

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Thomas C. Giordano

Middle School X045

**2502 LORILLARD PLACE
BRONX
NY,10458**

Principal: Annamaria Giordano

**Dates of review: Feb. 12 - 13, 2013
Lead Reviewer: Deena Abu-Lughod**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Thomas C. Giordano Middle School 45 has 978 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 13% Black, 81% Hispanic, 4% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 92%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Professional learning is promoted by frequent observations informed by a common teaching framework that enhances teacher pedagogy. (4.1)
 - While, in the past, school leaders had consistently provided feedback to teachers on what they do well and what they needed to improve, this year's involvement in the Teacher Effectiveness Pilot (TEP) has increased the alignment of feedback to the school's selected rubric and competencies. Feedback provided to literacy teachers includes very specific suggestions of next steps and supports, making it particularly useful to teachers for improving practice. Teachers appreciate the change in the nature of the feedback they now receive. One teacher observed, "In the past, feedback was more critical, like 'gotcha,'" and another stated that it had "gotten us out of a rut." The results of the observation cycles recorded on the TEP dashboard indicate that nearly half the teachers have moved up a level in questioning so far this year. Classroom visits corroborated the accuracy of the observations, and the progress attained so far indicate that the school is on track to meet its goal of moving 80% of teachers up a level on the rubric.
- Teacher teams collaboratively engage in the inquiry process, regularly analyzing student work products to improve curricula and learning outcomes for students. (4.2)
 - All teachers collaborate in teams, meeting by content area, grade, mini-school and with special education and English as a second language teachers as agreed upon with the union's consultation committee. These meetings have focused mainly on aligning curricula to the CCLS, with the social studies and science departments commencing such work this year. Both the curriculum development efforts and the study of student work have surfaced gaps in teacher knowledge that teams are addressing to improve instructional practice. For example, the grade 6 math team observed that students lacked multiple strategies for solving problems related to ratio and proportion because the teachers themselves lacked sufficient content knowledge to teach them. The team then studied professional texts and the CCLS progressions to increase their repertoire and teach strategies such as double-number lines. As a result, this year, when given the same CCLS-aligned problem as last year's 6th graders, four times as many students were successful. Another team discovered that content area teachers had lower expectations for writing than the English teachers, so they have developed a common rubric to unify expectations. As a result, social studies teachers are now embedding literacy skills more deliberately in their lessons and have begun to practice close readings which teachers says have improved students' comprehension of the texts they assign.
 - Over time, the principal and cabinet have identified the most effective teachers in each content area to serve as instructional facilitators (IF). While these teachers' classrooms serve as internal lab sites, their reduced teaching load enables them to coach their peers in areas of need identified in the leadership's short, focused observations and the teachers' own reflections on their strengths and areas for growth in each of the seven selected Danielson competencies. The IFs' diligent

records, which document their actions and results, inform decisions of the instructional cabinet around the school's instructional priorities. Classroom visits attested to the strong skills of most IFs, as their lessons effectively used the discovery model and multiple entry points aspired to by the school's model. In addition, the principal purposely promotes sharing by teachers who have improved the most. For example, a teacher who had overcome his classroom management issues by learning to address the behavioral triggers shared his techniques at a faculty conference. This built his confidence as a teacher leader and impelled colleagues to introduce similar techniques. As a result of these distributive leadership structures, teachers have a greater voice in instructional decisions that affect their peers and there are models for effective practice that impact positively on student outcomes.

- The principal makes sound organizational decisions to ensure that teachers and students receive tailored supports so that the school can attain its goals. (1.3)
 - Decisions related to hiring, teacher assignments and student grouping contribute positively to staff's ability to meet student needs. The most effective teachers serve the highest need students, providing small group instruction during the early morning period, and they also serve all students interested in reinforcing their literacy and math skills and strategies during the semi-weekly 90 minute Focus Academy. Although not mandated, three teachers provide push-in Response to Intervention support that bolsters classroom teachers' ability to meet the needs of diverse students. In addition, based on positive results in last year's one integrated co-teaching class, the school has expanded the model to all grades with the expectation of replicating higher growth for students with disabilities. Literacy and math teachers have student loads of fewer than 60 and 90 students respectively, enabling them to know and serve each student well, knowledge that is reinforced because most students remain in the same mini-school for three years. The school has reorganized space such that each mini-school occupies one floor, which reduces passing time and stairwell disturbances, thus increasing instructional time and impacting favorably on school climate. As a result, there is strong support and a shared sense of accountability across teachers for student outcomes.
 - The principal developed a schedule that provides weekly opportunities for teacher teams to meet both as content-area specialists and as members of the mini-school academies. While teacher leaders facilitate the meetings, the assistant principals set agendas and activities to ensure these align purposefully to the school's goals of improving teacher practice, aligning curricula to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), providing professional development to incorporate multiple entry points and English as a second language strategies into lesson plans, and to support positive student behaviors. As a result, more students are engaged in substantive and meaningful projects in social studies, and tasks that are more rigorous are being embedded in more coherent units in literacy and math.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase the alignment of the school's curricula with the expectations of the CCLS and instructional shifts as a lever for accelerating student achievement. (1.1)

- The school has used the CCLS as a reference for aligning curricula in all content areas, and many teachers devote considerable attention to planning for different learning styles to meet the needs of diverse learners. For example, a social studies unit on food regulation introduced currently relevant content using stations that tapped into multiple modes of presentation, with guided video analysis, strong text excerpts, cartoons and web quests, enabling all students to access the important material. However, other lessons and the examination of portfolios and curricular artifacts reveal that there is inconsistent attention to selecting texts that fully support the learning objectives. For example, in one class of advanced English language learners, students struggled to infer character traits from facts, which they interpreted as dates, places and events, because the text provided few examples of what the historical figure said or did. More generally, many revised literacy units still lack alignment between the essential questions, objectives, standards, and skills, and fail to identify texts of sufficient complexity and substance to support attainment of the standards. In nearly all classes, there is little demand for citing text evidence in writing and discussion, one of the instructional shifts, in part because texts tend to serve as a vehicle for practicing particular skills and strategies. Despite addressing important themes such as perseverance, heroism and utopia, the uneven use of rich literature in the curricula, results in missed opportunities for all students to build knowledge through writing and develop the higher order skills that promote college and career readiness.
- Enhance the consistency of teaching strategies and instructional tasks that promote high level thinking so student work and discussions engage students as owners of their learning. (1.2)
 - The school strives for rigor, which it defines as instruction that “allows students to discover the learning, ask questions, investigate and arrive at a conclusion,” with students as independent learners and teachers as facilitators. Such instruction was evident in one math class where every student was highly engaged in an inquiry on the effect of rotation, experimenting with a roller and an object to roll, to attain a conceptual understanding of the relationship between two variables. However, in a self-contained science class, an opportunity to investigate mass was pre-empted by teacher-led procedural directions, while in another general education science class on the same grade, students were on a different unit and questions failed to prompt students to justify their responses. These differences indicate that the school is still working to align teaching practices to its stated beliefs, leading to missed opportunities for students to create richer, more meaningful work products.
 - In all classes, teachers use data to group students, and there is evidence that these groups change frequently in relation to ongoing analysis. In addition, most lessons revealed efforts to provide multiple entry points for students, reinforcing learning through visuals projected on SmartBoards that were available in nearly every room, providing access to content through videos and iPads in a social studies class, and books on tape in a literacy classroom. However, across classrooms, the use of protocols and routines to guide student collaboration was inconsistent, as were efforts to hold individual students accountable for their contributions. In nearly all classrooms, questioning was entirely teacher-led, and students were not required to speak in full sentences, refer to text, or use the academic language that was available on the word walls

or the word banks that were available to English language learners. As a result, student participation and thinking varied considerably across grades and subjects.

- Ensure assessment systems enable progress monitoring of key standards so that analysis of trends informs adjustments to pedagogy and surfaces high-leverage areas of feedback to students. (2.2)
 - The school developed common unit assessments across grades and subject areas last year. In response to disappointing outcomes on State exams, teacher teams have focused this year on creating additional common open-ended interim benchmarks and short pre- and post-selected response assessments. However, not all of these tasks align well to the culminating assessment or with selected key standards, and thus they provide insufficient feedback on student progress towards mastery. The school instituted a common grading policy this year as well, requiring all teachers to record student outcomes on an electronic grading program. However, because of variations in teacher understanding of what constitutes grade level quality, grades do not accurately reflect student performance and progress and do not fully serve the school in identifying where instructional adjustments are required.
 - Throughout the school, teachers typically use rubrics for scoring student work. However, the review of student portfolios reveals that much student work is scored above the criteria specified in the rubrics or the CCLS. More importantly, while one math teacher provided exceptionally precise and usable feedback to students, and some students, especially those from the honors mini-school, have opportunities to use teacher and peer-feedback to improve their work, many teachers' comments focus on writing mechanics and spelling. The absence of feedback that focuses on the highest leverage aspects of the work reduces the ability of students to improve performance.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Thomas C. Giordano Middle School 45	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
Instructional Core							
<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					
School Culture							
<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					
Systems for Improvement							
<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 inquiry approach 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					
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed