

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Public School 723

Early Childhood - High School 723

**3540 Bivona Street
Bronx
NY 10475**

Principal: Christine Walsh

Dates of review: April 29 – May 1, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Mick Megee

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 723 is an early childhood – high school with 382 students from kindergarten through grade 12. The school population comprises 44% Black, 51% Hispanic, 2% White, 2% Asian and 1% Native American. The student body includes 6% English language learners and 95% special education students. Boys account for 75% of the students enrolled and girls account for 25%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 85.4%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding. This District 75 special school is located in the Bronx on one main site and eight 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 12:1:4 (students to teacher to paraprofessional), 12:1:1, 9:1:3, 8:1:1 and 6:1:1. About half the students follow alternate assessment programs.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

This is a school that focuses well on improving what it offers to its students. As a result, all key performance indicators, such as those on academic performance, behavior and attendance, are showing good gains. The principal and administration have successfully united the staff around a common vision and core set of values, in order to promote life-long achievement. There is a good emphasis on promoting students' skills, knowledge and understanding so that they can take up the good range of opportunities to learn in the least restrictive environment of which they are capable. The school has several ways of achieving this. There is now strong use of academic data in English language arts, math, science and social studies, especially in analyzing group information, to improve instruction and to drive up performance standards. There is good use of data, too, to improve behavior and attendance. The school's data set does not yet cover all the core subjects, and goals are not always sufficiently specific so that success can be easily measured. The school recognizes these as their next steps. The school has accurately recognized that all teachers do not provide a wide enough range of activities in lessons to cover the needs and capabilities of all the students. Administrators are helping staff to raise the levels of their own performance through self-assessment, frequent walkthroughs and lesson observations, and through the provision of a good range of professional development activities. The school does not yet make teachers completely aware of what improvements the school requires from them and individual professional development planning is not in place. There is a strong sense of the school as a learning community, with great teamwork between staff and with families and other service providers. This teamwork, the coherent vision and enthusiastic commitment of administration and faculty has greatly improved the responsiveness of the school to any identified underperformance. Parents feel fully included in the decision-making processes and voice their strong support for all the work that is being done on their children's behalf, especially the frequent and effective two-way communication. They like the gentle but firm manner of the principal and typically say, "The principal, she's cool. If there's a problem, we know she'll do whatever's possible."

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has gained the commitment of the whole school community to her vision for constant improvement and for all students achieving the most productive future of which they are capable.
- Parents feel greatly valued and supported by the staff and appreciate the frequent communications and close relationships they have with the school.
- The principal successfully fosters a culture of consensus and collaboration between all who work at the school and students are constantly provided with good role models of productive teamwork.
- The administrators provide effective, welcome support to teachers by giving them frequent, accurate feedback on their performance and extensive programs of relevant professional development.
- The administration has secured a broad array of specialist support from external agencies and within the school to ensure the physical, emotional and intellectual well-being of all students.
- The administration meticulously analyzes the data on the performance of the various subgroups in the school, especially in English language arts and math, and puts in place good remedial strategies where these are necessary.

What the school needs to improve

- Collect, utilize and review high quality data in all core subject areas.
- Ensure that lesson activities and resources always closely match the individual needs and performance levels of all the students in the class.
- Ensure that there are clear, measurable, time-framed goals for all plans and programs.
- Ensure that all teachers have a yearly individual professional development plan in order to make clear their areas for priority attention and the professional development opportunities they will undertake.

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 collects, analyzes and interprets a good range of data in English language arts, math, science and social studies. The school does not yet collect information about all the core subject areas. Teachers in the school's alternate assessment sites have developed data collection sheets that they use well to monitor IEP goal development. The school makes effective use of individual student portfolios in which teachers keep much of the available information, including writing samples, best work and results of assessments. Information from the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) is also included for the standardized assessment students. Teachers and paraprofessionals collect this information in every lesson and points sheets are sent home at the end of each day for parents to review and to reinforce appropriate school behavior. Students who have successfully achieved maximum points proudly show their sheets to staff on the way out of school. Teachers display points sheet totals in every classroom and high scores are celebrated and rewarded. The students have a clear understanding of this consistent and fair system that has brought significant improvements in their behavior. As one student said, "Behavior has improved 100% since last year."

Staff meet fortnightly to review academic data, attendance and PBIS outcomes in behavior. At these meetings, all staff, including service providers, discuss the individual needs of students and review portfolios and individual education plans (IEPs). These discussions result in good decision making about any remedial strategies necessary, including how students will be grouped during instructional periods.

The administration carries out a very detailed analysis of the performance of the different subgroups within the school in English language arts, math, science and social studies. Administrators carefully address any anomalies by refining instructional practices and teaching materials, and providing additional professional development. This very good practice has resulted in improvements in performance but does not yet extend to all core subject areas.

Parents really appreciate the steps that the faculty and administration take to build a strong partnership with them. This relationship is a key factor in the students' successes. On joining the school, parents receive a welcome packet that addresses school policies, assessments, school-wide behavioral expectations and homework. Parents value this information as well as the daily points sheets, communication books, calls home and bi-weekly progress notes on their children's progress. They know that they are able to call at any time to discuss any issue, no matter how minor, and that any suggestions will always be given good consideration. The parent coordinator works hard to increase the involvement of parents, for example through relevant workshops.

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.

Each student has an IEP in which staff, alongside the student, set individual goals in priority areas such as communication, reading and math. Teachers set individual goals for students based on their data in science and social studies, although not all core subject areas are included. The school assigns two or three students to each staff member in order to meet with each student three times a week to discuss their goals, behavior and any other areas of concern. Staff convey clear, high expectations about students’ goals and suggest a range of techniques they might adopt in order to achieve them. As a result of these procedures, students have a good understanding of their academic and behavioral priorities and are able to identify their next steps in learning. As one student said, “The teachers here treat you respectfully and they don’t scream at you but let you know all the time how you can improve.” The school places great store in students achieving their goals in attendance and prized rewards are given for perfect attendance.

Most parents have a sound understanding of their children’s goals, although the school does not cover all subject areas. Many justifiably say that they would like their children to have more opportunities to increase their skills, knowledge and understanding across, for example, music and physical education. However, a few parents are not sufficiently aware of their children’s detailed objectives, even in priority areas such as English language arts and math, and so may not be able to provide their own specific support. All parents though are delighted that the school expects a great deal from their children and feel that this is a key reason why achievement is so good.

The goals that are set are generally of good quality, although some teachers do not specify time frames well enough, so that success is difficult to measure. The school-wide program goals in the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) do not always detail the projected gains expected from the students and so the value added by the new programs is hard to judge.

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 offers a satisfactory curriculum to its students including a good range of after-school activities that include sports, debate team and club periods. The arts are infused regularly into other subjects such as literacy and social studies, although there are not yet sufficient opportunities for students to achieve high performance in, say, music and drama. The school does its best to provide a worthwhile physical education program, although this is hampered by the accommodation restrictions on some of the school’s sites. The students feel that the curriculum is good, although they justifiably say that they would like to have a health class, so that they can learn about keeping healthy, sex education and personal hygiene.

The Comprehensive Educational Plan addresses the school’s most pressing needs. The administration does its best to seek out new, more powerful intervention programs

to help the students succeed. Recent innovations have included programs such as Achieve3000, Headsprout and QRI-IV. These are all proving to be very useful in raising the performance levels of students. Faculty members are equally committed to improvement and are not afraid to experiment and give the new programs a try if this is in the students' interest.

Lessons are usually calm and industrious, and relationships between staff and students are mostly very positive. Good teamwork among the staff provides students with a clear model of what can be achieved through cooperation and sensitivity to others' feelings. Most teachers provide lessons that stimulate the students and increase their desire to learn. However, not all teachers are equally skilful at matching up the activities they offer with the wide range of needs and capabilities in the class. This means that some students may be left behind and lose heart while others may find the work too easy and become bored. This inconsistency applies, too, to behavior management, and some teachers are not as skilful as others are, especially when students become angry or upset. Some parents and students report that, while the school is generally orderly, there is some bullying and lessons are occasionally disrupted. However, everyone says that the school's climate for learning continues to improve and that these problems have reduced dramatically over the past two years since the arrival of the current principal. The Learning Environment Survey shows above average levels of trust and respect. The relatively small number of girls within the school say that the boys respect them and treat them with courtesy and kindness.

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 administration is successfully building capacity to enable teachers to deliver instruction in English language arts, math, science and social studies that meets the needs of all the students. This does not yet extend to all other core subject areas. Administrators provide good support and accurate guidance to the entire faculty to help them improve their performance. The administration, through the school-based coach, has smoothly introduced a set of Professional Teaching Standards and these have become a focus for the monthly faculty meetings. Individual teachers are becoming familiar with the standards by being asked to identify one of the areas as their own professional goal. The administration has concentrated on the identified area during their walkthroughs, as well as in their frequent formal and informal observations. This has enabled the administration as well as faculty to develop a very accurate picture of individual strengths and weaknesses. Teachers, particularly those new to the school or to the profession, have found administrators' advice and guidance to be immensely helpful in helping them to develop their practice.

The teachers say that they are asked for their views on their own professional needs and aspirations. Teachers say that they would like to have further opportunities for sharing good practice through intervisitations, although they understand that these are currently restricted because of budget limitations. Teachers do not yet have an individual professional development plan in order to make clear their agreed priorities and goals for improvement.

Administrators and faculty members share the principal's values and beliefs and form their own learning community by being actively engaged in learning together from each other. This is most clearly seen in the school's various action research projects, such as

those that are evaluating programs such as CASTA and Getting Ready to Learn and in the work of the inquiry team. The inquiry team is providing a very strong steer to the rest of the staff in the way it is using small group instruction and one-on-one tutoring to raise performance levels rapidly in English language arts and self-esteem in a group of underperforming students. Other very exciting collaborative projects include one involving school and agency personnel who are seeking to develop the resilience and coping skills of students who have severe emotional disturbance.

The school implements a clear and comprehensive guidance plan and works very well in collaboration with many external agencies in order to support the personal and academic growth of students. These include family services, psychiatric centers and youth services. School staff work very well as a team with a whole host of specialist service providers such as speech and occupational therapists. Students speak very highly of the guidance counselors and paraprofessionals. They say that these are the people they can turn to and receive on-the-spot, sensitive assistance when they have concerns and troubles, whether serious or not. As one student said, "My paras give me good advice, telling me to stop playing around because I'm better than that."

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.

In its drive for constant improvement, the school has effective procedures for benchmarking progress throughout the year in English language arts, math, science and social studies. This allows the administration and faculty to identify at an early stage when students are going off track and to devise strategies to resolve the problem as quickly as possible. Benchmarking is not yet in place for all the core subject areas. The Comprehensive Educational Plan itself is the product of wide collaboration among all members of the school community, including parents and service providers. The school ensures that progress towards meeting the plan's goals is shared through the regular staff newsletter and at faculty conferences. Interim goals are in place for the school-wide action plans but not all have sufficiently specific benchmark criteria.

When it discovers any underperformance, the administration is proactive in putting in place effective, and often innovative, remedial strategies. For example, the administration identified that math scores were lower than expected and so instituted a summer program. Similarly, the administration has sought to raise science outcomes and scores by assigning a designated science teacher and including web-based programs (Brainpop), Urban Advantage and hands-on materials.

The principal has a very clear vision for the future of the school. She has ensured that the whole school community has internalized this vision through frequent meetings with all stakeholder groups to give a clear account of how well the school is performing and what the next steps are so that students can begin their journey of life-long achievement. One typical student's comments was, "She's the nicest principal I've ever met, and I've known quite a few."

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Public School 723	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
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.				
<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?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
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?			X	
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?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
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.				
<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?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
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?			X	
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?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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			
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed