

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**The Gifford School  
Elementary School 032  
32 Elverton Avenue  
Staten Island  
NY 10308**

**Principal: Nancy Spataro**

**Dates of review: December 8 – 9, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Linda Trifon**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Gifford School is an elementary school with 890 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 9% Hispanic, 85% White, 4% Asian, and 1% Native American students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 94.3%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

Extensive collection and careful scrutiny of a wide range of data on individuals, classes, grades and the school as a whole helps administrators and faculty to identify performance levels and trends. This review of data is used to guide organizational decisions that are focused on students' needs and raising their achievement level. While school-wide goals have been established, the school community is unable to articulate those goals precisely. Teachers receive and collect extensive information about their students and speak fluently about data as they plan instruction. They use their own systems to track student performance and progress. This information is disseminated to families informally, through brief conversations and/or notices sent home or formally, through parent conferences and workshops.

The development of the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan was not a collaborative one with two teachers assigned the task of writing it. The school embraces the need for ongoing leadership capacity through a differentiated approach to professional development that builds upon the expertise of experienced teachers and prioritizes the needs of new teachers. Teachers are engaged in inquiry and share student learning outcomes with each other. This has served as a springboard for deeper analysis of data. The use of data to assess the progress of all subgroups is not yet embedded throughout the school. Individual learning goals have been created, but they are not precise enough. Students know they have to meet their learning goals but lack specific strategies on how to achieve them.

The school effectively collects, records and analyzes a wide range of data in English language arts, math and social studies to monitor the performance and progress of individuals and groups of students. However, the use of the data to differentiate instruction based on the individual needs of children is inconsistent, and teachers do not always respond to student work by clearly identifying the next steps in learning.

School leaders maintain a culture of collegiality and collaboration. Positive attitudes toward teaching and learning exist and the professional development provided supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Systems and structures are in place for school leaders and faculty to regularly collect, record and analyze a wide range of data to identify patterns and trends to inform instructional and organizational decisions.
- The school communicates high expectations for learning to students and families and involves students in developing their learning goals.
- The curriculum is aligned to the state standards in all core subjects and the school makes strategic organizational decisions to support the instructional plan.
- A positive school tone exists wherein all teachers welcome the opportunity to participate in collaborative activities to strengthen their instructional practices to enable them to accelerate student learning.
- School leaders provide differentiated professional development to strengthen teacher practice and support new teachers.
- The school's effective student council and support services have led to the academic and personal growth of students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Establish interim checkpoints to collect and evaluate the learning outcomes of all subgroups and engage teachers, parents and students in developing a rigorous instructional plan with precise goals.
- Sharpen the Comprehensive Educational Plan planning and evaluating process to involve teachers, parents and students, resulting in a shared and cohesive vision for school improvement.
- Deepen teachers' understanding of differentiated instruction so that the process, content and product of lessons meet the needs of all students consistently and contain precise learning goals and strategies for achieving them.
- Use data from formal and informal observations as well as all student assessment data to evaluate the effectiveness of organizational decisions made to strengthen teacher practice and accelerate student performance.

## 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 principal's high level of competence in data analysis has enabled her to support all teachers in their own collection of data and they are diligent in doing so. The school collects data from external sources and from its own assessments. The analysis of data enables teachers to identify learning needs for their students. All teachers maintain and use comprehensive assessment binders to understand what students know and to identify next steps in learning. These binders promote meaningful data-driven discussion at grade conferences and during common preparation periods. However, there is little evidence that school leaders and faculty in all core subjects strategically and consistently monitor progress monthly or at the end of each unit of study and analyze what each student can do so that individualized learning experiences can be planned.

The school has clearly defined processes in place to gather, analyze and interpret formative, summative and diagnostic data for students' performance and progress. However, school leaders have not yet recognized the importance of closely analyzing the progress of different subgroups in the population. School leaders and faculty do not consistently engage in focused analysis and evaluation of a wide range of subgroup data that includes attendance, summative and formative assessments, anecdotal records and student work. As of yet, there are no concrete plans, measurable goals, benchmark assessments or rigorous timelines in place to ensure the accelerated progress of subgroups.

The school engages in an effective open exchange of information with parents and students with letters, interim progress reports, report cards and goal sheets.

**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 uses its grade meetings and common planning periods to analyze student data and to set learning goals in the core subjects. However, individual learning goals are often too general and lack specific strategies on how students can meet their goals. As such, they take too little account of students' different starting points, learning needs, styles and interests. When asked how learning goals are set, a student responded, "My teacher puts a list on the board and we have to pick one." Although revisited, there is no evidence that the goals are evaluated using frequent checkpoints and revising learning experiences accordingly. As a result, differentiated instruction based on the individual

needs of children is inconsistent, and teachers do not always respond to student work to by identifying the targeted next steps in learning.

School leaders involve some teachers in creating the school improvement plan. As of yet, the school has not recognized the importance of involving the whole school community in each stage of the school improvement cycle. The Comprehensive Educational Plan was written without input from the staff and there is little collaboration among school leaders and faculty to evaluate the goals of the previous Comprehensive Educational Plan and develop strategic action plans for the next round of goal setting.

The school communicates high expectations to students and their families through a variety of avenues. Teachers pass on this message primarily through one-on-one conferences with students and regular and frequent contacts with parents.

**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 aligns instruction with State standards. School leaders and teachers have created rubrics across the subject areas and the principal holds the teachers accountable to aligning instruction to them. The upper grade science curriculum challenges the students to think critically and students look forward to their lessons. For example, one fourth-grade student stated that, “Science is my favorite subject because we always get to explore and experiment.” The use of Everyday Math supports a consistent approach to mathematics learning through the grades. The development of organized, leveled libraries promotes student learning and independence in English language arts and other content areas. The writing program follows the Teachers College writing workshop model and there are rubrics in place to assess student learning outcomes.

Teachers collaborate and plan together. This collegiality effectively promotes discussion among grade teachers and out of classroom support personnel about student learning outcomes. However, the school does not consistently use these processes to revisit and establish new learning goals, establish interim checkpoints and determine next steps in all core subject areas. The use of the collected data to plan and teach differentiated lessons is inconsistent in many classrooms, adversely affecting the performance of the high performing students and students in the subgroup population. The design of lessons does not account for students’ different learning styles, interests and needs. The teachers do not challenge higher-level students in order to motivate their interests to improve student learning outcomes in all core subjects. Additionally, rigorous and meaningful written feedback does not consistently provide students with specific and precise help that will accelerate their learning.

Administrators ensure that the staff has the resources and support they need. The principal makes a good effort in using her resources to make strategic organizational decisions that positively influence student academic and personal growth. For example, the school has applied for and received a technology grant enabling the school to purchase many SMART boards to enhance teaching and learning.

School leaders support the staff effectively, maintaining a culture of mutual trust, respect and positive attitudes toward learning. Teachers create their professional learning goals at the beginning of the year and the administration strive to provide differentiated support to each staff member. The school leaders foster a positive and professional learning community where a strong work ethic exists and a collegial spirit embraces and supports teaching and learning well throughout the school.

**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.**

Teachers acknowledge the very good support they receive to develop their skills and deepen their knowledge through a diverse range of in-house and external training opportunities. School leaders have systems and structures in place to observe teacher practice and provide feedback. The administration is aware of the strengths and needs of their teachers and this knowledge is used to deepen teachers' understanding of best practice. The onsite professional development is augmented by providing opportunities for teacher training elsewhere, often at another school.

The inquiry team regularly meets to analyze and discuss the learning outcomes of students. Currently, the academic focus is on improving students' writing and note-taking skills. This has become a school-wide focus across all content areas. When asked if the data collected has changed practice across the school, one teacher said, "Teachers are sharing best practice. There are more teachers on teams and case studies are in place." The information acquired during their research and instructional techniques implemented are turn-keyed to other staff members during grade meetings and faculty conferences. This year teachers have chosen one student in their class to study deeply and monitor progress closely. However, school leaders have not engaged the inquiry team in analyzing all assessment outcomes to identify a target population consisting of between fifteen and thirty students. Taking teachers through the identified steps outlined in the Children First Intensive Inquiry Team Handbook provided to schools by the Chancellor has not yet begun.

School leaders organize the professional learning for their faculty based on the teacher learning goals and observations of classroom practice. Teachers have multiple opportunities to discuss their practice and visit colleagues' classrooms with the lens on improving instruction. However, school leaders need to monitor the progress and performance of teachers rigorously to encourage continual evaluation and refinement of their classroom practice.

A student council is in place at the school. Representatives from every class in grades 1-5 meet with the teacher in charge on a weekly basis. Students feel they have a voice and opportunities exist for them to bring issues, concerns and ideas of how to reach out to help the community to school leaders. For example, the council recently ran a successful "food for soldiers" drive. They organized a canned food drive and shipped it to the soldiers. They are currently involved in planning a "toys for children" drive.

**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 seeks to improve the quality of teaching and learning. School leaders monitor teacher practice and provide additional support when necessary. All teachers monitor student progress using collected assessment data and classroom observations. However, the plan for improvement does not include measurable interim goals with suitable timeframes for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year. Systems are not in place yet for school leaders and faculty to regularly and consistently evaluate individual student, subgroup and grade-level data to revise groupings and create new measurable learning goals for every student. As a result, detailed data analysis of student learning outcomes does not drive instruction precisely enough to maximize student progress.

School leaders use the results of the progress report, last year's Quality Review, the learning environment survey, findings from the inquiry team and interim assessments to make organizational decisions. However, the school is at an early stage in monitoring, revising and evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives. As a result, the evaluation of the impact of actions is not yet an integral part of the school's culture.

School leaders have not yet recognized the importance of collaborating with teachers and parents in creating the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan. As a result, there is a lack of clarity among the school community regarding the principal's school-wide goals and her plan for school improvement.

# School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: The Gifford School</b>	△	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		<b>X</b>		
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?		<b>X</b>		
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

## 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, DY0, 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.

<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X				
<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
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				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X				
<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
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					
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>