



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Public School 255 Queens**

**158-40 76th Road**

**Queens**

**NY 11366**

**Principal: Richard Marowitz**

**Dates of review: February 12 - 14, 2007**

**Reviewer: Ronnie Solow**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public School 255 Q, a District 75 school, scattered throughout Queens, serves 327 students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12. These students are classified as autistic and are educated using a curriculum that emphasizes communication, academic progress and functional life skills. The school is situated in eight shared buildings at which the principal and assistant principals are supported by coordinators at each of the other sites. The students are served in classes with ratios 6:1:1. The ethnic composition of the school includes 31.19% Hispanic, 27.83% White, 23.55% Asian and others, and 17.43% Black. Male students comprise 81.65 % of the student population, with females composing 18.3%. There are 62 students, 18% of the student body, classified as English language learners. Students with general education programs comprise 1.22% of the student body. There are 11.31% in least restrictive environments and 87.46% in most restrictive environments according to the student's individual education plans.

Students with autism often exhibit behaviors that impact on their ability to learn. Behavior support is built into the classroom curriculum. Approved curriculum designs include Picture Exchange Communication System, Applied Behavior Analysis, Treatment and Education of Autistic and other Communication Handicapped Children, and Positive Behavior Supports for Children with Challenging Behaviors. All students are classified as having State alternate assessment evaluations using data folios.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal and administrative team members are highly visible and well respected by staff and parents.
- The principal and administrative team work collaboratively and cooperatively.
- Classrooms and hallways are decorated with authentic student work samples.
- Uniformity of instruction, differentiated learning and behavioral expectations are promoted in the classrooms.
- Students are treated with respect and encouraged to reach their full potential.
- Assessment data drives the instructional program.
- Continuous monitoring of student progress, with interim adjustments, contributes to increasing student performance outcomes.
- Many professional development opportunities contribute to the growth and development of the staff.
- Youth development activities support the curriculum.
- There is a high level of family involvement and support.

### What the school needs to improve

- Track data for female students in order to plan appropriate activities.
- Develop additional opportunities for staff to share knowledge, skills and expertise as an alternative to formal observation.
- Continue to investigate ways to streamline the September to November assessment and individual education plan development period.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a well-developed school.**

PS 255 Q is a school that utilizes the team approach to educating autistic students. The principal and four assistant principals work with the site coordinators and classroom staff in a collegial and collaborative fashion to improve educational, communication and behavioral outcomes for the students.

The use of data underpins the instructional program. Beginning in September, each teacher utilizes a variety of assessments to evaluate the students and plan for the academic year. All classes are staffed in the 6:1:1 ratio and many students have crisis, management or health paraprofessionals assigned to assist them on an individual basis. There are many related service providers working with the students in the areas of occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language development, and adaptive physical education. Some students have augmentative devices to assist with communication. Each site has an assigned nurse. Performance levels have consistently risen as evidenced by the scores on the submitted New York State alternate assessment data folios.

### 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.**

The principal, assistant principals, site coordinators and classroom staff use many forms of data to determine the educational needs of the students. All teachers begin the school year with an extensive assessment program for each student in their class. A variety of assessments, including a lengthy parent questionnaire, are used. The school employs the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) or the Treatment and Education of Autistic and other Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) structures in each of the classrooms. An extensive range of assessments is used effectively to generate suitable individual education plan goals.

The school examines data for each class in a variety of areas. English language learners are tracked as they progress from bilingual Spanish program to English as a second language services to proficiency. At this time, female students are not tracked apart from male students. The school recognizes the need to implement tracking of data for the cohort of girls in order to provide appropriate activities for them. Additional data is available regarding attendance, toileting, job site involvement, movement to less restrictive environments and reinforcements. Each student has a binder that includes the individual education plan, all data and assessments, as well as the parent questionnaire. The binder travels with the student from year to year and provides a constantly updated picture of the progress the student has made. While staff regularly collects and analyzes data with the site coordinator and the assistant principal, the review is not carried out according to a set calendar.

School committees in the areas of literacy, behavioral supports, communication, and technology are comprised of staff members from each of the eight sites and an assistant principal. They review data to note progress, make recommendations and intervene when necessary.

Principals of similar District 75 schools across the city meet regularly to discuss issues pertinent to their students and schools. No cross-school data comparisons are made given the need to highly individualize the program for every student. The New York State alternate assessment data folios, used to assess student ability on the State standards in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies, indicate good progress for the students. In the 2003-2004 school year, 31 data folios were submitted for the targeted age group and scored at levels 3 and 4. Currently, the school is preparing 154 data folios in the required areas for the target population. It is anticipated that they will earn high scores for the Alternate Grade Level Indicator selected by the teachers to demonstrate proficiency in the adapted standard.

**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 well developed.**

The individual education plan and classroom assessments determine the goals and objectives that are set for each student. The entire administrative team reviews the progress of the individual students in a variety of ways. The assistant principals and site coordinators review the student binders. Related service providers, specialist teachers, classroom teachers and paraprofessionals confer and plan for each student. The Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal’s goals and objectives set forth the overarching goals for the school.

Students with challenging behavior are discussed at the various committees, after consultation with the site coordinator. Intervention plans are created and reviewed with input from all involved staff members and parents. The plan is reviewed for efficacy at the next monthly meeting. If necessary, additional interventions can be instituted.

Parents receive regular communication and support from the school. A daily communication notebook is employed to inform the parent about the daily goings on in school, since many of the students are non-verbal. The teacher and parent write to each other daily regarding curriculum, communication, behavior, social and emotional areas of development. Parents are taught how to use the behavior plan and the communication methods for use at home. Every student has a behavior plan that is aligned to the supportive curriculum. Parents regularly receive letters, newsletters, telephone calls, e-mail notifications and are invited to workshops designed to keep them informed and to provide information regarding their student. The September parent questionnaire is the initial step in the parent involvement process. Individual education plan conferences, report cards, open school meetings, parent association meetings and activities designed for parents by the parent coordinator and guidance staff are additional opportunities for the school and parents to collaborate.

All students are looked at for individual growth and progress. Best practices for children with autism are employed in the classrooms. Parents are asked to support the curriculum and are included in professional development opportunities when appropriate. New staff is

trained in the use of Picture Exchange Communication System and parents are invited to learn how to use the system with their student to further communication and language development.

**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.**

Curriculum is selected according to best practices for children with autism. Research-based curriculum designs are examined by the curriculum committee and recommended to the principal. The school leadership team is informed about the material and its possible adoption.

Teachers design their lessons, after completing assessments, using a wide range of published programs and teacher generated materials. All lessons are differentiated for the needs of each student. In the Treatment and Education of Autistic and other Communication Handicapped Children classrooms areas are set off for small group instruction, individual work centers and independent study areas. Similarly structured environments are used in the Applied Behavior Analysis classrooms. Every student has a personal schedule reflecting their daily program. Designed around the student’s functional level, it may include sight vocabulary words, Mayer Johnson symbols, photographs, or the actual object.

Best practices are shared and discussed at grade, site, school and committee meetings. Teachers adapt and reproduce age-appropriate literature using the Picture Exchange Communication System for classroom and home use. Mayer Johnson symbols are used for all non-verbal and preliterate students to encourage and increase communication ability. Technology is infused into many aspects of the curriculum, especially with the Edmark reading program.

Budget decisions are driven by student need. Each unit has a site coordinator and a shared assistant principal. Two staff vacancies necessitated the placing of the coach and one site coordinator into the classroom rather than hiring inexperienced, untrained staff. Many related service providers and 119 paraprofessionals provide additional direct services to the students. Teachers provide additional instructional support to individual students through the provisions of the teacher contract.

Structure, routines and regulations are high priorities for students with challenging behaviors. Applied Behavior Analysis and Treatment and Education of Autistic and other Communication Handicapped Children strategies are employed along with a behavior plan including reinforcements and rewards for each student. Students know and trust at least one individual on the staff.

Attendance is better than 90%. The nurse calls home on the first day of absence and notes any problems. On the third day, the principal is informed and the attendance staff is notified. Absence triggers immediate response.

**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.**

Staff turnover is relatively low. The principal selects new staff based upon past experience, knowledge of students with autism, and willingness to fulfill all the functions of the job. New York City Teaching Fellows are assigned during the summer school period and are frequently hired. All new staff receive training in behavior management, best practices in Applied Behavior Analysis, Picture Exchange Communication System, Treatment and Education of Autistic and other Communication Handicapped Children and are assigned an experienced buddy teacher.

Professional development opportunities are extensive. New staff receive specific training for teachers of autistic students. Other opportunities include training in the use of the Edmark reading program and the related technology, Meville to Weville reading pilot, Mayer Johnson symbols, Functional Behavior Assessment, Joint Action Routine, Picture Exchange Communication System, and systems and strategies for improving outcomes for children with autism. A behavior management specialist will be conducting training for teachers and paraprofessionals and then spending three days at each of the sites. He will collaborate with the staff to create interventions for students with the most challenging behaviors. Parents and paraprofessionals were included in many of the professional development sessions. The parent coordinator and guidance counselors have created an extensive series of workshops for parents.

Teachers are observed both formally and informally by the principal and assistant principals. Written reports and post-observation conferences provide feedback and are considered professional development opportunities. Staff members requiring assistance with certain techniques or strategies are directed to a colleague's classroom to observe the practice. Experienced staff members are readily available to assist and demonstrate their skill for their colleagues. The principal is considering using this practice as an alternative to formal observation for the most skilled and experienced senior staff. Staff members are deployed to sites where their expertise is needed.

The principal and the four assistant principals meet twice monthly, as does the full cabinet that includes the site coordinators. Data is reviewed and discussed for meaning and implications. Grade, faculty and school meetings are held monthly. Committees meet once a month. Every meeting includes a review of pertinent data. Teachers meet informally at lunchtime and during preparation periods to discuss students, share materials and strategize about meeting student needs.

The school runs smoothly and efficiently. Rules, regulations and routines are known and followed by students and staff across all sites. The school has a calm and orderly environment, conducive to learning. The principal is well-respected by staff and parents for his openness, accessibility, administrative capacity, warmth and educational knowledge.

The school has linkages with many organizations that encourage the growth and development of students with autism and provide support for families. Middle school and high school age students engage in job site experiences each week in order to increase their communication skills and to generalize the classroom work into their community life. A school store, staffed by the middle school students, supports the academic and functional curriculum. Other job experiences are aligned with the Syracuse curriculum that is widely used. Many fun activities are planned for students, parents and staff to enjoy the company of one another. Some of these activities include a Valentine's dance, overnight

camping at Floyd Bennett Field, barbeques, picnics, skiing and week-end recreational activities.

**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 well developed.**

The staff has ongoing conversations about how to improve outcomes for their students. The data, captured daily, is used to determine the next stages in the developmental process. The data serves as the benchmark for each student, class, unit and the whole school. The principal and the administrative team meet with individual teachers to review individual education plans, behavior plans, and classroom work. Revisions are immediate when determined to be necessary. Data from related service providers assist teachers in making immediate modifications to the academic services for each student.

The ability to set goals, monitor and revise them is evident throughout the school and at all sites. The Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal's goals and objectives are the guide for the goal setting. The Comprehensive Education Plan is reviewed and discussed at monthly school leadership team meetings. Parents and staff monitor the plan for success and make modifications and revisions when they are necessary. The very active parents association and the school leadership team work to make the Comprehensive Education Plan a useful tool for school improvement.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: P255Q</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
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"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		<b>X</b>	
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* 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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
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.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X