Quality Review Report
2017-2018

Frederick Douglass Academy
Secondary School 05M499
2581 7Th Avenue
Manhattan
NY 10039

Principal: Ayisha Fullerton
Dates of Review: February 1, 2018 - February 2, 2018
Lead Reviewer: Rod Bowen
The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Celebration** to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the **Area of Focus** to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as **Additional Finding**. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Frederick Douglass Academy serves students in grade 6 through grade 12. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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</table>
### School Culture

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<thead>
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<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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### Systems for Improvement

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<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Developing</td>
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Findings

The school leaders and staff are developing expectations for communicating ongoing feedback to parents and students through the use of an online platform. School staff is establishing a culture that communicates high expectations and a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

Parents and students inconsistently receive feedback regarding student progress. However, they agree that there are experiences in place to inform their understanding of expectations leading towards college and careers.

Supporting Evidence

- The current school year marks the introduction of an on-line grading platform for teachers to communicate attendance and assignment completion as well as behavioral and assessment performance information to parents and students. Parents commented that although some teachers use the on-line grading platform, some do not use it consistently, while others do not use it all. They stated that if they request the information from teachers who do not provide it on-line, most will forward it to them in an email. Given the current state of this growing practice, parents have to initiate the sharing of up-to-date information regarding student progress. Report cards are distributed after each marking period.

- Parents shared their approval of the various initiatives, partnerships and programs that enable students to explore options for their futures. One parent mentioned a grade seven trip to colleges in Albany. They also spoke of a mentoring program through Binghamton, as well as aviation and robotics classes, all of which have informed their children’s interest in possible careers.

- A number of students echoed the parents’ sentiments that teachers inconsistently use the on-line grading platform. One noted that two of her teachers do not post grades in a timely fashion. Another added that for one class, grades from marking period one, which had ended months prior, were the only ones provided. In such cases, students stated that with the exception of report cards, there is no clear means of knowing how they are doing in classes without asking.

- Guidance counselors meet with students both in classes and individually to review graduation requirements. They specifically push in to English Language Arts (ELA) classes at scheduled times to review how to read transcripts. Counselors in the college office support juniors and seniors with online college research and college applications.

- Students spoke of their participation in experiences such as the Frederick Douglass Academy alumni day, college trips, sports programs, trips abroad, and other opportunities that are provided in collaboration with partnering organizations. Although a student shared that her participation in the aviation program was informing her desire to apply to West Point and become a pilot, most students were not able to articulate how the opportunities were preparing them for life after graduation.
Area of Focus

| Quality Indicator: | 1.4 Positive Learning Environment | Rating: | Developing |

Findings
The school has not yet established a coherent approach to culture building, discipline, social emotional support, and parent outreach, as well as culture oriented professional development and student learning experiences.

Impact
The school is working to build a culture grounded in safety, inclusivity, and student voice that promotes the adoption of effective academic and personal behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- Students noted that they want to feel safer. There have been a number of physical altercations this year in the middle and high school, as well as instances of cyber-bullying. High school students commented that it has gotten worse over the years even though adults in the school are very responsive to issues as they arise. Parents spoke of wanting a stronger tone to be set as some students use disrespectful language during arrival. In addition, parents claim that staff is focused almost exclusively on uniform compliance. Staff commented that although tone and culture need to improve, it is only a core group of students who continually challenge the norms and expectations that most students abide by.

- Staff noted that there is an ongoing effort to build relationships with students. Grade teams meet to strategize ways to support students with behavioral challenges, and a student culture team has been instituted for the middle school grades. Behavior logs are used with certain students and there are regular hall sweeps to help students transition to class in an efficient and orderly fashion. Even with these practices, staff shared that they are looking for support and training on how to address the ongoing behavioral issues.

- The school has twelve non-negotiable rules and regulations that include expectations for compliance with homework completion, attendance, transitioning from class-to-class, keeping desks clean, and the dress code. There is also a merit and demerit system used by staff to reward students or hold them accountable to these rules. However, the school is still developing the means by which students are supported in learning behaviors that promote a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes. Exceptions, where some students learn life skills, were found in specific areas like the lacrosse program run by a partner organization, the taekwondo classes, and a discussion group for young women.

- Student senior council members meet regularly on their own and monthly with the principal. Their focus has been exclusively on senior class activities. Students were not able to provide instances when they or any of their peers had input in matters that affect the school.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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Findings
Curricula and academic tasks inconsistently emphasize rigorous habits and are beginning to reflect planning that is informed by an awareness of student needs.

Impact
Across grades and subject areas, students, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, are not consistently provided with access to curricula and activities that engage them cognitively.

Supporting Evidence

- Rigorous tasks were found in the curricular documents for higher-level math courses: pre-calculus and college algebra. The pre-calculus lesson plan was designed to have students use their understanding of exponential growth and decay to derive an equation for a population of bacteria and to come up with the annual rate of return on money invested to address the problem. In the college algebra plan, students would collaborate on determining the coordinates of a rotating triangle and justify their answer by comparing it to another figure. Such levels of rigor were not evident across all subjects.

- The learning objective for a social studies lesson was for students to “understand and articulate the impacts the caste system has had on Indian society by analyzing primary and secondary sources through the lens of an anthropologist.” The initial activity would be for students to brainstorm objective questions that they would ask Indians about the caste system. However, unlike anthropologists, students would not engage in research to build prior knowledge that might inform their brainstorming activity. Without such preparation, there would be nothing to ground the task in other than curiosity, limiting the use of higher-order skills. Similarly, the learning objective for another social studies lesson was to apply an effective procedure for completing the conclusion paragraph of a document based question (DBQ), but the task itself was simply for students to take up to four minutes to write a sentence.

- A science plan referenced purposeful heterogeneous grouping. It stated that higher performing students would serve as resources at certain points, and middle level students would also serve as added supports. Although this may reflect the teacher’s understanding of the diversity of learners in the class, it did not show how such awareness would be leveraged to ensure that these students would be cognitively engaged or provided with access to the task.

- The two ELA lesson plans that were reviewed showed no evidence of data-informed adjustments or modifications to the learning tasks that would provide access for students of varying learning abilities.
**Additional Finding**

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Developing</th>
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**Findings**

Across classrooms, teachers inconsistently provide students with multiple entry points into the curricula as well as the guidance and supports needed to fully engage them in tasks and discussions.

**Impact**

There are uneven levels of higher-order thinking and participation in appropriately challenging tasks.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Students in an English class were reading a text to identify the ways in which the author developed the characters’ and narrators’ points of view. Students drew a graphic organizer in their notebooks and tried to use it to complete the task, yet they were not provided with a close reading strategy to analyze the text. As a result, students were unclear on how to proceed. When asked what they were doing, one student replied, “We have to write what she is and what she really is.” Another added, “We’re putting down words to describe the character.” Neither was able to say how their efforts supported their understanding of the techniques the author used to develop points of view.

- Students in a science class were to come up with a procedure to address a challenge. The teacher stated that students were to work in groups to develop written procedures. No expectations, steps, or models were provided to clarify how students were to work together or the qualities of a good written procedure. In some groups, students asked each other questions. In one group, one student worked on the task while the others watched. In some cases, the procedure contained numbered steps that connoted sequence. In others, the steps read like a ‘to do’ list of actions that need to occur, but with little consideration of order.

- In a higher-level math class, pairs and small groups of students rotated through workstations, building on and correcting each other’s work. They discussed strategies used by peers and recommended ones that were more efficient. Errors were explained to uncover where the mathematical thinking was wrong. Students in another math class were not expected to discuss math concepts and processes with each other. The teacher-centered lesson consisted primarily of the teacher posing a series of process oriented closed-ended questions such as, “So what’s missing here?” and “Is this the same as the number subtracted from five?” Such instruction does not allow for high levels of student thinking or participation.

- Although students in a high level ELA class analyzed Toni Morrison’s *Sula* during a class-wide discussion, student thinking resulted solely from teacher questioning with few opportunities for students to build on or push each other’s thinking.
Findings
Across classrooms, assessment practices are loosely aligned to the school’s curricula and do not always effectively measure student progress.

Impact
Although teachers receive assessment-based information regarding student achievement, it is inconsistently used to adjust curricula and instruction. Feedback to students is inconsistent and limited.

Supporting Evidence
- Social studies assessments showed that students struggled with periodization, the process of categorizing the past into discreet, quantified blocks of time in order to study and analyze history. In response, a periodization strategies document was developed to support subsequent unit plan design. Such adjustments to curricula and instruction were not evident across grades and subject areas.

- A science exam data reflection document listed student struggles and next steps; however the next steps did not consistently address the stated student struggle. For example, it was stated that students struggled to understand biochemical processes, as well as the wording of the questions. The next step was to provide students with more sample problems. No strategies were listed to re-teach biochemical processes or to introduce comprehension strategies. Similarly, it was noted that students did not effectively support their answers. The suggestion that students would be provided with more written response questions did not address students’ needs to learn how to support their answers with evidence.

- Students showed varying levels of understanding of the feedback they received on their work. One student presented a scored rubric reflecting her performance on the task, yet did not understand the section that noted her tendency to use sentence fragments.

- One student claimed that feedback he received last year from a teacher is still helpful. Comments were frequently provided on his work. This year he noted that he gets little feedback in that subject area. He said, “I’m just told to do test corrections.” He now has to find time for one on one conferencing with the teacher, which is not always easy to schedule.
Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
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Findings

Collaborative subject area teams analyze student work and performance data. Although teachers feel heard, structures for distributed leadership are still in development.

Impact

The work of teacher teams does not typically result in improved instructional practices or progress toward goals for specific groups of students. Teachers are welcome to make suggestions, but processes to build their leadership capacity and include them in key decisions that affect instruction across the school are not currently in place.

Supporting Evidence

- During a departmental meeting, a presenting teacher’s focus questions were, “What do students’ responses indicate about the effectiveness of the prompt or assignment?” and “How can I improve?” Colleagues reviewed the work samples and the shared patterns that they had observed. They then interpreted these observations and offered suggestions for the teacher and students. They included removing instructional scaffolds, introducing counterclaim, and allowing students the option of visually representing their points of view. The team then reflected on the implications for their own work. The meeting ended with the presenting teacher sharing what he liked about the discussion of his work. Although this meeting followed a clear protocol and there was a thoughtful analysis of student work, no next steps were identified, leaving it unclear as to what aspects of the conversation would actually inform the subsequent instruction of any of the meeting’s participants.

- Minutes from a team meeting focused on looking at student work contained a bullet that read, “Norms, strengths and weaknesses.” It was followed by notes from the share out portion of the meeting, which included concerns about students not wanting to struggle through problems, even when there is nothing at stake, and how to get them to extend themselves to do the work requested. Without notes reflecting what was observed in the students’ work, the quality and depth of the student work products as well as the analysis of it were unclear. It was later mentioned that, “everything we do should have a focus on engaging students towards promoting learning,” yet no instructional next steps were identified.

- Although distributive leadership structures are not firmly in place, school leaders are open to input from the staff. A teacher recommended that the school explore a writing strategy that many on staff have since embraced, and a committee of teachers planned the alumni day. Teachers noted that they feel heard by the new principal, who will support most suggestions aligned to the school’s goals.