

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Thomas C. Giordano School

Middle School 045

2502 Lorillard Place

Bronx

NY 10458

Principal: Annamaria Giordano

Dates of review: December 1-2, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Lori Bennett

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Thomas C. Giordano School is a middle school with 1071 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 15% Black, 78% Hispanic, 5% White and 2%, Asian students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 90.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 83% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Thomas Giordano Middle School has progressed steadily since its last review. All areas identified in the last quality review have been effectively addressed.

The school is organized into six academies, each supported by an assistant principal, guidance counselor, dean and lead teacher. This structure creates small communities of learning where students are well supported. The principal and her staff make very good use of multiple data sources and use more than one data management system to gain a deep understanding of student progress over time. Administrators and teachers are further improving data interpretation skills and strategies to evaluate progress. They are improving the consistency of systems and structures to support teachers in data collection and analysis. However, the school does not yet have a detailed understanding of the performance of various ethnic groups and gender groups. As a result it does not have sufficient information to effectively investigate students' learning styles and devise a wider range of approaches to differentiate instruction.

The principal and staff encourage high expectations and students respond by continuing to strive for excellence. The school's budget and organizational structure is used effectively to support academic achievement for all students.

Teachers use extensive data to analyze student performance and to develop effective instructional strategies. They use Acuity and ARIS data systems to identify student strengths and academic challenges in order to create differentiated learning activities for their classes. However, not all teachers are equally effective in using the data to set learning targets and plan differentiated learning opportunities targeted to the specific needs of all students. Professional development is a school priority and the administration provides valuable support for all teachers' professional growth and development. They are now seeking to put in place more consistent systems and structures to support teachers and provide them with individualized professional growth plans.

The inquiry team, which is strong and active, undertook successful action research in mathematics intervention that resulted in a 17-point school-wide performance increase in math scores last school year. The team is currently using the same model and approach in English language arts.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal is a highly organized and effective leader who is respected by the entire school community, which shares her vision for the school.
- Members of staff know the students well and maintain a warm and safe learning environment that strongly supports students' personal and academic development.
- The faculty uses extensive data to identify areas of strength and where improvement is needed.
- Members of staff collaborate effectively to share and develop professional knowledge collaboratively, which has created a strong sense of teamwork.
- The inquiry team is generating helpful ideas on how to improve student performance and the team's action research is creating a reflective approach to improving instructional goals.
- School resources are aligned effectively to implement new initiatives.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine student goal setting in all core subjects, with established benchmarks and timelines against which to analyze and monitor students' performance and measure their progress.
- Fully analyze the progress of all subgroups within the school to better understand the reasons for their relative success and use this information systematically to set goals for grades and content areas.
- Further develop teachers' skills in the use of data to plan and differentiate instruction in order to better engage the interest and meet the needs of all students.
- Refine the professional growth plan model so that it addresses the individual needs of all teachers whatever their level of experience.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The administration collects multiple sources of data from a range of sources including, ARIS, NYStart, predictive, formal and informal class assessments. Each teacher keeps a data folio to record and monitor student progress. In the spring before the sixth grade students' arrival to the school, the principal and guidance staff acquire all available data and analyze it. They use this carefully to inform the makeup of classes and early identification of students who may be in need of extra support as they enter middle school. Systems and structures are in place to develop teachers' skills in manipulating and analyzing data.

The school is refining the use of student portfolios in the core content areas, but the quality and range of materials collected are not consistent across all academies. Running records and conferring notes are used in English language arts, math and science classrooms and student portfolios provide further evidence of individual student progress. Pre- and post-unit assessment outcomes help to further refine instructional approaches and to identify areas of students' strengths and where improvement is needed. Two or three students have been identified in each subject class and are targeted for Tier I intervention. However, the practice in this area remains inconsistent across all subject areas and is not analyzed well enough to monitor student progress over time to gain a better understanding of the performance of specific subgroups.

The principal has identified correctly the need to be more systematic in the use of data throughout the year for comparative purposes and to create systems to further develop teachers' skill in manipulating and analyzing data to plan for differentiated instruction and track student progress. Current planning for this year places a high priority on teachers becoming skilled in using electronic data systems to make data collection even more refined. Teachers show considerable enthusiasm for the rapidly increasing use of electronic data handling within the school.

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 school is welcoming and caring and administrators and teachers know students well. As a result students know that the adults in the building care for them and have high expectations for their learning. Parents are actively involved with the school and are satisfied with the school's expectations for their children. They receive information about their children's progress through the mid-semester progress reports and report cards sent out after each marking period. These provide information that enables parents to support their children's learning at home.

School-wide and interim progress data is shared with the school community through effective communication practices and the administrative team creates a weekly school-wide and monthly newsletter to disseminate and share best practices. Teachers, parents, and students also share information through the school's online web site, which enables the entire school community to be involved in school improvement planning.

Teachers regularly set instructional goals at grade level and departmental meetings and use data management systems to track and monitor student performance. Teachers analyze student work carefully and create standardized rubrics to formulate departmental unit goals. These focus on academic rigor, critical thinking and differentiation to meet the needs of individual students. The school is developing a uniform policy for student-teacher conferring practices in social studies and science. Students are required to set goals in each subject area before and after each unit of study. Teachers review goals and conference with students in order to assist them in reaching their targets by adjusting instructional practices and student groupings. However, the school does not have clear timetables for review and revision of interim goals and there is not yet a consistent system for recording information about student academic challenges, interim goals and next steps.

The inquiry team is generating helpful ideas on how to improve student performance and the team's action research is creating a reflective approach to improving instructional goals. The team has worked to analyze the performance of underachievers and proficient students who have not made one-year gains in math and English language arts. It is using the successful practices from last year's findings and success in math to develop strategies to support growth in English language arts.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school seeks to provide an engaging curriculum that challenges students to achieve academically. Instruction in all core content subjects follows City mandates and is aligned with state standards. Student and school-wide data is analyzed carefully to inform the design of curriculum and instructional strategies to meet the needs of students. .

Many teachers use school-wide data in addition to their own formal and informal assessments to understand their students' learning needs and students are made aware of what is expected of them in classrooms. Assessment outcomes are reviewed and student work is analyzed to guide instruction and differentiate instructional materials for targeted groups within classrooms. However, the use of data to differentiate instruction and actively engage students in their own learning is not yet consistently effective in all classrooms and content areas. For example, higher achieving students are not always challenged sufficiently. The inquiry team has identified this group as the target population for this year's investigation to identify strategies to increase the learning outcomes for students who are capable of achieving Level 4 on state performance assessments

The school uses its resources effectively to support student achievement goals and careful data analysis informs the principal's staffing and scheduling decisions. The six academies within the school broaden and enrich the students learning experiences. The

school schedule provides common planning time and sixty-minute blocks for all content areas, including the arts, drama and technology, which increases instructional time. An academic intervention period provides targeted support to students who struggle as well as student enrichment opportunities, resulting in increased performance of all students. Newly hired literacy and math coaches plan professional development sessions, provide staff with a wide array of instructional resources, and facilitate opportunities for professional collaboration.

Positive and collegial relationships are evident among all staff members. Students have great confidence in the administration and are very comfortable approaching teachers, guidance counselors or other support personnel in the school resulting in a highly supportive and safe environment. As one student stated, "Everyone has somebody to go to if help is needed."

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The administrative team conducts formal and informal observations and frequent classroom visits to continually provide teachers with helpful feedback on classroom instruction. Supervision of staff is consistent, with regular leadership observations, learning walks and collaborative planning among administrators and staff. The AUSSIE consultant, lead teachers and coaches plan with the administrative cabinet and support teachers during common planning meetings, thereby providing a consistent vision for instruction across content areas. These bi-monthly meetings afford teachers the support and structure to meet by grade and content area to plan, share ideas and best practices, and review assessment data and student work. Teachers welcome opportunities to strengthen their instructional skill and knowledge. Content area wiki spaces and e-mail communication facilitate sharing of lesson plan templates. However, there is currently no standardized way for teachers to share best practices.

The mentor teacher supports new and beginning teachers effectively, utilizing the California professional teaching standards that serve as the lens for classroom observation and differentiated professional goal setting. Veteran and mid-career staff participate in the 21-Century Model of Observation, which is a year-long action research study. One veteran teacher is researching how girls perform in science as they progress through middle school. The school takes the professional growth of all members of staff very seriously, though it is not yet fully addressing all teachers' very varied developmental needs.

The school benefits from a number of after school activities and external partners such as City Squash, Urban Advantage and the Young Ladies and Gentlemen's Club. These provide valuable support for students' personal and academic development.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 has a systematic process for monitoring its progress and revising its goals through regular administrative team and cabinet meetings. The instructional team meets regularly to set, monitor and review school-wide goals. The teachers have a strong sense of community and collegiality and utilize formal and informal structures to review and evaluate student achievement. Similarly, teachers regularly revise classroom action plans to take account of updated data. This is particularly evident in English language arts and math, though not yet as well targeted in other content areas. However, the development of long-term and interim benchmarks against which to analyze and monitor individual student performance and improvement is still a work in progress

The school has a good understanding of its strengths and the principal is continuously seeking to improve school practices. Data analysis informs instructional planning, and organizational decision-making as well as professional development planning. For example, the principal has taken significant steps to make the Santa Cruz Teaching Standards more explicit with staff, although individualized professional goals have yet to be fully developed.

The principal's vision for the school's development gives it a clear sense of direction and the staff and school community are committed to achieving the vision. Comprehensive school-wide planning and consistent communication among all constituents helps promote continuous improvement in all areas of school life. Parents appreciate the school's high expectations for their children and continue to support the school's efforts.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Thomas C. Giordano School	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		X		
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X				
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X				
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?		X					
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed