



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2015-2016

Frederick Douglass Academy

Secondary School M499

**2581 7th Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10039**

Principal: Joseph Gates

**Date of review: May 10, 2016
Lead Reviewer: Debra Freeman**

The School Context

Frederick Douglass Academy is a secondary school with 1412 students from grade 6 through grade 12. In 2015-2016, the school population comprises 1% Asian, 71% Black, 23% Hispanic, and 2% White students. The student body includes 3% English Language Learners and 12% students with disabilities. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2014-2015 was 93.3%.

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	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	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	Proficient
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	Focus	Developing

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations aligned to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* to the entire staff, and teacher teams and staff establish a culture for learning that consistently communicates high expectations to all students.

Impact

School leaders provide training to support all staff in meeting expectations and students receive ongoing feedback to prepare for the next level.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal expects all department teams to identify Problems of Practice (POP) utilizing a protocol and to establish a theory of action for addressing the POP aligned to the school's goal to deepen student engagement and achievement. The principal modeled a school-wide POP, students' inconsistent exposure to Common Core exams caused "lackluster results," to begin the process. As a result of this expectation, all department teams have articulated POPs evident in curricula documents. For example, the social studies department's POP is to strengthen students' literacy, therefore teachers create more opportunities for students to read and discuss texts in class. The science and technology team is focused on creating a strong system for tracking student scholarship data and saw an 83% increase in pass rates as of January 2016.
- School leaders expect all teachers to engage in student-centered practices, and leaders provide ongoing feedback to celebrate these practices such as partnering students to design models in science and engaging students in Socratic seminars. Additionally, during weekly professional development time, teams revise curricula and share approaches that put students at the center of their learning. The move toward student-to-student engagement was evident across most classrooms.
- The school's grade level assemblies provide a venue for communicating expectations to students. For example, students are reminded about the eleven Advanced Placement (AP) courses offered such as AP Chemistry, English Language or Microeconomics that, as one eleventh grade student noted, provide a realistic experience of the sacrifices that come with college life. Five guidance counselors and college office staff offer information sessions to introduce students and families to The City College of New York Urban Scholars program for tutoring and colleges tours, and, during February break, students participate in The New York City Omega Black College Tour. The school offers workshops to begin the college planning process for middle school students and their families. While high school students attend the school's college fair that hosts 100 colleges, middle school students attend their own college fair. Finally, all high school students receive grade-level college readiness checklists that keep them abreast of the path to college.
- One ninth grader discussed the difficult transition to high school given the tightly timed exams with extensive reading and writing. "My teacher taught the class to stop, reread, and figure out what a question is really asking. We all thought we were so smart, but now we have to think outside the box to be prepared for college."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Developing
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Findings

The majority of teachers engage in professional team collaborations that are beginning to connect to school goals. Teacher teams inconsistently analyze data and student work for students they share.

Impact

School team use of the inquiry approach is developing across teams, and the work does not consistently result in progress toward goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- This year the principal piloted a five-week middle school testing initiative to provide teams with a tool for tracking student progress in reading and writing stamina. The spreadsheets reviewed offered item analyses of student proficiency on Common Core specific exam questions. Although logistical challenges interfered with consistent exam scheduling, after examining assessment results, the English Language Arts (ELA) team learned that although eighth graders were proficient in identifying a central idea, students struggled with understanding satiric texts or texts with opposing viewpoints. This guided the team's decision to engage students in reading a variety of texts that offer multiple perspectives. The team also used the "They-Say-I-Say" template to strengthen students' comprehension. Additionally, a teacher's notes on the tracker indicated that students were to be grouped according to standard deficit. However, strategic grouping based on this or other assessments were not in evidence in classrooms visited. Additionally, in two high school classes students stated that they were grouped based on where they sat in the class, and in another that they remained in the same groups all year.
- All department teams establish a problem of practice to improve instruction. For example, the math department's problem of practice is to create more opportunities for students to "converse with substantive and intellectual thinking." This formed the team's theory of action, if the team provides students with sentence starters/prompts to facilitate student-to-student discourse, student responses will reflect intellectual thinking. In the two math classrooms visited, students engaged in small groups to support each other in rewriting equations, sketching functions, or in one group, to catch up absentee peers. Although students were conversing with each other, there was inconsistent evidence of implementation of the team's decision to provide sentence starters or prompts to promote student-to-student discourse in the portions of lessons observed.
- The ELA department team engaged in a discussion centered on supporting students at varying levels and test experiences with performance on the June Regents exam. One teacher noted that his students across levels scored well in writing, but not with multiple choice or reading comprehension questions. His next step was to align his test questions to mirror those on the Regents. Two team members suggested studying the root of questions so that students learn not to spend more than 45 seconds on each, chunking texts, and creating a student-friendly rubric. Although several team members shared suggestions and best practices, only one teacher grounded the discussion in student data. Additionally, absent of a protocol, many teachers did not share their ideas during the meeting.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The school uses common assessments to determine student progress toward goals across most grades and subjects. Teachers' assessment practices reflect ongoing use of checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Teachers adjust curricula and instruction based on student progress to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- A ninth grade ELA teacher regularly administers common Regents aligned assessments to monitor her students' reading and writing skills. The fall and January assessments revealed that 50% percent of her students scored below proficiency in citing central ideas and the use of literary techniques to convey an idea in texts. With this skill deficit in mind, the teacher refocused her lessons on author's craft to "help [students] understand that writers express messages in their work." After the January assessment surfaced that students were also struggling to construct text-based responses, the teacher extended her unit to include complementary texts such as Nina Simone's *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* and Langston Hughes poems to foster text-based Socratic seminar discussions. The teacher shared that "We are working more slowly and deliberately to read actively and discuss ideas" prior to students' analytical writing. This focus has resulted in a range of ninth grade students, from four to nine in each class, earning proficiency in text analysis from the January to the March assessment. A sampling of student writing reflected increased improvements in students' understanding of the central idea, and in writing evidence-based essays.
- Humanities and ELA teachers track student progress and adjust their practice. For example, after analysis of October and November assessment data, a twelfth grade teacher noted that students were not using relevant evidence to support essay claims and adjusted her lesson to focus on annotation techniques for gathering evidence. Due to this emphasis on text analysis, student essays reviewed showed progress in citing evidence and students' grades improved by 20% from October to May. Similarly, after examining the March assessment, the data surfaced that 69.8% of ELA students struggled to identify the central idea in a text and 56.3% mastered analyzing how text evidence illustrates the main idea. An ELA teacher also focused on annotation but adjusted it so that students tracked text evidence for one literary element. In the April assessment a six-paragraph essay, 74% of the students tested increased in their mastery of organization.
- Teachers check for student understanding during lessons. For example, during a math lesson as the teacher checked in with student groups, he noticed that students were not recording text information, and stopped to remind them to. In a second math class, when a student raised a question regarding the process for translating a soccer team dilemma to a sketch, the teacher instructed students to turn and talk, and to arrive at the answer on their own. Students reflected on their learning when they engaged in Socratic seminar discussions and ninth graders use rubrics to support their work in reading groups.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and emphasize rigorous habits.

Impact

Curricula and tasks promote college and career readiness and provide opportunities for all learners to engage in higher-order skills across grades and subjects.

Supporting Evidence

- All teachers design curriculum maps that include targeted Common Core Learning Standards, essential questions such as “How do feedback mechanisms help maintain homeostasis?”, or “How does science fiction capture society’s fears?”, and either an overarching goal or a learning objective. Additionally, teachers include their team’s theory of action in lesson plans. For example, a sixth grade ELA lesson plan with a focus on “discussion methods that engage students in respectful dialogue” indicated that after students independently consider survival methods on a desert island, they move into small group discussions with identified roles such as chairperson or secretary to share their thinking. After group discussions end, students complete an evaluation of their group’s process and then come together to share discussion highlights. The teacher then introduces the “touchstone” non-fiction text, *The Royal Commentaries of the Inca*, and students connect their groups’ ideas to the central idea in the non-fiction text. The lesson plan’s culminating task requires students to write short responses comparing characters in two texts studied.
- In a ninth grade lesson plan the essential questions focus on how Socratic seminars support text comprehension and the advantages and disadvantages of assimilating into American culture. According to the lesson plan, students prepare for the seminar by annotating two scenes from the play, *A Raisin in the Sun* and an article, *Assimilation: Black America’s Elusive Goal*. Students generate questions using Bloom’s Taxonomy to target questions that reflect levels 4, 5, and 6, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation such as “How does bleaching one’s skin relate to assimilation?”, or “How do you think Beneatha deals with the expectations placed on her by her race and gender?” Based on the lesson plan reviewed, students in the inner circle discuss the connection between the fiction and non-fiction texts, while students in the outer circle evaluate how well the discussion results in text-based analysis and high level questioning. Therefore, such student-led discussions and attention to high level questioning engage students in higher-order thinking.
- An eighth grade lesson plan’s essential question, “How do we identify Newton’s Laws of Motion?” indicated that prior to designing a balloon rocket laboratory experiment, students formulate a hypothesis and identify the variables they would isolate to test one at a time. The lesson also indicated that students would observe the teacher’s demonstration and then design their own experiments using balloons, a straw, string, a measuring tape, and a stopwatch. The culminating question requires students to determine if the outcome of their experiment represents more than one of Newton’s laws.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect a set of beliefs about how students learn best and student discussions reflect high levels of participation.

Impact

The school's belief about student learning is informed by the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and student participation reflects high levels of student thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal noted that the work to create greater opportunities for student-centered practices is yielding results. For example in a United States history class, students engaged in editing each other's essays using the State's document-based essay writing rubric and scoring guidelines. Each student recorded observations in response to a set of checklist writing prompts such as "Does this essay make an argument about how the Cold War affected other nations?" and "Does the essay include outside information?" After completion, students were required to provide evidence to support their checklist responses such as "What evidence does the writer use to prove his/her thesis?" One student noted that this helped her to focus on each part of her essay and another student shared that peer editing is also done in students' English classes.
- In a chemistry laboratory class, students worked in groups with plain and peanut M&M candies to learn about how isotopes decay, and to practice performing half-life calculations. Students recorded the number of "radioactive Candyium" (plain M&Ms) by shaking the bag, pouring the contents onto their desks, removing half of the "radioactive atoms" and recording their findings. After repeating the process several times, students were to predict how long it would take for all of the atoms to decay. Students understood the purpose of the experiment and that the candy represented the radioactive isotopes and how their repeated process of removal simulated half-life decay. Another student offered that this lab "helps us to visualize what we are learning in class about radioactivity," and a second student shared that they were also learning about how "radioactive isotopes are used to detect brain tumors." All students recorded findings, were required to translate their data analysis onto graphs, and were deeply engaged in discussion.
- After a Socratic seminar that focused on how men can get stuck in gender roles, ninth graders reflected on the discussion. To prepare them the teacher asked what constructive criticism is, and a student shared that it is "something you need to work on." The teacher then asked about how to reference texts, and several students offered that they annotate, analyze and show a passage's significance. Students in the inner and outer circles reflected on their peers' performance in areas such as engagement in discussion, responses to another speaker, eye contact, and avoiding interrupting a speaker. Reflection questions such as "If you changed your opinion during the discussion, what changed it?" or "What was your overall opinion of the Socratic seminar?" engaged all students in small group discussions. Students offered next steps for their next seminar such as more frequent references to the text and text to world connections.