



**Department of
Education**

Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Frederick Douglass Academy III Secondary School

Secondary School X517

**3630 Third Avenue
Bronx
NY 10456**

Principal: Rahesha Amon

**Date of review: January 16, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jacqueline Gonzalez**

The School Context

Frederick Douglass Academy III Secondary School is a Secondary School with 410 students from 6 through grade 12. The school population comprises 51% Black, 47% Hispanic, 0.7% White, and 0.5% Asian students. The student body includes 11% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 82.3%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	------------------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

School leaders and staff systematically emphasize high expectations for professionalism and academic excellence to the entire school community via several modes of communication. Support is provided through professional development for teachers and feedback to students about their progress places them on a path to college and careers.

Impact

The school's culture reflects a unified set of expectations that students will attain and exceed standards thus all students demonstrate and express ownership of their educational experience. Communication structures ensure a high level of trust and mutual accountability between parents and staff.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers engage in professional development focused on aligning instructional practices with the expectations of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. These meetings are ongoing and content is also embedded in grade level and department meetings held weekly. Additionally expectations are built into the observation and feedback cycles. Teachers say the feedback they receive through inter- and intra-departmental observations by colleagues and supervisors is meaningful and leads to self-reflection and improved practice. Specifically, teachers state that the feedback about the rigor and level of questions they ask during lessons keeps them accountable to the high expectations they must maintain to ensure that lessons prepare their students for college and career.
- High expectations for students include the Frederick Douglass Academy III (FDA) core values. These are focused by grade: Grade 9 - Respect, Grade 10 - Community awareness, Grade 11 - Valuing education and Grade 12 - Professionalism. Core values are reinforced through a scaffold of Advisory Curriculum Projects activities that are built around development of study skills, preparedness for the world of work and higher education and citizenship. Students participate in college internships and career day events that enable them to make real world connections between academic excellence, community awareness and the school's emphasized core values thus they are supported in reaching and exceeding expectations.
- The school's numerous activities for parents keep stakeholders informed and supports families in ensuring that their children have the appropriate tools to succeed in college and careers. Parents state that the principal, administrators and staff have very high expectations for excellence and success beyond graduation. The newsletters, Family nights, scholarship and financial aid workshops for parents help them to prepare for the expectations of the world beyond graduation. Parents appreciate the principal's accessibility and care and concern for their children. As a result, parents and students have been exposed to a variety of colleges and post-graduation opportunities and internships and feel supported in making sound decisions for their children.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
---------------------------	---------------------	----------------	-------------------

Findings

Pedagogy is aligned to the curricula, reflects a shared set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and the instructional shifts. Teachers consistently provide lessons that engage students in discussion and rigorous tasks.

Impact

Across classrooms, teachers use learning targets and scaffolds for vocabulary and ensure that discussions reflect the use of academic and content language. In some lessons, however, the lesson prioritized skill development via reading strategies over analysis of text, thus leading to inconsistent ownership of content and concepts.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's articulated beliefs about how students learn best are reflected in their "What we Believe" document which states in summary that daily instructional practices should include Common Core aligned lessons that include assessment of learning objectives, opportunities for students to write across content areas, and daily reflection by teachers on student work. Across classrooms lessons reflect these beliefs and provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in high level discussions and analysis of text. For example in a lesson on Osmosis, the teacher provides time and opportunity for students to analyze what happens to a gummy bear when soaked in water. Discussion and questions between students as they made decisions about how to measure differences in the before and after volume of the candy. They analyzed data, prioritized their findings and talked to each other as the teacher prompted them with guiding questions to facilitate higher order thinking.
- Aligned to the instructional shifts, students are consistently asked to provide evidence for their answers by referring to the text or to the information provided as in an English class where students engaged in analyzing a quote or in an algebra class where students worked in differentiated groups to solve a mathematical problem and provide a rationale for the type of line plot they selected to represent data. Most lessons focused students on the content language and learning targets and ended with some type of summary, exit slip or review of the lesson aim. Thus all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, have access to rigorous tasks and opportunities to demonstrate their thinking.
- All lessons provide scaffolds determined by teachers' use of data to identify the needs of students as evidenced by a review of instructional plans and student groupings. Learners' needs are addressed in a variety of ways such as re-teaching strategies, modified tasks, vocabulary supports and graphic organizers. In most lessons, strategies and acronyms, task specific rubrics and self-reflection support all learners. However, some lessons focused more on the scaffold strategy than on the actual content and potentially shifted students' focus from the actual objective of the lesson. For example, in one lesson aimed at deep analysis of a quote, students were asked to write questions in a graphic organizer in four sections: Clarifying, Questioning, Summarizing and Prediction. While these and other strategies are extremely helpful to students, they did not allow students to focus on the importance of the literature or textual information presented or for the opportunity to take ownership of the subject matter.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	-----------------------	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

All curricula across grades and content areas are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and are strategically revised and refined based on analysis of student work and data. All learners have access to cognitively engaging and challenging tasks.

Impact

The strategic integration of instructional shifts in the curriculum results in lessons and academic tasks that promote college and career readiness for all students. The analysis of student work results in a carefully designed menu of scaffolds and strategies, and the branding of grades by concepts and skills to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The schools administrators and teachers have engaged in professional development for curriculum design. Using understanding by design as the process for ensuring a coherent and consistent instructional program. The school's math curriculum for example builds on skills and concepts from grade to grade aligned to the common core shift of coherence. This unique feature of the school's curriculum is called department branding. For each content area at each grade level specific skills are named and teachers develop tasks and opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of those skills as they progress through increasingly complex courses in math.
- Lesson plans include specific learning targets and objectives. Additionally all lessons include the use of scaffolding strategies to provide access for all students to rigorous learning experiences. Examples of scaffolds reflected in reviewed lesson plans include vocabulary development which aligns to the academic vocabulary shift in the Common Core and includes strategies, graphic organizers, differentiated activities based on student learning needs.
- Revisions of curriculum and lessons are made based on the analysis of student work and formative assessment data. Teachers systematically use protocols for looking at student work, and determine mastery of concepts for each unit of study. Revisions are then made to curriculum to address the gaps in student learning. These changes have included changes in sequence of topics, additional lessons for re-teaching within the units and the selection of culturally relevant and appropriately challenging materials to support student learning.

Findings

Across classrooms, teachers consistently use rubrics, assessments, student self-reflection and protocols for looking at student work to create a clear portrait of student mastery. Teachers provide verbal and written feedback to students regarding their progress and next steps in meeting their learning targets.

Impact

The school adjusts curricula and teachers make instructional adjustments across subjects and grades based on assessments and data, leading to improved student progress and work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use standards based and task specific rubrics across grades and subjects to assess student work. This consistency enables teachers to analyze work together to determine student progress within the unit of study or a particular lesson. One team for example, noted that students were lacking in providing text based evidence of their claims and adjusted lessons to ensure that in both verbal and written responses students provided substantial reference of text when summarizing or providing an opinion.
- Teacher teams systematically analyze data for their grade and subject area to develop action plans and make necessary curriculum and instructional adjustments. For example, English teachers analyzed a benchmark performance task and determined a 15% increase for 11th graders scoring at levels two and three in reading. Science teachers analyzed a fall benchmark, performance task and noted an overall improvement for all students, as well as targeted subgroups of learners, in the areas of the data analysis of causative and correlative information and in using charts and graphs to represent data.
- Students say that the feedback teachers give them about their writing, their projects and classwork has helped them to improve and prepare for their next learning goals. For example one student indicated that his teacher gave him strategies for note taking that have helped to him to improve studying for all his subjects and as a result he is now on the honor roll and in an advanced placement class. Another student spoke of a teacher who gave him feedback about the content of his writing although his grammar was lacking since English is not his first language. She then gave him feedback about the grammar which kept him motivated to write and believes that her feedback has helped him in all subjects. Student work across the school also reflects teachers' written comments based on rubric elements that students can use for self-reflection and revision.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
---------------------------	---	----------------	-----------------------

Findings

Teacher teams systematically analyze student work and data and reflect on instructional practices. Teachers also participate in school wide decision making that improves teacher practice and affects student learning across the school.

Impact

The school's structured professional collaborations and implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards result in improved teacher practices and key decisions that lead to enhanced student learning.

Supporting Evidence

- The school's structured collaborations for teachers include grade level teams and weekly department meetings. Teachers call these collaborations the backbone of the school and appreciate the structured time as well as the frequent voluntary collaboration with their colleagues. The vast majority of teachers are able to plan together, analyze student work and discuss instructional strategies to support the improvement of student work and student led discussions in the classrooms. Additionally, teachers state they use this time to create tools to hold one another accountable for grade level objectives and standards mastery. For example, they develop rubrics and other practical tools and design academic tasks that promote a variety of ways for students to demonstrate higher order thinking skills. These practices have enabled teachers to strengthen their own instructional capacity, especially around questioning and discussion techniques, and have led to improved progress on Common Core Learning Standards performance tasks across subject areas as evidenced by the analysis of formative assessments from the fall.
- Student academic confidence is a specific area of improvement that teachers have noted as a result of the collaboration and development of grade level branding. Across the school, clear expectations are stated for every moment that students are in the classroom and specific goals for skill mastery are shared with students. Students are able to self-assess and monitor their progress. This has increased student motivation for owning their progress towards academic achievement.
- Teacher leadership is encouraged and supported across the school. Department chairs and grade level leaders are able to collaborate across grades to make key decisions around curriculum, instructional strategies, inter-visitations and professional development of their colleagues. The administration is very supportive of initiatives led by teachers' including mentoring of new teachers, collegial team teaching and interdisciplinary projects that encourage teachers to work together across content areas. Teachers state that the principal trusts and empowers them to make decisions. They feel supported by the leadership and appreciate the opportunities to be creative within their subject and grade level responsibilities. This distributive leadership has engendered a culture of trust and mutual accountability for helping students achieve high standards.