

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

The Facing History School
High School M303

525 WEST 50TH STREET
MANHATTAN
NY 10019

Principal: Dana Panagot

Dates of review: November 1, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Elaine Gorman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Facing History School is a high school with 421 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 26% Black, 70% Hispanic, 1% Asian students and 2% White students. The student body includes 21% English language learners and 24% special education students. Boys account for 49% of the students enrolled and girls account for 51%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 84.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Informed by long-range plans and rigorous expectations for students, a highly collaborative administration and staff make organizational decisions impacting curriculum and student-teacher groupings, furthering engagement in rigorous tasks. (1.3)
 - Based on thorough analysis of student work and difficulties completing eight required portfolios in grade 9, staff developed interdisciplinary courses, providing connections across content and four rather than eight portfolios. This has resulted in student reports of greater confidence and mid-cycle reports demonstrating increased content understanding on more rigorous tasks and greater on track portfolio preparedness.
 - The commitment of time for a robust team structure is valued and collaboration is embedded in school culture, demonstrated in strategic hiring practices. There is clear analysis of team and student needs when hiring as well as budget considerations. Long-term planning has led to staff reorganization with observable alignment of teacher talent and instructional goals. The use of 90 minute periods reducing teacher-student ratio, has led to extended and more robust exploration of topics and greater opportunities to support students.
- Students appreciate challenging performance tasks with ongoing academic and social-emotional support, embedded into the fabric of the school community, resulting in a family environment where students are motivated to succeed. (1.4)
 - The great majority of students talk freely about challenging performance-based tasks in which they are engaged. They speak about the 98 percent of last year's class who went to college and alumni who report being better prepared than peers. They voice moments of feeling overwhelmed but "stayed the course" because of staff's extraordinary willingness to help. Students are advocates for themselves. A student described being guided as he appealed to present his final English PBAT a second time so that he could participate in a college program. Administrators and teacher teams use performance data and Kid Talk sessions to balance accountability and needs of students. While improved four-year graduation is a target, weighted graduation rates remain high and graduation for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) exceed the peer group and city.
- An instructionally focused school team hold themselves to high expectations through a common framework, modeling well-embedded expectations for students impacting curriculum development with scaffolded supports leading to increased learning. (3.4)
 - Teachers, students and parents articulate rigorous expectations of instructional programs embedded in sequenced performance assessments, with transparent outcomes and informing all organizational and instructional moves. The school community highly supports incorporation of Facing History themes and Habits of Learning grounding content with college readiness, and alumni report they are more prepared for college than peers. A culture of robust feedback to families has all teachers regularly communicating through mid-cycle reports and refined advisory system. With advisors, students develop personal action plans which inform school plans, resulting in increased credit earning by students. Thoughtful pairing of collaborative teacher teams and persistent analysis of student work

leads to successful supports for ELLs and students with disabilities which has impacted greater academic success than peer schools or city.

- A well integrated and age appropriate youth development program provides multiple opportunities for students to participate in post-secondary advisement and real world application resulting in greater student confidence and self-advocacy. (4.4)
 - An intentional and deep review of cohort achievement, attendance and behavioral data as well as a study by the University of Pennsylvania inform the youth development program and needed supports for staff and students, including a revised advisory and Fairness Committee. Monthly professional development by social workers in sensitive areas affecting students, including racism and bullying. These sustained efforts are resulting in an incremental increase of attendance and a reduction of suspensions from 17 to 5 percent.
 - Partnerships with Facing History and Ourselves and Urban Arts provide what students describe as defining moments, as are interactions with powerful speakers and visiting artists. These experiences and the senior seminar, Choosing to Participate, are underpinned by Habits of Learning and well understood opportunities to advocate for self and community has led to results such a college readiness index four times higher than peer schools.
- Staff engages in thoughtful curricula alignment to Common Core Learning Standards with intentional coherence across grades and subjects for all learners, including robust arts integration and Facing History themes, leading to more rigorous tasks. (1.1)
 - Professional development is used to align curriculum maps and units with robust, sequenced assessments and high-level rubrics. Informed by Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), existing curricula is being revised or reorganized as interdisciplinary. Using Atlas mapping software, curricula is shared, creating a common language with connections across subjects and grades. By analyzing student work and data, teams determine gaps in learning and revise curriculum with particular attention to ELLs and students with disabilities who are held to equal standards. All curricula embed Facing History themes, college readiness skills, and sequenced art experiences. This work is leading to substantial coherence of curricula with great thought of how the essential questions in an interdisciplinary unit lead to deeper thinking by students across grades, subjects, and in their assessments. An unintended outcome is the reinvestment in the school's mission.
- Aligned to a research-based rubric, administration and peers offer ongoing and focused observations providing effective feedback on pedagogical strengths and challenges, evidenced by improved teacher practice and student work. (4.1)
 - Grounded in embedded beliefs about student learning and by norming pedagogy through work with the Danielson Framework, particularly engagement, each adult establishes goals by which specific feedback is given. Through self-reflection and recursive conversations on next steps, subsequent observations reflect improved practice by most teachers and noted changes in the quality of student work. Differentiated support for teachers new to the profession or school is highly appreciated by teachers reporting that their ability to prepare students for portfolio assessments was substantially improved by targeted assistance. Robust peer feedback further supports teacher growth and informs teams on needed pedagogical moves to impact student performance, including flexible groupings and tied writing, evidenced in student participation and portfolios.

What the school needs to improve

- Build on articulated beliefs about student learning and models of best practices to deepen the use of questioning across the school to lift the level of student discourse and further cognitive engagement. (1.2)
 - There are deep beliefs about student learning, supported by observation feedback and discussions at teams. Although there are consistent routines, as flexible grouping, inconsistencies in strategic questioning by teachers limits surfacing of gaps in understanding and high-level student-led discourse in some classrooms. Promising models of differentiation exist, including subgroups; but without greater consistency, some students reach high levels of work only through extensive tutoring and revision. This pattern which is being addressed by the school has caused lower course passage and on-time graduation rates than peers and city.
 - There is consistent attention to enrichment courses and real-world experiences, as well as growing use of Depth of Knowledge practices, but insufficient extensions within unit or daily work. Without fluid opportunities for extensions, the level of discourse and work products have a ceiling.
- Develop structures for formative assessments informed by a sophisticated system of portfolio assessments to ensure organic responses to students' instructional needs. (2.2)
 - As a consortium school, there is a long-standing practice for teams of teachers by grade and content to use summative tasks to make schoolwide and team decisions about curricula and organization. The school has correctly identified the need to deepen the use of periodic assessment to more precisely uncover content and skill gaps preventing students and groups to demonstrate deeper learning. While some teachers naturally monitor and adjust in lesson design, absent a school wide system for formative assessments, including checks for understanding and real time response, gaps widen requiring remediation, including young men for whom targeted intervention is now occurring.
- Refine team and individual tracking of student mastery to incorporate changes in curriculum and to deepen the specificity of feedback to students and families in order to impact student learning of content and skills. (3.3)
 - Team evaluation days facilitate the tracking of school wide and department assessment results, as well as cycle narratives to families. Tracking for selected subgroups with precise plans has led to greater mastery; more so, regular analyses have produced agreed upon school wide and team goals and action plans, including emerging iLearn plans. Team and individual tracking also informs consistent feedback to students and parents on perceived next steps and needed supports. However, while most teachers give common periodic assessments, team and teacher current tracking of student-level mastery on specific content and skills produces limited understanding of root causes for gaps resulting in interventions with mixed impact on increased learned.
- Expand systems of monitoring and revising to further the integration of the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) with assessments and ensure the alignment of grading practices to valued outcomes. (5.2)

- Through an intentional and interconnected system of teams – vision, development, grade level and content – using agreed upon tracking reports and web-based communication system, current portfolio assessment practices are regularly evaluated with consideration to the current development of CCLS units. However, though current assessment is standards-based and consistent across content, grading practices are less so. Without further review of grading criteria, the percentages used by departments remain inconsistent and most reinforce compliance by students rather than valued performance outcomes, in particular rigor and relevance, and the Habits of Learning that are well integrated in most aspects of the school program.
- School leaders and teams have plans to use current structures to further develop and implement CCLS units with refined exit competencies by grade and content. While current data organization is regularly revised based on identified needs and have led to some decisions benefitting students, there is insufficient pattern analysis of specific content and skills to assure coherence between the learning needs of students and the outcomes of hard working teacher teams.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The Facing History School	UD	D	P	WD
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				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
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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 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?			X	
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?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?				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>	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	

Quality Review Scoring Key

UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed
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