

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Liberation Diploma Plus High School

High School 728

**2865 West 19th Street
Brooklyn
NY 11224**

Principal: April Leong

Dates of review: May 11-12, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Isabel DiMola

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Liberation Diploma Plus High School is a transfer school with 164 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 48% Black, 28% Hispanic, 18% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 73.8%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 79% eligibility.

Liberation Diploma Plus High School opened in 2007 and serves students from 16-21 years old. Its purpose is to provide students with a “second chance” in being successful and graduating high school. Rolling admissions means that new students in grades 9-12 enroll at the school throughout the school year.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

In its second year of operation, Liberation Diploma Plus High School is developing a culture that is reflective, collaborative and centered around student learning. The Diploma Plus model provides for a performance-based system of evaluation and a strict alignment of standards with Diploma Plus competencies emphasizing habits of mind and critical thinking skills. Diploma Plus is a collaborative model, where a community partner shares responsibility with the school for the social, emotional and academic growth of students. The partnership with CAMBA is effective in providing students and families with advisory and counseling services and supporting students as they move toward meeting their learning targets.

Understanding of data is at the heart of all decisions made at the school. School leaders and faculty collect, analyze and share data very effectively to better understand student performance and needs. The school is creating tools to organize the collection of data to ensure consistency in the manner that teachers and advisors monitor student progress. Goal setting begins upon admission when students work with advisors to create individual learning plans. In most classes broad goals are broken down into specific learning targets. However, not all student goals are aligned to specific skills and Diploma Plus competencies. School leaders are providing support to build teacher capacity so student goal setting is consistent throughout the school. Every Friday, students reflect upon their progress in each class and collaborate with teachers on creating action plans to affect their learning. This process is resulting in students taking ownership over their learning and demonstrating progress in their classes.

Instruction is engaging, rigorous and aligned with standards. Most teachers use data effectively to plan and execute lessons that are differentiated to meet student needs. Where gaps exist, administrators and coaches provide support to improve pedagogic practice so that instruction is data driven and aligned to student needs.

The principal has the highest of expectations for students and staff. She has the respect of teachers, students, families and members of the community. Her leadership fosters collaboration and communication and the honest belief that all students will succeed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- School leaders and faculty in all subject areas analyze a wide range of data to understand the learning needs of individuals and groups of students.
- School leaders and faculty have systems in place to set measurable, learning goals for students and groups of students and regularly monitor progress at specific points throughout each trimester.
- The principal has the respect of all constituencies and creates an environment of mutual trust, respect, collaboration and reflection.
- The curriculum in all subject areas is rigorous, aligned to standards and Diploma Plus competencies and is flexible to meet the needs of individual and groups of students.
- Excellent collaboration between the school and community-based organizations ensures that students and families have the support they need to be successful.
- Professional development is aligned to individual teacher needs, which enhances professional growth and supports student outcomes.
- School leaders use data effectively to monitor student progress to evaluate success toward school goals and make adjustments throughout the year.

What the school needs to improve

- Design school-wide tools for teachers to organize data and provide consistency in the monitoring of student progress.
- Develop and implement a school-wide system that ensures student goals in all classes are aligned to Diploma Plus competencies and address individual student skill deficiencies.
- Continue to support teacher use of data to develop and implement differentiated instruction in all subject areas.

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 well developed.

School leaders collect, distribute and meticulously analyze a wide range of data to understand student performance and recognize trends in progress for individual and groups of students across all subject areas. Upon admission, students meet with counselors and develop a social, emotional and academic history profile. Data analysis forms the basis of programming and developing student guidance plans. Every student takes a series of assessments in all subject areas to determine skill levels. Teachers receive intricate data for each student allowing them to plan effectively to meet students' needs. However, the manner in which teachers organize the data they receive is not consistent, leading to various methods of analyzing data and resulting in inconsistencies in how teachers monitor student progress. The school is currently in the process of developing a system to organize data to provide school-wide consistency. School leaders use data from ATS, HSST, ARIS and assessments measuring Diploma Plus competencies in all subject areas to continually review student performance. Closely monitoring student attendance allows counselors to provide immediate interventions for students that have attendance patterns that are cause for concern, resulting in improved attendance and academic outcomes.

Effective communication with parents and students through mailings, phone calls and one-on-one conferences provides all stakeholders with a clear understanding of student learning needs and performance trends. Regular guidance meetings with advisors from the school's community organization, CAMBA, allow students and parents to address individual student needs and ensure that there is clear understanding of every student's progress toward graduation.

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 principal and administration set high expectations for themselves and all members of the school community and every constituency takes its lead from this. Students, with guidance from counselors, create individualized learning plans that set broad subject area goals. Many teachers use the individual learning plans to set specific learning goals that align with Diploma Plus competencies. However, this practice is not consistent throughout the school. As a result, student goals have varying degrees of specificity leading to inconsistent measures of progress in different classrooms. School leaders are collaborating with faculty to develop school-wide systems that embed alignment of student goals with Diploma Plus competencies and address specific skills.

Students engage in weekly reflection of progress toward reaching their goals. Teachers provide students with support through this process and help students understand assessment results and identify areas in need of improvement. Students and teachers create action plans with well-defined strategies to support improvement. As a result, students feel they have more control over their own progress and initial data indicates that this process is leading to academic gains.

The principal is extremely collaborative with all constituencies in developing the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan. Thorough data analysis and identification of trends and areas for improvement are the basis of school goals. Teachers in every department provide input in creating goals and action plans. As a result, there is clear focus among all stakeholders in working toward improving student outcomes.

The administration and teachers communicate well with students and families regarding course goals and expectations. High expectations are clear and embedded in the school culture through regular assemblies, bi-weekly group guidance classes, course contracts and individual student-parent meetings. A high level of collaboration between school, students and family results in parents and students being involved in every aspect of goal setting and supporting movement toward reaching learning targets.

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.

Rigorous, standards-based curriculum aligned with Diploma Plus competencies exists for all subject areas. Structures are in place for content area teachers to meet regularly to align course content to student assessment results. As a result, lesson planning is data driven and most teachers do a good job of differentiating instruction to meet individual and groups of students' needs. Engaging, differentiated instruction results in student participation and rapid gains in student outcomes. However, a few teachers struggle with translating data-driven lesson plans into instruction that effectively differentiates to meet the needs of students. School leaders are aware of the gaps in this area and are providing support that is resulting in teachers' professional growth and higher levels of classroom instructional practice.

The administration makes strategic organizational decisions to foster student progress. Detailed analysis of student assessment and performance data results in strategic grouping of students in classes across all content areas. Implementing the Skills Tutor Program across all content areas provides individual assessment results instantly and on-line tutorials as a method of academic intervention. Teachers and students acknowledge that this tool provides targeted support in areas of concern resulting in increased student performance.

The principal holds all members of the community accountable for supporting student progress. As a result, every member of the school community holds the principal in high regard. Teachers express gratitude for her collaborative style and state, "Our success is due to her leadership." There is a high level of respect among constituencies and all stakeholders share a well-articulated belief that all students can succeed. The school's focus on reflection, "understanding where you are in order to move forward" is the mantra that drives progress.

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.

Two explicit strands of professional development support teachers' professional growth. School-wide professional development focuses on alignment of curriculum and instruction with Diploma Plus competencies. The second strand is a collaborative effort between school leaders, a Diploma Plus coach and individual teachers. Teacher reflection, informal and formal observation and student results are the basis for teacher goals and individual professional development plans. Teachers have the opportunity to inter-visit each other's classrooms to review best practices. The principal provides opportunities for teachers to visit other schools to observe instruction in specific content areas. Through observations, school leaders and coaches gauge teacher progress toward their goals and revise when necessary. This has resulted in strong pedagogic practice and engaging rigorous instruction.

All content areas have inquiry teams that focus on targeted groups of students. Teams meet weekly to discuss target-student performance and develop strategies to support outcomes. As a result, most targeted students are making rapid progress toward reaching learning goals. Daily common planning time for teachers embedded in the school schedule results in constant collaboration among teachers and high levels of communication across the faculty. Teachers support each other in developing strategies and use the sharing of best practices to elevate the conditions of learning for students.

The support of every student's social and emotional growth as well as academic achievement is a priority for all members of the community. The school has cultivated relationships with several community organizations, most notably with CAMBA. This on-site community-based organization provides advisors and a social worker. These people are part of the school's culture and no distinction is made between them and school faculty. Regular meetings between teachers and advisors allow for effective collaboration around students' social, emotional and academic performance. CAMBA and several other community groups provide family counseling, child protection services, internships, housing assistance and employment opportunities for students. Strong college partnerships provide college readiness opportunities for students. The school's efforts to engage students with outside organizations have expanded the sense of community throughout the school resulting in students and families viewing the school as an institution dedicated to their success.

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.

All school constituencies can clearly articulate the vision of the school to ensure that students become reflective learners and have the skills they need to be successful in achieving their post-secondary plans. School leaders are actively engaged in monitoring student progress and have mechanisms for setting measurable interim goals and timeframes for evaluating success. School leaders review data from all content areas twice each marking period to monitor outcomes and adjust classes and curriculum. As the end of each trimester approaches, careful analysis informs programming for the next

term. An example of this is the restructuring of the math curriculum in response to assessment data highlighting different degrees of skill deficiencies among students, resulting in minimal progress in mathematics. Needs-based programming and the addition of classes with instructional focus on areas in need of improvement have improved student outcomes and moved the school forward toward reaching its goal.

The comprehensive and highly detailed school self-evaluation form illustrates the reflective nature of the school and its accuracy in knowing its strengths and areas in need of improvement. The school is able to demonstrate that its work is having a positive effect on raising student achievement. There is a clear message that instruction is to align to State standards and Diploma Plus competencies and the evaluation of student performance is based on completion of learning targets that result in elevated student achievement. "Strategic Fridays" provide time for teachers to meet with advisors to review qualitative and quantitative data across subject areas to evaluate student and school progress and modify practice where necessary. Administration and faculty collaborate in whole-school planning which enriches the curriculum and develops the rigor that challenges students as they move toward making their vision a reality.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Liberation Diploma Plus High 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
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