



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Public School 231

District 75

**5601 16th Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Laura Giannino

Dates of review: November 26 – 27, 2007

Lead Reviewer: Alvin Jeffs

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

PS 231 is a District 75 school with 276 students from kindergarten through grade 7. The school population comprises 50% Black, 26% Hispanic and 24% White students. The student body includes 15% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 82% of the students enrolled and girls account for 18%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 87.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 100% eligibility.

The school is multi-sited, comprising one main site and three off-sites. The settings are varied, with inclusion self-contained classes in a community school, a self-contained school and an agency affiliated with the Jewish Board of Family and Children Services. The majority of students experience a range of severe and complex emotional and behavior difficulties. A significant minority are alternate assessment students, having severe learning difficulties or autistic disorders. Although the sites are very different in terms of facilities and students supported, everyone regards the four sites as one school, PS 231.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school is a calm and orderly environment from which students clearly benefit.
- The principal is highly respected as both a practitioner and a manager.
- All staff are committed to providing the best educational experience for every student.
- There is a strong and consistent behavior management system in place that contributes significantly to the good social progress students make.
- Teachers and paraprofessionals work very well together and provide highly effective classroom teams.
- Staff are now using data to plan lessons and as the basis for discussions about individual students.
- A good professional development program has supported new initiatives well.
- The partnership with the Infants Home of Brooklyn is an outstanding example of collaboration and sharing expertise.
- Students feel safe at the school and receive good personal and academic support.
- Staff work together well and there is very good communication on each site and between sites.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop action plans for all initiatives with clear targets, responsibilities and deadlines.
- Continue to share expertise with regard to differentiation in planning and classroom activities.
- Accelerate staff training in technology.
- Seek ways to provide staff with summaries of classroom data as a basis for discussing student progress.
- Identify more clearly the many subgroups within the school and review the progress of each.

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 proficient.

This is a school where the pace of change is very well managed. The administration and school-based coach work with a newly designated data specialist to make more effective use of the wide range of external data. The school is now better able to understand student performance and, thus, provide more relevant targets and work. This is also the case with many teachers, who actively use external data together with their own observations to group students and set targets.

Instruction is well aligned to meet the wide range of complex needs. The many new initiatives, such as the reading/writing workshops, are being well adapted to suit both standard and alternate assessment students. Care is taken to ensure that augmentative communication and specialized professional development are readily available within classes of autistic students. The budget is well planned to ensure the best possible classroom resources. Above all, the school's approach to behavior management is very well developed, with a strong and popular 'token economy' and rewards system.

Despite having to move many classes between sites, the school has found time to build well on the areas for improvement within the previous report. It recognizes that there is still more to do. Teachers now use data routinely, but vary in the clarity of their analysis and long-term goals. Student data profiles are valued as "three-dimensional" pictures of individual students. The administration has become better at tracking important sub-groups, such as 'promotion in doubt' students. No ethnic and gender analysis has been undertaken. There have been good developments in collaborative meetings and teachers show a strong willingness to share data and discuss classroom practice. There is more inter-visitation between classes. However, all plans do not yet have clear deadlines, interim targets and responsibilities.

The school's inquiry team is developing well. It has identified students who narrowly missed gaining level two and is looking closely at the data to decide how to support these students across a large number of classes. It sees the process as contributing to current standards, but also as a useful model for other groups in the future. However, all plans do not yet have clear deadlines, interim targets and responsibilities.

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 proficient.

The school is now more comfortable with the large amounts of data it receives from outside the school. The administration is making very good use of the newly identified data analyst. Consequently, it has a much clearer picture of the attainment profiles of individual students and class groups. This has allowed it to assess the success of the agency classes, which comprise students with many complex difficulties. It is also clear that the students it wishes the inquiry team to target are those students who gained level one, but were close to level two. The school's use of data can be powerful. It has been able to investigate the reason why it has a high rate of 'occurrences' of bad behavior. The data is irrefutable. While 15% of the incidents occur within classrooms and 12% around the school, 73% of incidents of bad behavior occur on buses to and from school. Action, in the form of a training session with bus drivers and matrons, has already taken place as a result.

The school makes useful comparisons with its previous progress data. It also has links with a number of schools with similar general or special education students. There are regular phone calls and e-mails to discuss data and procedures. Its item analysis of test papers has prompted significant development in the use of non-fiction texts.

The monitoring of English language learners is beginning to take place and the school is keen to identify which elements of under-achievement relate to special education issues and which to those arising from the early development of English. At present, the school does not analyze data based on ethnicity or gender.

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 proficient.

Parents and students say that their conferences with teachers give them a clear idea of where to go next. Teachers discuss individual student's work in detail within class and at parent-teacher meetings. Teachers make good use of data portfolios and samples of student work to highlight progress and skills that still need to develop. In the sphere of behavior development teachers' knowledge and advice is excellent. Many of the students have met with criticism in the past and are relieved to work within a system that shows them respect. For families of students with autistic and severe learning difficulties, there is a constant flow of information between school and home. Teachers recognize the knowledge and experience that parents bring to their children's education. As a result, there is a strong partnership and good collaboration.

Collaboration is also strong between staff. In addition to monthly grade and faculty meetings, there are regular informal discussions within grades, across sites and between individual teachers. As a result, there is a good pooling of information on each

student. This is strengthened by staff willingness to share good classroom practice and turnkey valuable professional development. This collaboration has been one of the reasons for the very successful implementation of the reading/writing workshops across the school. It is now far less common for a teacher to dismiss new ideas. It is very common for them take a technique from one part of the school and modify it for another group of students. A very real strength of the school is the way in which teachers and paraprofessionals work as a classroom team, sharing insights on a regular basis. As a result, lessons are more effective and students receive a good level of one-on-one attention. Those students for whom data suggests action is necessary are subject to discussion in considerable detail by classroom teams and between teachers, counseling and therapy staff. This a very strong feature of the work with students placed by the Infants Home of Brooklyn.

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 proficient.

The curriculum is well aligned to the needs of students. The excellent behavior program permeates all aspects of school life. Students for whom attention and interaction are problems, say they behave better as a result of clear and consistent rules. This is strengthened by a well-organized ‘token economy’ and ‘Caught in the Act’ awards. The acts in this case referring to behaving maturely. Staff working with alternate assessment students employ specific techniques for which they receive professional development. In addition, where it is appropriate, staff uses signs and symbols to aid communication. The curriculum is enhanced by trips to museums, Friday clubs and the very successful use of drama from visiting specialists. Art and science are also strengths within the curriculum. Students with autism benefit greatly from horse riding.

A very positive aspect of the leadership within the school is the effective use of the budget and schedules. The school has used its budget well to develop technology for students across all sites. The scheduling of literacy lessons as the first session of the day is inspired. It not only places a key subject at a point where students are freshest, but also sets a tone for the day through the calm these lessons emanate.

The environment within the school, and across sites, is one of trust. This arises from the fact that the principal has been adept at introducing the wide range of initiatives in a balanced and acceptable way. The staff’s respect for her and the success of the initiatives themselves have won over staff for whom many of the new ways of working initially appeared a retrograde step. She now recognizes the need to develop summaries of data to encourage further usage by busy classroom staff.

There are good procedures to ensure that absence and lateness are monitored and action taken where necessary in the form of phone calls and home visits.

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 proficient.

Structured classroom observations are very effective. They are rigorous, but supportive. There are always practical outcomes in the form of resources and professional development. The professional development program is good. It manages to meet individual and whole-school needs. Positive developments in analyzing data have been supported by good technology training for key staff. The school recognizes that there is now a need for all staff to receive this training as soon as possible. Staff increasingly visit each other's classrooms. The exchange of good practice and the security of staff in sharing problems are indicative of the culture of trust.

Procedures are clear. All staff and students are aware of key processes, such as arrivals, departures and acceptable behavior in corridors. This supports the drive for good behavior well. The rewards system is rigorously applied and highly valued by students. The accumulation of points is an important goal for all students, who exchange them for attendance at the Friday clubs and fun items.

An outstanding feature of the school is its partnership with the Infants Home of Brooklyn. This organization works with students experiencing severe and complex mental and behavioral difficulties. For some while, a number of these students have been placed at PS 231. They are taught by skilled teachers and supported by therapists and a psychiatrist from the agency. The principal of the school and the director of the agency work closely together. Teachers and therapists are integral members of the school. This collaboration provides the agency with a secure and empathetic environment and the school with additional professionals experienced in mental health issues.

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 proficient.

There is a clear vision within the school. It is shared by each member of the management team and is steadily permeating the school's practice. It involves a strong emphasis on the need to develop skills for the effective collection and analysis of data. It has a strong emphasis on the employment of the latest technology. This works well at administration level, with very clear hypotheses developing from both 'hard' data, such as exam results, and 'soft', outcomes of in-class tests, quizzes and observations. This is linked closely with the better development of differentiated programs for individual students. At both class and whole-school levels staff look at student progress, or lack of it, and collaborate well to seek solutions or ways of improving outcomes.

Detailed discussions take place at the end of the academic year between all staff meeting together on a single site for that purpose. The outcomes of these discussions, such as the need to improve differentiated planning or the necessary introduction of reading/writing workshops, become a clear plan of action. This is presented to staff at

the start of the New Year, with practical workshops. All staff are then aware that these goals will be the themes of classroom observations and professional development.

The analysis of progress data is set alongside initiatives to measure whether goals are realistic, whether initiatives are on track and how they can be accelerated or modified. The system works well as the result of the excellent communication systems across sites. Many new ways of working have been introduced, such as the collection of work samples and the use of academic intervention service folders. Currently, the school does not make the best use of clear deadlines, staff responsibilities and review dates for each development.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Public School 231 (K231)	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
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 . . .	Δ	▷	✓	+	◇
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		

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped