

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Foundations Academy

High School 322

**70 Tompkins Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Gary Beidleman

Dates of review: May 11 – 12, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Denis Pittman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Foundations Academy is a high school with 294 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 87% Black, 12% Hispanic, 0.5% White and 0.5% Native American students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 11 % special education students. Boys account for 42% of the students enrolled and girls account for 58%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 80.9%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 100% eligibility.

The school is in its fourth year of operation and will have, in the current year, its first cohort of graduating students. The school occupies the second and third floors of a building that it shares with a suspension center, an elementary school and a District 75 program.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school is establishing a climate of trust and supportive relationships between students and teachers. This commitment is shown by the fact that every teacher has a group of students in addition to the assigned advisory for whom they provide help and encouragement. Productive collaboration is evident in staff interactions. The sharing of good practice is promoted through professional development, subject meetings and the work of the inquiry team. Promoting and encouraging effective communication with parents is a continuing objective for the school. Parents and students are well informed about the school's relevant expectations for attendance, behavior and academic performance. Parents are appreciative of the detailed information they receive about their child's progress. This process is enabled by the comprehensive baseline data compiled by the school. However, there is variability in the way the progress of special education students is monitored and how well this group's specific learning goals are met in general classrooms. Most teachers are keen to improve their professional skills and are committed to the personal and academic development of their students. However, some instruction is too teacher-dominated and provides insufficient opportunities for students' independent research, and, in consequence, does not accommodate their varied learning needs completely enough.

The curriculum is sufficiently challenging to meet the requirements of college entrance. Having this objective in mind, the school has introduced a range of advanced placement courses that endorse these high expectations. However, the monitoring of strategic action plans and outcomes in curriculum areas is not consistent so there is a lack of coherence to the school's work. Broadly, the lack of robustness and interim checking in some action planning makes it harder to build on the results of development issues. Technological resources are limited which inhibits skill development in this area. Students say they are supported well in most of their lessons, but they are unsure of how to specify their learning goals in academic terms or identify next steps in learning. Productive partnerships with support agencies are increasing, which meet a variety of needs such as supporting applications for college entrance. The vision of the principal is providing a clear sense of purpose and direction to the work of the school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The collection of achievement data is detailed and helps to establish baseline performance profiles of individual students which guides instructional planning.
- Staff collaborate well and share good practice which is helping to promote improvements in student achievement.
- A positive and supportive relationship has been established between students and most staff which is building trust and co-operation.
- Professional development is directed on providing knowledge and strategies to promote the school-wide objective of improving student writing.
- The school has introduced a range of advanced placement courses which promote the high expectations of students to aim for a college placement.
- The administration has a clear vision for the direction of the school which is being increasingly shared with all constituents of the school community.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide support for students in specifying academic learning goals and systematically review these with them to identify their personal next steps.
- Monitor the progress and teaching of special education students more effectively to ensure their specific learning needs are met in all classrooms.
- Ensure instructional strategies and activities are planned more coherently to address the learning needs of all students.
- Refine strategic planning practice to reflect more precisely staff accountabilities, interim benchmarks and evidence of modifications and progress towards goals.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City 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.

Baseline data in most core subjects is effectively collated and analyzed to identify students’ progress and areas for improvement. Formative data in relation to the performing arts and music is not as systematically correlated. Scholarship reports, which reflect achievement in content areas, grades and specific classes, are routinely analyzed to identify issues for specific groups. English language learners are supported individually and their progress is regulated well. However, the monitoring of the progress of special education students is not sufficiently rigorous in most classrooms. The increased use of computer data base systems, such as Acuity, have presented teachers with a synopsis of student skills levels and identified those that they have mastered or alternatively where support is required. Given the school's emphasis on improving writing skills, the English language arts department has identified a need to support students in improving their collection of evidence in order to develop an argument. The school has effectively identified decoding ‘word problems’ in math as a key factor in contributing to poor performance in testing situations.

Most staff systematically compiles profiles of student achievement. This process supplements the generation of regular progress reports. The reports give a detailed current overview of student performance in content areas but the identification of next steps in learning is not strongly evident. The resultant ‘portfolio’ of evidence forms the basis of informed discussions with parents at conference meetings. The school is mindful of establishing further communication links with parents. For example, at the start of each semester every student and parent receives a curriculum letter from each content area teacher that outlines goals, grading policy, required materials, course outline and expectations for every class. The increasing breadth of the information provided to families is helping to promote parental involvement with their child's learning, although at present this is not yet extensive.

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.

Most content areas generate, through their curriculum units, a significant amount of formative and informal data that is regularly used to stipulate learning goals for students. Students are encouraged to articulate their own learning goals and a standardized form has been devised for the recording of this information. Despite the school’s emphasis given to formulating learning goals, students tend to specify attitudinal goals rather than being explicit about academic objectives or their next learning steps. The process of identifying and formally recording learning goals for students is not a strong feature in the performing arts and music.

The reflection on and identification of emerging issues for the school is a positive feature of the collaborative work undertaken by the administration, faculty, parents and students to produce Comprehensive Educational Plan goals. These include raising attendance levels, improving writing competencies in all curriculum areas and strategies to retain teachers. A common feature of some of the action planning is that insufficient emphasis is given to identifying specific responsibilities, interim checkpoints or detailed timeframes for completion.

Content area scholarship data and Regents data is systematically analyzed to identify students' common areas of weakness in order to plan supportive interventions. The school is proactive in promoting its high expectations about college routes through regular curriculum letters to parents and 'Townhall' meetings about college preparation courses for students. An innovative feature is the display of an increasing number of college acceptance letters to senior students on a prominent bulletin board in the school; providing encouragement to others.

A range of communication processes such as newsletters parent-teacher conferences, telephone contacts and e-mails provide a good basis convey the school's expectations about attendance and behavior. The details of periodic assessments effectively identify areas for development. The routine sharing of information is an important strategy to encourage parents to feel part of the educational process.

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 proficient.

The curriculum is carefully aligned to state requirements in order to satisfy a prime objective of preparing students for college entrance. In order to meet this challenge the school is making an increasing commitment to the provision of advanced placement classes. Towards these ends a recent addition to the math program has been the introduction of a pre-calculus course. Students remark that they find the advanced placement courses demanding but interesting. Given the constraints of practical resources, the school is innovative in its approach to accommodating physical education requirements. Older students, both male and female, enthusiastically support a successful yoga and dance class. The incidence of inadequate technology resources and poor library facilities limits students' opportunities for independent learning. The school recognizes the need to improve basic literacy skills amongst its lowest achieving students and is focusing on relevant strategies to deal with comprehension issues through an inquiry team.

The program for special education students is not monitored sufficiently rigorously. The individual education plan goals for students are not adequately addressed through the teaching strategies used in some classes. In a wider context, some general instruction is also too teacher directed which is de-motivating for students and results in limited opportunities for their engagement in the work of the lesson. Positively, other teachers are adept at using strategies to effectively involve students in collaborative group activities. The extracurricular dimension of the school is not strong in relation to interest clubs and activities.

The principal prudently allocates resources according to the learning needs of students and staff on most occasions but, of necessity, there have been some compromises

because of budgetary restrictions in relation to technology and library facilities. However, the increasing number of advanced placement courses has been adequately supplied with relevant expensive texts and the dance room has been renovated to extend learning opportunities for students. But, conversely, some professional development training has had to be curtailed because of financial restrictions.

Students and parents refer to the improved levels of mutual trust and respect that exists between staff and them. This is evidenced by the increasing number of activities which are shared by staff and students such as the formation of a basketball team. The strength of these relationships was endorsed by the positive comments expressed at the parents' meeting.

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 proficient.

The school has effectively aligned professional development towards meeting many of its goals, such as improving students' writing skills in a range of curricula contexts. For example, the social studies department uses graphical organizers to help structure the written responses required from their students. The specific training needs of individual members of staff are routinely built up through a specified program of lesson observations and recommendations for improvement. Teachers have a professional development reflection folder that is used to monitor their development throughout the school year. An instructional team utilizes a common protocol for conducting lesson observations in order to develop consistency in practice. The variability in teaching outcomes indicates that this process is still 'work in progress'. However, in general, members of staff report that one-to-one discussions with relevant administrative staff and coaches are helpful in promoting their professional development. The inquiry team takes an active role in promoting staff training. The team has led a school wide initiative to train every teacher in the use of the ARIS data retrieval system. The outcomes of the inquiry team's investigations in supporting low achieving Grade 10 and 11 students in developing comprehension skills is collaboratively shared with staff through grade and subject meetings. The school builds its capacity for improvement through a supportive mentoring program for new staff. Regular meetings are held to help with planning, arrange for inter-class visitations and co-teach lessons.

In a broader context, the commitment to promote the specific personal and emotional needs of students is reflected in a developing partnership with a range of support organizations to help students. The 'Institute for Student Achievement' provides a structured program for developing leadership qualities in students. The guidance team plays an effective role in raising student awareness of pathways to college and supporting student's personal growth.

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 proficient.

A regular cycle of administrative team meetings reflects on scholarship data to monitor student progress and revise plans and groups to improve outcomes in line with these

issues. A continuing focus on improving levels of attendance is seen as a critical factor in raising student achievement. Within subjects, open discussion and collaboration effectively create an environment where strengths and areas for improvement, related to the curriculum and instruction, are routinely identified. The subsequent discussions enable staff to make timely adjustments to curriculum maps and pacing calendars. Positively, an analysis of low passing rates in Regents examinations has led to modifications in the scheduling arrangements for science and social studies. Staff were also invited to specialize on specific components of the programs in order to utilize their expertise and interests and thereby have embed a greater rigor into the teaching of these subjects. However, in a wider context, the lack of robustness, clear accountability and interim checks in some action planning within the administration does not provide an adequate framework for monitoring the progress of development issues in areas including special education programs and the quality of work recorded in student portfolios.

Encouragingly, the routine monitoring of instruction and the learning outcomes of students in lessons form the basis for recommendations in relation to professional development or revisions of the curriculum. An emergent issue to improve opportunities for common planning time in content areas was identified and resulted in increased occasions for this work. The review process, based upon an analysis of need, is exemplified in the additional tutoring provided in support of Regents preparatory classes and extended day classes for off-track students.

The school is self-reflective and works assiduously to use the data it has generated but this feature was not strongly reflected in the current school's self-evaluation form. In general terms, the student profiles which have been created enable the administration to routinely monitor the outcomes of specific classes and thereby the effectiveness of individual teachers. This data is not used systematically enough to identify potential professional development requirements and plan accordingly. The school, through the commitment of its staff, promotes a positive response to the challenges it faces from and within its local community. This supportive culture is promoted by the vision and strong personal commitment of the principal in order to develop and sustain a high quality of education for students.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Foundations Academy	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, DYQ, 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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
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							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed