



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Public School 176 Bronx

**850 Baychester Avenue
New York
NY 10475**

Principal: Rima Ritholtz

Dates of review: February 5 - 8, 2007

Reviewer: Ronnie Solow

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

Public School 176X, located in the Northeast section of the Bronx in Co-op City, has the largest population of autistic children in District 75. The school serves 480 students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12, in 73 classes spread out over four sites. Students are educated in classes with a staffing ratio of 6:1:1 or 8:1:1 or 8:1:2 and inclusion classes. There are 108 teachers and about 150 paraprofessionals to assist the students who range in age from 2.9 years to 21.

The student body composition is 46.8% Black, 42.6% Hispanic, 6.3% White, 3.1% Asian, and 1.3% Native American. The majority of the students participate in the State alternate assessment program for students with severe disabilities. The individualized curriculum program is designed to serve the full spectrum of autism, for students with severe cognitive disability to students in full time inclusion programs.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The hallways and classrooms are richly decorated with student work that demonstrates appreciation for learning.
- Students are well-known to administration and staff across classes, cohorts and buildings.
- Continuous monitoring of student progress, with appropriate adjustments to their learning programs, contributes to increasing student performance outcomes.
- Youth development activities are aligned to support the curriculum.
- The principal and administrative team members are highly visible and well-respected by staff and parents.
- There is a high level of family involvement and support.
- The staff has formed a professional, collaborative community that supports one another in their professional growth and development.
- Professional development is personalized according to need, interest, and experience as determined by staff surveys and questionnaires.
- Individual student data is continuously reviewed to determine the need for additional services.
- The budget is used wisely to optimize student learning outcomes.

What the school needs to improve

- Create a parent notification protocol for use by all staff.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a well-developed school.

The team approach to working with students and their families is apparent in all aspects of the educational process at the school. The principal, assistant principals, teachers, support personnel and parents work together to help each student reach their maximum potential. The students are well-known by the staff who can provide detailed information about students in their class and students they have taught in the past.

The principal is a reflective practitioner who is knowledgeable about the special education techniques and requirements for educating children with autism. Under her leadership, the school has been named one of five sites in the State as an effective program for students with autism. This recognition has resulted in the school serving as a mentor site for other schools throughout the City and State. The pedagogy and curriculum are based on the 14 areas specified on the State autism program quality indicators. Youth development activities are designed to support and supplement the classroom instructional program.

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 and her administrative team use many forms of data to inform decisions regarding student cohorts, curriculum designs, programs and behavioral expectations for the students. Every teacher and support personnel gathers data several times per week. All but a small group of students are classified as having the State alternate assessment category. At the elementary level, teachers fuse applied behavioral analysis and treatment and education of autistic and related communication-handicapped children methodologies to capture data on each child, group and class. At the middle school, treatment and education of autistic and related communication-handicapped children methodology and the Stages computerized assessment program are used to gather data about the students. At the high school, State alternate assessment data is aligned to the curriculum and assessed through Brigance for accuracy and independence. The Brigance materials are used at the other levels as well. Every student has a pupil outcome portfolio that travels with them from year to year.

The school examines data for cohorts of students including 6:1:1 classes, 8:1:1 classes, 8:1:2 classes and inclusion classes. They are also tracking data for the smaller number of girls in the program and have designed some special activities especially for the girls. English language learners are served in a bilingual Spanish class with appropriate bilingual support staff. Data for specific ethnic groups is not tracked.

The pupil outcome portfolio, designed by the school, precedes the creation of the State data folios that are now required. The portfolio contains evidence of the best practices extrapolated from applied behavioral analysis including constant, ongoing assessment,

large group-small group instruction, individual instruction, and communication with family members. Every pupil outcome portfolio has the student's personal goals, data charts, curriculum materials and student work samples. Every cohort is examined for progress across age groups, classrooms, behavioral expectations and personal growth and development across all sites. The principals of similar schools meet regularly to discuss outcomes and issues for the particular population.

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.

Goal setting is driven by the individual assessments of each child that emanates from the individualized education plan. The principal, administrative team, the curriculum support teachers, the coach, and the unit coordinators meet with staff weekly to review the progress of students. Teachers of classes with staffing ratios of 6:1:1, 8:1:1, 8:1:2 and new teachers meet once a week to discuss assessment and student progress. Related service providers and specialist teachers, such as art, music, technology, and applied behavioral analysis coordinator meet with the principal once a month to review their logs. Team meetings regularly include data as an item of discussion. The Comprehensive Education Plan and the principal's goals and objectives set forth the broad goals for the school.

Students who are not progressing as expected or are exhibiting behaviors that require additional interventions are referred to the pupil personnel team. Staff communicates with non-verbal students using the picture exchange communication system and through the use of the English language. Multi-element treatment plans are devised with input from all the adults involved with the student. Parents are an important element in the creation of the plan and readily participate. Proactive, positive strategies are created, a motivational assessment scale included and reactive measures devised, if necessary. The plan is revisited in six weeks to assess the outcomes of the intervention. If necessary, a change of staffing ratio, classroom or building can be effected due to the large size of the school. The new classroom might have a smaller ratio of students to teachers, use a different methodology or simply better chemistry between the student and the new teacher.

Parents receive information about their child three to five times per week at the elementary level, and two or more times a week at the middle and high school levels. The school mandates the contact but does not use a standard form for parent notification. Informal discussions and telephone contact is frequent. Formal notification and updates of the student data progress reports is done four times per year to coincide with the report card periods. Parent participation is very high in meetings, school activities, the parent-teacher association, the school leadership team and regularly scheduled practical parent professional development activities, that impart high expectations for all students, and which parents can use at home to work with their child.

Student progress drives the activity of the school community. The Comprehensive Education Plan is reviewed by the school leadership team at the monthly meeting. Teachers present to the parent association and school leadership team about classroom activities. Social activities, such as clubs, athletics and the arts, involve parents as well as the students. Classroom methodologies are tied to the assessments and success is measured by student movement from 6:1:1 ratios to 8:1:1 and inclusion classes.

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.

Students are assessed using the Brigance Inventories and unit materials from the classroom instructional programs. Teachers design lessons using the picture exchange communication system, applied behavior analysis, treatment and education of autistic and related communication-handicapped children, and the many reading programs such as Edmark, Caught Reading, and Raps that are designed to address the wide range of student abilities. Mathematics programs include Attack Math and Menu Math. All classroom activities and curriculum are tied to the autism program quality indicators which include 14 areas for the school to assess the success of the educational program. These indicators focus on the individual education plan, the curriculum design, instructional activities, methods, monitoring progress, family involvement, inclusion, transition, challenging behaviors and personnel. Students are engaged and motivated to learn using rewards.

Best practices are shared at every cohort meeting. Teachers adopt literature, create big books, and use Mayer-Johnson symbols for non-verbal and preliterate students in the creation of student materials. Technology is utilized with the Bookmaker program for emergent readers. Teachers are constantly striving to improve instructional outcomes.

Budget decisions focus on student needs. Every unit in the school has an assistant principal, a unit coordinator, a curriculum specialist as well as sharing the technology coordinator, the coach and the applied behavioral analysis/behavior support specialist. Additional support is provided by the related services coordinator, the transition linkage person who also serves as the job developer. There are more than 150 additional adults attending to the needs of the students serving as classroom, management, health or bus paraprofessionals. These adults and students have a close and intimate relationship that allows each student to trust at least one adult on the staff.

Routines and regulations are high priorities for students with challenging behaviors. Applied behavioral analysis and treatment and education of autistic and related communication-handicapped children, strategies are employed to assist teachers along with high-interest, low-vocabulary materials that are age appropriate. Each student has a specific program tailor-made to meet specific needs.

Attendance has steadily improved over the past 10 years. It is currently at 92%. The principal meets with the attendance team weekly. Absence triggers immediate response from the school. Incentive awards for good attendance are employed. Busing issues negatively affect student attendance when routes are changed, or a bus does not arrive to pick up a student as scheduled.

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 staff turnover rate is low. The principal hires new staff based upon qualities of kindness, tenderness, understanding the needs of the autistic population, special education training and a willingness to fulfill the requirements of the job. Staff are supported in many ways. There are handbooks written for staff, parents, paraprofessionals, transition issues and end of year magazines celebrating student and staff achievements. Guides contain information about rules, regulations and routines and contribute to the orderly environment and smooth running of the school. The principal is well-respected for her knowledge of educating students with autism and her administrative capacity.

Professional development opportunities are extensive. Staff are surveyed as to their needs and desires. Coaches, curriculum teachers and other support staff help to translate these needs into practice. Several staff members teach at other sites in order to bring their expertise and particular skills to the entire school community. Activities include inter-class and inter-school visits, training conferences, regularly scheduled City-wide professional development days, and District 75 opportunities. Paraprofessionals and parents are often included. Formal classroom observations, performed by the principal and assistant principals, serve as opportunities for professional growth and development. Written reports and the pre- and post-conferences provide positive feedback and worthy suggestions. Plans are in progress to expand training for the paraprofessional staff. Expert consultants in the field of autism education are brought into the school to assist the staff to develop new skills. This year, the social skills in our schools curriculum are being implemented.

Data binders, student portfolios, work folders, leveled libraries, journals, writing logs and student schedules are evident in the classrooms. Cohort meetings encourage accountable teacher talk and the sharing of materials. The materials reflect student ability and are respectful of the age group in the class.

The school has many linkages with outside groups that encourage youth development activities. Students participate in the Achilles Track Club, Special Olympics, Astor Little League, and week-end socialization programs for differently-abled youth. The SAGES (Students with Autism Gaining Employment Skills) Café provides work skills training for high school students. A major focus on the arts includes a chorus, drum line, dance troupe, rock band, martial arts, and photography. All activities of this type support the skills being developed in the classrooms. The transition linkage program results in support for students and parents throughout the school years, especially as students near the age of 21 and must leave school. Students create community help programs in order to learn about giving, sharing and empathy. Examples are the Penny Harvest, City Harvest, and adopt a grandparent program. This year, Valentine greetings with enclosed phone cards are being created and mailed to the U.S. troops in Iraq. All the sites in the school participate in these activities and others that are age appropriate.

The principal is highly respected for her knowledge of education for this population, her interpersonal skills and her willingness to participate in all aspects of the education of her students. The guides and handbooks she has created spell out the rules and regulations that all follow. These rules are generally followed by all staff and students and contribute to the safe and orderly environment that is evident throughout the school.

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 ability to set goals, monitor and revise them is demonstrated throughout the school. The Comprehensive Education Plan is examined and discussed at the monthly school leadership team meeting. Immediate revisions are implemented if necessary. Parents, staff and administrators create the plan and make it a living document. They work conscientiously to see that the goals and objectives are implemented and achieved across the entire school.

The staff have ongoing conversations about how to raise student outcomes. Captured data about each student is used to determine the needs and the next steps in the developmental process for each student. The data serves as the benchmark for planning for each student, cohort and the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 176X	∅	✓	+
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