



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Public School 53

Elementary- High School 53

**720 Livonia Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11207**

Principal: Gloria Sorkin

Dates of review: November 27- 28, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Corinne Brown

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 53 is an elementary-high school with 383 students from kindergarten through grade 12. The school population comprises 55% Black, 28% Hispanic, 12% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 73% of the students enrolled and girls account for 27%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 84.6%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

This school, based at seven sites, serves special education students with a diverse range of disabilities including learning difficulties, autism, emotional and behaviour problems, and multiple difficulties. Four assistant principals support the principal to oversee the work of all sites, with each site having a unit coordinator.

All students have an individual education plan and are entitled to a twelve-month school year program. Students are served within self-contained, community-based and inclusion programs with related support services. Sixty-nine students participate in community-based vocational and work/study programs at 16 worksites that support and train them. Fifty-eight students are in full-time inclusion classes in general education schools. Other students are included in academic programs within general education host schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The highly effective leadership of the principal drives the school forward through continual reflection, strategic use of data and planning for improvement.
- The assistant principals ably support the principal in ensuring consistency and professional rigor across all sites.
- All staff serve as excellent role models through their dedication, cohesive teamwork and respectful interactions.
- The school embraces data to understand student performance and accelerate academic, emotional and social learning.
- The relevant curriculum is carefully chosen and adapted to reflect the needs and interests of the student populations.
- The school has excellent communication systems with parents and works strenuously to involve them in their child's education.
- Teachers work creatively to plan interesting lessons, based on data, which promote independence.
- Students enjoy the learning opportunities the school provides and feel valued.
- Families and students benefit from comprehensive support from service providers.
- A culture of high expectations and a positive determination to improve student outcomes permeate the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue efforts to secure parental participation in the student's program in the home setting.
- Continue to ensure all teachers are skilled at using the new assessments and tests, Scanton and Acuity, to deepen understanding of performance.
- Continue the integration of technology as an instructional and learning tool to maximize engagement.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

A culture of continual reflection is matched by dedication to make a difference for students in this school. The principal sets the tone with high expectations of both staff and students. She knows her staff and the student populations well. Her caring professionalism and effective delegation of responsibility means there is a unified approach across all sites. Dignity and enabling effective communication underpin all work with students, who vary considerably in age and disability. The school is truly data driven and sensitively embraces new sources of information that contribute to detailed understanding. Staff training is ongoing to ensure that staff are fully familiar with all the data in the battery that informs planning. Personalized learning programs are matched to ability and interest. High caliber teachers and paraprofessionals are creative in adapting and modifying the curriculum to suit the individual. Technology of multiple forms is used by teachers as an aid to learning and they work to hone its applications within the classroom. All staff are thoroughly professional and dedicated to improve student outcomes. They continually learn from each other and freely share ideas and resources. Daily communication with the home ensures that parents are informed of progress about academic, social and behavior issues. All staff work hard to encourage parental participation in the student program at home.

This school meets the challenge to provide for the wide-ranging needs of its student population through consistent approaches that deliver carefully devised programs. Carefully structured environments, coupled with clear routines and high expectations, mean that students are given the framework for success. All staff are excellent role models who work with consistency and positive determination.

The school acted on the recommendations of the previous Quality Review. The integration of technology for instruction is ongoing. Collaboration in planning is now much wider and includes teachers and service providers. The data inquiry team works well and has identified its focus and target group of students.

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 the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school has long used data to understand school and student performance and as a means to accelerate academic, emotional and social learning. Within each site, data relevant to that student population is centrally collected and regularly scrutinized. The principal and administration maintain a thorough overview and compare performance year on year. Strong supportive links with other District 75 schools mean that good practice is shared. Standardized and alternate assessment results are interrogated to give an overview of the performance of groups of students, such as by gender and ethnicity. Patterns or trends are noted and investigated, with interventions triggered accordingly. The progress of English language learners is carefully monitored and students achieve well because of the help they receive through the support program.

The student's individual education plan informs programming, so assessment data from within the classroom feeds into this. These plans are revisited and revised when indicated by data, at least three times a year. Formal assessments are complemented by informal and thorough record keeping within the classroom so that the teacher has a current picture of individual strengths and areas for continued reinforcement. Teachers choose appropriate methods of assessment carefully for alternative assessment students, including autistic and related communication-handicapped children.

Teachers in this school keep meticulous records and work with academic intervention service providers and other professionals to ensure that they have a current and comprehensive picture of the individual student. Experienced teachers also assist new staff. There is continual exchange of information amongst staff, aided by email communication, and there are good systems for training staff in the use of data. New assessments and tests, such as Acuity and Scantron, are welcomed to deepen understanding of performance and enable purposeful conversations about strengths and areas for improvement with parents and suitable students. The school has identified the need for ongoing training and support of teachers in these new assessments.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

This school is characterized by teamwork, positive determination and high expectations. Over-arching school goals, to improve the students' ability to communicate within each of the student populations, inform planning. Attention is paid to the academic and personal development so that individual education planning involves service providers and paraprofessionals, as well as parents and teachers. Parents are fully involved in setting realistic goals, with translation services available to facilitate this process. Cluster teachers are also included. This ensures there is continuity and unified strategies with measurable outcomes and realistic timeframes. Teachers and paraprofessionals skillfully tailor small steps within the plan, to enable the student to meet goals which are based on detailed knowledge of the individual student. Cognitive needs and preferences, as well as learning styles, are taken into account when devising activities that allow students to demonstrate understanding. Care is taken to review goals and revise them when mastery is achieved, or when they require modification. Within each site the unit coordinator ensures that everyone works towards the goals in the students' individual education plans. Students are involved in independent learning with self-assessment, using rubrics and clear structures. Academic intervention

meetings also review the progress made. Support programs are put in place for those deemed “at risk”. Alternate assessment teachers collaborate so that assessments are written and cross-checked for accuracy.

The school has excellent systems to communicate with parents through daily progress cards and behavior charts. It works strenuously to involve parents in their child’s education. Teachers and other staff also share positive news with parents through telephone calls. Parents appreciate the open access to teachers, therapists and other staff. They gratefully acknowledge the extent to which the school facilitates individual progress and engagement. As one girl’s parent said, “They’ve worked to find a system she’d react to.” Outreach staff and the parent coordinator actively pursue full parental involvement in each student’s education. The school is mindful of family circumstances that may compromise this, but maintains a determination to maximize parental participation.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school’s work is well developed.

The school pays unusually close attention to the environment in which students learn. Respectful interactions are evident throughout. The assistant principals support the principal strongly and ensure consistency and professional rigor across all sites. Classrooms and hallways are managed and organized systematically for learning. All staff work with a calm purpose, to serve as excellent role models. They are particularly dedicated and strive to plan creative and interesting lessons, based on data, which promote independence.

The carefully chosen curriculum is adapted to reflect the cognitive level and interests of the different student populations, so that students are meaningfully engaged. The school uses adaptive communication systems innovatively to give students ownership of their learning. Students work independently on their individual schedules with carefully differentiated tasks. Skilled teachers and paraprofessionals expertly devise activities and adapt materials that enable maximum access and engagement for students. Cross-fertilization of ideas is evident in many lessons. Effective use of the smart board, to study Van Gogh’s picture “Starry Nights”, made a compelling introduction to a math lesson in the library. The infusion of art and music throughout the curriculum encourages communication and expression.

The curriculum is greatly enhanced by programs that attend to personal and social development. The school works in partnership with general education students from its host school, PS384, in the behavior management program “Acting the Write Way”, which builds on last year’s “Teaching Little Hearts to be Big”. These programs develop communication skills, understanding and compassion and have significantly reduced reported incidents of unsatisfactory behavior. Across the school there are very good systems for monitoring attendance and following up absence with parents.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The school has a stable staff base. The principal and administration know the staff strengths well through the collaborative ethos and systematic regular walkthroughs. They develop leadership skills in their staff. Professional development is self-directed, equitable and suitably differentiated for the student populations and staff needs. This school serves as a model for others, so visits are frequent. Formal and informal turnkey training is efficient and leads to improvements in instruction. The collegial staff share resources and expertise freely. New staff are effectively inducted and feel well supported. The experienced staff are not complacent, continually seek new ideas, and cleverly devise ways to reach individual students. For example, the school recognizes technology as a powerful learning tool and is seeking ways to extend its use to a wider range of classrooms, to maximize student engagement.

Students enjoy the learning opportunities and the support the school provides and they feel valued. They understand the high expectations of behavior and make the most of the learning programs. Comprehensive support and service providers reach out sensitively to the community. The school provides computer-aided devices that 'talk', to enable students without speech to interact and communicate. This successful program is extending into the home and community. Sixty-nine students take part in the successful and expanding vocational training program. Several students have gained employment as a direct result.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

The principal is a highly effective leader who drives the school forward, using data strategically to plan for improvement. Designated senior staff from each site report to the principal, so there is a comprehensive, unified overview of work across the whole school. The school evaluates hard and soft data relating to whole-school and individual student goals continually and modifies or realigns goals as the data indicates. Teachers and service providers maintain detailed records so that adaptation is timely and pertinent in the quest to improve the student's quality of life. The school swiftly incorporates new information such as Acuity into the battery of information for individuals, classes and sites. Academic intervention services and professional development are put into place or fine-tuned in the light of current information. Attendance data and behavior reports show measurable improvements as a result of the school's initiatives. This school is led by a principal who is continually "raising the bar" in order to improve the quality of a student's life, by ensuring all are treated with dignity, have effective means of communication and achieve independence. The assistant principals and all staff share her vision and rise to the challenges she sets. They are reflective and examine each aspect of the school's work with a critical eye. The whole staff find ways to make things happen for students by starting from student interests and building on their strengths, ensuring a continued cycle of improvement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 53	△	▷	✓	+	◇
Quality Score				X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?					X
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?					X
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X	

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?					X
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?				X	
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?					X
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?					X
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?					X
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?				X	
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?					X
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?					X
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance?					X
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?					X
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other's classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another's instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					X
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?					X
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.2 the school's plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan's interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X	