

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**The Throop School**

**11x121**

**2750 Throop Avenue**

**Bronx**

**NY 10469**

**Principal: Rachel Donnelly**

**Dates of review: January 26 - 27, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Elizabeth A. White**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

P.S. 121 Throop is an Elementary school with 950 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 60% Black, 30% Hispanic, 2% White, 6% Asian students and 1% other students. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 11% special education students. Boys account for 50% of the students enrolled and girls account for 50%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 93%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Curricular development is purposefully aligned with new state standards and is designed to address the requirements of all learners resulting in increased levels of cognitive demand.(1.1)
  - The school has purposefully focused on embedding opportunities for engagement and written communication into curricula resulting in student work tasks they call, 'exemplars', that require students to explain their reasoning. For example in math, students were given a 'New Year's Party' scenario requiring them to write a letter to a donor requesting to place an order for soda after investigating and planning, and demonstrating the process they used to determine guest preference and the quantities needed. Content area exemplars are assessed to determine next steps for further curricular refinement and student supports. Since tasks are continuously assessed and refined the school's efforts have led to positive improvement in curriculum that fosters conceptual understanding of subject matter.
- The alignment of organizational decisions with school goals results in effective support for identified priorities.(1.3)
  - To support implementation of more rigorous curricula, teams of teachers on each grade have common collaborative periods that support the development of rubrics, unit tests, student work review and instructional strategies. This has resulted in improved curriculum. Student work exemplar tasks have been developed to engage them and encourage higher order thinking. This is demonstrated through written task assignments such as the 'New Year's Party' math task where students demonstrate conceptual understanding. In addition, increased support staff has been hired and has resulted in effective supports. For example the school's content consultants support teacher teams as well as individual teacher development by modeling, planning lessons and lesson viewing leading to improved teacher practice. These efforts have led to consistent teacher practice which is evident across classrooms and includes the use of manipulatives like geo boards in math and coherent teacher practice such as the workshop model in literacy, specifically guided instruction. It has also enabled the school to surface gaps in student learning, curriculum and pedagogy.
- Teacher team and classroom assessment practices are on-going and result in actionable feedback that informs instructional decisions.(2.2)
  - Teacher teams supplement summative assessments with "Mini-assessments" to benchmark student mastery. For example, in literacy, Kindergarten teachers administer a summative pre assessment to students to determine their knowledge of sixty 'Power Words'. During the course of the year (November, February and March) they administer benchmark assessments after teaching clusters of words. As a result of on-going review of student progress, teachers continually adjust their practice to meet student needs. This has led to development of strategies

such as a focus on modality based teaching that offers kinesthetic, visual and auditory supports for learners. .

- Across classrooms teachers administer school-based assessments like ECAM (Early Childhood Assessment in Math) evaluation process to determine students' "most advanced stage of learning". Assessment analysis is used to identify student strengths and needs resulting in the formation of ability-based groups based on student outcome trends. This has enabled the school to address gaps in learning to address student deficiencies that have decreased based on these efforts.
- The school frequently examines the progression of student learning goals resulting in effective targeting of interventions throughout the year.(3.3)
  - Classroom teachers consistently use acuity periodic assessments and other assessments like the Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) to track the achievement of learning, to determine strengths and develop next steps that are used to create "power goals" for students. The result is effective benchmarking and supports during the year for targeted groups of students whom are also the focus of teacher teams. This has led to increased student performance based on unit exams. Likewise as evident by the school leadership team and parents' association documents, the school regularly involves the community in tracking the progression of school-wide goals. Adjustments, such as, surveying students as to which kinds of books they like to read used to augment classroom libraries are supported and positively impact initiatives like the increased volume of books read during the 100 book challenge. This has led to improved student comprehension levels based on formative measures and to family input in initiatives that are supported by the school community.
- Teacher professional growth is effectively supported by frequent supervisory observations in which include feedback aligned to school priorities that result in improved pedagogy.(4.1)
  - Feedback from classroom observations include cycles of visits and 'rapid memo' feedback that effectively captures concerns and next steps for teacher development in a timely manner. For example, in comparative informal observations, one teacher moved from teacher dominant math instruction in November to a balanced approach in January. A next step given was to use curricula resources to engage students in math games that enable them to apply what was learned. This focused, research based feedback results in improved instructional practice.
  - Staff development is on-going and grounded in school instructional goals and student data. It is individualized based on teachers' needs resulting in support aligned to student outcomes and supervisory judgment. SETSS teachers receive assessment training to effectively benchmark student progress to address the needs of students with IEPs. These efforts have led to effective supports that improve pedagogical practice.
- The school has a positive culture enhanced by partnerships with families and outside organizations that result in the promotion of the academic, social and emotional growth of students. (4.4)

- The school community, including administration, parents, teachers and students has positive attitudes towards the school which results in a school culture that promotes the holistic development of children. Middle School articulation seminars are held with families of seniors to support their journey towards college and careers. External partnerships with Education for Music and American Ballroom Theatre have led to positive outlets for student expression through the Arts via band membership and dance competition. The social emotional growth of students is also supported by active participation in charitable events such as food and toy drives during the year. The school has a well established *Learning Leader* program that provides training for staff and parent volunteers resulting in effective community support for school initiatives. The school's parent coordinator serves as a key liaison between the school and parents. Her efforts have resulted in a weekly parent newsletter that provides parents with an additional information source about school happenings for example, content area workshops designed to help parents help their students at home. As a result of these efforts, students expressed positive attitudes about the school, which has maintained a respectful climate as evidenced by a low suspension rate.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Continue to improve teacher pedagogical practice that provides differentiated supports to address the needs of a variety of learners.(1.2)
  - Across classrooms, teaching practices are becoming aligned to curricula that promote a high thinking demand. Teachers are using a balanced approach to instruction and are utilizing hands-on strategies. Currently however, instructional activities are not yet appropriately tiered to address diverse learners and groups of students, resulting in insufficient support and challenge for completion of tasks. In math for example, while struggling students had suitable scaffolding and challenge, the high achieving group was only required to do more of the same lower level activity. Likewise, in literacy, several students were assigned a poem that was far above their independent reading level and thus experienced frustration without teacher support. This limited the students' ability to independently engage in the task.
  - Similarly, while across classrooms teachers are encouraging thinking via increasingly engaging questioning and discussion, the practice of monitoring student work groups insufficient, resulting in a hindered ability to make on the spot instructional adjustments to support student needs. During a rich conversation in science, students engaged in discussion around text however because of their high level of internal motivation and enthusiasm they often talked over one another limiting the ability to hear the thoughts of all group members. Group discussion practices were posted but did not meet the needs of higher achievers as they did not use them, limiting the opportunity to fully benefit from peer contributions.
- Increase consistency of school-wide protocols to inform parents about student progress resulting in accessibility of current data and an understanding of next learning steps.(2.4)

- Parents have expressed that they use ARIS to get their children's academic progress information. They have also stated that they communicate with teachers - in person, via telephone, internet or in writing. Teachers have varying procedures for sharing student progress information according to parents. Some parents have received academic information every two weeks, while others not as consistently. Parents agreed that information is not received about all subjects including behavior to the same degree. The school currently uses a Google-based system to communicate expectations and supports for families. However, this tool has not yet been frequently used. Parents have reported experiencing technical difficulties with site. As a result of these inconsistent structures, timeliness of conveying student progress to parents is hindered thus limiting support for students at home.
- Enhance systems for data aggregation so that trends are more readily available to inform policies and practices across the school. (5.2)
  - Faculty conduct student outcome trend analysis by using school-based tools like acuity class views, ECAM class summaries in math, and Fountas & Pinnell at risk assessments in literacy to determine next steps for instruction. This practice is not evident all disciplines however limiting the assessment of curricular and instructional impact across disciplines. Currently ELA, math and science are tracked regularly but there is limited accessible social studies data. This impedes the school's efforts in assessing impact of written communication across subjects.
  - Currently the school uses individual classroom data to assess school-wide trends. While the school has recently secured a consultant to devise a web-based system for capturing student outcome data it is not yet fully operational limiting the school's ability to efficiently aggregate and identify emerging trends. This hinders opportunities to make timely adjustments based on student outcome data to enhance school-wide processes.
- Refine systems to regularly evaluate the development of leadership and professional collaboration resulting in improved pedagogical capacity. (5.4)
  - Refine systems for capturing student outcome data to enhance processes for identifying school-wide trends. The school has experienced successful outcomes as a result of teacher team work. Grade one teachers have noticed students better prepared in reading, particularly with sight words, which was the focus of Kindergarten team inquiry. However, the structure for sharing inquiry success is still developing. For example, the Kindergarten teachers were not all aware of their impact resulting in a missed opportunity to distribute leadership via sharing best practice.
  - Teacher teams have taken ownership of inquiry work. Rigorous discussions are had around student outcomes. However while teams are often supported by coaches and consultants who participate in the collaborative work, administrative feedback to teams is limited restricting capacity building efforts. For example, one team was utilizing a rubric and applying it to student work but did not establish a common understanding of what the highest level of performance should look like for connections in mathematics hindering their efforts to norm scoring and thus their ability to accelerate learning.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: The Throop School	UD	D	P	WD
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			<b>X</b>	
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?		<b>X</b>		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students progress toward school and class expectations?		<b>X</b>		
<b>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.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
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?			<b>X</b>	
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?			<b>X</b>	
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			<b>X</b>	

<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				<b>X</b>			
<b>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.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>WD</b>			
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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			<b>X</b>				
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?		<b>X</b>					
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?			<b>X</b>				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		<b>X</b>					
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>