



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Henry David Thoreau School

Public School 017

**28-37 29 Street
Queens
NY 11102**

Principal: Cynthia Dickman

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Reviewer: Alan Geller

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Henry David Thoreau School, Public School 17, is an elementary school located in Queens and serves 712 students in pre-kindergarten to grade 5. The school population is comprised of 53% Hispanic, 20% Asian, 18% White, and 9% Black students. There are 93 special education students (13%) and 251 (35%) English language learners. Other than English, over 40 languages are spoken with Spanish and Bengali as the two most predominant. Attendance is over 95% and is above similar and City schools. The school receives Title I funding.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a focused leader who is well respected by the students, staff, and parents and has created a positive learning environment.
- Performance data is collected, tracked and used to inform the instructional program.
- Teachers have high expectations for their students and are committed to providing each child with the skills to achieve.
- The parents are very pleased with the positive learning environment and the open lines of communication.
- School procedures and routines have been well developed, resulting in a school that operates efficiently.
- Students feel well respected by their teachers, resulting in classrooms where students are actively engaged by the instructional programs.
- A spirit of collaboration exists amongst the staff and is exhibited at school-wide meetings.
- The workshop model is used in every classroom as a means to provide students with more individualized and small group learning opportunities.
- Students enjoy participating in the challenging school activities which is reflected in an attendance rate of over 95%.
- There is a positive tone in the school where children feel safe, supported and enjoy learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Utilize a common system for the collection and tracking of performance data to more efficiently and consistently measure the mastery of skills.
- Further systematize the way school programs are monitored and assessed to measure their effectiveness.
- Further develop the feedback received by students regarding their writing pieces so they will know what they need to do to improve.
- Further develop budgeting and scheduling plans to provide additional service to students in greatest need of improvement.
- Continue to develop a relationship with a community-based organization to further support students with their academic needs.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Over the past three years, since the arrival of the principal, the school has undergone significant change. The workshop model is used across the school to provide greater interaction between teachers and students in small group settings. This change was a first step in setting up good systems to collect and track data across the school, although this is not yet consistent. There is a mutual respect between the students and the staff, creating a positive learning environment. The teachers have high expectations for their students and work collaboratively to ensure that each student achieves.

The principal and her team actively utilize the data to improve the instructional program. The overall tone of the school is very orderly with students engaged in their lessons. Professional development is based upon the needs of the students and what the staff have identified in order to improve student outcomes. Teachers are encouraged to participate in decision making activities as they work together to extend and improve next learning steps for the students. The parents are very pleased with the positive changes and the safe and orderly learning atmosphere at the school. They also participate in decision making activities as part of the school leadership team.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Data is collected and analyzed in mathematics, reading and writing as a means of tracking student progress. However, this is not yet consistent across the school. There is some very good use of technology to track progress in the Reading First program in literacy. This program allows the school to track individual, class and grade performance data on a regular and consistent basis. This enables the faculty to clearly identify student needs, which has made teaching more purposeful. The school also collects data from standardized tests, assessments from the beginning of the year and interim assessments as another means to monitor achievement. The school does good work in tracking reading progress using running records in kindergarten to grade 3 but this practice is not as consistent across the entire school. Suitable diagnostic tools are used along with interim assessments to provide useful performance data about each child's progress. This provides valuable information for grouping children based upon their skill needs identified throughout the year. English language learners and special education students are tracked in the same manner, with data carefully analyzed to provide specific services. The workshop model has been adapted in all classes allowing students to receive additional small group instruction which provides the teachers with the opportunity to more carefully monitor student progress.

The school has started to look at the relative performance of other student groups, such as by gender, and is in the process of planning activities to support each group. However,

this is just beginning and has not yet taken hold. The school compares itself to other Reading First schools to note their progress as well as schools within its network to identify and adopt successful practices. The school analyzes the progress of students from year to year, by reviewing student writing pieces, and standardized scores as a means to understand better student achievement. The school leaders compare the progress of students, classes, and grades as a means of identifying successful strategies used by the faculty that helped students to learn more effectively. Subject area gains are also reviewed as a means of measuring the quality of instruction.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The principal begins the goal setting process in May for the following year, by measuring the achievement of goals as established in the Comprehensive Education Plan and making revisions based upon the progress achieved. This is a collaborative process as different committees work on specific components of the plan along with the support of the principal and her cabinet. A survey of student attitudes is conducted as a means of measuring the effect of school programs and is used in establishing challenging goals. The Reading First program is the basis for establishing plans and setting goals based upon reaching grade level benchmarks for all students.

Different academic intervention tools are used well as a means to determine the level of progress of each student who may be assigned targeted support. Intervention is provided before the school day for small groups of students which has improved their skills in English language arts. Additionally, students receive intervention in a pull-out mode of instruction during part of the year. However, service and time are not consistently provided throughout the year. Students who have been held over receive individual intervention plans. The school sets priorities in the short and long-term to improve students’ skills, especially students at level 1 and English language learners. Most special education students are served in collaborative team teaching classes whereby they receive support from two teachers in a small group setting which has helped them to achieve more effectively. English language learners receive instruction in self contained English as a second language classes as well as through push-in and pull-out modes of instruction, although there is a downward trend in test scores for these students.

The school has set high expectations which are recognized by the students and the parents. The teachers encourage the students to work hard, with positive results. The principal provides a daily message to the school that encourages students to succeed. Parents share information with the faculty that supports the setting of goals. Teachers communicate with the home through the student planner which allows the parents to provide the school with useful information about the students. Parents are a part of the school leadership team where they participate in decision making activities. The school is sharply focused on developing plans and goals that support good student progress.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school employs the mandated curriculum and has identified additional supplementary programs to support students in greatest need. The mathematics program has built in assessments to track student progress. Additional interim assessments that are selected by the region provide meaningful information in mathematics and literacy about students and classes. The English language arts program uses tracking tools that provide constantly updated information about meeting the goals of the program. This has resulted in the teachers developing specific work stations which differentiate instruction through both individualized and flexible grouping. The school leaders visit classes to observe this process as well as reviewing these practices at common planning meetings with the teachers. As a result of the frequent collaborative activity of the faculty, a specific phonics program was successfully implemented in kindergarten. Teachers have started to conference to provide feedback to students concerning their writing pieces. However, the commentary is not specific enough for students to know exactly what they need to do to improve. Staff are accountable for the quality and impact of the instructional program. The school leaders monitor the instructional practices of the teachers through focused walkthroughs as a team and by observing students working in guided reading groups to note its effectiveness.

Budgeting, staffing, and scheduling are aligned to meet the needs of the students, with a small class size to maximize learning and before-school instruction for students in need. However, practice is not yet fully developed to provide services to students in greatest need or English language learners most effectively. The school is aware of this and has planned for additional staff to provide extra time for students. Students enjoy and are engaged by the challenging curriculum activities. Teachers try to excite the children about learning and interacting with each other about the subject matter on a daily basis. Students feel well respected by their teachers who are committed to improving student achievement. Consequently students conduct themselves appropriately and apply themselves to their learning. Student needs are well known and students trust all members of the staff, knowing they can receive support when needed. The school values good attendance and rewards students who attend daily which has contributed to the positive school tone.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient with well-developed features.

New staff are selected who demonstrate a commitment to student learning, a willingness to work together and a desire to be lifelong learners, especially in understanding and using data to support student improvement. New teachers are supported with specific training opportunities and a buddy teacher that helps them to address challenges that arise. All new Reading First teachers must participate in a 90 hour training program. Professional development is provided in using data to develop class groupings to differentiate instruction. Training in understanding and using the information from interim assessments has enabled teachers to better support their students. Training in looking at students’ work has also been provided, yet feedback given to students is not yet exact enough to help

students to improve their work. Teachers visit each other to learn new strategies and watch videotapes of each other teaching. The principal and the assistant principals conduct either formal or informal observations regularly. Constructive feedback is provided, in writing or verbally. The school leaders share their observations of the staff as a means of providing each teacher with the specific help that they need to improve. Teachers share progress data and other information at common planning meetings in order to improve instruction for all students within a grade or across the school.

The principal is well respected by the school community as she provides good leadership that has culminated in improved learning opportunities for the students. She has a vision for improvement yet listens to the staff as a means of enhancing the curriculum. Her work has resulted in many positive changes and she has a good capacity to secure further improvements. Students feel safe and the school runs smoothly as a result of clearly communicated school procedures. The school has some partnerships with external organizations, but as of yet these relationships are not sufficiently developed to provide a wide range of additional academic support.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal has a good understanding of the school's strengths and development needs. She and her cabinet meet regularly to analyze the progress of students throughout the year and to plan next learning steps for them. The academic intervention team meets weekly to review the progress of intervention plans as well as to share the findings of meetings. A vital part of the process is the open lines of communication that exist between the school leaders and the wider school community. Teachers assess students on a regular basis and develop strategies to improve instruction. The coach conducts meetings with the teachers who share these findings with the cabinet. The principal and assistant principals look more closely at the results of assessments both within classes and across the grades. Based upon the data, specific decisions regarding the use of professional development are planned. Grade level meetings are an important structure to review the effectiveness of plans and the sharing of successful strategies.

A good example of the school's success at monitoring and revising its practice was the tracking and comparing of students' reading levels on a regular basis. Monitoring showed that the current process was not working well. A running records program was secured and implemented so that a uniform set of results made it possible to evaluate all students more accurately. Consequently, the school was successful in replacing an existing way to evaluate results to better achieve its goal. The cabinet and the academic intervention team are two important structures that support the flexible change of practices. This is due to the commitment to share information and communicate openly and effectively. If parts of a school plan are not working well the school has become much better at making the necessary changes, although the monitoring of programs and plans are not yet fully systematized across the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Henry David Thoreau School (PS 17)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English Language Learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			X
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.			X
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	