grade 9 so are less familiar with the school philosophy and programs. Comparative data shows that students with the longest experience within the school make greater progress. The school uses data well to gain insights into variations in performance between subjects, grades and classes. It uses graphs well to show how the school's high performance for each subject and grade compares to that of other schools in the district.

Staff skills and confidence in analyzing, understanding and using data to plan instruction have grown because of well-planned and effective support. As well as formal training, the school pairs less confident teachers with a more confident colleague to provide advice and encourage them to work with data more deeply. This work is ongoing as not all staff are yet sufficiently skilled and confident to work independently with data.

**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.**

The school makes good use of its extensive information on students to plan effective instruction and programs matched relevant to their Personal Intervention Plan. This is successful in helping them overcome earlier under-performance, and resulted in 96% of students making at least a year's progress in English language arts in 2006-2007.

The structures for collaborative working provide regular opportunities for grade and subject teams to review data, set goals and prepare the next stages of instruction. The school keeps students and their families well informed about past results, school activities and how to support students' learning through newsletters, personal contacts with teachers and the school website. They are less informed about the goals teachers set and what skills or knowledge students need to master in order to achieve those goals.

The high expectations of scholars and staff are achieved through systems the principal has established to improve instruction and learning. She delivers her 'State of the School' address three times each year and tells the community how the school is

progressing, its current goals and priorities. Each week teachers receive the “Spirit” newsletter, which keeps them up-to-date with short-term actions and issues. The school is successful at working with students to replace their low expectations and self-esteem with high expectations and strategies to make them achievable. From grade 6, they participate in visits to colleges and start to build an image of themselves as successful under-graduates rather than school students.

**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 principal has revised the curriculum, which now includes wider options for elective programs and after-school activities. Arts and creative programs are integral to the curriculum and the school provides a limited physical education program. Staff work hard to deliver the curriculum in ways that hold students’ attention and promote effective learning outcomes. The systems to make teachers accountable are robust. They have explicit links to teacher’s personal development plans and ensure that teachers continue to deliver effective instruction and improve their practice.

The school is well equipped with technology but this is not used to the full to add interest, or provide differentiated instruction for higher or lower achieving students. The approach to learning enables students to acquire knowledge, skills and strategies that encourage them to become resourceful and independent learners ready for college life. The school has set up innovative schedules for some students who wish to follow a vocational interest, by combining part-time attendance with the remainder of the day at a vocational school program. The school pursues student absence immediately and with rigor. However, attendance is below average owing to issues with a small minority of students.

Staff and students treat each other with high levels of care and respect which underpins the highly effective learning culture. Students spoke of loyalty to each other, themselves, teachers, and the school. The personal loyalty they develop enables them to “learn how to learn and get your business done.” The ‘Big Brothers and Big Sisters’ initiative provides grade 6 students with role models in grade 12 and supports the younger students in their first year at the school. The older students value the opportunities this gives them to make a positive contribution to the life of younger students.

**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 principal is unwavering in her drive to improve teacher performance so that all instruction meets the quality of the strongest. She has developed a clear process linking classroom observation with professional development and the outcomes of each teacher’s goals for improvement. This starts with informal observations of all teachers in a department, before a meeting with the team where they identify key issues for the observations. The rubric for each observation scores each teacher on one of four levels

and includes the extent of the use of data. Teachers and the whole team then have post-observation meetings with the principal to review the outcomes of the observations with a particular focus on the issues agreed earlier. The school agrees professional development needs which align with each teacher's goals and the needs of the school.

Staff share their expertise to such an extent that this is now an automatic way of working and often not considered to be professional development. The principal pairs teachers so that those with greater capability in an area work with a "buddy" to help them develop. The weekly newsletter is used to great effect to tell all staff about good practice and innovative work quickly. Fifteen teachers form a 'critical friend' group, which examines issues and explores effective ways to deal with them through a collegial approach. As the school has expanded each year, it has hired new teachers and ensured they receive exceptional support even before the school year starts. They receive programs focused on classroom management, working within the philosophy of a Frederick Douglass Academy and a specific program to reinforce the superior use of data expected of teachers. This enables new teachers to make rapid but sound progress in refining their skills and becoming valued members of the staff team.

Students receive wide-ranging support to deal with school life, prepare them to take responsibilities and develop mature attitudes. They spoke of, "strategies for life" and recognized their own "growth in maturity." This enables them to deal with difficulties they encounter as young adults and build self-confidence.

**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.**

This is a school with clear structures to evaluate the progress of students and teachers throughout the year as it strives to attain the highest possible standards for instruction and learning. Students also evaluate their progress through discussions with teachers and monitoring their test scores. Monitoring of progress is informal, as students do not have specific goals so they are not always aware of their progress.

Every teacher meets with the principal at the start of each year to agree time-related goals for each of their roles within the school. These precisely written goals relate to outcomes for the students they teach and their own professional development. They gather evidence that informs each of the three monitoring meetings during the year. Teachers have also initiated independent pieces of research investigating how particular aspects of instruction affect learning outcomes for students. One current focus is examining how to share data more widely with students to give them greater insights into their own progress. Reviews of test results are stringent and lead to focused changes to instruction and curriculum where necessary. The school bases changes upon evidence that reflects strong adherence to the systems for reviewing practice and outcomes. In addition to evaluating test outcomes, the school looks ahead and carefully plans how it will meet the needs of existing students and the increased numbers of students starting in 2008-2009.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Frederick Douglass Academy III</b>	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>				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.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				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.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>				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.**

<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				X	

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?					<b>X</b>
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				<b>X</b>	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				<b>X</b>	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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?			<b>X</b>		
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?					<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
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?				<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					<b>X</b>

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>