

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

Public School 253  
Elementary School Q253  
1307 CENTRAL AVENUE  
QUEENS, NY 11691

Principal: ROBIN JOHNSON

Dates of review: March 29 - 30, 2012  
Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Public School 253 is an elementary school with 526 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 48% Black, 43% Hispanic, 3% White, 2% Asian students and 4% other students. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 92.3%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school prioritizes ways to communicate with families that keep them informed of their children's progress and performance leading to an increased understanding of academic and social-emotional expectations. (2.4)
  - o School leaders and faculty work diligently to engage students and their families in ongoing conversations about progress and performance. The parent coordinator plans and delivers workshops and newsletters in response to parents' request or to provide information regarding the school's instructional goals. For example, parents express appreciation for the information they received regarding the State Common Core standards and what they mean for their children's learning. Additionally, interim progress reports are sent home with progress monitoring data for reading, writing, mathematics, attendance, and behavior. Agenda books that are sent home by the teacher every night serve as a venue of communication between teacher and parent as needed. Furthermore, the principal has monthly "Dialogue with Parents" meetings to maintain open lines of communication for timely information and address concerns. As participants in the school's decision-making processes, parent voice is valued. For example, administration is exploring their latest idea using a phone messaging system to further complement present communication systems. As a result, the last three years of Learning Environment Surveys reveal that parents are very satisfied with the school's efforts to engage them in their children's education.
- All stakeholders are unified in providing a safe, nurturing environment that supports academic and personal growth of all students. (1.4)
  - o Each student is known well by one or more adults in the school. In turn, there are unified efforts to coordinate attendance and social-emotional development for all students. Faculty and school leaders recognize the importance of good attendance habits for students to succeed in school and beyond. Displays in halls and classrooms identify students with perfect attendance and the most improved attendance each month. Students share how their teachers encourage them to come to school every day and express their pride in receiving certificates and prizes for their good attendance throughout the year. Additionally, a school wide initiative the "Right Choice, reinforces exemplary behavior and character development. Positive interactions among student peers are acknowledged keeping students focused on learning and a desire to succeed. Consequently, a climate of mutual respect and positive attitudes is evident throughout the school.
- The school has developed internal capacity to provide an atmosphere that supports youth development and improved learning. (4.4)
  - o As part of a grant focused on teaching tolerance, the school has developed internal capacity that fosters a conflict resolution program that is supported by a full-time cluster position. In turn, teachers are provided with professional development periodically to reinforce the skills learned regarding respect for cultural diversity and how to resolve differences from day to day interactions among students. Additionally, the cluster teacher leads a conflict resolution program for students. Students agree that this program has

"... helped [them] get along with each other." These practices support good citizenship as a lifelong character trait beyond school. Thus, the school community is a safe and respectful culture that promotes learning.

- The principal is working steadily in making organizational decisions that refocus the school on school-wide goals to improve student achievement. (1.3)
  - o In response to last year's Progress Report results the principal through collaboration with staff has made several decisions redirecting the school's focus on instructional goals. Teachers were reassigned to grades that match their expertise, teacher teams were reconfigured to include cluster teachers and other support staff, and the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher now follows a push-in model to support English language learners. Furthermore, school leaders are spending more time in the classroom assessing teacher practice. Teacher teams meet more frequently each week to develop curriculum and inquiry protocols. As a result, more effective programming, assignments, and use of teacher and student time are increasing the potential to improve instruction and engaging students in challenging work to support progress.
- Teams and individual teachers are developing systems to set goals for their students that are intended to improve outcomes and increase achievement. (3.2)
  - o Teachers are establishing learning goals for their students. Students record their goals on portfolio cover sheets. In addition, some teachers are diligent in recording next learning steps while conferencing with students. Teacher teams identify trends through an analysis of Acuity, the school's chosen Department of Education periodic assessment, results to establish class goals. Consequently, team and classroom level goals are beginning to leverage changes in classroom practice and Acuity data shows that some subgroups of students are making progress.

## **What the school needs to improve**

- Develop curriculum that challenges students and incorporates cognitively demanding skills through more rigorous academic tasks and activities to ensure gains in student achievement. (1.1)
  - o In response to citywide instructional expectations grade level teacher teams are developing units of study in English language arts and mathematics aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) . Literacy and social studies are integrated in the 5th grade unit of study. Teams are making some purposeful choices about emphasizing academic vocabulary and oral language to meet the needs of ELLs. However, teacher teams have not fully developed or established a process for how to align curriculum and academic tasks to the cognitive demands of the CCLS. In turn, tasks do not adequately engage students in higher order thinking. For example, one task at the end of a weeklong series of lessons that engaged students in studying the Civil War and Reconstruction through primary and secondary documents prompted students to write a two to three paragraph essay with basic recall questions that lacked opportunities for rigorous thinking. In turn, the resulting student work was assessed against a "primary source analysis rubric" that did not match the intended outcome of the fifth grade writing standards. This misalignment led to student work did not demonstrate evidence of extended thinking and work that pushes them to their next level.

- Improve teaching practices to expand on teachers' use of differentiated approaches to learning so that all lessons are effectively challenging and elicit higher order thinking that leads to improvements in student progress. (1.2)
  - The use of data to inform lesson planning that takes into account the academic diversity of students is not uniformly practiced. Some lessons are planned to include a short motivational assignment in the form of a question(s) and a mini-lesson introducing a learning goal followed by group activities. In some integrated classroom teaching (ICT) classes, teachers use data to offer group artifacts that matched student skill sets, especially lower achieving students. In other classrooms, student work displays demonstrated students' proficiency in the content that was being presented again to the whole class during the lesson. One 2nd grade student commented, "Why are we doing this? We did this already. I know this." However, most lessons include the same or similar activities for all groups and individual students. In turn, not all teaching strategies enable students to approach new content without being hampered by their skill deficits, and therefore students do not always understand the intended outcomes of the work. Consequently, some students do not make sufficient progress in acquiring new knowledge, skills, and understanding as evidenced in their work products.
  - In some classrooms, student work and conversations are rigorous in that teachers focus on accuracy of information and supporting evidence to substantiate thinking. However, in other classrooms, teachers dominate the lesson with basic recall questions and tasks that require elevated levels of cognitive demand. Additionally, student notebooks inconsistently reflect ongoing work that fosters high levels of thinking. For example, in one class the teacher read aloud a text displayed on a SMARTboard to the students for approximately twenty minutes. During that time, students were asked to simply follow along as the teacher pointed to the words using a yardstick. After the reading, students were only asked a series of basic recall questions regarding fact and opinion but were not required to substantiate their responses using evidence from the text. Consequently, while students responded accurately to some questions while seated at their desks without notebooks or other artifacts for learning, there were limited opportunities for student-to-student participation or discussion. As a result, levels of student engagement and participation are uneven and student work products do not consistently reflect critical thinking and understanding of content concepts and skill sets.
- Ensure that assessment practices at the team and the classroom level continuously identify specific learning needs of students and are used consistently across classrooms to improve student outcomes. (2.2)
  - Acuity predictive and interim data is managed and analyzed at the team level. Some students manage their Acuity results and choose practice questions to work on the computer to improve specific skills. At the classroom level teachers supplement Acuity data with conference notes, rubrics, and a benchmark system to meet independent reading level goals. However, teachers use a wide variety of rubrics that do not always articulate rigorous levels of proficiency. Additionally, across classrooms conference notes lack consistency. Some teachers, for example those in the 12:1:1 classes, maintains explicit, ongoing notes assessing what students can do and what they need to work on to make progress while other teachers assesses student progress without specificity in next steps for improvement. Furthermore, reading level benchmarks are not sufficiently rigorous, i.e., they do not require students to engage in high levels of thinking at

the students' grade level and therefore, do not always provide teachers information on students' critical thinking skills. As a result of these inconsistencies in assessment practices, an evaluation of the effectiveness of curricular and instructional decisions is hampered.

- Improve teacher pedagogy through explicit and focused feedback with clear next steps that ensure improvement of student learning and achievement. (4.1)
  - o School leaders observe classroom instruction using a variety of checklists and criteria for each visit. All teachers were observed four times since September. However, only one round of short observations based on the school's chosen competency from the Danielson framework of expectations for teacher practice has been completed since September. Furthermore, using student data as part of the observation process is not yet uniform among school leaders. As a result, feedback does not always explicitly articulate strengths and weaknesses in teacher practice nor is it normed to framework expectations, and therefore does not consistently lead to improved teacher pedagogy and student outcomes.
- Formalize systems that regularly evaluate the quality of curricular and instructional decisions with a focus on modifying policies and practices that ensure coherence across classrooms. (5.1)
  - o Capacity-building practices are developing through the work of several teacher teams, some with a lens on curriculum development and instructional expectations, and others on youth development and personal growth. A core team of grade leaders and coaches facilitate the work of the teams. However, formalized systems to determine the effectiveness of their work at the team and classroom level are now developing. As a result, efforts to modify curriculum, instructional and organizational practices to ensure rigorous and accurate expectations for student learning outcomes are not yet realized.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Public School 253	UD	D	P	WD
<b>Overall QR Score</b>		X		
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?		X		
1..2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		X		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?		X		
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?		X		
2.2 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?		X		
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?		X		
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			X	
<b>Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?		X		
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?		X		
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		X		
3.4 Communicate high expectations to staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?		X		

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.**

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?		X		
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X		
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?		X		
1..4 Integrate child/youth development, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	UD	D	P	WD
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?		X		
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?		X		
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?		X		
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?		X		

**Quality Review Scoring Key**

<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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