



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Governor Thomas Dongan

Elementary School R011

**50 Jefferson Street
Staten Island
NY 10304**

Principal: Erica Mattera

**Date of review: May 19, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Jennifer Eusanio**

The School Context

Governor Thomas Dongan is an elementary school with 282 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 15% Black, 41% Hispanic, 35% White, and 7% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 93.3%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	Additional Findings	Well Developed
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Focus	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the staff and provide training to support them. The school effectively communicates its expectations to families and students to form successful partnerships.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability and successful family partnerships result in student progress toward school-wide goals and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- School leaders communicate their expectations using various structures, which include memoranda, a staff handbook, and feedback provided to teacher teams. For example, in the staff handbook, school leaders emphasize, “Planning is the essential key to effective teaching and learning. Plan books must include the Common Core Learning Standards...and instructional shifts.” In addition, for assessment, the handbook states, “Planning according to assessments is critical to improved student outcomes.” All lesson plans reviewed incorporated these expectations.
- Accountability structures are in place to serve as a means to communicate school leaders’ expectations on teaching and learning, such as debrief sessions and written feedback from observation cycles. For one teacher, feedback in the beginning of the year emphasized the part of the school’s instructional focus on rigorous questioning, discussion, the use of citing text to support ideas, and student engagement. In a subsequent second cycle of observation, the teacher demonstrated improvement in this area using Depth of Knowledge (DOK) level three questions and engaging students in a debate on whether a text on John Muir was persuasive or informative. Another teacher demonstrated improvement in the same area when the school leader communicated in a written feedback report to, “ask a question that allows students to talk it out.” In addition, teacher-to-teacher feedback sessions based on intervisitations provide key staff members clarity on the expectations of teaching and learning on the school’s instructional focus. On one teacher’s intervisitation feedback where the focus was on student engagement, the reflection indicated turn-and-talk and use of prompts such as “Thumbs up if you agree and thumbs down if you disagree,” along with discussions of the different perspectives, was a strategy that would be implemented in future lessons. During a subsequent observation feedback, as indicated on the observation report, the teacher showed effective improvements in this area.
- The school provides key workshops to parents to share with them the expectations around the Common Core Learning Standards and school-wide goals. This year, the school began a series of Parent as Learning Partner experiences where parents visit their children’s classroom and participate in standards-based activities. After classroom visits, the principal, assistant principal, and parent coordinator, conduct a debrief session with parents and provide ideas on how they can take what they learned and apply it at home to assist their children. A few parents commented that they found these sessions very helpful. One parent commented that she was able to learn how new math concepts are taught to her child and now can understand the homework that is sent home. One tip provided to the parent that was applied at home was to make homework into a game which helped make the experience “fun and like a competition” for both of them.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching strategies consistently integrate multiple entry points and high-level thinking, but vary in providing high-quality supports and extensions for all learners.

Impact

Demonstration of higher-order thinking in all student work products and discussions are engaging students yet do not yet sufficiently lead to student ownership and high-quality extensions for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- Teaching strategies incorporated the use of visuals, scaffolded questions, and graphic organizers to support at-risk students, especially students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs). For example, in one grade 4 Integrated Collaborative Teaching (ICT) English language arts (ELA) class, the teachers provided three versions of a graphic organizer to groups of students to answer the question, “How did John Muir devote his life to conservationism?” Students were asked to use their version of the graphic organizer to cite specific examples from the text, and with a partner, discuss the importance of this thought as it relates to the real world. Students were able to provide responses such as, “Conservationism is important as animals are losing their homes and dying as a result. John Muir wanted to stop this from happening” and “John Muir felt responsible for making sure animals and nature was preserved which is why he wanted to convince Theodore Roosevelt to stop hurting trees.” This level of engagement was not as evident in the vast majority of classrooms.
- In many classes, students were group by ability into red, yellow, and green groups. Tasks provided were modified for each group. The red group received concrete scaffolds, such as graphic organizers with three column charts and the green group had no graphic organizers, but additional DOK questions to answer. Although students were provided with different tasks and scaffolds, the level of student thinking in work products resulted in only some DOK 3 level responses. In one grade 5 math class, some students’ responses to math questions led to responses that provided only explanations to answers or just solutions. In a grade 2 ELA class, most of the students were provided the same graphic organizer to write stories with the objective to include a problem, solution, and climax of events. Some student responses only reflected the application of organizational concepts such as a problem and solution, resulting in ideas but lacking a clear plan of how to apply reasoning to reflect a climax in their stories.
- Across classes, teachers provided opportunities for discussion in groups or with partners through a turn-and-talk. In a grade 3 ELA class, one group conducted a “turn-and-talk” to a partner to determine the text-based definitions for words and phrases such as “bitter cold” and “tower” and make a connection with the words and the author’s purpose for using them in the text. One partnership was defining the words on their graphic organizers and one student stated, “the author’s purpose for using these words is to help us understand what she learned about sea creatures” and “it was colder in the sea than here.” However, in a few classes, conversations were mostly teacher directed or led to misunderstandings.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry based structured professional collaborations that have strengthened instructional capacity, promoted the standards, and led to teachers systematically analyzing assessments and classroom practice.

Impact

School-wide instructional coherence as an outgrowth of inquiry and teacher teams, results in improvement in teacher practice and increased student achievement.

Supporting Evidence

- Grade-level inquiry teams meet weekly to use student work and data to discuss strategies aligned to the school's overarching instructional goal relative to increasing reading comprehension across content areas. At the beginning of the year, student baseline data reflected the need to emphasize skills and strategies for the following ELA standards: identifying the main idea, academic language, citing text evidence, and text complexity. In addition, based on Measures of Student Learning baseline data, teachers noted the need for understanding the challenges of problem solving. Once students showed improvement in the targeted skills during the ELA inquiry cycles, a transition into math problem solving began to develop strategies for struggling students. Teachers reported that strategies such as the school-wide problem solving and close reading protocol have developed due to inquiry.
- During a grade 4 team meeting, teachers used a discussion protocol to frame the content of their conversation around the review of student work based on the ELA standards for academic language and citing text evidence. In reviewing student work, the teachers noted that the students had improved on their most recent post-assessment in which students determined the differences between developing implicit and explicit questions and using text evidence to support their answers to prompted questions. During the pre-assessment, the percentage of students who were able to complete the task correctly was 32%. Based on this result, the teachers decided to focus their work with students who received a level 2, by front loading vocabulary and using modified texts. For students with level 1, the same modifications were provided yet with the additional support of reading the questions aloud to them. Adjustments to instruction led to the percentage of fourth grade students completing the task correctly moved to 55%. With this improvement, the teachers decided to continue with a new skill in their classes for whole group instruction and decided to spiral the concept for those students who needed more support to small groups with additional support using the RACE (restate, answer, cite, explain) strategy.
- The teacher data team meets monthly to analyze class-level data in the school's identified focused standards in ELA and math. The data team reported that trends from the lower grade data tracking sheets demonstrated that close reading with a focus on author purpose wasn't working, as students were not showing mastery of the concept in the beginning of the year. Teachers decided to change their focus to emphasizing strategies for understanding academic vocabulary and using annotation as a strategy for close reading. The teachers report an improvement in students' ability to read grade level texts.

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher order thinking skills are emphasized and embedded in unit plans and tasks.

Impact

Across grades and subject areas, rigorous curricula include embedded tasks, which promote college and career readiness, provide high-level tasks for all students, and require all students to demonstrate their thinking, including target subgroups.

Supporting Evidence

- Units of study are crafted based on the ReadyGEN and GO Math! Curricula, which are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and include the instructional shifts. To supplement their reading units, teachers incorporate other sources such as Scholastic and Story Works to combine a balance of nonfiction and fiction texts and a variety of text complexity to incorporate the instructional shifts across grades. In a kindergarten ELA unit on the theme of past and present, the learning objectives emphasize students using close reading strategies to identify main ideas, formulate opinion, and make inferences. In a first grade ELA unit on diversity, objectives include using closing reading strategies to determine the main idea using multiple fiction and nonfiction texts to understand story elements and identify the central message. In a fourth grade ELA unit on the biography of Sam Marshall, unit objectives combine the use of fictional literature using *The Boy Who Drew Birds* and nonfiction to understand how to read complex texts, develop the main idea, and cite evidence to support their interpretations of what the text says explicitly and implicitly about Sam Marshall.
- Integration of instructional shifts across grades and subject areas provide a means to expose students to lessons that focus on academic vocabulary and citing text evidence. In a fourth grade interdisciplinary unit on scientists and their impact, unit objectives include having students understand academic vocabulary from fiction and nonfiction texts and use strategies such as context clues to connect to the text. The research obtained from fiction and nonfiction texts is then used to write an investigative report on tarantulas. In a kindergarten interdisciplinary unit on neighborhoods, students were to use a combination of drawing, labeling, and dictation to write a book review using text evidence to support their opinions of two texts, *On the Town: A Community Adventure* and *Places in My Neighborhood*, which continues to support the integration of instructional shifts. In math, kindergarten students studied geometric shapes to make connections to the shapes of building and other community features.
- Across grades and subject areas, teachers use the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) matrix to incorporate rigor in levels of questioning and objectives in lesson plans, units of study, and tasks. In a fifth grade ICT math lesson plan, the task asked, “How can three students share two pieces of construction paper equally?” Students were asked to develop different ways to solve the problem. In a fourth grade ICT lesson, the task required students to cite text evidence to determine what impact John Muir has on our environment. In a kindergarten English as a second language (ESL) ELA lesson, students were required to use the process of elimination and their understanding of initial and ending sounds to determine which word best matches the given picture and includes the use of partnerships to discuss which answer would be better and what strategies they use to determine which is correct.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teachers use assessments, rubrics, and grading policies, to consistently check for understanding, and they incorporate student self-reflection in their practices.

Impact

Consistent assessment practices lead to actionable feedback and ongoing in-the-moment adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use City wide Measures of Student Learning (MOSL) and content area performance tasks, Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA), running records, ReadyGEN assessments supplemented with Great Reader and Good Habits tasks, GO Math! benchmark assessments, and rubrics aligned to the school curricula to inform them of student progress. A review of benchmark assessment data revealed that students in the school's bottom third needed more academic support in comprehension and solving word problems. Teachers reported that the data is used to determine student performance to formulate tiered groups for instruction.
- A review of student work folders and conference notes indicated that teachers provide feedback to students across classes. According to the principal, feedback is provided verbally and in writing with an emphasis on strengths, an area for improvement and strategies for next steps. Work folders and bulletin boards demonstrated that students have access to written teacher's comments. On a completed math task, one student received the following feedback, "Your use of long division and the distributive property of addition is superb! I love your labeling! Be sure to explain the process in which you divided. For example, use transition words to explain the steps you take when you are dividing." In ELA, one student's feedback in writing stated, "You did a great job paraphrasing the text. It is clear you are comprehending the text. Be sure you are using at least two quotes rather than numerous ones across the text. For example, combine quotes in paragraph four..."
- Across classes, teachers used conferences as a means to check student understanding of content. In a first grade class, the teacher asked students, "Why should we care that Emma helped the immigrants?" Only two to three students raised their hands to provide a response. The teacher asked students to think about the question further with a partner and went to several students to use prompting to coach their thinking about the posed proposed question. After, the teacher restated the question, several students raised their hand to provide a response. In fifth grade ICT math class, the teacher used the same technique asking students to turn and talk about what the term divisor meant. After students resumed and discussed the responses, all students gave a thumbs up indicating their understanding of the concept when the teacher asked if everyone understood or had questions.
- In addition, on student work, the use of the 3-2-1 strategy as an exit self-reflection slip was evident in student work folders. As a part of a research project one student wondering was, "What will happen if animals lose their homes?" A review of student work folders revealed the use of this strategy across classrooms. Teachers reported that this method assists them in determining where students are in need of further support.