

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Henry David Thoreau**

**Elementary School Q017**

**28-37 29<sup>th</sup> Street**

**Queens**

**NY 11102**

**Principal: Rebecca Heyward**

**Dates of review: April 30 - May 1, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Dr. Philip A. Composto**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Henry David Thoreau School is an elementary school with 561 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 8% Black, 56% Hispanic, 12% White, and 24% Asian students. The student body includes 28% English language learners and 15% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 95.0%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school is a safe place where students are engaged in learning and benefit from the effective level of support they receive for their personal and academic development. (1.4)
  - School leaders created a preliminary school-wide learning survey which was administered to staff in November 2012. Based on an analysis of this data, school leadership team (SLT) members implemented the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS), as a school-wide behavior program to ensure the school's goals in creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. In addition, the student government members create newsletters and turnkey information to provide peers with expectations and positive behavior models throughout the school building. As a result of including goals for student government as well as increasing the role of students during student government meetings, the school experienced a 70% increase of participation in Spirit Days due to the fact that students were able to decide the type of activity for the day. Students, staff and parents comment positively on the safe and orderly environment.
  - As per the Online Occurrence Reporting System (OORS) data, the third highest percentage of incidents (17%) occurs on the school bus. In addition, the OORS data from the previous year indicated that recess was a location with a high frequency of incidents. An analysis of the OORS incidents determined that students from a specific bus were exhibiting unsafe behavior. Students from this bus met and created a Lego Club as a rewards system for exhibiting positive behaviors on the bus. In addition, students who exhibited difficulty while waiting for the bus in the cafeteria were provided with an alternate location where they were able to draw or use the computer. Providing students with a calmer and quieter location to wait for the bus ensured that students are engaged in productive activities, line up, walk to and enter the buses safely. The matron reported that students now wear their seatbelts on the bus, and remain in their seats. According to the further analysis of the OORS data, incidents on the bus have decreased to 4%. To address the OORS data indicating that 3% of incidents occur during recess, school aides and administration met in September to discuss expectations for recess which included promoting organized activities. As a result, jump ropes, hula-hoops and chalk are now provided for students during this time.
- The school leader and teachers effectively align curricula to key standards and offer engaging learning experiences that challenge students and support their learning. (1.1)
  - School leaders reviewed the citywide instructional expectations and thoughtfully analyzed multiple data points from various sources such as state exams, Acuity, running records and conference notes to sustain their work integrating the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). The school focused on standards related to text complexity to promote college and career readiness and writing opinion pieces on topics or

texts, and supporting a point of view with reasons and information. For example, fifth grade teachers created a unit of study specifically focused on informational reading and opinion writing that included thirteen informational texts on a fifth grade complexity level, intended to close the gap between current levels of performance and the higher expectations of the CCLS. Teachers used these texts to create lessons to promote students' ability to navigate and synthesize information across multiple complex texts, as well as form opinions around relevant topics to produce a written opinion piece. As per an analysis of baseline, formative and culminating tasks, there was a 57% increase of students' ability to synthesize evidence from multiple complex texts to support points of view in writing as demonstrated in rubric-based grades on student work.

- School data indicated a need to increase the reading proficiency levels of a number of special needs students. In addition, an analysis of reading levels indicated a need to ensure that English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWD) are exposed to and engaging with grade level texts and rigorous academic tasks that foster critical thinking skills. Special education and ELL teachers implemented Foundations, a phonics based program to focus on phonological awareness and spelling enabling ELLs and SWD to improve their reading skills, access more complex texts and participate in learning activities that promote thinking. As a result, there was a 20% increase of students performing at or above grade level on phonological and phonics assessments.
- The school uses its resources effectively to build teacher capacity and improve instruction as evidenced by increased student engagement in academic tasks. (1.3)
  - The school uses its resources to improve the learning outcomes of all students. For example, the budget was aligned to ensure that every teacher has access to an ELMO document camera or Smartboard in order to promote engagement and students' ability to master standards related to the use of technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others. As a result, during classroom observations students were observed utilizing technology to display their work exemplars and by teachers to project live meal worms on the ELMO document camera, to guide students in to writing informative texts. Consequently, there was an 88% increase in the use of text features and attention to language and audience in students' writing pieces as noted in student work products.
  - Teachers are programmed to meet in grade teams and planning teams a minimum of one period a week and a full day each month with the support of a coach to collaborate and design academic tasks, rubrics, units of study and generate lesson plans. For example, the kindergarten teacher team designed a literacy thematic unit of study that incorporated science. Based on an analysis of student writing samples from past units, the team decided to include a pattern book unit prior to the science thematic unit on butterflies to promote students' ability to master CCLS writing standard 2: use a combination of drawing, dictating and writing to compose informative, explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic. As a result, formal and informal observations of teachers document that kindergarten students use data collected to compose informative texts. In addition,

charts in classrooms reflect the expectation to use content vocabulary and provide visual supports. Consequently, the kindergarten team utilized the data from culminating tasks to adjust the teaching points of a second literacy unit on animals, both building teacher capacity and ensuring high levels of engagement for students.

- The school conveys high expectations that promote parent involvement and support learning so that staff, students and families work together toward achieving student and school goals. (3.4)
  - Initial administrative cabinet meeting notes documented the need to revise grade conferences to match the instructional goals within the Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). In addition, professional development needed to be aligned with school goals and the citywide instructional expectations. The focus on grade and faculty conferences is centered on questioning and discussion techniques, planning and preparation and assessment in instruction. During faculty conferences, the principal meets with teachers then teachers frequently break out into smaller groups to reflect on the impact of the work around designing units of study to meet the needs of all learners, as well as discuss possible next steps. The focus of cabinet meetings centers on norming feedback and systems of delivering written feedback from coaching cycles. Select teachers receive ongoing training on how to deliver explicit instruction, use of Socratic techniques and Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). As a result of focusing the work around Danielson competencies administrators cited that during formal observations of fourth grade teachers, students were observed creating questions in readers' notebooks. School officials noted that teachers provided students with more wait time to respond to questions. As a result, instruction is more focused in that expectations for classroom practice are now clearly defined and consistently practiced through the use of the school wide research-based framework for teaching. In addition, classroom visits and conversations with teachers demonstrate ongoing collegiality and mutual accountability towards ensuring a strong culture for learning.
  - According to a survey administered by the parent coordinator, parents asked for more opportunities to learn how to assist their children at home. The School Leadership Team (SLT) created a clear homework policy that is equitable, manageable and meets the needs of students. Teachers from across grades facilitate Curriculum Nights. The social worker and the English as a second language (ESL) teacher provide ongoing workshops for parents with translations available in both Spanish and Bengali, centered on how to create and maintain routines at home that support academic achievement. The parent coordinator creates monthly calendars that include workshop dates and topics. Progress reports are administered twice a year to all students and four times a year to high needs students. Progress reports provide parents with information on current performance, including strengths and areas for improvement. For example, a Progress Report sent in October to fifth grade students show reading benchmarks for the entire year, and informs parents of current reading level. This fifth grade report also includes feedback on performance during the literacy essay and fractions units of study. Parents are also made aware of current classroom and homework performance. This system provides the school with ongoing opportunity to communicate high expectations for students, as well as provide

suggestions for how parents can support these expectations at home. As per an analysis of feedback forms from parents, 85% indicate that Progress Reports have assisted them with understand the high expectations of the CCLS.

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

- Deepen the use of specific teaching strategies that embed multiple entry points in the curricula for all learners, including relevant subgroups that result in students producing meaningful work products. (1.2)
  - A focus on the design of coherent units of study and the use of assessments to measure student learning as outlined in the Danielson Framework supports the school's belief about how students learn best. However, class visits reveal that teaching strategies, questioning techniques and the supplemental resources to meet the varied needs of all students, particularly students with disabilities (SWD), English language learners (ELLs) and high performing students do not consistently offer sufficient scaffolds or entry points that amplify learning opportunities to meet the diverse needs of all students. For example, the use of math manipulatives, visual aids, and learning graphs to generate high level student participation were not evident across all classrooms. Consequently, student discussion, levels of participation and teachers efforts to promote thinking are uneven across classrooms, thus limiting opportunities for increased student learning.
- Strengthen teacher assessment practices to reflect effective feedback in order to make instructional adjustments and provide clear next learning steps to improve student outcomes. (2.2)
  - Student work is available in well organized folders in addition to the displays throughout classrooms. It is also evident that teachers celebrate students' best efforts through checkmarks and written comments and use this information to inform instruction. However, not all student work includes feedback in the form of next steps for improvement. As a result, teachers are not fully able to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum or instructional decisions or to consistently provide students with their next learning steps, thus limiting progress. Teacher teams and individual teachers use Acuity, conference notes, Teacher's College assessments and running records to supplement summative data and identify student performance levels. However, the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment to make immediate adjustments to lessons is not a fully embedded practice across the school. This limits the school's ability to pinpoint and address the special needs of student subgroups and modify targeted, differentiated interventions to accelerate learning. As a result, instructional strategies and learning tasks are not always strategically revised, hindering opportunities to meet the needs of all students.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: The Henry David Thoreau School Q017	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
<b>Instructional Core</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, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
<b>School Culture</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?			X				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			X				
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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 <b>inquiry approach</b> that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?			X				
<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>