



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Queens Occupational Training Center**

**Public School 721**

**57-12 94 Street  
Queens  
NY 11373**

**Principal: Madelaine Hassell**

**Dates of review: April 16 - 18, 2007**

**Reviewer: Louise Kapner**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The Queens Occupational Training Center, Public School 721, located in Elmhurst, Queens, is a multi-sited organization serving 431 students in a 12 month program. This is a non-graded program for students aged 13 to 21 with significant to severe disabilities who require a high level of support. Some students are non-ambulatory. Students are functionally grouped within a three year age range. Sixteen percent of the students are Asian, 37% Hispanic, 30% Black and 17% White. Eighty one students (19%) are English language learners representing 29 languages or dialects. The ratio of male to female is 58% to 42% respectively. All students participate in alternate assessments.

PS 721's main site serves students in classes of 12:1:1, 8:1:1, 6:1:1, or 12:1:4, student to teacher to paraprofessional staffing ratio. This site provides self contained classes for bilingual and English language learners. Many students participate in a work study program and are off-site for four or five days a week. All newly admitted students attend PS 721 at Info Tech High School for one year in a 12:1:1 setting. Students then transition to the main site. PS 721 has two inclusion programs. PS 721 at High School for Arts and Business fully integrates students into mainstream classes with the support of paraprofessionals. PS 721 at Queens College enables select students 18 years and older to attend college courses and participate in community-based instruction. Paraprofessionals travel with the students throughout the day. Assistance to ensure appropriate placement and continuation of services is provided for parents of aging out students.

The principal has a long tenure with this school. She, along with her administrative team and staff, has created a highly supportive environment with a well-structured, functional instructional program for fragile students.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal provides effective leadership to meet the school's challenges.
- The administrative team works collaboratively to support the goals of the school.
- Technology is incorporated into the instructional program well.
- The school places a high priority on creating a safe, nurturing environment for very fragile students.
- Instruction is well supported by a wide range of authentic items from daily living.
- Parents are welcomed into the school and appreciate their child learning to become independent and socially appropriate.
- Students are engaged in learning opportunities to enable them to reach their potential.
- Teachers are highly committed to addressing instructional and behavioral needs of their students.
- Professional development is an integral part of the school program and is well supported by an in-house coach.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop formal school-wide monitoring procedures of student performance and progress.
- Continue to develop teachers' skills to use data in understanding student's needs, differentiating instruction, and planning next steps for all students.
- Further incorporate literacy into the instructional program.
- Disaggregate available data to monitor performance and progress of student sub-groups.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

Three words, 'Embrace, Empower, Enable," encompasses the mission of PS 721. The principal, her four assistant principals and dedicated staff are highly committed to creating an environment that encourages independence, learning, and opportunities to develop social skills enabling students to transition to the real world. They are very proud of their accomplishments, keenly aware of their strengths, and working collaboratively to address areas that need further development.

Classrooms reflect project based learning that is differentiated, lessons that mirror real-life situations, and hands-on activities that integrate literacy. Two students, although limited verbally, in response to what they liked most about school responded, "I learned to read," and "I love reading." The school has established extensive partnerships with community-based organizations which further support their program. Approximately 25% of the students are involved in community-based instruction/work study. This year nine students will be leaving to enter competitive jobs. One former student is now on the custodial staff of the school. The school maintains positive relationships with their host schools. "It has been wonderful to be able to have students from the inclusion program in my class," said a professor from Queens College.

The school is planning a disability awareness recognition luncheon where teachers, students, alumni and dignitaries will join the school's administration to celebrate the school's successes. The school continues to focus on creating opportunities for students to reach their personal best and integrate into the wider community. In June 2007, five out of six graduating students from the high school inclusion program will transition to inclusion at Queens College.

### 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 proficient.**

The school uses available data from the Brigance, the individual education plan, and the New York State alternate assessment data folios to determine functional levels and needs of each student. Data from the New York State English as a second language achievement test is collected and reviewed for English language learners. Automate the school reports provides additional data. School-generated data is heavily used to understand student performance and plan next steps. Teacher observations, page six of the individual education plan and report cards, and various assessments for behavior are resources for student performance and progress. A school generated reading/writing skills and knowledge assessment enables teachers to ascertain student levels. Using individual education plan goals, results from the Brigance and alternate grade level indicators from the alternate assessment plan instruction. Some teachers maintain individual student daily and/or weekly formal task analysis using various tools. However, this is not consistent

throughout the school. An assessment that will determine an on-going understanding of student performance and progress and provide teachers with professional development how to use this data to inform instruction needs to be identified and incorporated into the school. Monthly data for school-wide behavior identifies more difficult times of day. The crisis intervention teacher maintains student specific information.

Data on movement of students into less restrictive environments and participants in inclusion, work study, and independent travelers program is collected and serves as a yearly comparison to its own performance. Students participating in inclusion have steadily increased and for September 2007 the classes will be increased to accommodate additional students. However this information is not disaggregated. The school does not review the data by ethnicity and other categories of interest. The principal does look at data from similar schools; however she does not formally compare performance.

**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.**

Staff participates in a high level of collaboration given the wide-range of skills needed for students to complete each activity. The school coach, classroom teacher and occupational therapist plan together to support students during instruction. For a child who has difficulties transferring, the physical therapist worked with a paraprofessional on lifting to avoid injuries. Teacher observations, formal and program-specific school generated assessments, anecdotes, and authentic student work from project-based learning are used to evaluate progress and plan next steps. Progressive trial results from the picture exchange communication system monitors student performance from needing assistance to spontaneous comments.

Goals are student specific and focus on individuals and the school as a whole and are not always sufficiently meaningful, functional or purposeful. High expectations are inherent in the school’s program and philosophy. Throughout the building four questions are visibly displayed and focus the staff. “What are we teaching? Why are we teaching it? How do we know students are learning from it? What are students using it for?” An in-house coach, strongly supported by the principal, is assisting in all facets of the instructional program to set standards and provide extensive professional development and materials to improve the teaching practices and meet student’s needs. Students receive awards for their work that is prominently displayed. Earned tokens for positive behavior enable them to participate in extra-curricular activities. Teachers use post-its to respond to student work. A student proudly shared with me that his teacher, “Helped me learn how to read.” A transition linkage coordinator maintains contact with parents from the initial time of a student’s admission into the school and a parent coordinator welcomes parents to workshops and shares resources and at-home suggestions. Further communication is achieved through report cards and progress reports. Parents are appreciative of the school’s efforts and are strong advocates for their children ensuring that they are provided with optimum opportunities. One parent shared that her “child can now sit at the kitchen table.”

**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’s selection of reading materials and the implementation of best practices from formalized reading programs reflect a careful consideration of student needs as identified on the individual education plan. Age appropriate, high interest and low vocabulary books are accessible to encourage students to read. Instruction in core subjects and specialties is supported by commercially designed supplemental materials, assistive technology, and authentic items from daily living such as the calculator, newspaper, woodworking tools, and cooking utensils. Symbols from ‘Mayer Johnson’ are extensively used for communication with non-verbal students. Many teachers have created their own library of additional authentic pictures. Consistent school-wide symbols are visible throughout the building labeling rooms and common areas. The core curriculum is well supported by customized programs in the specialties including music, home economics and woodshop. Currently all students are receiving the same direct instruction. Differentiated activities and materials need to be developed and incorporated into subject areas to meet student needs. Students are actively engaged in learning. Items built in woodshop will be sold at the school’s crafts fair, students prepare and serve lunch in the teachers’ cafeteria, and as one student told me he was using the computer to “do research on entertainment” as part of his project. Teachers are held accountable for designing tasks that are age and academically appropriate. The instructional program is well reinforced by project-based learning. Teachers are provided with guidelines including theme, type of project, due date and details of student outcomes. Criteria are established for bulletin board displays of student work. Pacing calendars provide further focus.

Decisions for budgeting, scheduling and staffing are collaborative and based upon identified needs. Allocated funds are well used. An after-school program for English language learners and their parents was initiated. Materials to support instruction are made available as needed. The speech teacher requested an assistive technology item that was readily ordered. Students with specific needs are individually programmed and attend appropriately leveled instructional programs. Staffing positions support addressing instructional, medical, and social/emotional needs of each student.

Tremendous care is taken to ensure that students are well attended to academically and socially. A health resource room enables students to meet privately with counselors to discuss personal health and hygiene needs. A student lost in the hallway took out his assistive technology device and pointed to “I need help” when approached by a teacher.

Regular student attendance is strongly encouraged. Staff recognizes limitations due to the fragile nature of the students, however absences are quickly followed up with phone calls and home visits.

**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 proficient.**

The stability and commitment of staff is important as the school moves forward to achieving new goals. The career ladder has enabled the school’s paraprofessionals to join

the teaching staff and a teacher to transition to coordinator. Staff may be moved intra-site as needed, however there is little movement inter-site.

Professional development is provided almost “every minute of the day,” as shared by the in-house coach. She is highly energetic, visible and knowledgeable and works in all curriculum areas. Staff members eagerly sign up to participate in her workshops and meetings. Classroom inter-visitations are encouraged and best practices videotaped and discussed. Participants receive their own ‘dvd’ as a reference tool. Visits to other schools are scheduled and staff from off-sites participate in main site activities when appropriate. The coach facilitates many of the school’s team meetings and shares out information with staff and administrators.

The behavior committee is reviewing and revising their token economy system to make it more reflective of the school’s and student’s needs. Learning walks and formal and informal observations are part of the school routine carried out by the administrators. Teachers are appreciative of the feedback. Teachers may be targeted for additional individual support. The principal is highly visible and well respected and well informed of the school’s programs. Administrators meet formally two times a month and informally each morning and afternoon. A compact disk with school procedures is distributed to all staff at the beginning of each school year.

Service providers and staff members actively reinforce the school’s program. They meet with students, participate on planning teams, and provide help for parents. There are broad-based linkages with community-based organizations. Students participated in a ‘wrapping for inclusion’ project during the holidays at an adjacent shopping mall. Community-based instruction includes the Queens Borough president’s office, and transition sites for graduates include Gateway, Queens Center for Progress, A.N.A.B.I.C., and AHRC.

**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.**

The school schedules a yearly internal PASS review to look at outcomes and set future goals. The results are reviewed relative to the collaboratively developed Comprehensive Education Plan. Needs of each of the school’s sites are taken into consideration. The school leadership team, which meets monthly, is directly involved in this process. School leaders are not complacent and recognize the need to review and revise plans as needed and include staff in the process. Additional common meeting time for teachers that had been eliminated this year will again be scheduled. Available data is supporting change. Students who transitioned into the main site from the inclusion program at Info Tech High School had a great deal of difficulty acclimating to school. Behavioral issues were regularly occurring. Schedules were reviewed and revised and students held more accountable. Students are now remaining in classes and engaged in learning. To support the goal to integrate and increase appropriate literacy activities the school has purchased and will be providing professional development in using the ‘Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills’ to identify student needs to inform instruction. The behavior token economy program is undergoing revision for greater consistency and to support instructional goals.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Queens Occupational Training Center (PS 721)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<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>		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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<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.			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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<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	