



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Public School 256**

**Early Childhood – High School 256**

**525 Convent Road  
Queens  
NY 11791**

**Principal: Oswaldo Roman**

**Dates of review: March 24 – 25, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Corinne Brown**

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## Part 1: The school context

Public School 256 is a District 75 early childhood through high school with 452 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The school population comprises 58.6% Black, 20.9% Hispanic, 16.2% White, 2.5% Asian, 0.5% American Indian and 1.4% of students from non-specified backgrounds. The student body includes 4% English language learners and 82% special education students. Boys account for 90% of the students enrolled and girls account for 10%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 91%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding, through a Long Island district program, with 75% eligibility.

This is a multi-sited, complex organization comprised of eight cluster sites. It serves a diverse population of general education and special education students across a widespread geographic area. Seven sites are located in Rockaway, Queens (PS/MS 43, PS 831 at Temple Beth El, St. John's Home for Boys, PS 253, PS 848 at Peninsula Hospital, PS 114 and Beach Channel High School) and one in Long Island (PS 256 at Mercy First). The school provides instruction to students in residential facilities, self-contained special education school buildings, self-contained classes in community schools and general education inclusion classes in community schools.

Students range in age from three through 21. They are designated as requiring intensive management and therapeutic services with differentiated instruction. Students are assigned to multi-grade classes of 12:1:1, 8:1:1, 12:1:4 or 6:1:1, student to teacher to paraprofessionals staffing ratios. St. John's and Mercy First are residential placements for special education and general education students. Peninsula Hospital is a day treatment program. At several sites, students attend grade-appropriate general education classes through inclusion programs. Students participate in either standardized or alternate assessments.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The effective principal facilitates cohesion with administration in realizing the shared vision across all sites through integrity, unity and sensitivity.
- Safe, nurturing environments provide respect and sense of individual value, which parents and students appreciate.
- The school uses an impressive array of data effectively to understand student and school performance longitudinally over time.
- The motivating and widely varied curriculum creatively facilitates student engagement and progress.
- Students who have previously experienced failure flourish because of the school's high expectations, flexible interventions and teamwork.
- Teachers, and all staff, are highly dedicated professionals who prepare engaging lessons and experiences through effective data-based planning.
- The school evaluates itself well and prioritizes professional development, which is directly relevant to student needs and teacher professional growth.
- Students show exceptional emotional, social and academic growth due to effective integrated support from partners, agencies and support services.
- Highly effective communication with parents and caregivers ensures continuity in all learning environments and sustained progress.
- The school uses data well to gauge the effectiveness of programs and to suitably modify practices and plans.

### What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that goals are worded to explicitly describe measurable, interim checkpoints.
- Explore further opportunities for cross-curricular links to reinforce skills and concepts that are transferable.
- Maximize professional development at all sites through continued utilization of staff strengths and overarching professional frameworks, especially in new data systems and technology.

## 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.**

Public School 256 as a community is dedicated to meet the widely varied needs of its students. It successfully provides high-quality programs that develop students holistically through personalized learning and support programs. Staff know students well and value their individuality. Respect is evident in all relationships. One parent commented, "My son comes home happy. The teacher is his friend." The school has well-established practice of using data to understand performance and progress, which informs effective instructional practice. It looks at performance of particular groups of students, as well as different sites, and carefully adjusts resourcing or programs to meet identified needs. Longitudinal studies of school performance over time are unique in their analyses and insight. Students make good progress academically as a result of timely interventions and modification of practices, although there is also transience in the student population.

The school works cohesively across all sites. Goals are congruent and the product of collaboration at all levels, including with parents and related service providers. High expectations are supported by clearly understood structures, routines and systems. The school motto, "Kids First. High Expectations. No Excuses," embodies the high degree of commitment and accountability that exists throughout the school. Utilizing staff creativity, the arts are infused so that the curriculum is broad for all students. Staff are dedicated and work hard to reach students through interesting lessons that touch all learning styles. Professional development is thorough, individualized and ongoing. The school is committed to building on staff strengths in furthering cohesive overarching professional growth. However, the school does not fully exploit opportunities to reinforce transferable skills for its students. The school is continually reflective and raises its own bar. The school's Comprehensive Education Plan is a living document that drives the school. Although progress is reviewed regularly, this process is not formalized when goals are created.

Following the previous Quality Review, the school has increased focus on subgroups and has implemented successful initiatives targeting the performance of both boys and girls. The creation of academies in the middle school enhances grade-appropriate instruction. The school inquiry team has a target group of students who will transition to middle school at the end of the year. Its work is systematic and well documented with substantial data. All findings are shared with staff. An intervention program to focus on identifying story detail is underway using the Achieve 3000 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 the student's progress over time.**

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

The school collects data from a wide range of sources, including standardized test results, to understand student performance. Different populations at the eight sites are assessed according to their identified needs. Students on the autistic spectrum are assessed twice a year using the Brigance Inventory. These alternate assessment students are successfully taught using the "Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-Handicapped Children" (TEACH) methodology. Their teachers keep detailed records of progress toward mastery, which track accuracy and independence. All residential students are assessed on entry to guide effective grouping for instruction to meet their needs. Information from instructional programs feed into the comprehensive database that is held in each classroom, site and centrally. Student work is part of rigorous assessment. The school uses photography as one alternative method of recording skills development and progress for some of its students. The behavior management system, which operates across all sites, delivers daily data. This is reviewed weekly and monthly as part of the motivating reward and incentive program.

The school is mindful of its English language learner population, even though they are few and spread across many sites, and examines specific data on their progress as well as that of groups by ethnicity. Attendance has improved and there is a reduction in visits to the crisis room because of analysis on gender and subsequent initiatives. The school is adept at working with data at the individual, group and whole school level. It analyzes trends over time, so knows that there is an overall steady increase in skills development. An impressive longitudinal study over nine years shows that 70% of its standardized assessment students pass Regents exams. Of 44 long-term students from its Mercy First site, 73% of students showed significant gains in reading levels. It uses such information to reflect on and improve its performance for the future. Alternate assessment students and all variable groups of students are rigorously tracked to inform adjustment to programs and practices. The school compares data not only from its different sites, but also against other District 75 schools, and makes comparisons by grade with general education schools. The school ensures extensive training for piloted initiatives such as "Read 180" and "Meville to Weville." Teachers receive individualized computer training. Paraprofessionals are trained to record and utilize data. As new systems come online, such as Acuity, the school provides ongoing training so that it remains at the forefront in its comprehensive interrogation and use of data.

**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.**

The school leadership team is an active decision-making forum with representatives from each site and significant parental input. Through their monthly meetings, and other regular meetings such as the pupil personnel teams, cabinet meetings and positive

behavior teams, all goals across the school are congruent and complementary. Teamwork characterizes the school. The majority of students have individual education plans, which are reviewed carefully at the end of each marking period, and all goal setting is based on comprehensive data. Students attend different sites based on identified needs. The school has noticed that many students are entering with more severely challenging needs. Entrants are also functioning at lower levels overall. As a result of such patterns, the school has established more intensive support, such as the Sanctuary partnership, to address psychiatric needs. The Read 180 program pilot for grade 6 and 7 students is already showing positive results. The school's high expectations, flexible interventions and teamwork from caring professionals mean that students who have previously experienced failure are able to flourish. One older student said, "This is a great school. I was always failing everything." Communication is frequent between school, home and residencies through daily behavior sheets, newsletters, email, staff accessibility and the efforts of the parent coordinator. Continuity of strategies in all environments ensures students make excellent progress. The community "Open House" session was a successful event to disseminate information and strengthen support networks for parents. Careful attention to maintain open communication reinforces strategies and high expectations so that progress is recognized and celebrated.

**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.**

At each site, the school selects curricular approaches and instructional programs with assessment capabilities that best suit that student population. The balanced literacy workshop model underpins much of the school's work. Alternate assessment sites successfully use carefully structured teaching methods, with Mayer Johnson picture symbols to aid visual learners and non-verbal students. Students are motivated to communicate through assistive technology. The school invests heavily in technology of many types to support learning. Its curriculum is wide through creative maximization of resources and staff strengths. This ensures that students have opportunities for self-expression and alternate ways of experiencing success. The arts are skillfully infused, as in math perspective drawing, music and comic book literature studies. Students with physical disabilities meet learning objectives through sports clubs, and progress is recorded in photographs. "Club Friday" operates successfully at all sites and is an incentive-based program of widely varied activities.

Teachers and all staff work hard to engage students through differentiated, interesting and experiential learning based on data. They are self-motivated and highly accountable for student progress. At present, teachers do not fully exploit cross-curricular opportunities for students' transferable skills reinforcement. All staff show great respect for students, which is clearly reciprocated. Students enjoy lessons and appreciate the efforts of teachers. They have a high regard for the bright, welcoming environments that staff create. One student commented, "She thinks up the craziest ways to help us understand." Student attendance is good because students want to come to school, with effective procedures in place to monitor and maintain this. Average attendance increased 16.8% over the past ten years and the trend continues. The administration budget carefully to provide the resources required to meet students'

needs based on data analysis, such as technology and additional academic intervention staff for tutoring.

**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 administration evaluates the school and knows the staff well. A thorough selection procedure ensures that staff share high expectations and a student-centered approach. Daily classroom visits and observations are constructive and support professional growth. Teachers feel well supported, with new staff mentored effectively. Comprehensive professional development is directly relevant to identified student needs and school priorities. Teachers collaborate well, though formal opportunities to meet are limited due to different locations. The school wishes to utilize staff strengths further, especially as new data systems and technology become available, within an overarching professional instruction framework.

Staff are excellent role models who ensure orderly, calm environments through consistency and clear structures. The successful positive behavior management program shows a sustained decrease in reported occurrences. Highly effective integrated support from significant partners, agencies and support services enables students to take control of their lives and make responsible choices, notably at the Mercy First site. Students demonstrate substantial emotional and social growth through creative multimedia productions and revealing poetry that explores deep emotions. They show responsibility and care through a program to train dogs for handicapped people. Young students with autism greet visitors with smiles.

**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.**

Goals across the school are clear, congruent and linked to data analysis. The school measures interim progress effectively, although the wording of goals does not reflect this well enough. Subject area coaches monitor and support teachers' instructional goals. The school continually evaluates its progress and adapts programs using data from interim and instructional program assessments. Teachers refine and revise individualized programs, based on careful observation and recording of data. The middle school creates an atmosphere of belonging through theme-based academies, as a result of information from data. The school uses data effectively to modify practices, to inform strategic decision-making and to plan for the future at all levels. The strong, well-respected principal leads the school in its vision to holistically develop the whole student and enable each student to be independent and responsible. The administration and school community support him and together work tirelessly to make a difference. As one parent commented, "Teachers empathize and figure out how to make it work for your family." The learning partnership in this school is systemic and works through strong systems and effective teamwork.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

|                                       |   |   |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>SCHOOL NAME: Public School 256</b> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + | ◇ |
| <b>Quality Score</b>                  |   |   |   | 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.**

| <b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>                                                                                                         | 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 |   |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>                                                                                                                              |   |   |   | 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.**

| <b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>                                                                                                                                       | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + | ◇ |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, 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 |   |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>                                                                                                                                                    |   |   |   | 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.**

| <b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>                                                                                                                                                                          | 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 and tardiness?                                                                                   |   |   |   | X |   |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>                                                                                                                                                                         |   |   |   | X |   |

| <b>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.</b>                |          |          |          |          |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Δ</b> | <b>➤</b> | <b>✓</b> | <b>+</b> | <b>◇</b> |
| 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, and effectively address discipline related incidents?                                                                         |          |          |          |          | X        |
| 4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?                                                                                                                                     |          |          |          |          | X        |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                               |          |          |          | X        |          |

| <b>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.</b> |          |          |          |          |          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>To what extent do . . .</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Δ</b> | <b>➤</b> | <b>✓</b> | <b>+</b> | <b>◇</b> |
| 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        |
| <b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>                                                                                                                                                                                     |          |          |          | X        |          |

|   |                                                |
|---|------------------------------------------------|
| ◇ | <b>Outstanding</b>                             |
| + | <b>Well Developed</b>                          |
| ✓ | <b>Proficient</b>                              |
| ➤ | <b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b> |
| Δ | <b>Underdeveloped</b>                          |