

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

The Gifford School

Elementary School 032

**32 Elverton Avenue
Staten island
NY 10308**

Principal: Nancy Spataro

Dates of review: November 9 - 10, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Diane Sharett

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Gifford School is an elementary school with 867 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 1% Black, 8% Hispanic, 85% White, 4% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 1% of students with no ethnic code. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 94.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The Gifford School is an extraordinary professional learning community where students achieve well and are proud to attend the school. Students' interviews convey positive attitudes regarding their success, achievement and emotional fulfillment. There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the school, which resonates from students' work on bulletin boards and through science investigations and applications. Teamwork is at the core of the collaborative spirit as seen during "lunch and learns", mini inquiry teams and grade meetings. The principal and staff are passionate about data collection to assist them meet students' needs. The assistant principals immerse themselves in administrative and instructional responsibilities, which leads to distributed leadership and shared learning experiences. An innovative schedule enables teachers to meet regularly and discuss their individual students with colleagues. This fosters a strategic learning and sharing environment for the staff. Advanced technology in the classrooms and interactive lessons effectively support standards based content area lessons.

The school is a community of learners as evidenced by the advancement of student performance and progress. The level of trust and confidence among the staff and students is high. The principal is an effective leader who clearly enjoys her role. There is a strong focus on creating learning opportunities that challenge and support students with an emphasis on a rigorous curriculum such as balanced literacy and Renzulli Learning. Classroom activities engage students in higher order thinking skills, synthesis, and application of concepts. Staff and parents exhibit a plethora of pride for their school. They are enthusiastic about the high expectations shown by the students. Stakeholders learn about student achievement shared through data analysis, monthly goal setting, awards assemblies, mini inquiry team meetings and interactive technology based lessons. However, not all constituents have the opportunity to participate in the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan and this limits the opportunity to establish and embed a common vision.

Presently, mini inquiry teams work on case studies by identifying individual needs. They do not yet identify a common instructional focus with the target population and precise academic learning goals. Teachers and teacher teams are beginning to strive to set annual and interim goals for students in need of additional support to accelerate learning to reach their potential. Best practices depict monitoring and revising as the school created its own math assessment. This shows strong flexibility, awareness and communication of curriculum needs.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Relationships are warm and respectful throughout, resulting in an environment where students demonstrate positive behavior and an enthusiasm for learning.
 - Students interact enthusiastically in classroom lessons, responding to group work, individual conferencing, work products and writing samples, and offering responsive answers to questions during instructional time. This supports them in reaching their full potential.
 - Students and student council members respond to questions regarding how they learn best by explaining they feel a sense of camaraderie. They are safe and connected to staff for ongoing support. Parents comment that the school is, “like getting a private school education in a public school environment”. They appreciate the focus on the individual needs of students.
- Administration and staff have a deep understanding of the performance and progress of individual students and use it to inform instruction and organizational decision- making.
 - The school regularly uses a wide range of relevant data and a plethora of student assessments on a daily basis. They consist of ‘Design Your Own’ (DYO) monthly math assessment, and daily use of spreadsheets indicating math trends and mastery skills. Informal assessments are prevalent. Student work folders encompassing various content areas show assessments in math, progress in writing and reading item analysis. These assessments depict higher order thinking skills. Teachers disaggregate data monthly, across the grades, in math, English language arts and New York State English as a second language assessment test for English language learners. The impact of this compilation of data results in a school wide awareness of the individual student needs.
 - Assistant principals engage the lowest performing third of the students by monitoring their individual progress and conducting daily lessons, depicting a rigorous standards based curriculum. This has resulted in students making gains of one or more years. Teachers are able to develop lessons based on the guidance provided by the assistant principals resulting in data driven, standards setting instruction.
- The principal’s superb leadership is the impetus for ongoing, efficient communication that supports the achievement and success of the students.
 - The development and utilization of weekly administrative meetings with individual staff members to discuss the literacy and math goals for their class and open exchanges with parents, 55 workshops a year, has resulted in an increased instructional awareness of school activities.
 - Efficient communication has established strong cohesion among all stakeholders. Students and teachers share monthly goal-setting targets with the home for review and parental signatures.

- The school's excellent systems and structures enable the staff to participate in regular professional development focused on strengthening instruction by identifying the best strategies to meet students' needs.
 - Differentiated workshops, meeting the varied needs of the staff, encompass all curricula areas. The school provides them through organized learning communities. Successful technology workshops lead to the integration and use of SMART boards in many classrooms resulting in interactive lessons. Teachers have the opportunity to use the Renzulli Method to create an awareness of students' different learning styles to raise learning outcomes.
 - Ongoing mini inquiry teams meet where teachers discuss the students in their case studies. Staff of various grades and capacities offer suggestions and additional strategies to assist their colleagues' work. Newer staff members attend intervisitations and "lunch and learns". This fosters support, additional knowledge and a collegial learning environment where teachers can reach out to their colleagues for assistance.

- Teachers convey high expectations for student achievement and work diligently to develop individual student goals to inform parents and strengthen their awareness of their child's academic needs.
 - Students articulate the system in place for sharing individual goals in reading, writing, math and physical education to their parents, on a monthly basis, providing accessible information and students' awareness of next learning steps. This results in on going student-teacher reflective conferencing to promote student achievement and to ensure the goals set are effective.
 - Extensive displays of student work abound in classrooms and hallways and provide a testimony of high quality learning.

- School leaders make informed and effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school.
 - A thorough review of each teacher's performance takes place annually. It assesses their effectiveness in the grade and determines their placement for the following year together with appropriate professional development aligned with school goals and curricula. The creation of individual teacher goals propels teacher and student learning.
 - Assistant principals develop, model, and monitor sample literacy lessons so that classroom teachers utilizing those lessons create expanded versions for implementation across the grade.

- The school has a diversified curriculum with valuable and innovative opportunities for students to develop high levels of academic and personal success.

- The enrichment through the arts and sciences program enables students to participate in highly popular during and after school programs. These consist of art club, band, and science exploration resulting in an opportunity for the students to develop new talents by experiencing various curriculum areas.
- The school offers thirteen different specialty areas in the arts and sciences to meet the diversified interests of all students including special education students. The impact of this program enables the mainstreaming of these students to take place.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen collaborative inquiry to encourage teacher teams to work with target students who have a common instructional need.
 - Mini inquiry teams meet regularly to discuss teachers' individual case studies. However, the system of developing an inquiry team to analyze the common need of a group of students is not yet in place.
- Expand participation in the development of the Comprehensive Educational Plan to bring about changes to increase student learning.
 - Not all constituent groups within the school community have the opportunity to voice their suggestions in developing the Comprehensive Educational Plan. This limits their opportunity to play a greater part to increase student learning.
- Ensure that individual teachers and teacher teams use data to set annual and interim goals across the grades in content areas for student subgroups and those in need of additional support to accelerate their learning.
 - Individual teachers and teacher teams use data to set differentiated goals for individual students across the grades and subjects, including all subgroups of students. However, it is difficult to determine if those students are making effective progress towards the annual and interim goals.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: The Gifford School	△	▶	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▶	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?				X
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▶	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				X			
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals 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 progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?				X			
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X			
Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed