



**Department of  
Education**

*Joel I. Klein, Chancellor*

**Quality Review Report  
Office of Accountability  
2008-2009**

# **Quality Review Report 2008-2009**

**Public School 231**

**Elementary-Middle School 231**

**5601 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11204**

**Principal: Laura Giannino**

**Dates of review: April 27 - 29, 2009**

**Lead Reviewer: Louise Kapner**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public School 231 is an elementary-middle school with 299 students from kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 46% Black, 27% Hispanic, 20% White, and 6% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 85% of the students enrolled and girls account for 15%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 87.8%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

Visitors to the main site of this school for emotionally challenged and cognitively delayed students immediately notice the word 'Respect' prominently displayed. This serves to remind students what is expected, but it also importantly points to the high priority the school places on establishing a positive school tone so students can learn and reach their potential. A teacher/student mentor program provides excellent support for exceptionally difficult students. This is resulting in much improved behavior as students seek out their mentors to reveal their accomplishments. Students set year-long goals in academics and behavior that guide them to "do the right thing", but do not yet review progress during the year to revise goals suitably to reflect mastery.

The entire school community shares the principal's vision for student learning. Administrators and teachers work hard at reviewing, analyzing and recording a wide range of information from standardized and formative assessments to understand the diverse needs of their students and inform their instruction. Teachers use various documents to record student information. The principal monitors school-wide performance by subject, grade and for relevant subgroups. However, recording systems are not sufficiently precise to enable easy understanding of trends in performance. Related service providers are integral members of the instructional team and effectively support student learning. A highly energetic physical therapist, for example, provided an autistic student with relevant tasks, well focused on meeting his learning objectives. Parents are key partners in the school and appreciate all the support their children receive. They unanimously echoed they "wouldn't change a thing." Staff work in a highly collaborative manner enabling them to share good practice and hone professional skills, in tandem with participation in useful formal professional development. Teachers are increasingly focusing on and adjusting their practices to improve instruction. However, they do not formally set or monitor personal goals to measure success of their practice. Students benefit from a well-paced curriculum suitable to their needs. However, lessons do not always offer sufficiently differentiated strategies to engage students suitably. Teachers' response to student work is evident, but rubrics are not yet refined adequately to provide students with clear next steps to improve their work.

The principal is very skilled in organizational decision-making. After reviewing students' results on the English language arts exam, the 'Comprehension Toolkit' was introduced to support the teaching of non-fiction reading strategies. Ongoing review and conversations continue to focus the school as they plan further. Currently, they are in the process of looking at results of inquiry work to extend the successful practices into raising student achievement in math.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal and staff work hard to establish a positive school culture where students feel respected and enjoy coming to learn.
- The school analyzes relevant formative and summative information routinely for students in all service categories to understand the performance and learning needs of its diverse student population.
- Parents are key partners in their child's education and are kept well informed of school programs and their child's needs.
- Teachers across all sites welcome the opportunity to participate in collaborative processes and professional development activities to strengthen instruction and raise student outcomes.
- The achievement and success of students is a central focus of the whole school community.
- The principal's ongoing review and evaluation of student performance and progress is used well to make organizational decisions to improve student learning now and in the future.

### What the school needs to improve

- Create suitable instructional and grading rubrics to enable teachers' responses to students' work to provide guiding comments and clear next steps.
- Ensure that the management of the wide array of collected data allows easy monitoring of trends, by school, class, grade and student.
- Extend and refine the goal setting process for students and teachers so that interim checkpoints are used to measure progress towards end-of-year objectives.
- Deepen differentiation of instruction so that all lessons engage students and offer suitable challenge at their level.

## 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.**

The school collects and carefully analyzes summative data for students in each of the service categories. This enables the principal to monitor by grade and subject how her school is doing year-to-year. She is rightly proud of the increase in the number of students attaining Levels 2 and 3 on both the English language arts and math exams over the past three years, and the improved results on the social studies test. Faculty is increasingly adept at analyzing formative assessment data to understand students' performance and progress. Teachers use tools such as Fountas and Pinnell, Scantron, The Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills, and embedded curriculum assessments. This, along with individual student portfolio checklists specific to the needs of students in each service category, helps build a picture of individual and group achievement and progress across many subject areas and by functional level. By using color-coded graphs the principal is able to visualize a picture of group achievement on some assessments. However, well-refined tools are not yet developed to present summaries of information in accessible formats to monitor trends or anomalies by school, class, grade or individual students. Teachers use the information they receive to plan effectively. A teacher stated, "From data we can make really important decisions." She uses the information to suitably group her students and monitor their progress. Administrators and teachers are very mindful of the behavioral needs of their students. They rely heavily on School-wide Information System and Online Occurrence Report data to inform them of key issues. In response to the high number of incidences recorded during students' bus rides to and from school, implementation of a positive behavior intervention plan has resulted in a 38% decrease in reportable incidents.

The school has, as a parent said, "strong communication skills." Parents are notified of successes and areas for further help, so they are involved in an effective partnership. There is easy access to administrators and teachers provide daily individual updates and monthly newsletters on "What's Happening" to share instructional foci. Formal reporting includes individual education program updates on progress of learning objectives towards end-of-year learning goals. A newly implemented phone messaging system reaches out weekly to parents and, as a result, attendance at parent workshops has increased. Teachers share assessment information with students who frequently referenced their reading level and know what tasks they need to work on to improve. "I'm getting ready for big words by learning to break them up," a very proud student explained.

**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.**

Goal setting at the school level results from collaborative analysis of performance data and reflects a good understanding of the needs of students in all service categories. The Comprehensive Educational Plan and corresponding action plans provide a very good framework for “everyone to know what is expected and how we go about getting there.” The goals help focus conversations at weekly ‘Professional Learning Team’ meetings arranged by grade level and service category. This ensures that there is a clear priority on instruction and student performance and progress. Staff use this time wisely to share best practices and to dissect student work as a benchmark of what they need to work on and how to do it. As a result of working with the school coach, teachers developed differentiated units of study to pace instruction and provide strategies suitable to their students’ needs. The principal is proud of the school’s progress thus far towards meeting year-long school goals. A mid-year review of non-verbal students’ acquisition of communication skills shows great strides. A parent commented that her son, who was non-verbal upon entering the school, is now able to read. This is further testament to the emphasis placed on each student’s learning. Academic intervention services provide students with targeted supplemental support during the day. Extensive formative assessments enable frequent monitoring of student performance. Consequently teachers are able to provide prompt and relevant support, such as that put in place by a teacher when he noticed a decrease in a student’s verbal language. Therapists work in classrooms and with individual and small groups of students to implement individual education program learning objectives. The speech teacher’s targeted work, for example, using excellent visual prompts, focused on helping a student identify initial, medial and final sounds.

Teachers assist students to identify personal goals, reflective of their own “voice”, in writing, reading, math and behavior. Students see this as a means to “help you to figure out what to do better,” and what to do “not to go into crisis.” However, students do not review their goals at regular intervals for suitable revision based on secured mastery of tasks. Teachers use post-its to provide written feedback on displayed student work relative to instructional rubrics. However, most comments do not suggest clear next steps to extend achievement and many rubrics are not sufficiently matched to the activity or students’ functional level.

**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 proficient.**

The curriculum is aligned to the state standards and it meets students’ diverse academic and functional needs. The school has structured programs for teaching most core subjects, which teachers adapt to suit students’ learning levels. The social studies teacher’s participation in a ‘Teaching American History Grant’ is particularly beneficial to the development of students’ ability to respond to document-based questions. Teachers are proud of the way in which their students are now using supporting information to respond to questions, and the transference of learned skills into their other writing activities. Student behavior is also showing improvement, as they feel more confident in

their learning. Teachers use data to understand the needs of their students and to inform instruction. Students work in large and small groups, and individually on targeted skills. Staff work hard to engage students in well-matched learning activities. A teacher used a suitable book to engage alternate assessment students in a read-aloud of 'The Itsy Bitsy Cricket'. Their use of a miniature frog helped them act out the story. Subsequently they participated in a well-matched relevant activity to identify "og" and "op" words. However, this practice is inconsistent across classes with some teachers missing opportunities to use differentiated materials or activities.

The learning climate is extremely positive. Student response on last year's Learning Environment Survey indicated a 98% rating relative to safety and respect. Students work hard to rise to the high expectations for their personal conduct and have opportunities to earn points and attain levels allowing them to participate in extra-curricular activities. One student proudly shared that he went bowling, obviously a higher-level choice, as he was the envy of the other students. The introduction of 'Second Step', a well-structured instructional program, further supports students' social and emotional growth. As a result, student behavior continues to improve.

The school uses data very effectively to inform organizational decisions. During the scheduled literacy block, staff do not pull students out of class and speech therapists work in the classroom to support student learning. Academic intervention services are incorporated into reading time to ensure students receive congruent, suitable instruction with a wealth of well-matched supplemental materials. Teachers accompany and stay with their students during lunch. As a result, students are much calmer and ready to learn when they return to the classroom.

**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.**

The professional development and sharing of best practices is excellent and well differentiated to meet the needs of the staff and their students. The school extends itself to incorporate district trainings and those of private organizations to enable teachers and paraprofessionals to participate in relevant training to enhance their skills. Birch Services provides staff of autistic students opportunities to learn the implementation of 'Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication-Handicapped Children' (TEACCH) methodology to suitably engage their students. The school-based coach provides ongoing support across all sites and is a valued member of the professional learning teams. She leads intervisitations and uses a school-developed 'focused observation' format to facilitate conversations around observed best practices. Teachers self-reflect how they can incorporate new strategies to become more adept at meeting students' needs. As a result, teachers are showing greater confidence and developing strategies, such as good questioning, to engage their students. The principal and assistant principals formally observe teachers and are in classrooms daily. These visits provide very good opportunities to monitor evidence of implementation of information culled from professional development activities and guides conversations during grade meetings. The work of the inquiry teams, for standardized and alternate assessment students, has been a catalyst to show the importance of data in assessing and monitoring student performance. Their work last year helped students improve in non-fiction reading activities. This served as a "microcosm of the school" and helped to "change the instructional strategies school-wide." This year, teachers are using the 'Comprehension Toolkit' to teach well-defined strategies to a targeted group of students.

A mid-year review shows growth in reading levels of 13 out of 14 students. To improve communication skills for non-verbal alternate assessment students, teachers are expanding the use of the Picture Exchange Communication symbols. A non-verbal student who previously acted out to seek help, recently took out a sentence strip, "I need help" along with a picture of a computer. A parent spoke passionately about the dramatic changes in her son at home because of his ability to express himself using symbols.

Students' academic and personal growth is very well supported through counseling and highly effective collaborations. The Brooklyn Jewish Board and Family Services provide intense on-site therapeutic interventions for students and support for families in school and at home. School-based counselors are involved with all aspects of the school's program. They effectively help students "test the waters" in general education mainstream classes in anticipation of their re-evaluation to attend in a less restrictive environment.

**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 proficient.**

The principal's commitment focuses the school on addressing the learning needs of students and developing good instructional practices. A teacher expressed, "It's been a great year. Everything collectively is bringing out good things." The professional learning team meetings are valuable venues for discussing student performance, progress, and reflection on good teaching practices. Everyone is involved in using a wide range of data to assess students' needs. Staff make good use of this information to inform their instruction. Many teachers spoke of the need to "assess in the moment" and effectively make immediate modifications to their practice in response to students' emotional needs. Teachers use year-to-year standardized assessment information to compare student performance, to self-reflect on their own best practices, and to plan adjustments to their teaching to improve student achievement. However, a formal teacher goal-setting process with defined measurable outcomes is not yet evident.

The principal evaluates overall school performance. Her self-evaluation shows a strong understanding of the big picture and astutely identifies what is working. Organizational decisions are well thought out and effectively implemented. As a result of looking at students' tests results, the school successfully introduced new instructional programs. 'Words Their Way' is helping students, who did not know the alphabet, to read books and recognize sight words and word families. The use of the 'Comprehension Toolkit' is highly effective in providing students with precise strategizing in non-fiction reading. They are now more engaged and using learned skills in all reading activities.

The principal, in looking towards the future, wants the usage of data to "become second nature" and to "connect with the curriculum" as a means to address students' needs and improve learning outcomes. She is expanding opportunities for teachers to become familiar with data systems such as ARIS. Teachers are being held accountable and engaging in conversations centered on student performance, and best practices culled from inquiry work are being expanded into the teaching of math.

## School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

<b>School name: Public School 231</b>	△	▶	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>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.</b>				
<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?				<b>X</b>
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
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?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				<b>X</b>
<b>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.</b>				
<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?				<b>X</b>
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?				<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>
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?		<b>X</b>		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

### 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, DYQ, 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

<b>rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X				
<b>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.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				X			
<b>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.</b>							
<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			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>