



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Public School 256

525 Convent Road

Queens

NY 11791

Principal: Oswaldo Roman

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Reviewer: Louise Kapner

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 256, a multi-sited complex organization of eight cluster sites, serves 460 students in a twelve month program. Seven sites (PS/MS 43, PS 831 at Temple Beth El, St. John's Home, PS 253, PS 848 at Peninsula Hospital, PS 114, Beach Channel High School), are located in Rockaway, Queens and one site, (PS 256 at Mercyfirst), in Syosset, Long Island. Students, ages three through 21, pre-kindergarten through grade 12, some of whom are non-ambulatory, are identified as requiring intensive management and therapeutic services and differentiated instruction and are assigned to multi graded classes of 12:1:1, 8:1:1, 12:1:4 or 6:1:1, student to teacher to paraprofessional staffing ratios. St. John's and Mercyfirst are residential placements for special education and general education students, and Peninsula Hospital is a day treatment program. At a number of sites, inclusion programs enable students to attend grade-appropriate general education classes. Students participate in either standardized or alternate assessments (approximately 6%). The majority of students (58%) are Black, 20% are Hispanic, 19% are White and 3% are Asian.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal and his administrators and extended cabinet work collaboratively to create a nurturing school climate that meets instructional needs of all students.
- The school makes outstanding use of data to identify needs and monitor the performance and progress of their students.
- Instructional programs are engaging and appropriate to students' levels.
- Data on student performance is exceptionally well used in the decision making process.
- Staff works together as a cohesive team that shares the vision and contributes to the positive atmosphere of the school.
- Staff is provided with good opportunities to participate in professional development.
- Parents are welcomed into the school and appreciate the commitment of the school community.
- Fragile children are provided with excellent opportunities to mature socially and be successful learners.

What the school needs to improve

- Build on the data collection for additional student sub-groups.
- Further develop the middle school program to ensure grade appropriate instruction in each of the content areas.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

“Kids First, High Expectations, No Excuses” is the school’s motto and evident as the focus of the entire school community. As one student said, “They didn’t give up on me, they kept pushing me.” The principal, his administrators and staff, work untiringly as a team to provide some of the most challenging and fragile students with opportunities to be successful academically and behaviorally. Instructional programs, special events, recreational activities, and the arts, are incorporated into the school’s program. PS 256 maintains a positive collaboration with sponsoring agencies for the residential and day treatment programs, enabling students to be involved in a quality program.

Collection, evaluation and use of data is at a very high level and used to drive instruction and for programmatic decision making. Recent scores on the Regents and competency tests showed an increase in the percentage of passing students. Professional development to support the school’s goals in instruction and behavior is offered to all staff who eagerly participates.

The school is constantly challenged by the transient nature of the student population. A recent review of data showed that approximately 72% of the students attended PS 256 for less than two years. Since January 1, 2007, 30 new students were admitted to PS 256 at Mercyfirst. Yet, the focus remains on children. From January 2006 to January 2007 64 out of 86 students at Mercyfirst were discharged to less restrictive environments.

Parents who are involved with the school are very satisfied and pleased with the progress of their children. One parent said, “The program has done a lot for my son. He gets 80%.” A parent, whose child attends from Long Island said, “District 75 knows what they are doing.” These are testaments to this school’s commitment and care for all children.

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 school regularly collects available data and generates its own data from a broad range of standardized tests and assessments to understand school, grade, class, and student achievement. The highly effective manner in which data is analyzed enables monitoring of student performance and progress. Class lists are generated with individual performance level results on standardized examinations. Information relative to where the student is placed within the level and performance on each tested standard is further indicated. Teachers use this information to address instructional needs and monitor value added. Data is recorded daily for alternate assessment students using the ‘Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-Handicapped Children’ (TEACCH) methodology. Teachers are able to track student accuracy and independence for targeted activities to plan next steps. A well established point system monitors student behavior

and for residential students serves as communication with cottage personnel. The school-wide information system is being piloted at one site. Data generated thus far on time, place, and type of referrals shows the need for more support at the middle school level. While the school does an excellent job in reviewing and using the data, it does not look at results by ethnicity. This is an oversight, given the high number of minority students in the school.

A seven year longitudinal comparison of data shows trends and enables the school to monitor its own performance and progress. Intra-school comparisons showed Mercyfirst with a higher passing rate than St. John's on Regents and competency tests. A focus on instruction and changes in staffing at St. John's increased the percentage of students passing the January 2007 exams. The principal not only compares his school's performance to other district schools, but does grade comparisons with general education schools.

This constant review and use of data is built into the school's culture. School leaders effectively use this information to compare student progress, address programmatic needs and determine next steps.

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.

Available data and generated data enable teachers to have a very good knowledge of their students' academic and social needs. They are highly committed to providing good instruction to maximize learning opportunities and constantly discuss students and share ideas. Reports from Read 180 provide individual student diagnostic and on going performance and progress data. Teachers use this information for grouping and differentiating instruction. Paraprofessionals and service providers support instruction. Students work independently on the Princeton Review web site and receive immediate feedback. Teachers access data to monitor student's work and match additional instruction. The Wide Range Achievement Test, administered to newly enrolled students in the residential program, provides immediate data used for class placement and informs instructional needs. The Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, administered yearly, gives student achievement in reading and mathematics. A yearly comparison of one student's results indicated significant gains in both areas. Review of data folios and results from the Brigance are effectively used to develop appropriate goals and instructional tasks for alternate assessment students. Student behavior is carefully monitored by a point system.

All standardized assessment students receive academic intervention services during the school day. Individual student tracking sheets provide performance data used in designing appropriate interventions. There is daily monitoring of the delivery of services and student outcomes. Additional tutoring is provided to students at the residential sites. Students know that they are held to high standards. Picture symbols are used to relay expectations to the non-verbal students. Assignments are clearly outlined and opportunities for self-reflection are part of the final grading process. Required exit projects are adapted to each child's ability. One student shared, "They want us to learn more." The school works hard to involve and inform parents. Parents receive newsletters with information of school programs and 'helpful hints' for at-home support. Although some sites have limited parent

participation, those who attend conferences express their appreciation and support of the program. A foster parent said the residential program “gives students a second chance.”

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 selection of the school's curriculum is firmly based on high expectation of students. Assessments are used to identify supplemental programs to ensure that students make good progress. The district’s pacing calendar and units of study align instruction to the core curriculum. An early literacy and communication program, ‘Meville to Weville’ offers comprehensive, systematic instruction that is necessary for students with disabilities to experience literacy learning success. Data collection monitors student progress. Use of Mayer Johnson picture symbols further support communication with non-verbal students.

Teachers hold themselves to high standards and are held accountable for student achievement; they create meaningful environments for learning. Student engagement is at a very high level and supports minimal classroom disruptions. Teachers are well prepared and provide grade appropriate materials, focused lessons, inter-active discussion and computer-based learning. Extensive use of assistive technology encourages communication for autistic students. Progress is constantly monitored and new methodologies and materials are introduced as appropriate. A high school mathematics teacher uses color codes so at a glance he can identify who needs additional skill building. A communication chart notes each non-verbal student’s mode of communication and expected behavior and is constantly up-dated to reflect progress.

Data is well used in the decision making process for staffing, scheduling and addressing students needs. Rollover monies were used for an additional assistant principal. Simultaneous scheduling of mathematics ‘A’ and ‘B’ supports students’ programmatic needs and facilitates co-teaching. Differentiated materials support classroom instruction. However middle school teachers are responsible for teaching all content areas in multi-graded classes and the school does not have supports in place to ensure that instruction is grade specific.

Staff has a keen understanding of students’ behavioral needs. Training in crisis intervention and mental health enhances the school’s nurturing environment. Students appreciate the opportunities to talk to adults. A student acknowledged that he learned coping skills and how to work out issues with other students.

Student engagement and effective programming is seen as critical to reaching and maintaining 90% attendance. Absences are followed up and students who leave the residential sites without permission are identified and returned.

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.

A committee of school staff attends well to the selection of new staff. Potential candidates and transferees participate in a rigorous screening process. The principal is highly regarded and recognizes strengths in staff members. A recent move of a middle school teacher to the elementary organization met with much success.

High priority is given to professional development. Staff is appreciative of the extensive opportunities afforded them. Participation is strongly encouraged and well supported. A number of teachers were sent for formal training for 'TEACCH'. Administrators, coordinators and lead teachers all provide on-going assistance. A 'make and take' scheduled during common planning time encourages teachers to share ideas, plan together and prepare instructional materials. Teachers have opportunities for intra and inter site visitations and common meetings are rotated into different classrooms. Senior teachers are paired with new staff and meet weekly for one on one support. Faculty conferences are well used for additional sharing of information and instructional strategies.

Daily learning walks and formal observations by the assistant principals and principal provide administrators with opportunities for constructive feedback. Sharing of best practices and suggestions are welcomed by teachers. PS 256 maintains a collaborative relationship with their host schools. Mercyfirst is fortunate to have extraordinary support from their agency. The school's service providers are keenly aware of students' needs, provide appropriate help, and are well versed in school programs. A partnership with the East Coast Assistance Dogs organization furthers the focus of the school. Students are involved with training dogs to work with physically challenged and autistic children.

The highly focused instructional and behavioral support program is reflected by a well-managed school. Procedures are clear and communicated across all sites. The management skills of the principal, the high level of collaboration among administrators and site-based staff, and everyone's commitment to the students, enable the school to function at a very high level.

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 school reviews and uses data on an on-going basis to set interim and long term goals. Programming changes implemented in September 2006 reflected an increase of students passing January 2007 Regents. Constant review of data from interim assessments and instructional programs supports the monitoring of student performance and progress. This information is well used to support implementation of new or revision of existing programs. Criteria for inclusion have been revised to better identify students who will meet with success. Tutors at the high school provide student progress reports to ensure congruence of instruction.

Representatives from various sites participate in the school leadership team and the development of the Comprehensive Education Plan. They are extremely supportive of the process. The plan, a work in progress, reflects a very high level of data analysis and includes a seven year longitudinal study of students' results on standardized exams that is used for successive planning for each site. This school's successes are reflective of a high level of commitment and collaboration.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 256	∅	✓	+
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