



# Quality Review Report

## 2015-2016

**Frederick Douglass Academy VIII Middle School**

**Middle School K452**

**1400 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11239**

**Principal: Chantal Grandchamps**

**Date of review: March 11, 2016  
Lead Reviewer: Claudette Essor**

## The School Context

Frederick Douglass Academy VIII is a middle school with 307 students from grade 6 through grade 8. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 5% Asian, 72% Black, 23% Hispanic, and 0% White students. The student body includes 2% English Language Learners and 15% students with disabilities. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 95.0%.

## School Quality Criteria

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

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and staff consistently communicate expectations for high levels of mutual accountability for teaching and learning across the school. All staff members communicate expectations to and partner with families to support all students in meeting college and career readiness goals.

### Impact

Effective communication of and support for high expectations result in strong partnerships among staff and families and shared accountability for improving achievement by all staff and students.

### Supporting Evidence

- During the teacher team meetings, several teachers stated that the principal sets clear expectations for teaching and learning through a school-wide instructional focus on “high-quality student centered discussions and writing throughout the content areas.” The staff handbook shows that all teachers are expected to deliver data-driven instruction with multiple entry points and effective questioning and discussion techniques that maximize student thinking and engagement in lessons across all content areas and grades. During weekly team meetings, all staff members work to determine how to meet all expectations. The principal uses reviews of unit and lesson plans, feedback from observations, and regular analyses of student data to hold all staff accountable for all expectations.
- The principal issues a weekly newsletter, the “Monday Memo”, and a “Principal’s Message” bulletin that keep all staff informed about high expectations for teaching and learning. The newsletter identifies the week’s learning targets and reminds all staff of class work and homework expectations for all grades and subjects. School leaders also distribute an assessment calendar, *Depth of Knowledge* (DOK) question stems and a variety of templates that underscore expectations related to lesson study, analysis of student work and data, as well as unit and lesson planning. The principal trains all staff to meet the expectations, via weekly school-based meetings, reviews of videos, lab site model lessons, intervisitations, conferences and workshops. Teachers received training in topics such as questioning and discussion, student engagement and assessment in instruction.
- During the meeting with families, they all stated that they are regularly invited to workshops and conferences, especially on Tuesdays, where they learn about expectations for their children. They noted that staff members communicate expectations to them through text messages, telephone calls, emails, curriculum nights, open house events, the school website and a “Parent Power Hour” that allows families to visit classrooms. Several added that they receive a monthly newsletter, which offers an overview of curricula and reminds them of expectations for class work and homework. Another reported that she attended a meeting that informed families about college trips and requirements for high school. Families also stated that they attend workshops with their children, engage in book club activities at the school and are now working on a handbook for families. Utilizing progress reports and credit alerts that are sent home and posted on Jupiter Grades, an online data portal, all staff members partner with families in accelerating student progress towards high school and college readiness goals. “Mastery Averages by Skill” reports from two English Language Arts (ELA) unit assessments and gains analysis data from two math mock exams show improvement in achievement by a majority of students in all classes.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Proficient**

### Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies and academic tasks immerse all students in rigorous work and discussions. However, instructional strategies do not illustrate consistent use of extensions of tasks for students at diverse levels.

### Impact

While academic tasks foster higher-order thinking and learning across classrooms, there are missed opportunities to further deepen student learning via completion of tasks that allow all students to demonstrate high levels of ownership of learning.

### Supporting Evidence

- In the classrooms visited, teachers provided visual supports and scaffolds for students to be highly engaged in learning. In a science class, the teacher used manipulatives such as a salt solution, several microscope slides, tissue and a red onion, to guide students in an investigation of the process of diffusion/osmosis. Working with a partner, students recorded their findings on a worksheet and drew a diagram of the cell structure, which they viewed on slides placed under a microscope. In an ELA class, the teacher used an interactive white board to display lesson steps, review a rubric for scoring short response items and connect the rubric to a short response exemplar. Then she distributed a handout with the poem, "Please Don't Steal My Air Jordans," and a rubric for students to use in crafting and peer-editing their own short response to a question. In both classes, the teachers provided additional support as needed to support completion of the task.
- In most classrooms visited, tasks and lessons facilitated student participation in discussions driven by high-level student-generated questions. In a science class the teacher used a Fishbowl discussion protocol that resulted in peer to peer questioning, as students read and discussed findings from an article about the effect of types of surfaces on friction. They used accountable talk stems and cited evidence from the text in asking questions of and responding to questions from peers. As part of their study of American Colonists and the American Revolutionary War, students in a social studies class also engaged in peer-peer conversations, while using inferences about sets of pictures posted along a wall, to determine whether the snapshots of people and objects illustrated the construct of "revolution" versus "reaction". The high level of engagement of students in peer-to-peer dialogue seen in these two classrooms was not evident in a few other classrooms visited.
- In classrooms visited there was evidence of differentiated tasks or differentiated approaches to tasks for individual or groups of learners. For example, in a math class, groups of students worked on different problem sets involving manipulations of slope and intercept. However tasks involved students responding to teacher generated learning activities that did not typically offer more advanced students opportunities to tackle higher-level tasks, as extensions to curricula. In an ELA class, all students were told to use post-its to do a stop and jot while reading independently for 20 minutes. In another class, all students spent the observed period reading one page of text and using a highlighter to note lines that represent a "detail" versus a statement of "inference". In both cases, students who finished early did not receive a new task or an extension of the task to further their learning.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

All curricula are strategically aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and illustrate the integration of instructional shifts. Through horizontal and vertical planning, teachers collaborate to develop highly rigorous tasks for all learners.

### Impact

All students have ready access to curricula designed to promote college and career readiness and academic tasks provide multiple opportunities for all students to demonstrate high levels of thinking across grades and subjects.

### Supporting Evidence

- Curriculum maps provide an overview of topics, content and sample tasks for each unit of instruction across all content areas and grades. Teachers use modules from *Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP)* curriculum to support the infusion of literacy-based tasks across all content areas. A newly implemented humanities pilot program integrates *TCRWP* curriculum with the existing social studies curriculum. Math curricula include the Common Core-aligned *GO Math!* program and units of study linked to *EngageNY* resources, for additional focus on math instructional shifts and word problems. Content from the New York City scope and sequence and Common Core-aligned texts guide inquiry-based instruction in social studies and science.
- Driven by a school-wide instructional focus on student engagement, teachers create curriculum maps and unit plans that illustrate tasks designed for both enrichment and acceleration of students across diverse ability levels in all classrooms. In addition to units of instruction for day-to-day core content classes, tasks for Regents level course work in Algebra 1, Living Environment, French, and humanities, all combine to extend curricula offerings for students. Project-based learning focused on 21st Century skills and strategies, along with offerings in visual arts, strings, African drumming, African dance and other dance courses, further infuse college and career readiness content for all learners.
- Guided by a lesson planning template, all units of study reflect alignment to Common Core Learning Standards and include topics, focus questions, texts, essential understandings, embedded assessments, target vocabulary, sample tasks, skills, and strategies linked to a common theme for guided and independent work across all content areas. Each unit also includes a culminating performance task and a Common Core aligned rubric for assessing levels of student mastery of content and skills taught. A sample task from one unit required students to write a position paper in response to the question, "Should Child Soldiers Be Granted Amnesty?" An argumentative writing task from another unit required students to use current events articles to express their opinion, by creating claims and supporting them with textual evidence and reasons. The units included task-specific rubrics as measures of student proficiency on the tasks.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use formative and summative assessments, aligned with the school's curricula, to create a clear portrait of student mastery of targeted skills. Using common assessments, teachers evaluate and track students' progress and implement instructional adjustments based on identified learning needs.

### Impact

Teachers' effective use of data to provide other staff and all students with meaningful and actionable feedback results in adjustments to instruction that contribute to improved student mastery of learning goals.

### Supporting Evidence

- Using a variety of task-specific rubrics, all teachers provide students with feedback about their strengths and next steps for progress towards achieving learning goals for all grades and content areas. During the meeting with students, they all exhibited work samples to which a task-specific rubric, such as a narrative writing or argumentative writing rubric, was attached. These targeted rubrics highlight the content, process and skills required for a given rating at each performance level of the applicable rubric. On one work sample, the teacher used rubric-based feedback to commend the student for citing relevant details from the text to support the claim and counterclaim. The rubric attached to the work explicitly called for the work to address that criterion. Homework projects illustrate similar feedback aligned to a rubric that also requires the use of text-based evidence in response to tasks.
- There is a school-wide grading policy that is linked to common unit assessments, Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) baselines and Regents exams. Samples of work in student folders illustrate teachers' use of a common template designed to capture rubrics-based feedback, including next steps, as applicable to every content area. Team meeting agendas and minutes show that teacher leaders facilitate item skills analysis of assessments, helping all teachers gauge student progress and identify areas for enrichment and/or intervention. Teachers spend designated time on "data-driven Fridays" working on mini assessments and analyzing the results to make strategic adjustments to instruction. For example, given a finding that many students struggle with word problems in math, teachers revised curricula to link math vocabulary to more performance tasks that reflect real world applications of math concepts and skills.
- The school leader presented an assessment plan that demonstrated how teachers use common assessments, such as *GO Math!* chapter and unit assessments, running records periodic assessments, baseline assessments, mock exams and Common Core-aligned performance tasks, to track student progress across grades and subjects. Teachers also embed pre-assessments, projects, end-of-unit tests and short constructed response items in unit plans for all grades and content areas. Item skills data charts and spreadsheets with class and school level data presented by school staff, illustrate ongoing tracking of student achievement across grades. A review of assessment reflection reports from teachers also indicates that all teachers complete assessment analysis logs as part of school-wide tracking of growth in student performance, especially in ELA and math.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

Teachers meet regularly to systematically analyze instructional practices and develop strategies for improving staff and student achievement. Distributive leadership structures facilitate teacher collaboration with school leaders to make critical decisions about teaching and learning.

### Impact

Through extensive teamwork, teachers regularly reflect on their pedagogy and play an integral role in key decisions that improve teacher capacity and student outcomes across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet weekly in cycles of inquiry, during which members of the teams engage in activities such as using a protocol to examine student work and data, developing or revising curricula and designing curricular and instructional adjustments to improve student mastery of Common Core Learning Standards and instructional shifts. For example, on the first Monday of each month, teachers meet in content teams. On the other Mondays teams rotate across cycles of grade specific and whole school inquiry work where they engage in professional learning activities that include analyzing data, looking at student work or engaging in lesson study. They use Mastery Trackers with both classroom and individual student level data to identify standards and skills that need to be taught or retaught, based on the number of students showing low levels of mastery, in each class.
- The teacher team observed during the Quality Review examined a reading selection with multiple choice items from a past standardized assessment exam, to identify skill areas and instructional strategies for moving students towards mastery of the skills embedded in the items. A protocol for teamwork and an “Inquiry Cycle” document guided the teachers in collaboratively outlining steps that they would take in creating and implementing a mini-lesson that targets those skills. The participants focused on characteristics of the items, features of the answer choices and vocabulary words that may lead to incorrect choices. They agreed to revise the selection to chunk the content, use one portion for guided work and the other for follow-up independent work and use a graphic to draw attention to the “big idea” or central theme of the selection. Using spreadsheets with data from pre- and post-unit assessments, they described how similar interventions and shared ideas are yielding improvement in teacher practice and student mastery of learning targets.
- During both team meetings, teachers stated that shared leadership is demonstrated via school leaders’ designation of teacher leaders as peer collaborative teacher, model teachers, curriculum and assessment coordinator, and advisors, all of which confer responsibility for high level decision making. As part of weekly cabinet meetings, the curriculum and assessment coordinator and members of the teacher leader team provide input in decisions about activities such as the selection and development of curriculum materials, evaluation of instructional practices and design of assessments. These leaders work directly with their peers, framing school goals, guiding data analysis, and developing curricula and instructional initiatives, including intervisitations. The principal credits teamwork for the levels of individual teacher growth seen via observations and presented color-coded spreadsheets with data showing improved student achievement across iterations of school level assessments in ELA and math.