



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Public School 253

**1307 Central Avenue
Queens
NY 11691**

Principal: Robin L. Johnson

Dates of review: May 24 - 25, 2007

Reviewer: Richard Woolf

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well
What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school was opened in the fall of 2004 in a brand new building with state of the art facilities to accommodate students from pre kindergarten through grade 5. The school will house its first full enrollment in September 2007. Currently there are 434 enrolled students in pre-kindergarten through grade 4.

The population of the school is made up of 51% Black, 47% Hispanic, with Asian, White or other at 2%. Over the last twelve months there has been an increase of 20% in Hispanic students and subsequent 20% decrease in Black students. The number of English language learner students is approximately 18% and is higher than both similar and City schools. Special education students make up 11% of the school population and this is comparable to similar schools but lower than City schools.

Student attendance has risen consistently since the school opened and is currently running at 92% and improving. This is on a par with similar and other City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding for 83% of the students and this is comparable with similar and other City schools. The school shares part of its building with a District 75 school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is led by a charismatic principal whose vision exudes throughout the entire building.
- The assistant principal and staff are supportive in the extreme.
- The new building is a safe place for students to learn.
- The atmosphere within the school creates a wonderful learning environment.
- The displays of student work across all grade levels are exemplary.
- The parents embrace the school as part of the community in providing excellent educational opportunities.
- The exposure of the students to the use of technology is enhancing learning.
- There is a high level of educational debate within the building which is clearly aimed at the promotion of learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Goal setting and the monitoring of such goals needs to be more rigorous and focused.
- Higher expectations are required throughout to more effectively challenge higher achieving students.
- Develop ways of monitoring and improving gender improvement throughout the school.
- Further develop systems to ensure higher attendance rates, especially in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with well-developed features.

The school has been open since September 2004 in a brand new building. The concept is to provide the young students of the area with a school that is safe and encourages them to learn in order to achieve their full potential. Under the leadership of a charismatic and dynamic principal that concept is being shaped and the feeling from the outside community is that once the school is operating at full capacity the dream will be realized. The principal is supported by an assistant principal and staff who are hard working, dedicated and portray the same aspirations. Since opening, applications for each successive year have exceeded the number of available places.

The school uses data extremely effectively in order to demonstrate individual student and whole school achievements. This same data is used to monitor and evaluate progress to date and to plan for the future. The students play their part in setting a tone of calmness and endeavor. They are very well behaved and take a pride in their school as evidenced by the grade 2 Memorial Day concert which filled the auditorium with parents and guests. The parent body is very active in supporting the school and the role they have in making the school successful. The school has come a long way in a short space of time and it is apparent that it is only the beginning as it charts a path to creating young people who take pride not only in the school's achievements, but their own.

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

In the short period the school has been open it has amassed a vast array of data on its students. In opening with pre-kindergarten through grade 2 the school set itself the task of creating its own data. The use of a number of age specific diagnostic indicators has enabled them to establish baseline data from which to create groupings according to need and ability. The same assessment regime is in place as the school grows but this is now supported by State testing data. The school is in a strong position to demonstrate that progress is being achieved across grade levels, in individual classes and for individual students. The school has very detailed data banks on groups such as English language learners and special education students. They use the data to inform instruction, provide extra teaching support and track individual progress. The outcome of this is that on the testing grade both sub groups scored above level 1 on the recent English language arts State test with all English language learners scoring above level 2. The school is undertaking analysis on its ethnic populations and the data has revealed an increase in performance from the main sub groups.

The school does not yet analyze data with the same rigor when looking at the performance of males and females or the higher achieving students. The principal acknowledges this and is in the process of seeking ways to address it. The school does make comparisons with other schools and is looking ahead to facing the challenges created by the newly

formed group of peer schools. There is very strong evidence to demonstrate that excellent work is undertaken to compare grade level achievement. As a result of this, the principal is easily able to identify strengths and weaknesses of her teaching staff. This is all contributing to the improvement of instruction and the progress of individual students, classes, subjects and grade levels.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The principal has a basic philosophy that every student can achieve anything they set out to do in life. As a result she sets very high expectations for her staff and students to realize this goal. High expectations are a key focus of the school and the parents fully endorse this approach. They feel fortunate that their children are able to attend a school which not only expects high achievement but demands it. They are kept fully informed of student progress and a number of parent workshops are run each year to assist them in acquiring the knowledge that helps to support their children progress. They, like others in the school, feel this is a community effort to make the school a success. Goal setting and planning, for the betterment of students is a key factor to further progress as the school develops and becomes more sophisticated in its monitoring procedures.

Data is acting as a positive tool in providing the information required to enable students to perform at the highest possible levels. There are goals, with objective measures, set at the beginning of each year to demonstrate progress targets for the school as a whole, individual grade levels and individual subjects. However the school does not yet fully recognize the value that timeframes have in monitoring progress to date. The analysis of State test data is very thorough and shared with the instructional cabinet with further disaggregation to subject, class and individual grade levels. However the school does not adjust any targets in line with the overall yearly goals. Planning for English language learners and special education students is a key feature of the school’s work and as such close attention is given to monitoring their progress. As a result very good use is made of academic intervention services in supporting these students to improve their learning.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school follows the mandatory curriculum and adapts it to meet the needs of the students. Individual grade level teachers work with the coaches to produce curriculum maps which are reviewed at regular intervals to demonstrate effectiveness in progressing students. The data gathered at regular intervals and post marking periods also allows for revision of the curriculum maps to take place.

The teachers are held accountable for ensuring the progress of not only the whole teaching group but for individuals within in the class. The daily common preparation time allocated to each grade level is valuable and a tool much appreciated by staff. This allows for teachers to be fully involved in the process of sharing information and is aiding the improvement of student learning. There is a great deal of evidence to demonstrate that

teachers are differentiating according to student need. The school's coaching team use data extensively to work with teachers to raise overall class and grade level outcomes. As the school is growing the budget has become critical to the planning and scheduling process. The principal is aware of the need to balance both human and physical resources. The data drew attention to the high number of Hispanic students arriving in the school which had no Spanish speaking teachers. This is now not the case and a number of bi-lingual staff have been appointed with considerable effect upon student learning. The assistant principal is acknowledged by all to have complete mastery of the scheduling process. This is typified by each grade level having common preparation time every day.

The active engagement of the students in their instructional activities is a very strong aspect of the school's work. Aligned with this is the eagerness of the students to learn and their own self motivation. The excellent relationships between staff and students are witnessed throughout the entire building. There is mutual respect, politeness and a real 'can do' feeling about the school with students wanting to do their very best for their teachers but, above all, for themselves. The school feels very strongly about student's non attendance and acts immediately, by contacting home if a child is not in school. Therefore attendance is a high priority and this is acknowledged by the parents. However the principal feels attendance could be even higher if parents of pre-kindergarten through kindergarten students fully appreciated the educational program the school offers to be as important at this early age as they do for older students.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The principal has a very clear idea of the staff she needs to continue the development of the school. The data supports her in the hiring process by highlighting the areas where staff are most needed for example, with an increase Hispanic students the need to appoint bi-lingual teachers became apparent. Newly appointed staff have to demonstrate their willingness to work holistically with each student and be able to use data effectively in impacting upon their instruction. Currently there is a very good balance of new and experienced teachers who fully endorse this approach.

A key feature of the teacher's work has been the design of an excellent professional development program. The program is developed from the needs of individual teachers identified through working with the administration and coaches. It is supported by formal data and personal data collected by teachers that highlight individual and whole school needs. A strength of the school is its ability to schedule planned programs of teacher inter visitations and peer evaluation which clearly improve individual instruction but, more importantly, impact upon student learning. The principal and assistant principal observe their teachers with daily walkthroughs with the view to improving instruction against planned and perceived need. This is supported by the agreed number of formal observations.

There are a number of processes in place that allow for regular communication to take place between individual teachers and in teams. The work of the instructional cabinet is providing excellent impetus for the staff to drive the school forward academically. The outcomes of their meetings feed into the grade levels and this clearly leads to the improvement in instruction. Teachers are also afforded the opportunity to have their own preparation time which is greatly valued. The principal is highly regarded by the entire community as not only being an excellent educator but a strong leader with very clear

aspirations for the school. Within a relatively short space of time systems are in place that ensure a well run school focused on achievement and strong personal development.

The school has support from community-based organizations which the principal is fully appreciative of and there are signs that this is growing as the school establishes itself. In the school's efforts to develop itself within the community, the parents are taking a strong stance and over the last three years this is proving a strength as more and more parents become engaged in their children's learning.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

There is evidence to show the school's Comprehensive Education Plan is created from a wide constituency that includes parents. Annual targets are set and in many cases percentage increases are ascribed to demonstrate improvement both across grade levels and individual subjects. However at present the school does not effectively set goals based upon the actuality of the data. The principal acknowledges this and is reassessing her strategy for the next planning cycle.

The school compares the data of students across grade levels, between teachers and individual students. There is a high level of debate at meetings involving staff as they discuss and analyze data when received from the State, with the view to readjusting plans. There is evidence to show progress towards goals. However the school does not yet monitor its own progress towards achievement of targets with the same rigor as it does other aspects of its work. Similarly the school has a system of benchmarking when using diagnostic and interim assessments, however during the year, there is no objective revision of year-to-year targets for individual students or teachers should it be necessary. Planning effectively and setting realistic targets to demonstrate progress is acknowledged as a key element of moving the school forward in the pursuit of overall goals. The school will be better placed to achieve these aspirations as monitoring and succession planning begins to develop.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 253 (PS 253)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 			X
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 			X
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			X
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.			X
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	