

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Public School 77

Elementary - High School 077

**62 Park Place
Brooklyn
NY 11217**

Principal: Merryl Redner-Cohen

Dates of review: March 9 - 11, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Andy McClean

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Public School 77 is an elementary-high school with 286 students from kindergarten through grade 12+. The school population comprises 56% Black, 20% Hispanic, 18% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 9% 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 2007 - 2008 was 90.5%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Public School 77 is a school for students with autism, 93% being alternate assessment. With one main site for middle and high school students, elementary students receive their education at another school site. Many work placements occur for transition students at a variety of local work sites.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The school is very successful in serving the specific needs of its students based on the collection, analysis and use of a wide variety of data. This process begins before a student's entry to school, with a comprehensive process of discussion with all relevant personnel. Parents' wishes and concerns are listened to, not only by a far-sighted and caring principal, but also by all members of the teaching and support staff. Determined to ensure that all students will progress in their ability to "navigate their world", the principal, very ably supported by senior leaders, communicates a vibrant message of inclusion to all those who come into contact with the students. Within the bounds of a stimulating learning environment, where safety and security are paramount, students make significant progress, not only in the development of their social, emotional and behavioral skills, but also in their academic work. Instruction is challenging and highly individualized, based on constructive individual education plans. At present, however, not all teachers complete these plans at the same time and interpret certain aspects of vocabulary in a manner different to colleagues, which results in a lack of consistency.

All members of staff work together as a smoothly functioning entity. Paraprofessionals and other support staff work harmoniously, with the clear aims of ensuring the improvement, through a multi-sensory curriculum, of students' comprehension of instructions and their ability to express their immediate needs and feelings. This is achieved very successfully with the support of technical speech aids and a wide array of visual symbols, common across all classes. Students take great comfort from the sterling examples of mutual trust and kinship that adults within school demonstrate. Adding to the culture of calm and structure that pervades all school activities, this camaraderie provides exemplary role models of how students themselves should act. The principal recognizes a need to further disseminate the best facets of instruction seen in school to enable these to become commonplace in all classes. Parents are welcomed into school, with many formal and informal gatherings to share issues and offer mutual support to address any concerns. A current challenge school leaders are seeking to address is the change in the background of new elementary students coming to school and how to address their different needs. The school shows great success in its major strategic aim which is to ensure all its students transition to the next phase of their lives, with the necessary tools to communicate their needs and emotions.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal's strong and insightful leadership, which is well supported by cabinet and faculty, results in a clear vision of total inclusion for all students.
- A concentration on establishing a safe, harmonious and academically stimulating environment provides all students with an array of opportunities to achieve their full potential.
- Multi-sensory approaches to teaching, with an appreciation of individual students learning styles, enables instruction to be well planned, sequential and assessed against specific goals.
- Precise individual education plans drive all instruction to assist students in the quest to navigate their world with greater ease.
- Adult relationships throughout the school demonstrate a strong bond of mutual trust and support with the outcome that students have very positive role models to imitate.
- Students make very good progress in a variety of ways to express their needs, well supported through access to and use of a wide array of technical aids and systems of symbols.
- Exemplary collection and use of data provides parents with regular feedback on, not only their children's academic progress, but also their social and emotional well-being.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue the emphasis on involving the whole faculty in the interpretation and completion of individual education plans to ensure continuity of student progress.
- Expand opportunities for staff members to view the best instructional and supportive practice identified in school and elsewhere.
- Plan strategic goals to adapt instruction and support to meet the needs of the new cohort of students enrolling in school and to address the different challenges they present.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

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

Exemplary collection of data from a wide array of sources, both formal over monthly intervals, and daily on an informal basis, enables faculty members to construct a lucid picture of each student's individual needs. Teacher observations, quizzes, records of conversations and pertinent use of photographs and other recording devices mean that whenever staff assess students' progress and future needs, there is great immediacy to each evaluation.

Individual education plans drive instruction and differentiation for the individual needs of students. The plans are regularly updated, with records of progress against academic, social and behavioral goals leading to more challenging targets. At present, there is some discrepancy across the school in the actual timings of these updates, as well as a small percentage of teachers misinterpreting specific language relating to measures of progress.

Assimilation of data begins before a student's entry into school, to ensure possible barriers to that student's secure and familiar learning environment do not hamper their first days in school. Strong lines of communication exist with parents, with a robust and honest exchange of information flowing both ways. The principal takes extra care to ensure that whichever routines work in school are reported to parents. Parents take their opportunity to inform school of successes and progress at home to ensure continuity of learning.

At present, teachers and the parent coordinator have analyzed data very effectively to deduce the need for a greater number of girl-specific activities, where boys outnumber girls by 4:1. Such activities as spa days, cosmetics and ice cream parties enhance girls' opportunities to express their individuality. Cabinet have successfully identified from enrollment statistics an increase in the numbers of students from a particular ethnic group and are reaching out to parents who may be uncertain of the school's main aims and methods. Data, particularly observations of student behaviors, is used by all staff to verify instruction and adjust programs for individual students, as when one student traveling to a work placement is always given the last place in line to suit his preference.

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 takes an innovative approach to goal setting and ensures that students’ wishes are taken into consideration when selecting life-skills courses. Every effort is taken to interpret these desires from working as a subway driver to restaurant work or computer programming. Regular conversations with students, using a wide variety of interpretation aids and symbols, enable them to communicate what their needs are, rather than teachers imposing what they think the students should be doing. Examples of students’ work are displayed with pride, at the same time as enhancing individual student’s own manipulative and recognition skills.

School leaders use the wide range of data, including reports from speech and occupational therapists, as well as coaches and feedback from parents, to evaluate the progress of previous school goals and adjust them if necessary. Parents testify to the open-door policy of the principal and the accessibility of staff from early morning to late at night, as well as during vacations. This results in the parents’ and students’ clear understanding of rules, regulations and routines to increase achievement against well-differentiated, individual goals. There is a well-informed comprehension by parents and teachers of the demand, from the principal, that students will progress in their social, self and emotional awareness.

The prime directive of the school is to dignify students’ aspirations to make a worthwhile contribution to society using their undoubted skills and talents. Many sources of data are used to determine and regularly evaluate the school’s strategic planning. Teachers feel empowered by the manner in which their principal asks them to shoulder collaborative responsibilities that lead to greater student achievement. Paramount among such achievement is the successful thrust of leaders, teachers, parents and students to move as many students as possible to learning environments of less restriction.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

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

Adaptability typifies the faculty’s approach to instruction. Given the unique nature of each student’s individual need to improve their social interaction and communication, and to expand the use of their imagination, teachers demonstrate a wholly professional grasp of meeting such needs through many multi-sensory activities. These include musicians in school assisting students with simple tunes and songs, yoga classes to aid students in control of their bodies and minds, and the employment of a variety of “symbol books” to improve opportunities for students to express their needs through different media.

Teachers approach learning with well-prepared and sequential planning to build on what students can already do and understand. Praise for students and recognition of their gifts and talents pepper each class, with impressive portfolios of students’ individual work and well-presented wall displays of student activities including photographs,

drawings and writings. A thematic approach to learning produces an apt concentration on students' communication skills, at the same time as building on their core skills of reading, writing, listening and deciphering messages from symbols in line with individual education plan goals.

Resources to support student progress are deployed well. All adults in school understand the principal's directive that they provide consistent messages and support in keeping with the school's overall goals. Classes such as culinary skills, art, music, computer skills and work placements result in students receiving the sorts of experiences they need to assist them in navigating their world and daily lives outside school. Innovative practices, to utilize the skills of a variety of staff members, such as quilting, art and yoga, lead to "cottage industries" taking pride of place within the school day. The school recognizes that there is more to do in adapting the curriculum and instruction to meet the challenges that new cohorts present.

Teachers and paraprofessionals, as well as speech and occupational therapists, impart a seamless and dedicated team approach to their students' learning experiences that results in outstanding student progress towards their goals. An illustration of this exemplary teamwork occurred in one class where a speech therapist worked alongside the class teacher to achieve the best possible learning outcomes. Adult relationships in school demonstrate a strong bond of mutual trust with the outcome that students see very positive adult role models. All students make significant progress in their time in school. Many begin school with an understandable fear of their environment. As a result of individually differentiated support and academically challenging programs, each student develops many strategies to express their needs successfully and to leave school with very competent life skills. School leaders show good self-evaluation of instructional practice with initiatives that begin to move good instruction to become commonplace in all classes and subjects.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

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

Individual teachers have clear goals to improve their instructional capacity. Aply supported by a knowledgeable school-based coach and assistant principals, the principal uses regular formal and informal classroom observations, scrutiny of student work and an ongoing dialogue to assess needs and progress towards specific goals. Such is the open nature of this dialogue that a very positive climate for future development exists. Teachers new to the school testify to the excellent support given to them by their mentors and all other colleagues whether teachers, paraprofessionals or other team members.

Lessons learned through the work of the diligent inquiry team, which is concentrating on developing reading skills for all students through phonemic awareness, are communicated to all in a professional manner. An on-going dialogue among all staff encourages everyone to have their say, based on their everyday observations of students' successes and difficulties. Teachers deduce what works to improve student comprehension of their world. Due to very effective lines of communication, teachers and support staff, as well as cabinet and parents, all appreciate new instructional methods and seek to apply them with consistency, so avoiding any confusion for students.

Inter-visitations, both formal and informal, assist teachers to observe successful modeling of good practice. The principal accepts that more frequent opportunities to raise instructional standards are necessary, with teachers from all divisions of the school having the chance to visit their colleagues and schools of a similar nature. A very reflective cabinet ensures that complacency in improving instruction is unacceptable. Teachers benefit from many new approaches to accelerating their students' academic and social progress. School technicians play an integral part in providing resources to bolster student communications, through the production of personalized "symbol dictionaries" and software adaptations. Links with support services are excellent. All agencies are treated with respect for the knowledge and possible solutions that they bring in shining a light on each student's individual difficulties.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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.

Typical of the principal's sound grasp of the ever-changing nature of school life for students and teachers is the current awareness of the need to adjust induction procedures and instruction to meet the needs of an increasing group of students in kindergarten who have already received some pre-school support. Flexibility of instruction, planning and resource use is evident throughout the school. Individual education plans are reviewed regularly, following data scrutiny and in-depth discussions. Plans are adjusted to meet students' immediate needs across all areas of their school life. Regular cabinet, faculty and whole-staff meetings result in the re-direction of resources to meet changing student needs. They also lead to changes in class content, group structures and personnel changes. The whole faculty understands that a certain student may make better progress with another teacher or paraprofessional, due to personality clashes, and adjust accordingly. No approach is left unexplored to ensure each student's progress is unhindered.

Professional development succeeds in empowering all staff to accept responsibility for their own growth. Teachers share their expertise and have the professional maturity to know when to ask for the help of a colleague. Such is this positive learning climate among adults, that a significant proportion of new teachers demonstrate great trust in the skills and knowledge of more experienced paraprofessionals. Teachers evaluate their students' progress on an almost daily basis. If an aspect of instruction is not working, the principal and school leaders, with one voice and one vision, make immediate changes to actual practice.

Students make very good progress in their time in school. They show success in evolving their communication and social skills not only to use functional life skills, but also to enjoy the opportunities that school and home life present them with. All school staff demonstrate patience, intelligence and humanity to ensure their students are treated with dignity and respect. The school equips its students with as many life skills as possible, as well as presenting them with a great deal of challenge to expand their academic capabilities.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Public School 77	△	▶	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>				
	△	▶	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				X
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				X
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?				X
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			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 student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>				
	△	▶	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?				X
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?				X
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?				X
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?				X			
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?				X			
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X			
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher's instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?				X			
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X			
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	△	▶	✓	+			
5.1 the school's plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher's instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?				X			
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?				X			
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?				X			
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X			
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	▶	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed