Department of Education
Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

M.S. 203 (07X203)
Grades: 6-8
339 Morris Avenue, Bronx, NY 10451
October 9, 2012

Report to the Community on the Performance of M.S. 203 (07X203)

Introduction

We want every community to have high quality school options for families. To accomplish this goal, we are committed to the constant improvement of our schools—from student achievement to school environment. Every fall, the Department of Education (DOE) reviews the performance of all schools Citywide. Over the past several years, despite the best efforts of the community and the DOE to support M.S. 203, the school has struggled to demonstrate the capacity to meet basic requirements for student success and to support the student achievement your school community deserves.

Staff and families have worked hard to improve the school and the DOE has provided considerable support to M.S. 203: supporting school leadership; providing resources to increase the rigor of student work; offering supports to strengthen classroom instruction; ensuring the school is organized to focus on student achievement; working to improve the learning environment and culture of the school; and fostering community relationships and partnerships. Unfortunately, our best efforts have not turned around the school.

We understand that students, families, and staff members of M.S. 203 believe in the school's potential and we know that this message is a difficult one. At the same time, we hope you share our view that we can—and must—do better for our students. We count on each of our schools to provide a high-quality education to our students—and we hold all of them to the same high standard. We must ensure our students don't fall further behind.

This report provides an overview of the data and information we will review as we consider how to best serve current and future students of M.S. 203.

Performance Summary

Proficiency: % of Students on Grade Level		**Progress Report Grade**			**Most Recent Quality Review Rating**
English	Mathematics	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2010-2011
7%	10%	C	C	D	"Developing"

- The overwhelming majority of M.S. 203 students remain below grade level in English Language Arts and Math. Only 7% of students were performing on grade level in English—putting the school in the bottom percentile of middle schools Citywide. Only 10% of students were performing on grade level in math—putting the school in the bottom 1% of middle schools Citywide. In both ELA and Math proficiency, M.S. 203 ranks at the bottom of District 7 middle schools.

- The Progress Report measures the progress and performance of students in a school, as well as the school environment, compared to other schools serving similar student populations. M.S. 203 earned a D grade on its 2011-2012 annual Progress Report, including a D grade for Student Progress, an F grade for Student Performance, and a C grade for School Environment. This year's Progress Report marks a further decline in M.S. 203's performance after the school received C grades in the 2010-2011 and 2009-2010 school years.

- M.S. 203 was identified by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as a Priority school, defined by NYSED as one of the bottom 5% of schools in the state.

- M.S. 203 was rated "Developing" on its most recent Quality Review in 2010-2011, indicating deficiencies in the way that the school is organized to support student learning.

- The school's attendance rate remains below most other middle schools. The 2011-2012 attendance rate was 88% compared to the Citywide middle school average of 93%, putting M.S. 203 in the bottom 5% of New York City middle schools.

Despite Our Best Efforts, Performance Remains Low

Over the past several years, the DOE has provided numerous supports to M.S. 203. Among those supports are:

- Working with the principal to develop strong leadership skills;
- Providing strategies for engaging students in rigorous assignments that will prepare them for success in future educational and professional pursuits;
- Working to improve classroom instruction by giving teachers feedback that is aimed at strengthening their practice and providing professional development aligned with the Common Core Standards;
- Recommending effective ways to organize the school;
- Providing operational support for budget, enrollment, facilities, transportation, and health, among other areas, to allow school leadership to maximize support for student learning;
- Helping the school to improve the learning environment and develop a culture that supports safety, respect, and socio-emotional development; and
- Supporting the school in developing and maintaining strong ties to the community.

It is important to note that all schools identified by the DOE as "struggling" will receive an action plan. As we consider potential improvement options for M.S. 203, we will reflect on past efforts at the school to help us identify what has been working and what has not. This information will guide our thinking about how to best support students and the community going forward.

Next Steps and What You Can Expect

Over the coming weeks, we will talk to parents, students, staff, and members of the M.S. 203 community as well as organizations that work with the school. We are particularly interested to learn about things that may not be obvious on paper: What do you think is working well at the school? What is not working?

Based on that feedback as well as a thorough review of multiple types of school data, we will propose one of the following courses of action that we believe will lead to the best outcome for current and future students:

Action Plan #1: Developing an action plan for the school that will focus support in areas where intensive assistance is required to improve student performance. The plan will be implemented over the course of the 2012-2013 school year. The plan may include a wide variety of supports, such as:

- Providing leadership coaching;
- Providing professional development on instructional strategies for struggling students;
- Identifying grants aimed at specific needs of the school;
- Introducing new programs;
- Assisting with the development of a smaller learning environment; and
- Changing leadership.

Action Plan #2: Providing new school options for students and parents that can better support student success by:

- Phasing out the school over time by not accepting new students or reducing enrollment over time by accepting fewer students;
- Supporting current students at the school through graduation; and
  Placing new district or charter school(s) in the building that will support student achievement and provide additional school choices for families.

As we move forward in this process and develop an action plan for the school, we will be able to provide additional details about how that plan would impact students and the broader M.S. 203 community. Regardless of the outcome of this process, the DOE will work to ensure that all students receive the support they need and the excellent education they deserve. We appreciate and value your feedback and participation throughout this process.

Sharing Your Concerns and Questions

Parents, staff, and other community members who have questions or comments at any time are encouraged to reach out to the school's Community District Superintendent and/or Office of Family and Community Engagement:

Community District Superintendent: Yolanda Torres, D07proposals@schools.nyc.gov or 718-742-6500 x2
Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE): FACE@schools.nyc.gov or 212-374-4118
Office of Portfolio Management (OPM) website: http://schools.nyc.gov/community/planning/changes/bronx/feedback?id=220