



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Thomas Dongan School

Elementary School 011

**50 Jefferson Street
Staten Island
NY 10304**

Principal: Erica Mattera

Dates of review: October 18 - 19, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Paul Cosway

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Thomas Dongan School is an elementary school with 281 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 21.4% Black, 26.9% Hispanic, 48.7% White, and 2.9% Asian students. The student body includes 12% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 - 2007 was 91.8%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 56% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Achievement is rising rapidly in the school in both English language arts and math.
- There are effective and wide ranging strategies for supporting students who are below grade level.
- Classrooms and the school learning environment are attractive with displays that both help students to learn and celebrate their achievements very well.
- The school has a calm, orderly and purposeful climate for learning that is evident in every classroom and shared area.
- Relationships between adults and students are generally positive and promote learning very well.
- Data is used very well to monitor and evaluate the school's effectiveness and to drive improvement.
- The principal provides clear and inspirational leadership.
- The systems for promoting good attendance are very effective.
- The curriculum is constantly revised in the light of student outcomes to make it increasingly effective in raising achievement.
- Parents and care givers are given detailed and useful information to help them to understand their children's progress and help them in their learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Give sufficient help to students with their writing that focuses specifically on their individual needs.
- Ensure more teachers collaborate in their planning and to learn from each other by sharing best practice.
- Set teachers specific targets for student achievement in their classes.
- Develop differentiation strategies further to ensure that all students, including the higher achievers are challenged sufficiently.
- Compare the school's performance with similar schools and use this to identify schools to share best practice with.

Part 3: Main findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Achievement has risen rapidly in the school under the new principal. She is providing good leadership, clearly focused on raising standards of teaching and learning and meeting every learner's needs. Under her leadership, on-going assessment, sometimes on a daily basis, is used to plan each student's next step in the learning process. Data helps to drive the decisions that are made about the instruction and learning strategies for each individual. Students who are below grade level benefit particularly from these. The impact of all decisions is carefully measured in order to evaluate its effectiveness. These were all areas for development in the last Quality Review and good progress has been made since then. The school inquiry team has made a good start in its work and is shortly to set achievement goals for teachers and targeted students.

There are very good professional development opportunities to help teachers understand how assessment data can be used effectively and to give them the skills to try out new approaches. Although teachers do not yet set specific targets for their students' achievement, they are very aware of the overall school targets. The principal's high expectations are reflected in the challenges that the teachers set their students. The Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project approaches are being used well to enhance teaching. Innovative cross-curricular approaches, combining literacy, math, the creative arts and technology, are giving relevance and continuity to learning. Teachers use technology well to help students learn and to make learning accessible and interesting. This is another improvement since the last Review.

Most teachers collaborate very effectively to share ideas, plan together and develop their skills. Generally, teachers differentiate learning well in order to meet all students' learning needs, but writing tasks are sometimes too difficult for those with low level writing skills and not enough is done, on occasions, to extend the higher achievers.

The school welcomes parents, giving them considerable help in supporting their children's education. Attendance is rising because of the school's excellent campaign to persuade parents and their children of the importance of coming to school regularly. As one girl patiently explained, "You can't learn if you are not here!" The staff work very effectively to make the school an attractive environment in which to learn and student's respond by valuing their school, having very positive attitudes and behaving very well. The school is a welcoming, caring, innovative and exciting place in which to both teach and learn.

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 the student's progress over time.

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

The school uses a wide range of data sources to track the progress of classes, grades, groups of students and each individual. Alongside the end of grade and quarterly tests, there are end-of-unit tests in English language arts and math. Science and social studies lessons include on-going informal assessments and teachers record both marks and comments on each student's strengths and weaknesses in order to measure achievement and progress. Teachers responsible for English language learners and special education students track their progress carefully.

Comparison with the school's past performance is made annually and is used to demonstrate the good progress the school is making. For example, the proportion of students making a one year gain in reading last year more than doubled to 56%. In math, this figure rose by 19% to 45%. Individual student's progress and that of classes is also tracked carefully from year to year.

The school does not compare its performance rigorously with that of similar schools because it does not feel that it has yet made enough progress to do so. As it gains in confidence in its own performance, the principal intends to seek out similar schools that are achieving more highly and take her teachers to them to analyze the approaches that are being used successfully elsewhere. All other aspects of professional development are well developed and as a result teachers have an excellent understanding of how to use data to inform their planning and measure the effectiveness of their lessons.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

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

School leaders use data consistently to understand how to take students forward in their learning. They collaborate well to analyze current trends, set targets and plan for the future. Most teachers are aware of the need to work collaboratively to develop and share their teaching skills, but a small minority is less willing to do so.

The inquiry team is selecting students for a special focus and analyzing their past performance carefully to work out how to help them to improve. The team is in the process of setting teachers challenging targets for their students' achievement. There has been good concentration over the past year on groups and individual students in need of improvement and the quality of this has already resulted in significant gains by many. The good support includes an innovative range of strategies, including reading theater sessions that allow them to act out stories in order to improve their comprehension. However, so many students need this support that teachers do not always challenge the higher achievers sufficiently. This affects their progress.

Students and parents and caregivers are given regular information about learning goals, progress and next steps in children's learning. This is effective in supporting student

progress. Parents are full of praise for the school's welcoming and informative approaches. They feel fully involved in their children's learning, and the school makes every effort to reach those whose working hours make visits to school difficult.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

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

Teachers use strategies that provide on-going data to help them to measure the progress that their students are making. These include pre-tests, end-of-unit tests, and feedback in class through the use of small white boards on which students can write and show answers. The curriculum is rich in learning experiences and there are strong cross-curricular links that help students to make connections that reinforce each subject. In a science class, for example, students used technology well to paste text and pictures into their own non-fiction books that explained the life cycle of invertebrates. There is a good enrichment program, which includes drama, visits and special events to support learning.

Regular grade meetings provide feedback to teachers on the progress of their classes. This holds teachers to account and provides the basis for discussions on improving instruction. Strategies are shared at these meetings to make learning interesting, resulting in an exciting learning environment for students. Excellent displays and varied learning areas make classrooms fascinating places within which to learn and they help students to succeed.

Teachers differentiate instruction to meet most students' needs, but some tasks are not matched carefully enough to the abilities of the highest and lowest achieving students, particularly in writing. As a result, these students are not sufficiently challenged. Most teachers work in an atmosphere of mutual respect and students and parents are respected also. This supports students' academic and personal development. The very few teachers who resist change are being won over by the obvious effectiveness of new approaches. The school has very effective procedures to promote good attendance which is having a positive impact.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

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

There is a full program of classroom visits by the leadership team, all of which are followed by detailed feedback to praise what teachers do well and give constructive help to raise achievement even higher. Professional development is very well planned to support the school's goals. Teachers are enabled to share ideas and to watch each other's lessons, although a small minority is reluctant to take part. New teachers are full of praise for the support that they get and the induction procedures are comprehensive.

A significant proportion of students and families face difficult circumstances or personal problems and the school does much to help them through effective guidance counseling. The school runs very smoothly and behavior is very good, because students are totally clear about what they can and cannot do. They value the rewards and understand the

sanctions. These measures result in the calm, orderly and purposeful climate for learning that is evident in every classroom and shared area. This is a significant strength of the school. Teaching and support staff work closely together to establish and maintain the systems and structures that promote good relationships, high expectations for effort and good behavior and mutual respect for all. The work inside the school is enhanced by good quality partnerships with a wide range of agencies, concerned with both academic and personal growth and development. There are productive partnerships with outside organizations, such as the local veterans' association, that help develop citizenship skills.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

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

The school has interim goals that are carefully and regularly monitored by the leadership team and plans to reach these are adjusted as necessary. Goal setting is being extended to individual teachers and classes by the recently formed inquiry team, which shows a good understanding of how to use data to raise achievement.

Within their grades, teachers make good use of interim assessments to measure the effectiveness of their instruction and adjust their teaching approaches accordingly. The move to 'writing conferencing' is part of this process, giving students and teachers one-to-one time to discuss how to improve written work. If strategies are identified as having weaknesses, they are immediately called into question and alternative approaches are implemented both at a classroom and a whole-school level.

The principal and the school cabinet have a clear vision for the future development of the school and have put in place good and effective systems to bring about change. They have, for example, shared a document laying down 'bottom-line' expectations for teachers' work which sets out how they expect classrooms to be run. This has been shared with the school community and forms a basis for monitoring teachers' work that is understood by all.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Thomas Dongan School (PS 11)	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X	

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?				X	
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?				X	
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?			X		
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

To what extent does the school ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other's classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another's instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?			X		
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.2 the school's plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to make strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan's interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X	