

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

FREDERICK DOUGLASS ACADEMY VIII

Middle School 452

**1400 Pennsylvania Avenue
Brooklyn, New York
NY 11207**

Principal: Yolanda Martin

Dates of review: January 7-8, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Joyce Stallings-Harte

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Frederick Douglas Academy VIII is a middle school with 293 students from 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 71% Black, 21% Hispanic, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 9% special education students. Boys account for 44% of the students enrolled and girls account for 56%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 94.1%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Teacher teams use performance data from assessments that are aligned to curricula and a common grading policy to monitor and adjust instruction in order to elevate student outcomes. (2.2)
 - The school uses varied assessments aligned to Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and curricula to advance student achievement through the consistent practice of measuring student progress against those targets and modifying instruction based on student outcomes. Teacher teams review the assessments for alignment on an ongoing basis, looking at where students are currently and where they need to be at the end of the unit, noting specific skills for mastery. Students are able to track their performance using Jupiter Grades, the online grading system, as well as 'Mastery Trackers' that are posted in classrooms. These trackers include CCLS for the unit and assessment grades. A student with special education services showed ownership over her learning when she proudly exhibited the work in her portfolio, and expressed her progress and achievements using rubrics and a learning target checklist. Student work is analyzed using a specific protocol that enables teachers to develop a more rigorous analysis of student work proficiencies. Teacher team meeting notes and posted student work indicate the use of rubrics to grade and norm student work aligned to the school's grading policy. On Data Days, teachers look at baseline assessments and group students according to need based on an item analysis that yields skills they need to develop. Teams of teachers participate in Lesson Study and use these data to plan, teach and reteach lessons based on this targeted review of student needs and performance on tasks. All teachers conduct an in-depth mastery of skills review for each unit that notes areas of strength, excellence and improvement and implications for teaching of upcoming units of study work. During teacher team meetings, analysis of student mastery of specific skills on Unit 1 for a grade revealed that across classes, students struggled to identify the central idea from complex text. Teachers implemented the RAC2E3 strategy in reading, an acronym for restate, answer, provide two citations and three pieces of evidence and this strategy has yielded improvement on extended response assessments. Special education students and English language learners were provided graphic organizers to scaffold and structure their responses to the same questions. This specific and targeted review of student data and the precise alignment of ongoing assessments to curriculum and instruction as well as instructional adjustments lead to actionable and purposeful feedback to students and improved student achievement.
- The school strategically develops challenging curricula across subjects and grades, aligned to CCLS that engages students at high levels. (1.1)
 - The principal, administrators and staff hold firmly the belief that all learners must perform at high levels of attainment through engaging, rigorous and tough tasks. The principal deepens staff knowledge of rigor through an intensive, research-based professional study series around increasing rigor in student tasks. As a result of professional study, teachers agreed on the elements of an effective task. They collaboratively crafted challenging

tasks that engage all students in progressive struggle based on the school's belief that students may be uncomfortable as they progress through the learning tasks. Therefore evidence of learning is progressive and not always immediate. Students have transitioned from learning objectives to learning targets with a mid-point check to answer the, 'I can do' statement related to CCLS embedded in each lesson. The school's stated instructional focus of citing and presenting evidence is apparent in planning documents across subjects and grades. Teacher lesson plans indicate thoughtful planning to engage students in meaningful discussion across subjects. A grade 7 English language arts lesson plan asked students to rephrase the essential question, read two op-ed pieces to gather information and respond to a series of questions on author's perspective, benefits and detriments to implementing the author's ideas, how it would affect other countries and comment on the limitations and expansion of freedom if the author's ideas were implemented. According to the lesson plan, students were expected to be able to answer both verbally and in writing, with explicit vocabulary development for English language learners and special education students. This focused and targeted planning to engage all learners in deep discussion using higher-order skills in a low-risk learning environment provides access for all students to rigorous tasks and leads to higher student outcomes.

- Across the school community, adults and students maintain a climate of respect and trust that encourages personal and academic growth and promotes achievement of all students. (1.4)
- The school's mission is to provide a college preparatory curriculum and prepare students to enter prestigious institutions of higher learning. The school's theory of action drives planning, decisions and conversations about the school's efforts to prepare students for higher education and careers. The school provides multiple opportunities for students to be involved in school improvement initiatives. For example, students crafted a survey regarding the usefulness of the school's website and determined that an item such as weather reporting provided no value, so the site was amended to reflect their opinion. The school provides opportunities for student voice in the selection of courses of interest and possible future career and college courses of study. Students report that there are virtually no violent or inappropriate incidents because they are expected to uphold the Scholar's Creed, which communicates respect, academic and moral integrity and citizenship. Additionally, upper grade students are expected to lead the anti-bullying campaign as 8th graders perform skits and assemblies for the incoming 6th graders, lead school tours for prospective students and earn merits for volunteering activities such as City Harvest and the canned food drive. The assistant principal plans the college tours designed to expose students to the expectations of college admissions and merit trips which are designed to encourage and reward exemplary school service. The school provides targeted advisory for incoming 6th graders so that they are acclimated into the school life and culture. School staff including: the principal, assistant principal, advisors, social worker and attendance teacher take responsibility for groups of students' academic, attendance and personal growth. For example, at weekly student support conferences, the social worker discusses progress for an identified group of students and next steps in academic supports, advisory support for attendance and extra-curricular activities for personal development. The individual needs of

all students are identified and met within this structure. This structure has led to a 100% increase in the number of students participating in merit trips, increase in school attendance and the highest number of students achieving honor roll status for the last quarter. The Learning Environment Survey shows that parents feel that the school keeps them informed of their child's progress and performance through Progress Reports, the student work is rigorous, that teachers and staff are available to encourage and support students to persist and engage when the work seems difficult and that teachers and staff treat their children with respect. This concurs with teacher's response on the Learning Environment Survey where 100% of teachers believe that the school teaches students the social and emotional skills needed in high school. This commitment to the development of 'scholars' well-being and supports for student achievement and development of lifelong skills prepare students for college and career.

- The visionary principal and school leaders provide effective programs and policies that promote high expectations across the entire school community, resulting in student progress. (3.4)
 - The principal provides focused and targeted leadership that clearly communicates expectations of elevated academic achievement for students that models excellence while providing supports and responsibility. The principal enforces the central features and tenets of the Frederick Douglass Academy cadre of schools through a series of structures and non-negotiables that are well-known by all community members. The school day begins with the recitation of the Scholar's Creed adopted from nationally recognized, Morehouse College to remind students of the tenets to which they as students must ascribe. All members know that you cannot learn in chaos and the level of behavioral expectations is seen in the Learning Environment Survey as students, teachers and parents emphatically state that the school provides a learning environment that exudes high expectations. Incoming students are aware of the expectations, highlighted in the dramatic improvement in attendance of a student from 5th to 6th grade by 300%. One student reported that he receives advisement support from the school in light of the family's needs, and knows that in order to perform well, he must attend school on a regular basis. Consequently, he is able to produce standard-bearing work and is proud of his accomplishment. Teachers engage in consistent professional development around instruction including the shifts and identified areas of focus for the school. Consequently, teachers provide rigorous instruction of regent's level courses such as Integrated Algebra, Living Environment and French Proficiency, achieving high student pass rates by which students receive high school credits upon graduation from middle school. Teachers advise and hold each other accountable through the regularly scheduled Peer Instructional Coach visits where teachers work together to refine pedagogical practices through demo lessons and co-planning opportunities. Parents comment that their desire is for their children to achieve at higher levels and that they are kept apprised through Jupiter grades, the online grade reporting system, spearheaded by a staff member and quarterly Progress Reports. Parents report that due to the school's focus on college readiness, they have no doubt that their children will attend college and participate in sessions that communicate the expectations and expectations for students. The Learning Environment Survey indicates 97% of parents believe the school has high expectations, 98% of students believe the school expects them to work hard and continue their education after high

school. Students are able to explain the high quality expectations contained in their portfolios and keep track of performance in the multiple grading and assessment structures, including rubrics and projects. As a result, student capacity for achieving at higher levels is increased.

- The principal provides teacher supports through targeted and effective feedback, next steps and review of student work that increases professional growth and reflection. (4.1)
 - The principal elected to participate in a teacher effectiveness pilot program during the 2012 - 2013 school year and has continued this initiative for the 2013 – 2014 school year as reflected in the Comprehensive Education Plan. The Danielson Framework for Teaching, along with the citywide instructional expectations initiative provide core goals and clear practices that the school embraces in order to improve teacher pedagogy and increase student achievement. As a result of their participation in the pilot program, teachers received intensive professional development to norm best practices. Under the Department of Education Middle School Initiative the school participates in the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) and as a participating school has the additional support of a TIF coach and a TIF specialist who work to deepen teacher practice. These purposeful visits to classroom teachers, informed by school leadership observations, result in targeted conversations about student learning and outcomes related to the schools identified instructional foci and teaching practices from the Danielson Framework. Two teachers were selected to serve as Peer Instructional Coaches (PICs) who norm practices with school leaders and support teachers in areas identified as needing improvement. The principal implemented 'speed notes', in addition to the regular formal/informal observation cycle, to note pedagogical practices that could be strengthened through supports by the PICs. For example, one teacher received intensive support from a PIC in increasing student-to-student discussion with visits to the PIC's classroom and in-class support, which has resulted in improved teacher practice. New teachers report that they have developed more rigorous tasks for all learners across subjects with the support of the PICs and veteran teachers. Leadership has developed a professional support intensive that takes a week's observation cycle and highlights areas in need of support so that in-class support by the PIC can be provided. Teacher observations indicate marked improvement in the school-wide goal of increasing rigor in tasks. As a result of this structure of specific and focused differentiated supports for all teachers, pedagogical practices are strengthened leading to improved student outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to deepen teaching practices across the vast majority of classrooms, based on the Danielson Framework, that integrate instructional shifts and lead to even higher levels of student performance for all learners. (1.2)
 - The school is committed to full implementation of the Danielson Framework as noted in the principal's staff meeting notes and professional development calendars. They believe that all students must be fully engaged in rigorous tasks. This is evidenced by open-ended questions, as well as providing multiple forms of representation, means of action and expression. Teachers are provided with a lesson plan template that

ensures planning for diverse learners that incorporate multiple entry points. Teachers are keenly aware that all students are expected to engage in productive struggle for all lessons and teacher planning notes represent attention to rigorous tasks as the result of teachers' professional study. This was evident during a math lesson as a teacher asked students to make conjectures on the sums and products of even and odd numbers and provide evidence visually, using grid paper and tiles. Students reminded each other to present their evidence and to be able to defend their conjecture using a model. Students presented their thinking as other classmates used question stems to further engage and all learners were engaged through heterogeneous groupings and drawings. In the integrated algebra class, groups are based on prior assessments, the bottom third grouped heterogeneously with the top and medial third. All students were observed constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others in small group and whole class discussion. Students receive varied supports such as the use of manipulatives and graphic organizers. In a math class, advanced students were placed in three groups and given tasks requiring application of multilevel problem solving skills requiring them to perform transformations of various diagrams and shapes using a grid. Students showed high levels of participation in classes as teachers implemented the school-wide shift of engaging all learners in student-to-student discussion. While across many classrooms this practice is firmly in place, in some classrooms, where groups are determined randomly there is an over-reliance on heterogeneous grouping to serve as entry into lessons for some learners, thereby potentially missing opportunities to engage students more deeply in learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Frederick Douglass Academy VIII	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 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?				X			
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the 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 supports 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 those expectations?				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 student 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 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?				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