

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Freedom Academy High School**

**High School 509**

**106 Nassau Street  
Brooklyn  
NY 11201**

**Principal: Alyson Forde**

**Dates of review: May 23-24, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Evelyn Santiago**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Freedom Academy is a high school with 264 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 81% Black, 16% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 47% of the students enrolled and girls account for 53%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 77.8 %.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school maintains a generally respectful learning environment that fosters positive student attitudes toward learning. (1.4)
  - After reviewing information gathered from the school's Learning Environment Survey, the administration established a "Code of Behavior" protocol that includes "non-negotiable" expectations for student conduct. The school's Teacher Advisory Group, where teachers serve as advisors to groups of students, was created to facilitate interventions and counseling services that support students' academic, social and emotional development. Some of the activities generated by the council include "Respect for All Week", "Spirit Week" and "Twin Day" to strengthen positive relationships, build school spirit and reduce acts of bullying. To encourage service to the community, students participate in school-wide events such as the Cystic Fibrosis and Aids walks and the Toys for Tots, Penny Harvest and canned food drives. Additionally, training for teachers on emotional intelligence is provided by a consultant weekly to refine skills that positively impact student comportment. These varied efforts have led to a reduction in the number of incidents and confrontations at school and are beginning to promote a general respectful environment for learning. As a result, students now state that they feel "safer" at school.
- The school shares information with families and students to encourage parent involvement and student academic achievement. (2.4)
  - Teachers and school leaders reach out to parents via telephone and through one on one conference that target students' progress in areas of concern to ensure students maintain a focus on learning. The school also provides students' grade and homework information via electronic systems that are accessible to students and parents. In addition, the school offered training in the use of ARIS Parent Link and provides access to a computer at the school designated for parent use. As a result, parents indicate that they are aware of the school's expectations and of their children's progress.
- The school uses data to identify trends in student outcomes and adjust goals to ensure learning. (3.3)
  - School leaders track progress towards meeting instructional goals by reviewing the results of Acuity periodic assessments and mock Regents item analysis data. These outcomes provide information on individual student and classroom level proficiency in meeting curriculum standards and are shared with the school community in ARIS, the school's electronic system and scholarship reports. Adjustments are made based on outcomes and identified needs. For example, analysis of student performance trends indicated that the school needed to allocate more time for English language arts (ELA) and math instruction to raise the levels of student proficiency. This led to organizational changes that included revising the school program to provide double periods in ELA

and math and grouping students to travel in cohorts for these subject areas.

- Some teacher teams use information in ARIS and others use formative assessments to analyze data of their target population students and identify skills not yet mastered. These outcomes guide teacher dialogue and inform changes in instructional goals for the student subgroups. One of the changes included having students increase the use of informational text to support their point of view and claims. Subsequently, teachers noted moderate improvement in students' verbal arguments and non-fiction writing.
- The school's partnerships and internal collaborations allow for the development of post secondary pathways for all students. (4.4)
  - Responding to concerns raised regarding the lack of guidance support for students, the school hired a guidance counselor to work with selected students to help them maintain focus on their academic and social development. The counselor also meets with students and their families to facilitate articulation to college and provides services in the form of individual and group counseling to help students prepare for their transition to college and future careers. This targeted support has resulted in every student applying to a college of their choice and two students applying to the armed forces.
  - The school has established collaborations with several organizations that include Medgar Evars College Now and City Tech College Now to provide students access to college classes for elective credits. The Alpha Omega Theatrical Dance Company and Venettes Cultural Workshop assist with music and dance performances and award scholarships for selected students. After school sports and tutoring services are offered by the Madison Boys and Girls Club. These experiences are beginning to increase opportunities for students to develop positive self awareness, tap into students' talents and, extend learning and improve achievement.
- The school is creating systems to monitor school and student progress toward meeting interim goals to note areas in need of improvement increase student achievement. (5.3)
  - The principal uses midyear review processes to measure progress towards meeting goals at the department and individual student levels. These include quarterly analysis of Acuity Periodic Assessments, student progress folders and teacher grade books to determine growth and areas for improvement. Program and instructional adjustments such as new courses for students during the day and after school tutoring are made accordingly and outcomes are posted on "The Wall of Progress" to inform the school community. As a result, the school has begun to note that more students are passing their classes and accumulating credits towards graduation.
  - Teacher teams meet regularly at scheduled times to share classroom formative and mock regents exam results and examine student work samples to determine progress. Teams create item analysis so that trends in the students work are apparent and then discuss strategies and

interventions to address identified areas of need to improve performance. This is leading to an evolving culture of collegial collaboration to improve instruction and ensure students meet their academic goals.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Ensure the alignment of academic tasks to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) to deepen levels of thinking and increase learning for all students. (1.1)
  - In order to develop a more rigorous curriculum, the school identified “higher order questioning” as a key focus skill in addition to key CCLS that it is incorporating into the school’s curriculum maps. However, most tasks are not yet common core based and lack the rigor that would generate higher level peer discussions and argumentative writing. Consequently, students are not challenged with CCLS based work limiting their academic growth.
  - Although there was evidence of planning, there was little evidence of the use of the information contained in students’ Individual Education Plans (IEP), language assessment results and classroom assessments for planning learning tasks designed to engage student sub-groups across grades and subject areas. The same tasks were given to all students including students with disabilities and English language learners. This practice minimizes teachers’ opportunities to address the needs of all students through differentiated tasks and activities, limiting engagement and learning for a diverse student population.
- Strengthen teaching practices to ensure differentiated instruction is targeted to students’ needs to maximize students’ academic progress. (1.2)
  - In several of the classrooms visited, teachers used worksheets based on a variety of topics to differentiate instruction for the students. While the materials were differentiated, the scaffolded supports were not consistently aligned or utilized to accommodate struggling students. In one classroom some students did not understand the instructions from the teacher on what to do and therefore were not able to complete the task. This hinders opportunities to maximize understanding of concepts at various entry points and impedes achievement for all learners.
  - While students are compliantly engaged in classroom activities, deep levels of engagement are rare. Additionally, student work products often included worksheets and textbook based responses. As a result student inquiry was not yet fully developed and student growth and ownership of their learning is limited.
- Enhance the school’s use of resources to better align to the school-wide goals so that teaching and learning outcomes are the primary focus. (1.3)
  - While the school has computers in the classrooms, their use as a resource or learning tool was limited in some classrooms and not evident in others. In addition, classroom libraries had few books for students to choose from and consisted mainly of subject area textbooks. This

impedes opportunities for challenging modalities, analyzing complex text and meeting expected goals in line with the CCLS.

- In response to the need to improve academic performance, the school is providing intervention programs afterschool to allow more time for instruction and skill development. Additionally, the school has formed advisory groups led by teachers to further individualize the support provided. However, data indicates that while there have been some gains in progress noted in ELA and math as evidenced in periodic assessments, credit accumulation has decreased for all groups except 10<sup>th</sup> grade thereby limiting opportunities for students to be promoted or to graduate.
- Continue to develop school wide assessments and rubrics that align to key standards to identify and adjust instruction to meet the learning needs of all students. (2.2)
  - Teachers use Acuity Periodic Assessments and formative data to grade student progress in the specific subject areas. However, the use of these assessments does not allow teachers to identify the learning needs of all students including special education students. As a result, teachers do not select and implement instructional practices that will address the needs of these students limiting learning for all students.
  - Using student 'Exit Slips' has been established as a school-wide initiative. This formative assessment provides teachers with an ongoing check for understanding of concepts presented in each lesson. However, the use of the slips was not consistently reinforced throughout the school for all students. As a result, teachers are unable to uniformly provide instruction that effectively targets the needs of students, thus hindering progress for all learners.
- Modify the observation process to include detailed feedback that enhances teacher practice and raises the level of student academic performance. (4.1)
  - School leaders visit classrooms and conduct formal and informal observations. However, the frequency of the visits and the feedback to teachers that evaluates teachers' use of data to inform instruction and emphasizes rigor in lesson development is limited. This reduces opportunities for reflection on instructional skills and practices to enhance student understanding. As a result, teacher growth is restricted and is not yet positively impacting student achievement.
  - The school introduced a research based common framework rubric to provide teachers with clear guidance on standards for classroom instruction and practices. However, the framework used is mostly in the form of a checklist. As a result, the feedback to teachers does not specify teacher strengths and weaknesses nor does it offer targeted next steps to improve teacher practice thereby limiting growth in teacher practice and students' academic achievement.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

<b>School name: Freedom Academy High School</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		<b>X</b>		
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		<b>X</b>		
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?		<b>X</b>		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?		<b>X</b>		
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?		<b>X</b>		
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?		<b>X</b>		
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		<b>X</b>		
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?		<b>X</b>		
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?		<b>X</b>		
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>
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?		<b>X</b>		
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?		<b>X</b>		
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		<b>X</b>		
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?		<b>X</b>		

**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>	UD	D	P	WD
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, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?		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>	UD	D	P	WD
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, with particular attention to the CCLS?		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		

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>