Quality Review Report

2012-2013

Frederick Douglass Academy

Middle-High School M499

2581 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd.
New York
NY 10039

Principal: Joseph D. Gates

Dates of review: April 8-10, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Holly Reichert

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Frederick Douglass Academy is a middle-high school with 1461 students from grade 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 74% Black, 23% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 90.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Strategic use of resources, time and teacher talent aligned to the school's instructional vision and goals shifts the school's culture improving teacher effectiveness and increasing student achievement. (1.3)

    - Focused on credit accumulation, curriculum refinement, student engagement and guidance processes, the school strategically uses resources to address these identified academic, curricular and social-emotional goals. The school remodeled office spaces, library and halls to display and celebrate student achievement in academics, sports, clubs and extracurricular activities and has an updated logo reinforcing the college preparatory mission of the school. The school organizes the program so that all teachers meet at least twice a week to plan, analyze student work and data, and revise curricula to meet student learning gaps. The school releases lead teachers from full-teaching loads to coach and oversee team work. The school re-sequenced social studies courses so that students take global studies in 9th and 10th grade and US history in 11th grade. Credit accumulation for 9th grade social studies increased 32% from Fall 2011 to Fall 2012. Moreover, to address student learning needs, teachers are programmed for courses they excel in teaching. The school also revised special education programming, hired additional staff and established a special education office to support staff in meeting student needs. These programming and assignment changes have led to increases in student scholarship including a 6% increase in the number of students with disabilities receiving an 80 or above average comparing data from January 2011 with 2012. Conjointly, the school made additional hires to meet specified areas of need, including two additional deans to support the school's discipline goals. As an outcome of leveraging environment, time and staff, the school cited that 108 students in the sophomore class received an 80 or above average for the fall semester compared to 64 in 2011.

- Promoting the belief that all students can excel, the school's culture is built on a foundation of mutual respect where strengths and interests are acknowledged and deepened through personalized support. (1.4)

    - The school programs students so that they start and end their day with an advisory homeroom class and access to lockers. Students remain with their homeroom teacher for their first academic class creating continuity from the beginning of the day. Strengthening social-emotional and academic advocacy for students, deans monitor and address student behavior by greeting students as they arrive and visiting classes throughout the day. As a result, suspensions from September 2012 to March 2013 have decreased by 43% compared to the same time period for 2011-12. Deans also run after school sports, gender-based mentoring and student government programs. Students and families spoke highly of these programs as crucial self-development opportunities that strengthen student confidence, and personal and academic behaviors. The school's weekly progress sheet, known as "the green sheet", functions as a feedback loop for students who benefit from continued monitoring. All

staff members consider student interests when providing personalized support that includes recommendations for specific courses and programs at the school. One parent said, “They know her personally and that makes me feel good.” Nine 9th grade students who previously failed English are now passing as a result of mentoring by staff and older students. Students trust the staff and said they feel comfortable seeking out an adult for help. The senior student council intently proposes ideas for activities and events that celebrate diversity and bring the entire student body together, thus strengthening school pride and bridging middle and high school. The school attributes increases in the number of honor roll students across grades as a result of their unified focus on student success. For example, last year, 64 9th grade students had an 80 or above average after the first semester compared with 109 9th grade students this year. High school credit accumulation for 9th and 10th grade shows marked increases comparing fall semester 2011 with 2012.

- Rooted in a theory of action focused on school pride and academic excellence, the school's goals align social-emotional growth with achievement ensuring all students are college/career ready. (3.1)

    - Increasing credit accumulation in 9th and 10th grade, refining curricula, celebrating achievement and promoting the belief that everyone can excel and be prepared for success in college and career - drive the school’s systematic approach for improvement. The school’s clear and tangible goals speak to student data and are enveloped in short and long-term plans. The parents and students, fully aware of the school’s goals and plans for the future and the goals of the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP), know why certain changes are being made and how they relate to the school’s vision and future plans. Parents stated that their voice is heard at meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and conversations with staff. School leaders strategically plan professional development on planning effective questioning, strategies to deepen student engagement, and using data to tailor instruction which has led to more effective teaching practices. Instructional goals connect effective instruction for all students with closing the achievement gap. With a graduation rate of over 80% in 2012, the school’s college office supports students with college access by providing guidance, college visits, interviewing support and opportunities to meet with college representatives. Described as “an enhancement to the community” - the parents reiterated that the school’s vision and goals assure college readiness for all students.

- The school's college preparatory focus communicates high expectations for all students, grades 6 to 12, unifying the school community and ensuring students are well-prepared for the next level. (3.4)

    - High expectations for pedagogical practice and student learning underpin the school’s college preparatory vision. To this end, lesson plans include behavioral and instructional objectives, Common Core Learning Standards, essential questions and key vocabulary to create consistency. Students and families emphasized that the school’s college preparatory focus expects all students to graduate from college. From entry to the school, at 6th and 9th grade, students start to consider college and career opportunities through an articulated academic and college advisement process that unites guidance and the college office. With the use of

Jupiter grades, an online grading system, and Naviance, an online college/career system, the school communicates regularly about student progress and provides college advisement access to all students. Partnering with families, the school not only provides electronic communication information, but also provides in depth and on-going support so that all students meet the school's high expectations. The college office provides parents with workshops about the college process, and guidance counselors assist families through case conferencing meetings to create action plans to ensure students stay on track. Students and families highlighted the importance of these online systems as well as to the numerous college preparation activities the school provides. Middle school parents stated that their children can take advanced level courses in math and science and that their children use higher level vocabulary and read and write with a thesis in mind. A middle school parent further explained how the curricular focus on essential learning outcomes (ELO) in 6th grade builds writing skills critical for high school and college success. Parents commented on the school's communication and support structures that enable families and their children stay focused and up-to-date with the school's expectations and the college process. Parents shared that both middle and high school students go on college visits. High school students also spoke of how they are expected to take additional Regents examinations and advanced placement courses as well as participate in after school sports and activities such as robotics and chess. A number of graduating seniors will enter universities in Fall 2013 with college credits earned by passing their advance placement exams.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue refining school-wide curricula and academic tasks across disciplines and grades so that the trajectory of skill and content mastery is precisely articulated, thus closing the achievement gap. (1.1)

    - The school has developed essential learning outcomes (ELO), rooting student learning goals in ten defined elements connecting content, skills and standards. Teachers follow the workshop model structure in lessons and Understanding by Design in unit planning aligned to their beliefs about how students learn best to ensure coherence in the planning process. Teachers receive on-going professional development on effective planning. The school's ELO structure outlines a systematic and rigorous school-wide curriculum that goes beyond CCLS alignment. With CCLS alignment in place, the school is refining their work so that it is streamlined, student-friendly and allows for tracking of student mastery over time. This year, the middle school English language arts teachers rolled out a CCLS aligned, unified ELO curriculum. The other grade levels and content areas are following suit, with full implementation of ELO-based curricula in 2013-14. Middle school students said their ELOs and writing portfolios support them in knowing their strengths and areas for improvements, and allow them to track their progress. Teacher teams are working on the development of horizontal and vertical plans coordinated by the ELO framework. English language arts and social studies teams discussed how they use student work/data to revise plans to meet student needs. Across classrooms, students cognitively engage in rigorous tasks that require them to think, discuss, write and critique the work of others. Teacher lesson plans and units reviewed show

consistency in lesson elements and format as well as multiple levels of questions to engage students. Sample work reviewed shows that the school is emphasizing rigorous habits and skills embedded in a coherent way that leads to a trajectory of skill and content acquisition across grades 6 to 12. While there is consistency in format and design in plans and the ELO framework is used in English language arts grades 6-8, full horizontal and vertical alignment has not been implemented across the school. As a result, the school is limited in its capacity to track student progress by skill and content acquisition across subjects and grades to close the achievement gap.

- Deepen common teaching practices across the school that strategically elicit student thinking, discussion, and writing and promote student ownership of the learning process where all students meet or exceed expectations. (1.2)

    - Across all classrooms, teachers foster high levels of student engagement, questioning and discussion through a variety of flexible student groupings. Engaging students collaboratively in doing the work of grappling with challenging tasks, questions and problems links to a school-wide belief about how student learn best. Providing structures and support to ensure success connects to another belief held by the staff. Teachers provide access to content through visual supports, technology, graphic organizers, and hands-on group tasks with clearly articulated roles for each participant. To support student writing, the English language arts and social studies departments break down the writing process so that students see the relationship between sentences and the information they are presenting in an argument. In both English language arts and social studies, teachers gave anecdotal information about students who have made significant gains in their writing as a result of this structured approach. In one lesson, whole-class facilitated student talk focused on understanding the thinking of others while suspending judgment and then critiquing that reasoning. Despite high levels of student engagement and use of questions and discussion to facilitate student-to-student interaction across the school, there were a few missed opportunities for deeper probing and examination of ideas through more rigorous and sustained questioning. In a couple of group activities observed, not all voices were heard, and in a few teacher-student exchanges during the initial part of the class, once the desired response was received, the teacher moved on. Reviewed student work samples show completion of tasks, understanding of content, choice in use of note-taking strategies, problem solving and clearly articulated explanations. Only one sample of work was incomplete. While it is clear from classrooms visited, lesson plans and work reviewed that teachers follow unified planning structures and incorporate strategies to prompt thinking and support writing, not all strategies allow for decisive access and extension to meet all individual and group needs as well as continuously deepen the level of rigor. As a result, the school's efforts to strategically provide access and extension at increasing levels of rigor and facilitation allowing student ownership across all subjects and grades has not been fully actualized, thus leading to missed opportunities to deepen student understanding and mastery of content.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name:	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
Instructional Core				
To what extent does the school regularly…	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				
To what extent does the school …	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				
To what extent does the school …	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