

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

Frederick Douglas Academy VI

High School 260

**8-21 Bay 25th Street
Queens
NY 11691**

Principal Carlston Gray

Dates of review: April 24 – 25, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Frederick Douglas Academy VI is a high school with 413 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 60% Black, 36% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013 - 2014 was 76.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has created a safe and nurturing environment that implements structures to foster a positive culture thus promoting students' academic and personal growth. (1.4)
 - The school's safe and inclusive culture is achieved by its efforts to develop partnerships with outside resources to support student learning and engagement. For example, this year the school implemented the District Attorney Initiative to enable students to discuss elements within the law and promote their self-esteem. Other community based services have been obtained and are providing tutoring and counseling for groups of students. Academic and social clubs, such as the ladies club and the media/computer club, were also started this year, thus providing support conducive to student learning. School wide decisions infuse student voice as evidenced in the opening of computer labs to promote learning and the installation of mirrors in the third floor girls' bathroom to preclude students from entering other schools in the building and to avoid incidents on other floors. Thus, an open door policy with the administration allows all voices to be welcomed and valued. In addition, positive interactions between students and teachers during classroom visits demonstrated that there is a sense of mutual respect for one another. As a result of these efforts, the administration has developed a school culture that encapsulates positive attributes which has resulted in improved student behavior as evidenced during classroom visits.
 - The school provides multiple opportunities to enhance student-learning experiences towards the promotion of academic and personal behaviors. Professional development in the beginning of the year provided teachers with the support in creating improved academic behaviors in students. Teachers volunteer to conduct "Lunch and Learn" interventions with students to provide extra support in areas of need as well as provide additional mentoring guidance. Resulting from these meetings, students reported that their teachers "always motivate them to do better and that helps them for college" thus encouraging them to improve in their studies. The school provides a modified version of the school transcript for students and parents, highlighting how the student is currently performing as compared to the standards. Parents reported that these progress reports, along with Engrade, and meetings with guidance counselors, keep them informed throughout the year regarding their children's progress. As a result of the opportunities provided to parents, teachers and students, the school promotes and demonstrates growth in the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors.
- School leaders have developed a set of focused goals and action plans used to accelerate student learning which are collaboratively set and embraced by all community members. (3.1)
 - School leaders and staff have developed a Comprehensive Education Plan that articulates a set of annual goals and action plans relative to the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE), instructional shifts, is based on

the Progress Report and New York State Regents data, and includes a focused agenda around improving the school graduation rates through monthly faculty and weekly team meetings. For example, professional development provides support for teachers as they integrate daily, in each class, an on-demand writing opportunity for students so they engage with a higher order-thinking question for a portion of the period. In addition, the iLearn program provides intervention for students to improve within their classes, provides reports that are reviewed daily by the administration and program coordinator to determine student progress and track results, and ensure students are logging in regularly. The adjustments of action plans are made based on student progress towards school wide goals. In order to meet the goal of 10+ credits, the administration conducted a mid-year data review of course passing rates and changed the focus of Project 53, a program introduced to a group of ninth grade students this year, to include more Regents preparation. As a result of these instructional efforts and a mid -year review of passing rates, the data reflects 72.7% of students meeting course requirements in core subjects areas, allow the school to show growth towards meeting the goal of 80% of ninth grade students obtaining 10+ credits by 2014.

- Schools leaders make continuous efforts to involve and communicate goals, which lead to an inclusive culture around school improvement and decision-making. The principal includes various constituents in school wide planning process. For example, parents reported that they, “were very involved”, with the goal setting process this year as they wanted “to see positive changes” occur in the school. In addition, students reported that their Congress members share school wide goals via student bulletin boards and they are able to comment about their own concerns. For example, a 0 period was created because students felt they needed more time to work on their projects in the computer lab. As a result of the ongoing communication efforts between the administration and school community, there is shared commitment from all members to improve student learning.
- The principal makes decisions to align key resources in ways that promote the achievement of school wide goals and support professional collaboration to strengthen instructional capacity. (1.3)
 - In an effort to meet instructional goals this year, resources such as Smart boards, a new computer lab, and new science materials were purchased to provide students opportunities to be interactive and fully engaged in the curricula. Teachers and students are fully aware of the materials available to them and are provided training to utilize them to their fullest capacity. For example, one student stated that she enjoys her science class as, “it provides me with an opportunity to do experiments.” In addition, students felt that the iLearn program purchased this year provides them with a chance to improve in their classes by providing them with targeted intervention support. As a result of introducing these initiatives, learning tasks demonstrate growth as evidenced in student work folders.
 - School leaders structure the schedule effectively to integrate teacher teams as part of its school improvement efforts via weekly meetings leading to discussions around instructional practices and review of

student work. All teachers are actively engaged in structured teams by grade and department using the Looking at Student Work Protocol (LASW) to analyze student work, leading to providing supplemental practices for diverse learners. For example, during an inquiry team meeting, teachers used the LASW to analyze and provide instructional strategies to support teacher practice and student improvement in writing essays. At another teacher team meeting, teachers discussed a struggling student and determined an alternative program and guidance strategies to further his engagement in academic tasks. As a result of these structures and conscious efforts to focus on instructional work, instructional capacity has expanded to strengthen teacher practice to improve student learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine the school's curricula to further align key Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and instructional shifts to promote rigor and engage all learners in challenging tasks. (1.1)
 - School leaders and staff are in the process of developing curriculum maps and lesson plans to fully integrate the CCLS and instructional shifts. Currently, staff members utilize units of study from sites such as Engage NY and AMaps. Lesson plans reflect planning to provide some exposure to learning tasks that lead students to rigorous thinking. However, the school has yet to fully adapt all curriculum materials to reflect the instructional shifts embedded in the CCLS and content standards into school wide instructional maps. For example, a review of curriculum materials such as unit of study maps and corresponding lesson plans, demonstrate lack of full alignment and integration of higher order learning tasks reflective of the instructional shifts. Therefore, the school's ability to provide coherent rigorous instruction in all classrooms is hindered.
 - Some lesson plans reflect strategies to provide students some access to learning tasks. Within these planned activities are included the use of mixed level grouping for language and learning purposes, and scaffolded questioning strategies. However, the school's curricula and lesson plans are not fully refined to reflect full access for diverse learners across subject areas. For example, of all the curricula examined, only the Engage NY math curriculum for Integrated Algebra contained scaffolding boxes with suggestions of strategies for teachers to utilize to in order to provide diverse learners access to rigorous learning tasks. As a result of the absence in this refinement of units, all students miss out on being engaged in the work.
- Strengthen teacher practices of school's beliefs to enable teachers to provide rigorous instruction to diverse learners while embedding multiple entry points to fully engage students in challenging tasks. (1.2)
 - The school is working towards developing classroom practices that foster higher order thinking around student discussion. This effort is providing student opportunities to be engaged in groups with others through meaningful discussion. For example, in one class, students worked together to analyze water samples, cultivating a meaningful discussion within some groups. However, similar use of these practices was not

prevalent in all classrooms. Although many classes reflected grouping practices for the purpose of engaging students in discussion, several teachers' voices out-weighed the students', reflecting an uneven balance of question and response as informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and embedded in the instructional shifts. The inconsistency of student opportunities for meaningful discussion hinders the ability for all students to be engaged purposefully in the curricula.

- Classroom practices are beginning to formulate a set of pedagogical beliefs around grouping students in mixed-level groups. Many of the classes visited emphasized student groups and encouragement of students' active involvement in the class lesson. For example, in one class, students were placed in mixed-leveled groups to engage in work leading to defending and disputing events in the Greek tragedy, *Antigone*. The teacher provided meaningful support to groups of students in the class by providing insights into the best places to capture evidence to support their claim about the character. However, teaching practices to support struggling students were not made evident consistently across classrooms, which led to uneven levels of engagement, impeding students' ability to fully demonstrate higher order thinking skills for specific learning tasks.
- Enhance the use of assessments to include ongoing checks for understanding in order to provide students with actionable feedback and opportunities to self-reflect in support of adjusting instruction to meet all students' learning needs. (2.2)
 - The school uses a variety of formative assessment tools to determine student progress throughout the year. The use of rubrics, quizzes, and on-demand writing tasks are prevalent across content areas. Recently, the grading policy was updated by the school administration to reflect a set of rigorous expectations aligned to CCLS. However, a review of work products reflected an uneven amount of feedback support provided to students. For example, student writing products reflected minimal amounts of written feedback only providing vague thought questions, a grade score, and/or comments such as, Great job!. The lack of effective, actionable feedback hinders students' ability to improve performance on learning tasks.
 - School leaders set clear expectations for the use of formative assessment practices. Teachers are beginning to use questioning strategies to determine student progress during a lesson. For example, in one class, a teacher asked questions to see if students understood the purpose and directions of a lab assignment. In another class, a teacher asked students to self-reflect and grade themselves using a classroom rubric. However, across classrooms, assessment practices are not consistently ongoing and do not include opportunities for student self-reflection. The lack of self-assessment hinders students' ability to effectively have ownership of their own learning. Furthermore, inconsistent checks for understanding does not allow for sufficient in-the-moment adjustments to lessons, resulting in missed opportunities to meet students' diverse learning needs.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: Frederick Douglas Academy VI	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