



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Public School 723

**3540 Bivona Street
Bronx
NY 10475**

Principal: Christine Walsh

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Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs

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 723 is a District 75 school for students from kindergarten through grade 12. The current configuration consists of eight sites located throughout the Bronx. These eight sites support students with a wide range of learning difficulties, from emotional disabilities to autism, from developmental delay to learning disabilities. There are 362 students enrolled, all with individual education plans.

Four of the sites are day treatment programs for students with severe emotional disabilities. Two of these sites work in conjunction with the Astor Day Treatment team and one is residential.

Seven students attend the inclusion program at the Bronx Lab School supported by a specialist inclusion teacher and two paraprofessionals. This is felt to be an area that will develop in the future. The Public School 723 main site has recently moved from upstate to its location in the Bronx. Most of the staff, including the principal, have followed the students and now work on this new site.

Of the total school population 51% are Hispanic students and 44% are Black. Twenty students, just over 4%, are English language learners. Alternate assessment is in place for twenty-six students.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- All teachers know their students well and seek the highest achievement for them.
- A high value is placed on attendance and there are good procedures to ensure that levels remain high.
- Class-based portfolios of student work are developing well throughout the school.
- Students' individual education plans are carefully monitored and parents are given the opportunity to be regularly involved.
- The majority of staff is highly experienced in work with emotionally disturbed students.
- Parents of students with autism are very pleased with the progress their children make.
- The school makes the best use of internal and external counselors and therapists to ensure appropriate programs for students.
- The very high standard of inclusion work is the result of very good teaching and an excellent relationship with the mainstream high school.
- Collaborative work, such as that with the Astor Day Treatment team, is of a high quality and contributes to good levels of progress in terms of behavior and self-control.
- The principal and cabinet provide good support for staff, particularly in terms of resources and professional development.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase professional development related to classroom target-setting and the effective use of data related to sub-groups.
- Develop a more consistent staff approach to behavior and review the facilities and procedures for crisis management on the main Public School 723 site.
- Develop more opportunities to link with similar schools to compare procedures, outcomes and vocational training opportunities.
- Expand curricular and enrichment opportunities on the Public School 723 site.
- Continue developing ways to engage more parents.
- Involve students more effectively in discussion of their own academic goals.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

Public School 723 comprises a number of sites. The principal has only been in post since September 2006 and has successfully developed a school culture and procedures which have made all staff feel that they belong to one school. This has not been an easy task as the eight sites support a wide range of disabilities and many of the schools have not worked together until very recently. As the result of good planning and management by the cabinet and the very strong commitment from all members of staff, students and staff have a strong sense of the school's identity. In addition, all procedures from assessment of students to the allocation of the overall budget and the professional development of staff have coherence and clarity. The novelty of the school's identity should not obscure the fact that existing sites displayed good practice previously, particularly within the field of autism, developmental delay and day program work.

Currently, the school's strengths reflect the coherence of whole-school planning together with the development of a rich and appropriate curriculum. Areas for improvement are around the need for complete coherence in the classroom use of data and the development of a sound behavior policy on the re-located main site.

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 data well. From across the eight sites it receives valuable academic information from Wilson, Headsprout, datafolios and Read 180. Behavioral data arises from the effective and consistent use of Power of Choice and other school-based programs which are differentiated well according to the age and achievement of students. Attendance figures are generated monthly. For over 99% of students there is also the regular external assessment data. The school uses mandated assessments as baseline, review and summary points to bring together all relevant data on students. This is supplemented by detailed data from the Princeton Review and work carried out by external consultants. Already the new administration has current and objective data on every student and, through collaboration within the school, this contributes to a clear picture of each grade and classroom. The development of good student portfolios also provides clear indicators of individual development, especially within written work.

Every student has an individual education plan which is regularly updated and provides the driving force for individual long- and medium-term goals. In this way, the school has a clear and up-to-date picture of most of its sub-groups of students. English language learners are carefully monitored by the English as a second language teacher across the eight sites. The school is efficient in its separation of a first language from a special educational difficulty. There is no monitoring by ethnic groups. However, there has been effective action in analyzing other sub-groups, allowing the school to identify the need for the purchase of 'boy-friendly' literature and to look closely at the differential between the whole-school attendance (86.5%) and that of the re-located main site (just under 80%).

Although at an early stage, there has been some comparison with data from similar schools within District 75.

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 undeveloped.

Regular collaborative meetings allow the detailed discussion about the progress of groups, such as boys, English language learners or students displaying emotional outbursts. Recent examples of action arising from such an analysis are the professional development of the Wilson program, autism training for paraprofessionals and the intensive work with vulnerable young students on the main site.

As the result of the constant monitoring of progress, the academic instruction service staff, at their monthly meetings, use the individual education plans and classroom data to discuss the profile of individual students causing concern. Similar case conferences at the two Astor sites (Astor Tilden and Astor Byron) demonstrate very good collaboration between academic and Astor program staff. All of these procedures allow the development of a responsive and focused program for individual students in light of their individual education plan targets or more immediate emotional or academic crises.

However, the detailed analysis of data at whole-school level is not replicated in all classrooms. Teachers have become more adept at using the academic and behavioral data within the class, but this has not yet permeated the work of all staff. Thus, in most classes detailed information is used to develop individual student goals and such information is shared with students and parents alike. This encourages both students and parents to envisage higher levels of success. In a minority of classes the concern remains too much on just the welfare of the students and not enough on their academic progress. Monthly workshops that assist parents in working with their children add to the impact that regular parental discussions have.

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 proficient.

There are good relations between adults and students. All staff now have regular and useful data from both within and from outside the school. This allows them to group students for instruction and identify those students with particular or unexpected needs. As a result of this much, but not all, of the lesson planning is sound as it is based on the differentiation of tasks related to the achievement by different groups of students. With the increasing opportunity for teachers to meet and discuss, this data is shared and teachers are able to comment on their own and other’s students. Lessons hold student attention and staff go out of their way to provide extra instruction and support. Students at the Bronx Lab inclusion project and at the Astor Byron site are effusive in their praise of the way that staff have assisted them in moving from, in one case, extreme behavior and attendance difficulties to becoming a star student within a general education high school grade. All students say that they feel safe at their school and can always find an adult with

whom to discuss worries and fears. One student, describing his teacher went so far as to say, "She makes me feel like somebody and I love her for that."

The feeling of good teacher accountability arises from careful checks on staff attendance, regular classroom observations and the visibility of cabinet members over all of the sites. Management recognizes that a lot more work needs to be undertaken to ensure consistency on the Public School 723 site with regard to student target-setting, the management of behavior and crisis management. Students with autism have benefited from the development of small groups, those with low reading levels are finding the computerized 'Reading 180' very effective and all are beginning to see an improvement in the technology curriculum. The principal is very responsive to requests for resources. The curriculum and enrichment activities at the Bronx Lab, such as circus skills, are of the highest quality. The facilities for physical education at the Astor Byron and main school sites prevent the effective teaching of physical skills.

Budgeting decisions such as the purchase of audio books and good quality technological hardware have assisted in curriculum development. Staffing has also contributed by, for example, the employment of additional substitute teachers to free staff for collaboration. Scheduling has been imaginative, with the development of advisory sessions for emotional counseling support at the end of school.

The school monitors attendance carefully. The level of 86.5% is a distinct improvement at Public School 723 and 93% at Ittleston site is very good indeed. There are regular checks on absences and promptness in arriving at lessons and has been a focus of attention for all staff.

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.

Apart from the significant behavioral issues at Public School 723, the school operates smoothly and procedures across the eight sites are consistent. The principal takes much responsibility for this. Her hard work and vision has meant that combining eight sites into one school has been successful. Her staff and management team respect her for this. She, and senior colleagues, visit classrooms regularly and in this way keep up with staff development and views. She has had little time to hire new staff, but the few hires she has made, particularly at the inclusion site, show a strong emphasis on achievement and moving all students to the least restrictive environment possible.

Senior staff match teachers to relevant professional development. District 75 calendar days, good support from the coach and the use of excellent consultants have contributed to higher standards in mathematics and English language arts, as well as very good work on developing a whole-school behavior policy. Data has contributed significantly to the professional development program. Coaches have been brought in to enhance the low English performance. Science test results have triggered professional development in that subject. Data across all sites also attests to the school's success, with attendance and behavior scores improving significantly over the past year.

Freeing teaching staff, providing good quality staff development and making very effective use of her senior staff has allowed the principal to develop a strong culture of collaboration. Effective work is carried out by grade teams, but also by the behavior,

academic intervention and professional development teams. There is especially good collaboration at the two Astor sites, where academic and health staff work very closely and have great success in teaching and counseling very vulnerable students. However, the use of school-wide data at collaborative meetings is at an early stage and reflects the mixed response of staff to the use of data in general.

In addition, internal and external support staff are used well. While parent involvement in the education of their children is not good overall, the school has tried many ways to address this matter. There is better collaboration with a range of mental health agencies and students receive good counseling services from the Jewish Board. Imaginative work on the 'Principal for a Day' program has also allowed the school to develop its provision for games and physical education.

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.

Since her appointment the principal has instituted a more rigorous approach to the use of data and the review of long- and medium-term plans. Thus, upon appointment, she instituted a detailed analysis of external assessments, the Princeton Review data and classroom portfolios. This led to an immediate emphasis on the writing process. Similarly an analysis of incident data has identified behavioral 'hot spots' on the Public School 723 site. As a result, strong action has been taken with regard to lunchtimes and end of school dismissal. The institution of a points system means that behavior can be monitored for individuals, for classes and for sites.

In these ways the principal, and her senior colleagues, model a rigorous process whereby student achievement and behavior can be evaluated and new responses identified. It is a system that staff see working as it helps identify weaknesses in the curriculum, such as writing and science. It also allows a detailed monitoring of initiatives and expenditure. Thus, the school is now able to assess the value for money gained from the purchase of non-fiction reading materials or the change in behavior management at key times.

The use of incident data also highlights the responsiveness that now exists within the school's strategic planning. Long-term targets are set in the Comprehensive Education Plan as the result of teacher surveys and school leadership team involvement. These targets are differentiated between the different sites and are therefore more immediate and relevant for staff. The targets are re-visited in the light of academic or behavioral data collected at different times during the year. This means that not only will there be a mid-year review of targets, but that any initiative can be monitored to see how well it is contributing to the overall aim of higher achievement, more consistent behavior and better attendance.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 723	∅	✓	+
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	