



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

John J. Driscoll School

Elementary School 016

**80 Monroe Avenue
Staten Island
NY 10301**

Principal: Vincenza Gallassio

Dates of review: November 1- 2, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Anne Evanoff

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The John J. Driscoll School is an elementary school with 1032 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 35% Black, 51% Hispanic, 7% White, 6% Asian students and 1% American Indian. The student body includes 25% English language learners and 9% 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%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 69% eligibility..

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and administrative team have established systems for gathering and analyzing data to better understand student learning needs in the different subgroups.
- The principal provides clear leadership in building teacher capacity to use data more effectively to set targets, monitor progress and assess next steps and interventions.
- The principal and assistant principals observe teachers and provide detailed feedback to improve instruction so that students are engaged in rich learning experiences.
- Teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in student performance data in the State tests to better adjust the instructional focus to increase student achievement.
- Regular grade conferences, workshops, and visits to each other's classrooms are used to improve planning for more effective instruction and improve student learning.
- New teachers are well supported in the school and are learning from the collaborative culture.
- Students, parents and staff trust and respect the principal.
- The school has a variety of procedures, such as attendance checks, in place that ensure that it runs smoothly.
- The school has established relationships with community organizations to support special programs that enrich student learning.
- The principal compares the school's progress to similar schools that are achieving at a higher level to encourage and support staff in creating a culture of excellence.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop specific and measurable school, class and individual student goals against which to track student progress and inform any subsequent interventions.
- Ensure greater consistency in how teachers use data to set targets for student learning and measure progress towards those targets for the various subgroups.
- Continue to expand staff understanding of how to differentiate instruction to improve teaching and learning.
- Develop a communication strategy to ensure that all stakeholders can articulate the school's achievement goals and understand how data is used to measure progress.
- Review how feedback is provided to students to ensure that parents and students understand how to improve their work.

Part 3: Main findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made some progress since the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school's positive and encouraging atmosphere creates a strong sense of community. Students feel that their teachers are supportive, caring and work hard to make learning "fun and enjoyable".

The school collects and analyzes a range of data to better understand the needs of all students. In order to achieve the school-wide goal of improving student learning, teachers have begun to set goals for improvement with students to enable them to track and measure progress at regular intervals. However, the school does not yet use the data to set school-wide goals for improvement that are sufficiently specific and measurable. The school has planned further training to help teachers adjust instructional strategies to meet the varied learning needs of students. The Inquiry Team uses data to identify English language learners who are struggling and are in the process of establishing goals and plans for improvement.

The principal is a strong leader who works collaboratively with coaches and academic intervention specialists and teachers and is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. There is a commitment from all staff to use data as a starting point to clarify each student's learning needs. The school uses the outcomes from data analysis to make effective decisions about budget allocations, purchase materials, schedule classes and plan for professional development related to differentiated instruction. Teachers want to increase their repertoire of effective instructional strategies in order to have an even greater impact on student learning.

Since the last review, the school has made some progress in using data to focus on vocabulary development in other subject areas such as science and social studies. Teachers are implementing a non-fiction section into their language arts program and are engaging in professional development training to increase their capacity to integrate literacy across the curriculum. The principal is committed to building on the existing good partnerships with parents and various organizations to enrich learning opportunities for students. The school does not routinely share specific goals with parents to invite a sense of shared responsibility for improving student learning.

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 proficient.

The school gathers a range of data and analyzes it to gain a good understanding of student strengths and weaknesses as indicated on State tests and other assessment instruments. They use data effectively to identify weak areas in the curriculum that need to be addressed. An example of this analysis is the focus on the development of a common vocabulary for each subject content area.

Teachers disaggregate data sufficiently well to know what special education students and English language learners know and are able to do. The school has a clear picture of what ethnic groups and boys and girls can do in broad terms but have not dug deeper to identify specific subgroups within these groups. The school recognizes that more training is also required in how to use data to drive instruction and ensure it meets the needs of all students so none fall between the cracks. The school is in the process of planning the “big picture” to address professional development and improve capacity in setting targets in the core subjects and tracking progress over time.

With the establishment of a data committee, the school is positioning itself well to improve its use of data school-wide. The school is effectively using data to compare its results to similar schools where students are achieving at a higher level. Inter-school visitations have been occurring and the sharing of ‘best practices’ is raising awareness of what good teaching and learning looks like.

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 proficient.

The principal and various specialists in the school are engaged in analyzing several sources of data to identify next steps and to help teachers set bottom lines for improvement. Increased levels of collaboration mean that teachers are now more involved in planning and they are beginning to set goals for individual students. However, the school has not established specific school-wide goals to drive the improvement of achievement in the core subjects or developed a communication strategy to focus on whole school goals with parents, students and staff in order to raise the bar.

The school’s Comprehensive Education Plan provides some direction for improvement in the core curriculum but goals are not specific enough and are not written in a way that can measure progress over time. As a result, the school is not well placed to determine how effectively it is accelerating the learning of individual students, groups and classes. Since there is no mechanism to monitor improvement in reading, writing and math against its goals, the school cannot, with confidence, evaluate the effectiveness of its action plans. Without clear links among whole school, class and individual goals, staff, students and parents cannot be certain about what they are reaching for in working towards improvement in reading, writing and math.

Intervention teachers use data effectively to identify student learning needs in special education. The school’s case study outlined a good process for gathering data and designing a program to meet those needs. There is not enough involvement of parents and classroom teachers in the initial stages and during the process to ensure that efforts are coordinated in providing effective interventions.

The principal has an open door policy and communication with staff, students and parents is positive. The school has developed a number of strategies to keep parents abreast with

the curriculum and their child's progress. However, there is still some way to go before parents understand what they can do to best support their child's achievement.

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.

The school provides a good core curriculum with a focus on a workshop approach in reading and writing and every day math skills. Since the last State assessment, the school has implemented a program to ensure that the school's curriculum is aligned with the State standards and that teachers are teaching the skills that make a difference in student achievement. Teachers monitor student learning through running records and class-based assessments and work with literacy and math coaches to adjust their programs to meet the needs of students experiencing difficulty. Although the school is providing before and after school programs as well as extended-day programs to support and reinforce student learning, the school has few measures in place to determine whether or not they are making a positive difference. Students participate in weekly gym and computer classes and engage in a variety of programs related to the arts.

Many teachers plan effective lessons that probe student understanding and enable them to think more deeply about what they have to do to find solutions. They ask questions such as "Why?" and "How do you know that?" to challenge students and stretch their thinking. However, the consistent differentiation of instruction is not yet embedded in daily practice in all classes. As a result, the school has not fully built teachers' capacity and confidence to easily modify their teaching to meet the varied learning needs of students and close the achievement gap.

There is a high level of mutual respect and trust between staff and students. Consequently, students are confident to ask teachers for help if they find the work too difficult and say that their teachers will go "the extra mile to help them". Nevertheless, students are still not involved sufficiently well in evaluating with teachers their work and identifying specific next steps for improvement.

The principal has implemented a wide range of excellent incentives for encouraging daily attendance that has been highly motivating and rewarding for students. These are not reflected in higher attendance figures because of the transient population.

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.

The principal and assistant principals are highly respected by all stakeholders and are leading the school towards improvement. There are established routines and expectations that ensure the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Student behaviour is good. Staff members apply behaviour management systems consistently and students who experience difficulty receive additional supports and services. The principal's approach in treating every student with "respect and understanding" is reflected in the positive relationships between adults and students.

The school has well developed plans for in-service and staff training. There is an induction program for new teachers to ensure that they receive ongoing support. Meeting time for faculty to review progress and plan strategies for improvement also supports the school's goals for improvement in reading, writing and math. Conference agendas include the use of student data to inform planning as a key discussion item and student work samples are used to a sufficient level to plan appropriate next steps. Regular faculty meetings and in-service are helping to increase teacher capacity and accountability for their practice.

Administrators observe classes regularly and give verbal and written feedback about strengths and areas that need improvement. Teachers are given additional support if necessary to improve instruction to better meet the learning needs of students. Teachers visit each other's classrooms and share observations informally.

Teachers are receiving effective coaching and mentoring from the literacy and math coaches to increase their capacity in using good practices. These initiatives position the school well in terms of focusing on specific areas for improvement but since whole school goals are not well articulated or measurable, it is difficult to tell the degree to which these practices are accelerating learning.

Many good opportunities to extend student learning are provided through school programs sponsored by community organizations that support the school's focus on excellence.

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 proficient.

The school's Comprehensive Education Plan provides some broad goals to guide school improvement but does not articulate specific measures against which to evaluate whether the goals have been achieved. As a result, staff, students and parents do not have really clear guidance around which to plan for success.

Teachers establish baseline data for each student in the core subject areas during the first few weeks of school. They engage in planning meetings to examine the data and to plan curriculum that aligns with State standards. The school has been diligent in planning training to build further the capacity of staff to differentiate instruction. They have yet to set interim goals to monitor and measure student progress at regular intervals and so monitor the school's progress towards reaching its goals. The school does not have robust mechanisms in place to inform them that some students might not achieve the State standards. Consequently, staff were not able to adjust instructional practices and programs quickly enough to prevent a dip in student achievement. This is a critical aspect of school improvement planning.

The school is focusing on building the capacity of staff in using high quality instructional practices through its professional development planning process. However, it has not sufficiently set goals for improving teacher outcomes nor has it defined a process for tracking successful interventions to increase the capacity of all stakeholders in the community to achieve at a much higher level and excel.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: John J. Driscoll School	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