



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

The Facing History School

High School 303

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

Principal: Gillian Smith

Dates of review: November 24 - 25, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Facing History School is a high school with 418 students from grade 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 30% Black, 64% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% Asian and 2% multi-racial students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 81.0%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 85% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school is well led by the principal whose vision and commitment are the driving force of the school. That vision is shared by a hard-working staff, who are innovative and creative in promoting project-based learning. They are pro-active, self-motivated learners who are professionally supportive of each other. The rapport the staff has established with students helps to promote a productive learning environment.

The school monitors the achievement and progress of its students through its comprehensive project-based assignments. Subject staff have a clear analysis of the specific needs of students through these detailed assessment procedures. This results in effective support for particular groups of students, such those with special education need and English language learners. The profile of progress in developing competencies and skills in art is not as detailed as in other core subjects. The school has effective and detailed procedures for communicating with parents about the progress of their children. Discussions with parents are open and supportive. Although parents are encouraged to be active partners in the education of their children, their response varies and so currently there is not a strong two-way process of communication. Surveys show that parents are appreciative of the mutual respect and trust which has been created between students and staff.

The collaborative planning associated with instructional practices is a strong feature of the school. The creation of curriculum units, assessment rubrics and action planning are a reflection of a shared expertise. In action plans, the school does not yet identify specific responsibilities and progress checkpoints in great detail. The successful development of an advisory role is a pivotal element in conveying to students and parents awareness of high expectations the school has in relation to attendance, behavior and academic performance.

The curriculum is innovative and stimulating. Enrichment programs encourage students' interest and learning. The school is working to challenge higher-achieving needs to ensure that the challenge for higher-achieving students through a greater emphasis on differentiated instruction. Students enjoy their lessons and are able to explain in detail what they are doing and what they have learned. The school uses resources well to promote the learning opportunities of students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Collaboration between staff is strongly evident, which promotes a sharing of expertise, self-reflection and a commitment to school goals.
- The positive relationship that exists between students and teachers promotes a supportive learning environment and enhances the achievement of students.
- The procedures and systems for identifying teaching and learning goals are effective and provide purpose and direction to the school.
- The coherent professional development plan, which accommodates personal, as well as school-wide issues, makes a significant contribution to the drive for improvement.
- The school has developed an innovative, challenging curriculum through its orientation towards portfolio-based assignments enabling student engagement and achievement.
- The structured support for students with special education need and English language learners effectively enhances the progress they make.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to develop strategies for addressing the differentiation of instruction to meet the needs of students, particularly those who are high achievers.
- Improve action planning by specifying interim benchmarks and responsibilities so that the monitoring of progress has more coherence.
- Develop strategies for securing greater parent participation to ensure reciprocal sharing of information and increased involvement in school activities.
- Build upon good practice to develop profiles of progress in skills and competencies in all core subjects.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has created effective data-collecting processes that are aligned to its commitment to project-based assignments. Several teams and committees routinely conduct the analysis of this information. This process is particularly productive for generating baseline and diagnostic assessments in most subjects. However, the school has not consistently established a comprehensive profile of progress in skills and competencies in all core subjects, specifically in art. In general, the levels of progress that students have shown in their grades and subgroups, is an outcome of the informed way that staff utilize the accumulated profiles of student data. This is especially evident in the effective support and identification of the needs of special education students and English language learners. Students who receive this support are making good progress. The school's commitment to ensuring that this progress is maintained is reflected in the decision to make the needs of these groups a specific focus for the school. An innovative feature is that each team of teachers has an inquiry group. The detailed and relevant data for their particular sample is shared with the group. This process ensures that there is consistency in the way that staff analyze and interrogate data to meet the specific needs of groups of students.

An individual portfolio of personal information, assessment outcomes and specified goals is compiled and regularly updated for each student, by an advisor. The portfolio constitutes the record of all formative and summative data held about students. It is appropriately supplemented by anecdotal evidence provided by subject teachers who provide suggestions for improvement. This data file forms the basis of extensive discussions with parents at conference meetings. The formative assessments not only identify whether students have met expectations in subjects, but also refer to the effectiveness of a student's study habits. Parents are appreciative of the extent of and accessibility to information about the progress of their children. Parents are also able to receive a synopsis of grades via an Internet facility so that they are able to track progress themselves.

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 established an effective matrix of meetings staff that cover departmental issues and meetings of staff who have the instructional responsibility for specific cohorts of students. These cohorts reflect all the grades in the school. The meetings provide the substantive basis for determining learning goals for individual students and specific

groups. For example, one of the teams has a specific focus in identifying learning goals for English language learners. The systematic identification of needs through diagnostic procedures clearly establishes what students know and can do and provides the pathway for the next stages in their learning. The involvement of subject-area staff in this process ensures a synergy between learning goals and teaching goals.

The review and planning procedures that exist in the school effectively engage the faculty in determining school-wide goals. The strategic decision to move to a performance-based school utilizing portfolio evidence had significant implications for the way assessment practice was going to operate in the school. The subsequent discussions within the faculty led to significant collaborative work on the compilation of a common rubric for the evaluation of student presentations of their portfolios. The aspect of refining subject-specific rubrics is an appropriate continuing focus for the meetings of departmental staff.

The organizational decision to create teams of teachers working with the same cohort of students has created an effective context for sharing data. This innovative process ensures that on a daily basis, lesson goals are being systematically established for the same students. Scheduled weekly meetings are held for subject teachers to accommodate a review of progress and coordinate activities. The reality of being in a small school means that staff have membership of a variety of teams and are able to adjust goals and activities to meet the specific needs of students. In addition, the daily advisory meetings that are held with students ensure that there is a context for students to be reflective and establish a clear understanding of their goals in all subjects and what strategies they can use to improve achievement.

Expectations about attendance, behavior and academic performance are clearly communicated through newsletters parent-teacher conferences and e-mails. The detailed entry application procedure and related documentation is a significant part of the process in establishing a clear understanding of the school's expectations. Through the advisory process, parents are given clear guidance as to how they can help the children in relation to the next steps of their learning. However, parental involvement is not strong enough, and the school recognizes the need to secure the greater participation parents in a two-way the sharing of information and involvement in activities provided at school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

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

The school approaches the curriculum content innovatively through the medium of project-based assignments. Students are faced with the challenge of producing independently researched topics, which then have to be formally presented to a panel. Inherent in this approach is the increased flexibility of being able to address the specific interests of students and also ensure that they are working at their achievement level. The school has effectively developed interdisciplinary approaches in the arts and humanities. In the latter context, the school has established strong links with the organization Facing History and Ourselves. Classes are able to use stimulating interdisciplinary case studies of historical moments, which explore how individuals and institutions make moral and political decisions. Students respond well to these activities.

The regular use of formative assessments in most subjects ensures that lessons are usually differentiated to meet the needs of students. A common strategy is the creation of groups to generate discussions and develop collaborative practices. The composition of the group is normally heterogeneous, including both higher and lower achievers. While this can be productive, it is not always sufficiently challenging to meet the needs of all the students. Higher-achieving students are not always challenged in lessons. Curriculum units are formed based on extensive discussion between subject staff. The rigor of this process is reflected in the creation of extensive rubrics to assess the quality of portfolio presentations. An innovative feature of assessment is a focus upon study skills or, as students would refer to it, "habits of learning".

The school uses its budget well to promote the learning needs of students. A broad range of enrichment activities and clubs enhances the curriculum. The opportunities the school provides for students come from partnerships with Urban Arts, dance and the acting company. Periodic surveys indicate good levels of mutual trust and respect between parents and the school. This was endorsed by the positive attitudes expressed by parents during the review and mirrors parental opinion at conference meetings. The low response rate for the learning environment survey reflects the insecure levels of connection the school has with its parent body.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

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

The school has a clearly defined and strategic approach to professional development. School-wide professional development emerges from an analysis of performance data or in response to the requirements of curriculum initiatives. For example, relevant training has taken place in relation to the delivery of the advisory curriculum and the promotion of reading and writing in cross-curricular contexts. The creation of the instructional support team has effectively provided opportunities for experienced staff to coach individual staff members. In this respect, professional development is effectively differentiated to meet the needs of the individual. A strength of this position is that staff development draws upon the expertise that already exists in the school. The organizational systems based upon the collaborative arrangements between teams of teachers effectively promote staff development. The common planning related to project development generates productive discussions about effective teaching strategies. The staff, working in their respective teams, have responsibility delegated to them to ensure that the curriculum delivers interest and challenge for all students. This approach is indicative of the principal's commitment to developing leadership within the school. In this way she is effectively building the capacity of the school for improvement.

A carefully structured mentoring program supports new staff well. Team collaboration ensures that they are part of ongoing dialogue about how they can improve their instruction. Part of this process is the accepted practice of colleagues visiting classrooms to share ideas. New staff enthusiastically confirm that this level of support significantly helps in the development of their professional competencies.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.

The school, through its strategic construction of teams and subsequent collaborative systems has effectively created a process which rigorously identifies strengths and areas for improvement related to the curriculum and instruction. Most subjects have created performance-based curriculum units to regularly assess and monitor the progress of students. The outcomes of this formative process are a significant feature of the regular discussions after each unit at work. The subsequent decisions, in order to promote improvement, are efficiently synthesized in action plans which guide the work of departments and teams. These teams hold regular discussions to reflect upon the progress they have made on the action plans and whether subsequent data indicates that they revise these plans so as to address student need. The format of these action plans does not give sufficient emphasis to the identification of interim checkpoints or specific responsibilities so that the monitoring of progress has greater coherence. The process of continuous review highlighted the need to provide more support for students in helping them develop more effective reading strategies and improve writing. In consequence, the school has given greater emphasis to developing reading and writing in a variety of different contexts, such as the introduction of journal writing in mathematics.

The centralizing of assessment outcomes through an advisory portfolio provides a comprehensive array of data on performance levels and student progress. It provides an effective basis to be able to identify next steps in students' learning. This information enables teachers to modify their instructional goals and adjust teaching strategies to meet the specific needs of students. The extensive use of rubrics designed to assess the outcomes of projects is a very effective component of this analysis and review. The continuous and professionally informed discussions that take place have created an increased assurance among staff regarding the use of data to evaluate the progress of students. In this sense, they are self-reflective and pro-active in creating effective assessment tools. The drive for improvement, which is evident in the purposeful commitment of staff, is generated by the vision and commitment of the principal.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Facing History School	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				X
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?				X
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?				X
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses

rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?				X			
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?				X			
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X			
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher's instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?				X			
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?				X			
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X			
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher's instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?				X			
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?				X			
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X			
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed