

# **Quality Review**

# **Report**

## **2008-2009**

**Public School 256**

**Early Childhood - High School 256**

**525 Convent Road**  
**Queens**  
**NY 11791**

**Principal: Oswaldo Roman**

**Dates of review: April 24 – 28, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Mick Megee**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public school 256 is an early childhood – high school with 438 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The school population is comprised of 61% Black, 20% Hispanic, 17% White and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 97% special education students. Boys account for 89% of the students enrolled and girls account for 11%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 90.4%. This school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding. This District 75 special school is located in Long Island in one main site and seven off sites. The students are designated as emotionally handicapped or on the autistic spectrum. All students require a high level of support and specialist services. Class staff ratios reflect students' needs, at 12:1:1 (students to teacher to paraprofessional), 12:1:4, 8:1:2, 8:1:1 and 6:1:1. About half the students follow alternate assessment programs.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The principal and administration work hard to maintain a calm, orderly and pleasant school, where all staff work together well as a team. The principal ensures that his vision of 'no excuses' is realized throughout the school, and relationships between all members of the school community are trusting and respectful. Parents say of the principal that he is "right on the ball and fights for the kids tremendously to get what they need". The school fosters strong links with the students' families, keeping them daily in touch with how well their children are doing.

The school has good arrangements for gathering, utilizing and reviewing information about students' performance and progress in English language arts, math, science and social studies. As a result, there is good performance in these subjects. The school has yet to extend these arrangements to other content areas, such as the arts. The school does not regularly and consistently analyze the performance of all the various gender, ethnic and other groups within the school. This means that it cannot be sure that everyone is achieving his or her full potential. Students who have difficulty in managing their behavior are well supported by the systematic and consistent behavior procedures that all staff follow. As a result, there is little disruption to lessons and students work together harmoniously. Most teachers make good use of data to plan and provide instruction that closely matches the varying needs and performance levels in each class. Some teachers are not so proficient and the work in their classes may be too easy for some and too difficult for others.

The administration provides good support to teachers, especially those new to the profession, by giving them useful feedback on their performance following lesson observations and walkthroughs. However, the teachers do not have annual plans that set out clearly goals and strategies for improving their performance.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal sets out a vision for success and high expectations that is clear, supported and internalized by all within the school community.
- There is a strong partnership with families so that the students receive consistent encouragement and support.
- The school's effective procedures to promote good behavior mean that classrooms are always happy, peaceful and industrious.
- There is very good collaboration and teamwork between the teachers and all the professionals who work with the students.
- There is very strong use of data in English language arts and math to inform instruction and to promote high performance.
- The administration engenders a clear sense of trust, respect and support for all within the school community.

### What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that there is an effective collection, utilization and review of data in all core subject areas to ensure evaluation is more focused on student outcomes.
- Ensure that teachers provide differentiated activities that closely match the varied needs and performance levels of the students in each class.
- Make more regular and effective use of subgroup information to ensure that there is no hidden underachievement among different groups of students.
- Ensure that all staff have an individual professional development plan.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school assiduously gathers data on student outcomes in English language arts, math, science and social studies and creates an accurate picture of individual student needs in these content areas. The school does not yet collect and utilize data in other core subject areas. Staff make good use of a good variety of data tools such as ARIS, Brigance, New York State Tests and Read180. The cabinet has put together a ten-year longitudinal study of student data in order to help it improve instruction. Each student has a portfolio that demonstrates very clearly performance levels, work samples and evidence of progress towards the goals in his or her individual education plan (IEP).

The school does well in gathering and utilizing information about the behavior and attendance of individual students, and uses this information well to develop remedial strategies where necessary. The administration meets regularly with the attendance teacher to identify any students whose pattern of attendance is causing concern. Staff make good use of the Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) and School-Wide Information System (SWIS) to monitor individual student behavior, both at home and at school. As a consequence, attendance is high and behavior is very good.

Some work has been done in analyzing the relative performance of the different groups within the school and responding to any anomalies. For example, the school recently introduced a girls' club because its analysis showed that girls were generally achieving less well than boys. However, group analysis is not yet done regularly and systematically across all subgroups in all content areas to flush out any reasons for underachievement.

There is a good interchange of information with parents. Parents really appreciate the daily notebooks and phone calls that keep them informed on how well their children have done. They sit down with teachers at least four times a year formally to review progress and individual goals. As one typical parent said, "Staff are wonderful the way that they keep me in touch. We go back and forth about everything that's going on. If there's homework that my son doesn't get, they let me know how to help him."

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

The school has a system in place to regularly set measurable individual learning objectives in English language arts, math, science and social studies. This system does not yet extend to all core subject areas. For those students who have IEPs, additional objectives may be set by other service providers such as speech and occupational therapists. Objectives are reviewed four times a year by teachers and related service providers, alongside students and their families. School leaders and faculty track the progress of students in especially good detail in English language arts and math, making good use of item analysis to improve the students’ test scores. Where students are seen to be unlikely to meet their goals in these content areas, the school makes good use of academic intervention services for remediation and tutoring in standardized tests. The regular reviews give the students good opportunities to self-assess their progress and to discuss their next steps in learning. However, not all students are conversant with their own short-term goals so they understand clearly how to improve. The reviews provide families with the information they need to give encouragement and support at home, so that the students can quickly reach their goals. School leaders and faculty effectively communicate high expectations to parents and clearly explain how these can be achieved. As one parent said, “They aim high here. All the class ran for student council this year, and every student made a speech. Now that’s a lot for most of these kids.”

All sections of the school community participate in, and take ownership of, the school improvement planning cycle. The school leadership team represents administration, faculty and parents and is fully involved in evaluating the success of the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan and in developing strategic action plans. Final goals in the plan relate well to the school’s most pressing needs and have specific criteria so that success can be easily measured. However, some interim benchmark goals are not sufficiently specific. This makes it less easy for the school to detect early on whether the goal is likely to be reached.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

The school provides a curriculum that the students clearly enjoy and benefit from. One student said, “This place has helped me a lot. They seek your needs and work with you. Some teachers do much more than they have to, by taking you out on your own.” There is an interesting range of activities including opportunities for participating in the East Coast Assisted Dog Program, yoga, learning the bass guitar and in theatre productions. Parents feel that the curriculum offered is fairly good, but they would justifiably like to see more in the way of music and foreign language instruction for all students, as well as free access to the libraries on some of the school’s off-sites. The school has an effective assessment system covering English language arts, math, science and social studies

but there are no systems that fully include all other core subject areas. There is an especially strong use of specific teaching strategies designed for students with autism such as Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children (TEACCH).

Class groups are very small, giving staff and students the opportunities to get to know each other very well, and to develop trusting and respectful relationships. Students say, "All the teachers here are pretty skilful. They try their best and even if we don't like some of them, we respect all of them." Staff make effective and consistent use of the behavior system so that there is a very positive climate for learning in all classrooms. Students are generally engaged in their lessons and are supported and encouraged by the teachers and paraprofessionals. Students say that there is very little bullying in the school. Most teachers make sure that activities are at the right level for the students. Some teachers do not manage this quite so skillfully, and may not plan well enough for the wide range of needs and levels in their classes. As a result, some students may be left behind, whereas others may find the work too easy and become bored. This is recognized by some of the students who say, "Some advanced children here don't have the right classes so they don't get all that they need."

The administration makes wise decisions to move resources around where there is a perceived curriculum need. For example, the administration recognized that math scores were not growing as rapidly as student performance in English language arts. As a result the administration has employed a math academic intervention service provider with 'at risk' students.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school has this year introduced uniform teaching criteria and improved methods of assessing teachers' performance through the use of Professional Teaching Standards (PTS). Administrators utilize these standards to good effect in their regular formal and informal teaching observations and walk-throughs. Members of the faculty greatly appreciate the support they receive from the administrators, and find the advice and guidance particularly helpful in improving instructional practice. Teachers new to the school, or new to the profession, say that they feel very well supported by both administrators and their colleagues. They say that they have plenty of people willing to give on-the-spot advice or an invitation to visit the lessons of more experienced teachers to view good practice in action. Written feedback following observations is generally sensitive and helpful, but sometimes there are too many recommendations for improvement. Each year, the administration encourages teachers to self-assess their performance and to communicate their preferences and aspirations. The school does not yet have a system in which teachers have individual annual plans that make clear in advance the priority areas and goals for improvement which lead to professional development, as well as remedial strategies and development activities, when they are needed.

The administration successfully fosters good teamwork, including common planning time and the development of small learning academies, among all the staff and support

service providers and this sets the students a good example of collegial working. Staff members attending workshops provide very useful turnkey training to their peers on improving instructional practices. The school's inquiry team is providing a good example to the staff of what can be achieved by well-focused action research. The team's work has successfully raised the reading levels of a group of middle school students who were underperforming on tests to see whether the students could differentiate between fact and opinion. The school arranges regular pupil personnel team meetings to discuss individual student needs, and to create effective multi-disciplinary plans of action to address academic, behavioral or medical concerns. Parents appreciate the speed with which the school leaders react to any problem. They typically say, "You don't have to wait for a fortnight because the principal's right on top of it."

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient**

School leaders take stock of student information in English language arts, math, science and social studies regularly throughout the year in order to monitor groupings of students, review curricular decisions and improve student outcomes. This information does not yet include data from all core subject areas. For students who have IEPs, interim goals are set as short-term objectives and these are reviewed formally and effectively each marking period. Teachers hold regular conferences with students to give them detailed feedback on their academic progress and, where appropriate, their improving behavior. Students say that these conferences assist them greatly in identifying what next steps they have to take. Not all the school's plans are evaluated in terms of projected gains in student performance, so that it is difficult to see how effective these plans have been or whether good value has been achieved. For example, the school leaders do not use student data as a basis to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development plan.

The principal articulates his vision for the school very clearly, and the vision is displayed around the school as a reminder to visitors, staff and students. All members of the school community, including the parents, are committed to this shared vision of what can be achieved. As one parent said, "The principal listens to everyone very carefully. Our points make a difference. Everyone is underneath the same umbrella." The school seeks out and acts quickly upon third-party views of its performance such as the quality review and the learning environment survey. The administration carries out regular needs assessments in order to improve classroom practices and resources such as the assistive technology. It encourages staff to be self-critical through self-assessments and preference surveys, so that their performance is constantly improved.

## School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Public School 256</b>	△	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			<b>X</b>	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?		<b>X</b>		
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			<b>X</b>	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

### DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DY0, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

**Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.**

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X	

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.**

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?		X		
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X	
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X	

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X	

<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>