

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Foundations Academy

14K322

**70 Tompkins Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11206**

Principal: Jimmy Molina

Dates of review: June 4-5, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Aimee Horowitz

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Foundations Academy is a high school with 154 students from ninth through grade 12. The school population comprises 61% Black, 34% Hispanic, 1% White, 2% Native American, 1% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 74.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is beginning to align curricula and refine tasks to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), to engage a diversity of learners in critical thinking and using textual evidence to support claims. (1.1)
 - The school has begun to provide some guidance on meaningful curricula planning, leading teachers to design some learning activities that include multiple access points to engage a diversity of learners, including students with disabilities (SWDs), through the use of graphic organizers, film and visuals, student choice, and relevant real world applications. The school extended its work of increasing rigor in tasks, raising the level of higher order thinking, and increasing students' abilities to use textual evidence in writing. For example, the school is using Bloom's taxonomy to support teachers in creating higher order questions and tasks that require critical thinking. Accordingly, SWDs have demonstrated some improvement in reading and writing leading to more students in this sub group being placed in classes with their general education peers. A parent of a special education student stated, "My son is an IEP student who is now partially mainstreamed. His teachers have pushed him and he is now doing Regents work; he loves to read, and is being successful. They saw the potential in him." Thus, the work of creating supports for a diversity of students is beginning to show some progress.
 - Teachers have begun to plan and refine lessons and tasks based on an analysis of *Achieve 3000* data to determine students' reading levels, Mock and Regents data, summative assessment data, an analysis of student work products, and using anecdotal data. This is resulting in lessons and tasks better targeted to meet students' needs for meaningful engagement. For example, to enable students to engage with longer texts without becoming overwhelmed or frustrated, some teachers chunk text for students with lower reading levels. This has enabled these students to work with more complex text. Integrated Algebra teachers engage students in annotating word problems so that they can better understand the information given and what the problem is asking. This has resulted in some higher order student work products; more extended written work, and in greater numbers of students providing responses to short answer and essay tasks on Regents examinations.
- The principal's use of resources, hiring, and scheduling decisions support the school's goals, facilitating growth in student and adult learning. (1.3)
 - The school's first ever summer Bridge Program for incoming students improved 9th grade credit accumulation as all students who participated are currently on track to earn 10 credits. The redesigned student schedule providing additional instructional time for English and math, coupled with technology to improve student engagement and outcomes, has bolstered student achievement. *Revolution K-12*, a computer based math program, that students can use during class and at home, along

with coaching for teachers, has increased credit accumulation in 9th grade Integrated Algebra courses by enabling teachers to provide students with multiple entry points, additional opportunities for practice in areas of weakness, and the ability to work at their own pace. English teachers affirm that their ongoing work with an Aussie coach has aided them in improving their teaching practice and in developing rubrics, leading to improved student writing. *Achieve 3000*, a computer based literacy program, supports all students in increasing reading comprehension and other literacy skills. *Plato* provides students opportunities to earn credits in areas of deficiency, *Castle Learning* provides computer based Regents review, and implementation of Mock Regents examinations has helped students feel better prepared for exams. As a result, credit accumulation has increased and the school is on track to have an increased graduation rate.

- Analysis of eighth grade scores and Regents data revealed that students did not perform well on literacy based tasks and needed additional support in math. Thus, all freshmen have been programmed for 1.5 periods of math and English. The extra half period of English is designed to bolster students' literacy and writing skills and support their ability to use contextual evidence in their writing. This extra half period daily is also designed to improve achievement on document based essays in Global History. Upper classmen are programmed for a double English block to enhance their literacy and writing capacity. As a result, the pass rate on the January, 2013 Regents examination in English Language Arts was 85%, a 65% increase from January 2012. A recently hired guidance counselor is meeting students' academic and college advisement needs. Students state, "She has met with each of us, we now understand our transcripts, what we need to graduate, and the college application process." Student feedback also validates the principal's selection of teachers as they stated their satisfaction and how well the new math teachers meet student needs. Students report after school tutoring, Saturday school, and online learning options are helping them be more successful in their classes, in passing Regents examinations, and in earning credits. As a result, student work products are beginning to reflect increased stamina and improved focus.
- Teachers' use of assessment data to analyze student performance and apprise them of next learning steps and checks for understanding, is emerging across classrooms and teams. (2.2)
 - Some teachers assess student understanding through questioning and use of varied types of assessments for understanding including baseline exams and use of white boards for problem solving in Integrated Algebra classes. Other teachers are beginning to use standards based rubrics and student self-assessment opportunities to increase student awareness of next steps. The English team uses a standards aligned evidence-based writing rubric to provide students with clear expectations for essay writing and feedback on their work, enabling students to understand how to improve their writing. Student work products are beginning to indicate student progress in articulating a claim, selecting and incorporating relevant quotes into their writing, citing sources, and transitioning from one idea to another.

- In some classrooms teachers use checks for understanding such as turn and talks, exit tickets and graphic organizers. They also circulate as students are working independently or in groups to assess their learning, provide support and push their thinking, enabling them to adjust their teaching to meet students' needs. In an Integrated Algebra class, as the teacher circulated, she realized one group needed additional assistance; consequently, she used a mini-white board to model the problem solving steps for them, enabling students to then return to the assigned task and successfully complete it. In English, students generally complete multiple drafts of essays and are provided with peer and/or teacher feedback on each draft, enabling them to improve their work.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen the level of instruction so that lessons and tasks consistently engage students in critical thinking, extend opportunities for all students to learn at their entry points, and achieve at high levels for college and career readiness. (1.2)
 - Professional development has included work around effective questioning, using contextual evidence, and engaging students in learning. Teachers use Rubicon Atlas to create curriculum maps and units that reference State and CCLS. However, the accompanying tasks are not consistently CCLS aligned and do not incorporate the city-wide instructional shifts to support all students at their instructional levels. In the majority of classrooms visited all students were working on the same activity. High achieving students were not provided with extensions to deepen their learning and state that they are not challenged. For example, in Social Studies, students were playing jeopardy to review for their upcoming Regents and in Constitutional Law, the teacher read a summary of the case aloud and then called on a few students to respond to questions. In both classes, all questions were at the recall level, did not engage students in critical thinking or problem solving. In addition, lessons did not provide entry points for students at varying levels. As such, not all teachers engage students in challenging tasks or in higher order thinking through questioning or writing tasks, or maximize student learning by providing extensions to support higher achieving students in deepening their thinking to expand their potential. Thus, teaching strategies do not consistently challenge all students' thinking, limiting opportunities for high achievement and the school's ability to graduate students who are college and career ready.
 - Teacher questioning facilitates general student participation, however, accountable talk, extended student responses, student to student discussion, and evidenced-based discourse are limited across grades and content areas. Students do not yet generate their own high level questions and lessons are often teacher centered and not guided by student inquiry. Consequently, not all learners are pushed to think and write at high levels, limiting self guided inquiry and reflection. In addition, although student writing and discussions are evident in some classes, tasks are often limited to writing paragraphs, journal entries, reports of information, and essays. Students state they are writing more this year;

however writing assignments rarely require students to independently research or engage in analysis of information. As a result, across classrooms students are not consistently challenged, engaged, or adequately prepared for all Regents examinations and college and career readiness skills.

- Provide teachers with effective feedback on strengths, weaknesses, and actionable next steps to elevate their practice and improve student achievement. (4.1)
 - The principal observes all teachers and provides them with written observation feedback using Observation 360. Observation feedback occasionally refers teachers to view videos from PD 360 addressing the principal's concerns. However, there is no accountability for viewing the videos or implementing the strategies contained therein. Moreover, the feedback provided by the principal is generic; it does not provide teachers with actionable next steps to improve their practice, does not refer to integration of the CCLS or city-wide instructional shifts, and lacks reference to student work and other student data. Teachers state, "We get valuable feedback from our Aussie coach and although our principal is in our classrooms frequently, we would like more feedback on how we can improve from him." As a result of ineffective feedback, the observation process is not facilitating improved teacher practice in order to increase student achievement.
 - To aid teachers in further developing an understanding of effective teaching practices, teachers have engaged in professional development around the Danielson Framework. Although the observation tool, Observation 360, is aligned to Danielson, the feedback provided teachers is from a drop down menu; thus it does not aptly capture the individual teacher's strengths or challenges. Further, teachers are not provided with next steps to facilitate improved practice. Consequently, observation feedback fails to provide teachers with clear expectations and is not supporting teacher development.
- Develop systems to evaluate curricular and instructional practices and the effectiveness of teacher teams to inform adjustments to instruction and support students in meeting Common Core Learning Standards. (5.1)
 - The principal regularly collects data around credit accumulation and Regents passing rates for students and provides that data to grade teams, who intervene with students who are not on track to meet the standards. Some teachers and department teams collect student performance data gleaned from looking at student work. However, there are no school-wide protocols in place that enable the school to consistently collect and analyze student data to identify trends across grades and subject areas and reflect upon the success of strategic instructional decisions. The absence of a uniform system of collecting and analyzing formative school wide data to inform best teaching practices, adjust curricula, and regularly assess inquiry work by teams, hinders opportunities for school leaders and teachers in sharing and referencing data to make informed and effective decisions around the defined needs of student groups to consistently improve student progress.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Foundations Academy	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?		X					
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?		X					
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?		X					
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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					
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?	X						
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed