

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Freedom Academy High School

High School 509

**106 Nassau Street
Brooklyn
NY 11201**

Principal: Alyson Forde

Dates of review: March 2 - 3, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Michelle Fratti

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Freedom Academy is a high school with 297 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 79% Black, 14% Hispanic, 3% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 10% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 80%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Freedom Academy High School provides a broad curriculum with a good range of offerings in the arts, after-school credit recovery, tutoring and enrichment, mentoring, College Now, and a comprehensive array of youth development services that have created a calm, respectful, orderly environment for learning to take place. A good variety of external partnerships and community links enhance support for students and families. Students, staff, and parents greatly appreciate the opportunities for trips and other motivational activities fostered by a well-received incentive program.

The administration schedules structured opportunities during and after the school day for grade, subject, and inquiry teams to meet that have resulted in a positive culture of professional collaboration among staff. Teams meet to analyze data, plan curriculum and lessons, and to share best practices. In all classrooms, there is a clear, consistent focus on writing across the curriculum evidenced in student work folders, and on classroom and hallway bulletin boards. School leadership and staff have worked well together to align available resources with student needs as assessed through data analysis of school-wide trends and patterns. In addition to the previous all male/female literacy classes, identified students have this year been programmed for additional math and literacy periods in grade 9, as well as AVID classes for students in the middle, and credit recovery and tutoring classes after school to increase the number of students who take and pass Regents. However, at present, there are insufficient systems to monitor, measure and evaluate the effectiveness of these instructional decisions, for all subgroups, over the school year to ensure that progress is systematic and follows a continuous upward trend.

The faculty is deepening its understanding and expanding its use of data to drive instructional decisions in every classroom with the aim of accelerating student learning. Although there has been ongoing professional development on differentiated instruction, this practice is not yet apparent across all grade and content areas. Based upon data, some teachers flexibly group students, leading to progress. Others group students randomly with everyone engaged in the same task within their groups. While those groupings promote teamwork and accountable talk, they do not align the content process or products with the available skills assessment data to ensure multiple points of entry into a curriculum that challenges and engages all students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has been successful in aligning instruction with key State standards and ensuring a consistency of classroom routines and instructional practices that have fostered student engagement.
 - Regular common planning time in grade, subject, and inquiry teams has resulted in increased collaborative lesson planning and the revision of curriculum maps. For example, the English language arts team has revised curriculum maps and pacing calendars to reflect a focus on essay writing, and purposefully created mandated, targeted after-school credit recovery and tutorial classes, which have accelerated achievement for all seniors in Advanced Placement English language arts classes.
 - Students spoke enthusiastically about the variety of course offerings including foreign language, music, art, dance, cyber-journalism, moot court, and model United Nations that engage and challenge them.
- The school has developed a good variety of partnerships and community links that comprehensively support students' personal and academic growth.
 - As part of an extensive menu of support and academic services, the school has nurtured strong relationships with the Door, Access for Women, the Center for Self-Improvement, , and Medgar Evars, to provide customized counseling, mentoring, tutoring, SAT, and College Now offerings that are well matched to specific student needs.
 - Study groups led by the school's learning support organization have focused on engaging boys, utilizing text-based protocols. This has enabled staff to identify specific instructional strategies and materials that have become embedded practices in the single sex English language arts classes and increased the performance of Black males.
- School leadership and staff have identified patterns and trends in student performance that have resulted in a theory of action that support the school goals and meet the learning needs of targeted groups.
 - An outgrowth of Inquiry work, the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program targets "students in the middle" and utilizes research-based Shaffer Center strategies for writing, and Cornell note taking protocols that are regularly practiced in all AVID classrooms to accelerate student learning.
 - In most classrooms, there are word walls, bulletin boards that display student work samples with teacher feedback for next steps, and student work folders contain multiple examples of benchmarked extended writing tasks, evaluated by a Regents-based rubric, that support the school-wide goal of improving writing across all curriculum areas.
- This is a safe, caring school where students receive a good level of support for their personal and academic growth.

- Guided by input from the students, the school has developed an effective and extensive incentive program including trips to the theater, Catskills, Costa Rica, field day, movie night, and I-Pod shuffles that recognizes student attendance, academic progress and success.
- Students express strong ties to their school and report that the focus on writing in all of their classes, readily available lunchtime and after school tutoring sessions, and their performance on several Regents-based tasks in class has developed confidence in their ability to pass English Regents.
- The school effectively analyzes a variety of assessment data to identify trends in student performance to shape an instructional program that accelerates student performance.
 - School leadership and AVID staff utilize scholarship reports, Acuity and ARIS data, Regents results, school-developed diagnostic tools, student work folders, attendance reports, teacher input, referrals and a AVID matrix that has accelerated the progress of identified students “in the middle” who participate in the AVID program in grades 10 through 12.
 - A focused review of item test analysis of the incoming grade 9 class resulted in a program that includes additional periods of math and literacy instruction as well as a pre-living environment course that is aligned to the identified needs of a specific group of students.
- Teachers benefit from participating in professional collaborations that align with school goals and promote the sharing of best practices.
 - The network has recognized the comprehensive Advanced Placement English language arts program for all seniors that now serves as exemplary LAB site. This has maximized opportunities for leadership development, inter-visitation, observation, reflection, and the sharing of best practice both within the school and across the entire network.
 - Teacher teams receive good support from school leadership, the school’s learning support organization, lead teachers, and the UFT teacher center coach when they meet regularly. As a result, the use of student work folders, extended response tasks, and a project-based assessment each marking period are newly identified tools that now strengthen the connection between teacher practice and student work in all classrooms.

What the school needs to improve

- Systematize goal-setting structures to ensure that measurable interim and long-term subgroup and school-wide goals are set, monitored, and adjusted as necessary and progress evaluated.
 - The school has not collaboratively developed action plans that identify specific long-term and interim goals, timelines, or benchmarks. This means that the principal and faculty are not in a strong position to regularly measure and evaluate progress towards meeting the stated school-wide goals of increasing the cohort graduation rate from 47% to 75% and improving Regents pass rates by a minimum 50% for all students.

- There is no system for identifying interim and long-term goals for subgroups, such as students with individual education plans, males and females, those in the lowest third, or economically disadvantaged. There is no timeline for regularly measuring and communicating progress or protocols for adjusting goals and objectives in a timely manner to optimize the impact of actions and to celebrate success along the way.
- Use data more effectively to inform lesson planning by differentiating goals and strategies for subgroups to ensure that all students have their individual learning needs met effectively across all grades and subject areas.
 - There is inconsistency in differentiating instruction, so that lesson planning does not often reflect purposeful grouping, differentiated activities, or targeted questioning that maximizes learning. The impact of professional development on differentiation strategies was evident in a social studies class where the teacher provided multiple points of entry for a piece of text for groups. However, while students work in groups in most classrooms, tasks are often identical.
 - The school has effectively communicated its goal that all teachers should differentiate instruction in process and content using at least two or three strategies. While formal observations focus on adherence to many aspects of practice, there is no specific mention of differentiation. Additionally, since school leaders do not rigorously monitor this initiative during their regular walkthroughs, not all teachers group students based upon assessment data or the learning style inventory.
- Sharpen action planning by specifying student and teacher outcomes to formalize interim benchmarks so that the school community can monitor and evaluate the impact of key decisions on student achievement.
 - Although there are well functioning grade and subject teams, they do not establish interim and long-term goals for teams or students, or identify common assessment tools and data collection systems to monitor the effectiveness of curricular and instructional decisions such as AVID, extended day tutoring, or double periods of math or English for freshman.
 - Although the school monitors progress towards goals annually, the lack of measurable benchmarks, at specified times during the year, does not enable the school to evaluate with any degree of accuracy the extent to which it is on track to achieve its goals or how to rectify the situation if not.
- Establish a system that organizes summative and formative assessments to guide instructional decisions.
 - The school collects a variety of information, but has not designed a comprehensive method to gather, analyze, disseminate, and use data at whole school, grade, and individual student level to examine trends and patterns of subgroup performance. Nor does it have a system to make data easily accessible to enable teachers, administrators, parents, and students to measure the impact of interventions and track progress toward their goals

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Freedom Academy High School	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			X	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?		X		
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?		X					
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?		X					
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?		X					
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?		X					
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X					
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed