



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Thomas A. Edison

High School 620

**165 - 65 84 Avenue
Queens
NY 11432**

Principal: Ms Ilona Posner

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Reviewer: George McLeman

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Thomas A. Edison High School specializes in vocational and technical education, while maintaining a strong commitment to the academic achievement of the students. It is one of four High Schools of this type in the City. The school has 2681 students from grade 9 through 12. Places at this screened school are heavily oversubscribed and the roll has increased steadily over the last four years. There are 86 special education students and 21 English language learners, both numbers being well below the average of the City. A wide range of ethnicity is represented in the student population; it comprises 30% Black, 24% Hispanic, 36% Asian and 6% White. The proportion of students who are newly arrived in the City is small in comparison with other City schools. The enrolment of male students is much higher than female students. Attendance is good, averaging over 90 per cent over the last three years. There is no Title 1 eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- The school's culture reflects high expectations of achievement while being friendly and welcoming.
- Leadership is effective, exemplified in the work of the principal.
- There is a strong sense of teamwork among the staff across the wide range of roles and contributions.
- The vocational and technical classes are a strength of the school's curriculum.
- The students' attainments across grades, attainment levels, and linguistic and ethnicity backgrounds are good.
- Attendance is good.
- The behavior of the students is calm, courteous and cheerful.
- The students demonstrate engagement and enjoyment in their classes.
- The quality of the guidance and counseling team is good.
- The school buildings are well maintained.

What the school needs to improve:

- Improve the use of the wealth of data available on students' achievements to promote learning.
- Streamline the planning at whole school level to focus on improvements in teaching and learning.
- Develop the teachers' understanding and skill in teaching classes covering a range of attainments and their accountability for the students' learning.
- Gain greater cohesion between the appraisal of individual teachers and the program of support for their professional development.
- Improve the sharing of knowledge on the attainments of pupils across the grades and particularly between the middle schools and the 9th grade.
- Ensure early contact with parents whose children have difficulties in learning or behaviour.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with several well-developed features.

Thomas A. Edison is a thriving and continually improving school. Over the last four years it has seen a significant increase in its roll, in its overall academic performance, and in the subsequent placements and achievements of its students. This success is attributable to the leadership of the principal and the teamwork and commitment she has gained from her staff.

The school evaluates its strengths and weaknesses accurately and constructively. Much of this is undertaken through the analysis of examination and test data and through the direct and close contact of the principal and assistant principals with the school's work. In general, this information is used effectively and promptly in further promoting the students' learning and achievements. This report gives examples of how the leaders and the teachers identify areas for development and set about addressing them.

The school leadership also recognizes that it could use the information on the progress and achievements of the students more effectively. The overall planning, for example, could be improved by focusing more directly and explicitly on the students' achievements and by having a more streamlined strategy for whole school improvement. This will entail providing stronger direction and greater accountability to assistant principals for their work with the faculties. In their classes, teachers are expected to plan the level of their instruction on the information they have and generate about the students' attainments. While the overall quality of instruction is good, sharper focus on the responses, the learning, and the progress of students is needed. In response to this, the school has set up a program of appraisal and development activities to improve the teachers' monitoring and promoting of the students' learning, both during and after classes. This should contribute markedly to meeting the school's overall goal of continuous improvement.

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 well-developed.

School leaders collect a wide range of detailed data on the students' academic achievements. This encompasses statistics on the students' performances in the Regents examination, graduation assessments, progress towards career and technical certification and test results in English and mathematics. The data is used to compare the performance of the school against the previous year's results, those of similar schools and those across the City. They are also analyzed to compare the achievements of the students across the subjects, grades, classes and groups, but information on students' attainment is not always shared rigorously enough, particularly that sent from the middle schools to the 9th grade staff.

The progress and achievements of special education students is given close attention with individual education plans carefully drafted and reviewed regularly with teachers, parents and students. The progress of students who are acquiring English as a second language is similarly given appropriate emphasis with regular assessment of their development through the stages of English learning. However, the school does not always make early enough contact with parents of students who have difficulties with learning or behavior.

The principal, with her assistant principals, closely examines the data at monthly seminars to analyze the performance of the school as a whole and of the departments. The test scores, passing rates, promotion and graduation rates all show improvement over recent years, and there has been a significant rise in the percentage of English language learners passing the English Regents. Comparison with similar schools, in almost all aspects, confirms the high standing of the school. The progress and achievements of students taking the career and technical education courses are compared with schools taking similar courses. Although the career and technical education courses achievements are more challenging to analyze the school has devised alternative criteria. The school uses the improving record of placements of students in technical careers or apprenticeships (85%). Entries into City and national career and technical education courses competitions such as the Automotive Technicians further indicate high achievements of the students taking these classes. The school leaders have detailed knowledge of the achievements of the students and taken as a whole they show that school's aim of continual improvement together is being fulfilled.

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 proficient.

At a whole school level, the principal and the assistant principals together look closely at the available data and discuss the various strengths and weaknesses across the faculties. Together they decide on appropriate action as a result of this information. For example, the students' performances in some of the science examinations were significantly below those of other subjects last year. Action was taken on the staffing to improve this position. There is not, however, an overall written plan based on the available data to indicate the priorities of the leadership and how those will be tackled and how the success of the actions will, be judged. The Comprehensive Education Plan contains such information, but it is unwieldy and it is difficult to access the main points easily. This means that the main thrust of the school's commitments in response to the data is not immediately seen or felt. Nevertheless, there is a strong sense of teamwork among the staff across the wide range of roles and contributions.

At the faculty and class level, there are several examples of the effective use the data to diagnose students' difficulties and promote further learning but it is not consistently practiced across the school. In some subjects the test scores are analyzed item by item to identify strengths and weaknesses in the students' understanding of each element. As a result additional classes and revised programs may be arranged for individuals or groups of students. Similarly, a close watch is kept on the individual progress of special education students and those who are learning English as an additional language and the teaching and support are carefully geared to the assessment of need.

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 proficient.

The school leaders base curricular and resource decisions on the achievements of the students. Programs are modified or introduced to ensure that the academic, career and technical needs of individual are met. Tests are frequently set to assess the progress and the results are used to refine, repeat and to extend the learning program and tasks. Staffing and budget considerations are made on the basis of meeting the mandated curriculum, the drive to improve achievement and the needs of individual students.

Teachers are encouraged and expected to reflect on the effectiveness of their instruction by looking at the achievements and progress of their students. They undertake this mainly by scrutinizing the test results, sometimes analyzing them by item to provide insights into difficulties that the students have.

The teachers’ monitoring of the understanding and progress of the students during the classes, however, is not a prominent feature. While the presentations and questions are clear and appropriate, the focus on how the knowledge is being received is a lower priority. Teachers, for example, frequently take answers from one or two students and consider that represents the understanding of the class as a whole. Some will ask the whole class whether everything is understood and move on quickly without giving the students a chance to reflect on their understanding. Questions targeted at individuals or groups to gain awareness of the stage reached are rarely asked.

The planning of classes does not always reveal how the student needs may be met. There often is no the link with the previous learning, for example, or how the level of the topic is pitched or how different stages of understanding or rates of learning may be addressed. The wide variation in the drafting of precise and manageable learning objectives is a challenge for the school leaders. They know that too many are descriptive of activities or broad intentions. The school leaders also recognize that the key feature to personalizing learning is to get teachers to be more accountable for their teaching and to get the students to take more responsibility for their learning. In this respect fuller feedback to the students during the classes on their progress towards the objectives would help considerably.

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.

Teachers and leaders are selected on the basis of their high expectations of student achievements. The school, in the main, has a stable instructional staff. The great majority of teachers have been at the school for more than two years. For most subjects there is little difficulty in attracting teachers to the school. For the mathematics, science and career and technical education programs, however, the national shortage of teachers is keenly felt. In some cases this has led to inappropriate appointments, quick turnover and induction difficulties. This has in turn led to some underachievement of the pupils. There is a continuing challenge in attracting suitable teachers from industry to teach career and technical education. Gaining and retaining good instructional staff is a high priority for the school.

Much is undertaken to improve and maintain the quality of instruction at this school. The most prominent initiative is the introduction of a program of professional development entitled the Essential Elements of Instruction. This features a series of training sessions on such items as, teaching to the objective, selecting objectives at the correct level of difficulty, monitor learning, adjust teaching. This fits well with the school's aim of ensuring that the instruction is closely aligned to the data on the learning.

The school's program of individually appraising and developing teachers' skills also makes a contribution to the overall goal of improving teaching. The instruction of each teacher is regularly observed in line with the City program. In addition, the principal sees the teaching of every teacher at least once each year formally and regularly carries out informal unscheduled visits to classes. From all of these observations, strengths and weaknesses are discussed with the principal and/or the assistant principals and individual goals set for improvement.

The two elements of developing instructional expertise, that is the whole school program of professional development and the individual appraisal, are not always explicitly linked. While both contain elements that promote the effective use of data in instruction they do not directly address or emphasize this point. An analysis of the individual reports from the observation of instruction may reveal trends or general weaknesses that could be addressed in the wider sessions or in the setting of individual targets.

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 school leaders are keen to maintain the impetus for improvement set by the high expectations they have established. They continually review the schools' data to ensure that there is no regression. This includes examination and test data as well as evaluations of progress of groups of students. It also includes reports on the observations and analyses of the quality of the instruction across the classes. This is done formally through the monthly meetings of senior leaders where reports of subjects and classes are discussed and decisions taken. The principal has detailed knowledge of the school's work from her daily contact with teachers and students and this directs much of the discussions, decisions and in the subsequent planning of the school's development.

The students clearly enjoy their learning, they are engaged by the work they are given and as a result they attend well, and their behavior in school is calm ordered and courteous. They receive good support from the guidance and counseling team which strengthens and reinforces their motivation and commitment. While the momentum of improvement identified in the career and technical education program is maintained in the reviews, the school has not built tangible working plans that direct and evaluate the work of whole school. The specification of precisely worded outcomes, time frames, responsibilities and success criteria in a working document could contribute much towards meeting the goal for improved learning. The participation of parents in discussions of the school's aims and progress is a strengthening feature. Parents are represented on the School Leadership Team and through the Parent Teacher Association. Their views are widely sought and readily given on any aspect governing the teaching and learning of the school. Parents appreciate this involvement and communication and respond well.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Thomas A Edison High School (HS 620)	∅	✓	+
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	