

**Extended Learning Opportunities in Fostering
Student Achievement**

Public School 150 Elementary School Profile

Long Island City, Queens, New York



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Background

Public School 150 is an elementary school located in Community School District 30 in the Sunnyside area of the Borough of Queens, New York. The school is located in a multi-cultural residential community surrounded by many small family run businesses as well as large industrial corporations. P.S. 150 is a pre-World War II 4-story structure. The school was renovated and an addition was built approximately 10 years ago. The addition included additional classrooms, cafeteria, eating area, and pre-kindergarten facilities. At approximately the same time, the 500-seat theater with stage and sound system was renovated.

Public School 150, or the Sunnyside School as it is commonly known, is a large elementary school and serves approximately 1250 students from pre-kindergarten through the sixth grade. The school demographics reflect the diversity of the surrounding community: 46% Hispanic, 32% Asian, 19% White, and 3% African American. Students come from seventy different countries and speak forty-one different languages. Approximately 19% of the student population has immigrated to the U.S. in the last 3 years with the majority of recent immigrants coming from Bangladesh and South Korea. The majority of the entering students across all grade levels are English Language Learners. Of the 175 new kindergarten entrants for the 2000-2001 school year, 156 were Limited English Proficient eligible. Overall, about 30% of the students are English Language Learners. Over 75% of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. P.S. 150 is a Title I school receiving targeted assistance. The school student mobility rate is 16%, with an average daily attendance of 94.8%.

There are 31 general education classes in grades Pre-K to Grade 6. In addition, there is a Gifted and Talented (GT) class in each grade from first through fifth that involves approximately 9% of the student body. Approximately 7% of the student population receives Special Education Services through both resource and pull-out programs and 9 students receive deaf and hearing-impaired services. Both the GT program and the special education inclusion program draw students from throughout School District 30. Class size at P.S. 150 is relatively large: 18 in Pre-K, 25 in K, 25 – 31 in grades 1 through 3, and 32+ in grades 4 through 6. The number of school staff is commensurate with the school size.¹

There are multiple intervention programs designed to address the challenges of the English Language Learners (ELL) and to accelerate their language and literacy acquisition. In addition to the general education classes, there is one Spanish Bilingual Class in grades 2 through 5, two Spanish Bilingual Classes in Pre-K, K, and grade 1, one Korean Bilingual class in sixth grade, and two self-contained English Language Learners (ELL) Classes in kindergarten. There is a pull-out ELL program for grades K-6, which provides ELLs with intensive support services in language/literacy acquisition. P.S. 150 has Bilingual Cooperative Teaching Classes in grades Pre-K through 5 and Monolingual Cooperative Classes have recently been added in grades 1 and 2.

¹ The school is staffed with 83 teachers, 3 administrators, 2 counselors, 18 school aides, and 23 educational assistants. 99% of the teachers are fully licensed and permanently assigned to this school. 80% of the teaching staff have a Masters Degree or higher and 50% have more than 5 years of teaching experience.

Educational strategies are implemented through a standards-based curriculum based on enhancing literacy and integrating reading and writing within the various content areas. Emphasis is placed on developing mathematical skills, extending students' knowledge of social studies and scientific applications – using “hands-on” and manipulative materials, and promoting awareness of cultural diversities and values. Spanish is offered as the foreign language program.

P.S. 150 offers a comprehensive fine and performing arts program at all grade levels. Students' participation in drama, dance, music, and the visual arts is strongly encouraged. Music specialty teachers at both the primary (K-3) and secondary (4-6) levels provide recorder and keyboard instruction, music appreciation, choir, and band. Other specialists provide instruction/appreciation for dance and theater - including various school productions and drama classes, and an art appreciation and enrichment program.

Parents are active participants in the School Leadership Team, and make decisions along with staff regarding school related issues. The Parent Teacher Association plays an active role in the school including fund raising and school beautification efforts. The school staff works closely with parents through several programs providing daily workshops in parenting and literacy acquisition, health issues, test-taking strategies, and student and family development.

P.S.150 has been recognized as a highly effective school by local and state agencies. The school has received the Effective Schools Award and has been placed on the Chancellor's Honor Roll for Reading for four consecutive years. In spring 2000, the school was selected as a Title I

Distinguished School of Excellence by the New York State Education Department.

Beginnings

The Sunnyside School community has been challenged over the past several years by a growing student population, city financial support that has not kept pace with inflation and student population growth, and a large influx of English Language Learners. The school building is over capacity and reduced financial support has resulted in relatively large class sizes. As noted above, many of the new students entering P.S. 150 have little, or no, previous school experience and are limited English proficient. Although students have shown consistent and strong growth in academic achievement as evidenced by continued improvement in the New York City CTB reading test scores over the past five years, a drop in last year's scores has raised some concerns.

Between 1992 and 2000, the percent of students at P.S. 150 scoring above the 50th percentile in the NYC CTB reading test has climbed from 42.5% to 69.5%. English Language Arts test results from all the students (539) taking the citywide test (grades 3, 5, and 6) and the state test (grade 4) in 2001 indicate 68.6% of the students meeting, or exceeding, the state standard. This was the highest test result for the twenty elementary schools in District 30 and earned the school a “Far Above Average” ranking in the Performance Category.² Results of the City CTB-Mathematics Tests in 2001 for grades 3 through 6, shows 72.2% of the students

² The Performance Category is a ranking system based on the difference between the percent of students in each school meeting the state standard compared to schools similar in size and demographics.

scored at Levels 3 and 4 (the two highest levels on a 4-level scale).

A closer review of the State Reading Achievement data indicated a decline in grades 3 and 4. On the spring 2000 test, 80.1% of all third graders scored at or above the State Reference Point. The spring 2001 English Language Assessment for fourth graders indicated 64.5% of the students on Levels 3 and 4. Upon review and analysis of this data, the school staff established literacy in grades 3 and 4 as the highest priority. During the spring of 2001, the staff and parent community of P.S. 150 developed a comprehensive educational plan to address some of the challenges facing the students of P.S. 150. The major area of concern was the need to increase the academic achievement of their students in reading. As part of this effort, the literacy program – especially at the third and fourth grade levels - was reviewed and became a priority during the regular school day and in the afterschool program.

The administration and staff of P.S. 150 are committed to student high academic achievement, developing critical thinking skills, and providing a supportive learning environment for academic success. This is evident in the interaction between students and teachers, positive student behavior, focused classroom instruction that is differentiated according to student need (despite the large class sizes), strong community support, and the wide spectrum of intervention and support services available to academically at-risk students. The administration and staff of Sunnyside School have actively engaged in collaborations with at least eighteen organizations to expand and enrich the school-based programs as well as develop community partnerships. These organizations include local colleges, opera and arts guilds, museums and artist's studios, writer's col-

laboratives, and parent volunteers. In addition, there are other collaborative partnerships formed with five additional organizations that help form the core of the afterschool programs.

The principal and staff have been able to pull together a highly coordinated afterschool initiative from a multitude of different programs and resources. By braiding together public, private, and community resources and integrating in-school and afterschool staff and programs, they have put into place a highly effective program that supports classroom instruction and builds cognitive, social, emotional, and physical well-being in their students.

Program Structure and Content

“A lot of our students need that extra support piece. The afterschool program builds on what takes place during the school day. ... We need to maintain that additional support to maintain student academic growth. We constantly review and modify the afterschool program to ensure that it remains a support for academics.” Ms. Gloria Guzman, Principal.

Over the past five years, the administration and staff have instituted several extended day programs to meet the needs of their students. The extended day initiatives were implemented to foster academic achievement, to have a positive impact on risk-associated behaviors by students during out-of-school hours, and to address the needs of at-risk English Language Learners and special education students.

The extended day program is integrated with and designed to support the school's educational goals and objectives through academic support and enrichment, homework assistance, and recreational activities. There are five major elements to the extended learning initiative: an academic support program, Sunnyside Community Services, Virtual Y, Arts Connection, and Project Share. Each of the programs has a different focus and each receives support from a different agency or organization. There is effective communication between the program providers and between the in-school and afterschool staff. Each of the programs is discussed in further detail below.

Academic Support

The extended day program's academic component is focused primarily on establishing reading and writing connections for at-risk youngsters. In addition, there is a math and technology component as well as an ESL initiative targeting recent arrivals with an intensive language acquisition program. Specifically, the goals of the extended day program are to provide academic intervention for students academically at-risk, English as a Second Language intervention, additional support services for English Language Learners, reading and writing support services, test sophistication skills, and parental involvement activities.

Within the academic support initiative, there are several extended day literacy programs: Project Read, Reading for Success, and Title I/Pupils with Compensatory Education Needs (PCEN) Reading. Each class has a maximum of 15 students and the program presently provides services to approximately 300 students. The regular classroom teacher delivers the program.

The instructional approach in reading and writing is based on meaningful enrichment activities that arise out of students' strengths and expressed interests, rather than a discrete set of skills to be mastered. The curriculum is developmentally appropriate and reflects a multilingual, multicultural learning environment that acknowledges, respects, and celebrates diversity. An extensive number of trade books in the content areas, as well as genres, are used to support, enhance, and deliver instruction. Teachers use the Early Childhood Literacy Assessment System (ECLAS) as well as item skills analysis to design further intervention services for students in both reading and writing. Time is also spent on building test sophistication skills using an assortment of teacher designed and commercial materials.

"The small class size in afterschool allows us to focus on the particular problem area(s) for an individual student. We (in-school and afterschool teachers) communicate as a team to work on key strategies to meet a student's needs." Fourth Grade Teacher

Different strategies are employed during the afterschool literacy program to build students' reading and writing skills. These strategies may include: shared or guided reading, independent reading, vocabulary development, directed reading skills and strategies, response journals, project-based activities, and/or test sophistication skills. The major focus of the 2001 - 2002 school year is improving literacy acquisition for third and fourth graders.

During one afternoon session, a group of fourth graders had a spirited discussion about science. In doing this self-

assessment on science they wrote about and then discussed what science was, their likes and dislikes about science, what they found useful about science, and whether science was easy or hard. After their discussion, in which everyone participated – including this observer – they wrote about their self-assessment in their journals. This was to be followed up by developing a graph, incorporating data from other classes, and analyzing their results. The teacher was able to integrate critical thinking skills, discussion skills, science, writing, and math into one 30-minute time block in an effective manner.

The extended day program also incorporates programs for parents. Parent workshops in literacy were instituted in an effort to provide further assistance to students in improving their reading and writing skills. One component of these workshops dealt with the assessment process itself. Parents took the assessment exam. This was designed to further prepare the parent to better understand the focus on reading and writing and how they could help their children at home. The program also provides parents with classes in English as a Second Language and computer literacy.

“I have observed significant growth in the reading and writing skills of my students who are in the Project Read afterschool program ... especially those students who may have passed the ESL exam but are not quite there yet.” Third Grade Teacher

In addition to the academically focused afterschool initiatives, the school has formed strong partnerships with Sunny-

side Community Services (SCS)³ and the YMCA. SCS operates an academic and recreational afterschool program sponsored by The After-School Corporation (TASC)⁴. The YMCA provides the Virtual Y⁵ – a recreational, literacy acquisition, and homework assistance afterschool program.

Sunnyside After School

The Sunnyside Community Services Center operates the The After-School Corporation (TASC) - sponsored afterschool program. The program has a staff

³ Sunnyside Community Services is a community-based organization that serves more than 9,000 children, youth, adults, and seniors in Western Queens. SCS provides a broad spectrum of community services for active seniors, homebound and disabled elderly, and youth services, including three afterschool programs, a Beacon community center, an evening teen center, summer and school-vacation camps, college and career counseling, and employment training. They also provide vocational English instruction for adults and ESOL for youth and adults.

⁴ The After-School Corporation funds community-based organizations and other nonprofits to operate school-based afterschool programs from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday throughout the school year. TASC currently funds more than 130 CBOs and other non-profit organizations to operate afterschool programs in 143 New York City public schools and 75 schools throughout New York State serving more than 40,000 school children. For more information, visit www.tascorp.org.

⁵ The YMCA of Greater New York launched the Virtual Y in 1997. The program is available in over 100 public elementary schools in all five boroughs of New York City and serves more than 8,000 children. Students remain in their schools for Virtual Y from 3:00 to 6:00 pm five days a week. For more information, visit www.ymcanyc.org/ygny/YMCA.html?branch=youth&body=youthabout&.

of 20 and provides services to over 200 children in grades K – 6 from 3:00 to 6:00 pm daily. A typical afternoon includes a snack and socialization period, homework help, fine and performing arts, sports, and recreation. The homework help session builds upon and enhances the students' school day experience and supports the NYC Board of Education's Performance Standards.

Many of the program staff are professional artists, dancers, and martial arts instructors who supplement their income through this program. The staff I observed were highly dedicated and adept at engaging young people in learning and participating. The children were actively engaged in activities whether it was dance, sports, martial arts, painting, or homework completion. A group of fifth graders I observed were painting a large patriotic poster for the mayor urging that he not reduce financial support for schools, including afterschool, and other city services. The poster was a large American flag and included paintings of the seals of every city department around the perimeter. Students conducted internet-based research and other searches to obtain illustrations of the city department seals and researched the responsibilities of each department.

“Both Sunnyside and Virtual Y help provide a language rich environment for our young people and are key to enhancing their socialization skills.” Afterschool staff member.

Virtual Y Afterschool

The Virtual Y Program is a program developed by the New York City YMCA – named Virtual because it brings YMCA programs into the public schools. Virtual Y focuses on learning enhancement, values, and recreation. It offers support for classroom learning and encourages building social and emotional skills. The program runs from 3:00 to 5:30 pm daily and serves 50 students in grades 2 - 4.

A typical afternoon's activities include a snack and socialization period, homework help, recreational reading, and a planned activity, which could include education, values, health and fitness, community service, and journal writing. The children play games; write letters to their sister school (P. S. 29), and visit other countries – virtually. For these virtual visits, students read and learn about other countries and cultures, students talk about their home country, and parents provide food and snacks representative of the country's culture. The Virtual Y program also incorporates a strong character and values development component. All children in the program know the four key values – respect, honesty, responsibility, and caring for others – and their meaning.

Other Afterschool Initiatives

There are five other elements of the afterschool initiative that are smaller in scope and more focused but contribute strongly to the overall philosophy of providing a diverse, rich, and supportive learning environment for the students at P.S. 150. Other partners involved in the afterschool initiative include: Arts Connection - which develops theater and performing arts skills with students and teachers and drama and enrichment activities for about 75 students; Marquis Studios – provides artist in residency programs in drama and

dance; Writers and Actors Collaborative – sponsors an artist in residency program for all students in the Project Read afterschool program with a focus on developing writing skills through the integration of drama; Queens County District Attorney’s Office – sponsors Fairy Tale Trials, a program for sixth grade students to develop and explore substance abuse and character building issues; and, Project Share – providing conflict resolution skills and values and character education for 25 sixth graders.

There is a strong focus on the fine and performing arts at Sunnyside School as evidenced by both the in-school and afterschool activities. In addition to the music and arts programs, students also write and produce their own plays. Fifth graders demonstrate the knowledge and skills gained in theater at their annual “Broadway” play. All fifth graders take part in some aspect of the production - writing, lighting, sound, set design, directing, and acting. This observer had the opportunity to observe an outstanding production of *Annie*. The young lady who played Annie had a stage presence and singing voice that ensures she will be on the Broadway stage in the not-too-distant future.

“Afterschool is a lot of fun. I like it because we get to read and talk about the books we read.” Fourth Grade Student

“I like afterschool. I can get most of my homework done and the teacher helps me when I need it.” Third Grade Student

Program Administration

The project administrator for the afterschool program is the school principal – Ms Gloria M.Guzman. She handles all administrative duties, classroom observations, and ensures adequate delivery of program services. The regular classroom teacher provides the academic component of the afterschool program. The teaching staff who participate in the afterschool program receive additional compensation, at an hourly rate, for their services. School aides also provide afterschool services through attendance taking, snack delivery, and additional support services.

Both the Virtual Y and the Sunnyside Afterschool programs have a project coordinator on site. These individuals oversee all program staff, coordinate their afterschool program with in-school activities, act as liaison to the school staff and administrators, and monitor program delivery. Many of the afterschool staff are from the local community. Some are college students and others are professionals – artists, dance instructors, and martial arts instructors.

The director of the Sunnyside Project Learn Afterschool program is Elizabeth Guidi. Her typical work hours are from 10:30 am to 6:00 pm. She oversees approximately 20 staff. The After-school Corporation provides approximately 45 hours of professional development for the coordinator and staff.

Gerri Sacino coordinates the Virtual Y program at P.S. 150. She supervises 4 other counselors who work with over 50 children. The YMCA provides 45 hours of professional development focused on education and pedagogy and multicultural and tolerance issues. Ms. Sacino and her staff interact closely with the classroom teachers, feel comfortable advising staff,

and writing lesson plans for the after-school program.

Staff from both the Sunnyside and Virtual Y programs remarked that they each seek one other's help and support on a regular basis. These discussions encompass the status and/or attitude of a particular child, behavioral issues, academic challenges, and developing a particular lesson plan to meet a student's needs.

The Sunnyside and Virtual Y coordinators and staff work closely with the school staff and administration to coordinate program content and delivery. The teaching staff feel the afterschool program is of high quality and is an extension of what takes place during the school day. One illustration of this close cooperation stemmed from the recent reading assessment, which indicated a slight drop in student test scores between grades 3 and 4. Through a coordinated approach between the administrators and in-school and after-school staff, Sunnyside Afterschool added an additional homework session to their program and Virtual Y developed and implemented an additional literacy component into their afterschool program. Both programs are reviewed on a regular basis and modified to meet the changing academic and developmental needs of the students.

Funding and Sustainability

The primary financial support for the extended learning programs comes from federal, State, and City sources. The Federal Title I and Reading Excellence Act initiatives and the New York State PCEN and Project Read initiatives support intensive literacy programs for identified at-risk students and includes school day, afterschool, and family literacy programs. The New York City Board of Education provides the bulk of financial support for

the afterschool initiatives. The cost of the academic component of the afterschool program is approximately \$100,000 per year.

The After-School Corporation runs its afterschool program through Sunnyside Community Services. This community-based organization provides the coordinator and staffing for the program. The TASC program runs on a cost estimated of \$1,000 per child per year. In addition to TASC financial support, the NYC Board of Education provides resources with a matching grant from the Department of Youth and Community Development.

The YMCA of Greater New York partnered with the NYC Board of Education and the United Way of NYC in forming the Virtual Y. Over 130 major corporations, foundations, and individuals fund the Virtual Y program. Each Virtual Y program in NYC has its own individual sponsor. The community sponsor for P. S. 150 is Deloitte & Touche, LLP.

Financial support for the Sunnyside and Virtual Y programs appears to be fairly stable as a majority of those resources come from the private sector. City funding for the academic support component of the afterschool program was reduced this past year. This had a significant impact on program delivery and on the number of students who could participate in the academic intervention component of the extended learning initiative. These funding cuts from the NYC Board of Education restricted the afterschool initiative to only grades two through five with additional restrictions to the types of programs available to sixth graders. Limited NYC funding had a double impact in that it not only affected the extended learning initiative, but also resulted in very large class sizes, especially at the upper grade

levels. In particular, in the past year, the average fifth grade class has increased from 27 to 34 students. Thus, not only has class size been increased, but also the intervention and support services for those very same students have been negatively impacted. It remains to be seen what the long-term consequences of these actions will be.

The Elements of Success

P.S. 150 Elementary School provides a wide spectrum of support services – academic, enrichment, social, and recreational - for their students. By blending together available resources and support, the administration and staff have implemented an extended day program that reaches a large number of students and supports the school's overall educational goals and objectives.

Student progress is closely monitored through standards-based instruction. Early intervention services are provided for early childhood students who are most at risk of not meeting the state standards by extending their school day in Project Read three days a week. Students in grades 3 through 6 who fail to meet the promotional criteria are offered academic intervention in reading and math with day as well as extended day programs. English Language Learners most at risk for not meeting the promotional standards are provided additional intensive extended day services in reading development, test sophistication strategies, and in writing. The extended day program targets these students also with an emphasis on recent arrivals through an intensive language acquisition program. A focus has been placed on emphasizing reading and writing skills and making those strong connections between reading and writing. There are strong links between the practices occurring in the extended day

programs and classroom academic course work and standards-based reform. Staff work with ESL students with an emphasis on building math skills, language content skills, and conversational skills. The extended day program also provides homework assistance.

The principal has a clear vision of the important role that the extended learning initiative plays in the overall academic and social growth of her students. Ms. Guzman has established strong partnerships with many organizations in the Sunnyside community with a focus on building an integrated, supportive network that meets the needs of her students. The teaching staff are also committed to this effort and contribute significantly to the staffing of the extended day program and collaborate closely with the other afterschool staff to provide a continuum of support. Many of the staff remarked that the Sunnyside and Virtual Y programs provided a good blend of academics, recreation, social skill development, and help and support with homework. The academic support programs build on what takes place during the school day and are critical to the overall success of the students.

When asked to comment about the quality of the afterschool initiative and its impact on student academic growth and well-being, both the classroom teachers and the afterschool staff gave the program high marks. The classroom teachers remarked about the quality and dedication of the afterschool staff, the strength of the instructional program, the overall quality of the afterschool program which provided strong academic support without being "more of the same", the rich diversity of opportunities that were available in the extended day, and the constant reviewing and modifying of the afterschool program to ensure quality.

The majority of parents want and support the afterschool initiative; although some concern was expressed that it can be a challenge convincing some parents as to the advantage of afterschool for their children. Many parents are working two or more jobs and may need their older elementary children to help in the home or they may find it difficult to pick up their child at the school late in the day. Transportation home is not provided to those students who attend the afterschool program and parents must arrange for transportation for their child in order to participate in the extended day initiative. The fact that late bus transportation is not provided also limits participation of some special education children who may need specialized transportation services.

The strong partnerships formed with community-based organizations have led to a renewed vitality and commitment to the school. All staff remarked about the ability to work together to strategize on developing approaches to meet students' needs and the strong communication and coordination between in-school and afterschool staff. Several teachers expressed the desire to establish a set collaboration time to meet with the afterschool staff as opposed to the somewhat ad hoc approach that occurs presently. The challenge appears to be one of time. There is a substantial amount of in-house staff development available to the classroom teacher. In addition, teachers meet and confer in small groups on a regular basis – especially on grade level – as part of their overall planning process. With the classroom teachers providing afterschool instruction through Project Read and other efforts, there is limited time to carve out additional planning and meeting time with the Virtual Y and Sunnyside afterschool staff to establish stronger continuity between the in-school and afterschool programs.

The overwhelming number of classroom teachers and afterschool staff expressed strong support for the afterschool programs in place at P.S. 150. Some teachers felt the Virtual Y and Sunnyside programs should have more of an academic structure to them; others felt that Project Read had too strong of an academic focus.

Overall, the principal and staff have designed and implemented an extended day initiative that, with all its parts, appears to have struck a good balance among academics, enrichment, youth development, and recreation. With a host of community partners, they have been able to interweave multiple layers of support for their students. The children appear to be happy and comfortable in both the classroom and afterschool environments. Certainly the majority of students at Sunnyside School are doing well academically and there is continued strong academic improvement.

The various options available in the afterschool programs are meeting the needs of the school and the community, although additional resources would allow more students to participate in the afterschool program. The recent reduction in city financial support has had an immediate and substantial impact on the program. With a strong standards-based curriculum coming from both the city and state, the administration and staff have responded effectively and expeditiously to meet the growing challenges they are facing. P.S. 150 has put into place the tools and programs to support their general education students and their English Language Learners and to help them and their families become an integral part of the school community.