



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Mark Twain Intermediate School for the Gifted and  
Talented**

**Intermediate School 239**

**2401 Neptune Avenue  
New York  
N Y 11224**

**Principal: Carol Moore**

**Dates of review: January 9 — 11, 2007**

**Reviewer: Jill Berman**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Mark Twain Intermediate School 239 for the Gifted and Talented is located in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn. This grade 6 through 8 magnet school serves a culturally diverse population that comes from District 21 as well as other districts in Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island. Students gain admission into this school through competitive examinations. It has 1246 students of whom 97% are in general education. The school has 5 English language learners and 34 special education students. White students comprise 55% of the population. Twenty-eight percent are Asian, 10% are Black and 6% are Hispanic. Thirty-four percent of the students are Title 1 eligible which is comparable to similar schools but far below the city average. The school's annual attendance rates of over 95% are above those of both similar and citywide schools.

Mark Twain has been designated as an exemplary site for the arts. Unique to the school is the cluster organization. It is organized into nine clusters or mini schools, three on each grade level. The cluster team of four core teachers is scheduled for conference periods that emphasize interdisciplinary planning. Students are required to study the four interdisciplinary core subjects plus a second language while pursuing a sixth major in a talent area. Consequently, in grades 7 and 8 an individualized program is created to best suit the needs and interests of each child.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school sets high expectations for all students and constantly raises the bar.
- Student progress is exceptionally well monitored.
- There is a strong sense of teamwork and the principal, administrators, teachers and other staff, students and parents see themselves as vital members of the team.
- Hard and soft data are well analyzed in order to monitor student progress.
- The school provides good enrichment opportunities and support services for students.
- There are annual increases in student performance as measured by State and City tests.
- The school promotes interdisciplinary collaboration as well as the infusion of the arts and technology into all subject areas.
- Students are motivated by being able to focus on one talent area during their time in the school.
- Students' interests and abilities are expanded by rotating them through additional talent areas.
- Staff are invited to contribute innovative ideas and whenever possible these suggestions are transformed into realities.

### What the school needs to improve

- Provide continued support for teachers who need assistance with differentiated instruction.
- Continue to match teachers' abilities to the most appropriate grades and classes.
- Enable teachers to be more confident using technology to access and use data.
- Continue to find ways to integrate special education students into mainstream classes and activities.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a well developed school.**

The school draws students from several boroughs because of its reputation as a school of excellence. In May 2006 it was recognized as one of 137 middle schools in New York State that had achieved the dual goals of increasing student achievement while closing the gap in student performance. Academic rigor is stressed and the school is organized for effort. There is a palpable sense of teamwork among all constituents. Hard and soft data are utilized in decision-making. The cluster structure ensures that all students are known by their teachers who meet regularly to review student progress as well as to plan interdisciplinary projects. All students learn information technology. The Project ARTS and technology coordinators work with teachers to find ways to integrate these areas into course work. Student work reflects both initiatives. Students are involved in activity-based learning in their academic and talent classes. The school provides a plethora of opportunities for students to shine in their talent areas. Accomplishments are celebrated. Community service, which is seen by the school as an important aspect of students' development, is mandatory. The school is recognized as the city's premier middle school and all constituents strive to maintain this honor.

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

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.**

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

The school uses a wide range of data to frequently assess the performance and progress of each student. In addition to data gathered from standardized sources the school analyzes data from student performance in classroom assessments. Every student has a folder that includes his/her work, tests and evaluations. The school also monitors data from Regents, foreign language Proficiency examinations as well as the number of students accepted into specialized high schools to assess student progress.

At the heart of the school's ability to monitor student progress is the cluster structure. Each grade is broken into groups of approximately 150 students and the group's four academic leaders meet together three periods per week in order to review the progress of the students in their charge.. This structure allows teachers to compare notes on how each student is doing. When problems are identified, the teachers and the student develop well established strategies that can help the youngster move ahead. The cluster can also summons parents to jointly review the situation and develop methods to foster better student performance. Each cluster does a quarterly failure analysis and deficiency letters are sent home if a student is not making the expected progress. The principal, assistant principals and teachers pride themselves on being pro-active and the cluster structure enables the school to closely monitor student effort and results in higher student achievement.

The principal and staff also examine the data in terms of ethnicity and gender. The number of students achieving levels 3 and 4 in lower performing subgroups has increased year on

year as reported by the 2004-2005 Annual School Report. Since the school far outstrips similar schools in terms of student achievement measures, the focus of data analysis is often on how to improve upon the school's own past performance in enhancing student achievement.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.**

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

The school prides itself as a center of excellence and all students are expected to achieve at the highest level. The principal, administrators and staff use a data-driven approach based on very detailed item skills analyses, portfolio assessments and other indicators to track student performance and target areas for future growth. When the principal and teachers wanted to move students from Level 2 to 3 and from Level 3 to 4, for example, the principal and English teachers created strategies to improve reading across the curriculum. The principal also created reading logs and students now do sustained silent reading during homeroom periods and have summer reading assignments.

The leadership has a collegiate style and suggestions made by teachers about ways of enhancing student performance are regularly incorporated into the Comprehensive Education Plan. Goals and plans are developed to enhance the achievement of all students in each grade and subject. Specially targeted services are identified for students scoring on Levels 1 and 2. When students are identified as being in need of additional support they are mandated to go for peer or teacher-directed tutoring. Although there is some mainstreaming of special education students, the school needs to find additional ways to mainstream these students in order to help them to clarify their learning goals and enhance their performance.

The principal communicates regularly with parents in addition to the parental outreach done through the clusters. One aspect of this communication involves getting parents to push their children to take on more challenging work thus conveying the school's high expectations for its students. This is critical in a school where most of the students can do well without having to work very hard.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.**

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

The school provides a balanced curriculum that is aligned with all relevant standards. General education students are required to take a second language. As an arts-centered middle school, the arts are a jump-off point from which students study the core curriculum subjects. The Project ARTS and technology coordinators meet with clusters to infuse these areas. Students also pursue one "talent" area (e.g., visual arts, dance, music or media) and programs are individualized in grades 7 and 8.

The cluster structure allows teachers to plan interdisciplinary units that enhance student learning. The principal works closely with the program/budget coordinator to find ways to

support this key and expensive aspect of the school's organizational structure. The principal also puts money into the school day since so many students have to be bussed. Thus, cluster teachers have one mandated tutoring period per week although many voluntarily meet with students during their lunch.

The principal plans ahead very effectively and prepares teachers for upcoming openings. Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and differentiating instruction. Although many teachers can effectively differentiate instruction the challenge for this school is to make sure all teachers can do so. The adjustment of teachers' programs to improve student outcomes is an area that requires continued development.

Student attendance is a high priority and is pro-actively monitored. The instructional program provides a rich array of classes featuring student-centered learning and students are actively engaged in the learning process. The principal and staff know and respect students, and are quick to respond to their academic or personal needs. Parents are contacted immediately and necessary interventions are jointly determined.

**Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

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

The principal, as the school's highly regarded instructional leader, sets high expectations for student achievement and hires teachers, according to needs identified by data analysis, who share this concern and are willing to commit extra time and energy to the school's many special programs. Her frequent classroom visits provide detailed knowledge of her staff's strengths and areas for development. Teachers feel supported by her and eagerly share suggestions for improvement as well as their concerns.

Professional development decisions are based upon needs identified through analysis of the data, classroom observations, school initiatives and needs identified by teachers. Given the school's reliance on data all teachers need to be fully trained in this area. The cluster structure provides numerous rich opportunities for professional growth that promote student performance. The school runs as a well oiled machine with well-established and known routines that are followed consistently by all staff and students. Everyone is proud to be a member of this school community.

Most of the school's partnerships with organizations such as the Council for Unity and Rachel's Challenge that promote tolerance and respect for diversity are aligned around adolescent development needs. A more academically focused partnership with the New York City Aquarium is being developed which will integrate science, art and other media.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.**

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

Although the school is highly successful, the principal and staff keep looking for ways to raise the bar of student achievement. Decision-making is shared, and school planning is determined by the results of data analysis as well as the staff's keen awareness of students' progress. Progress made by student subgroups is carefully noted. New initiatives are introduced in response to the data and are regularly reviewed. The Comprehensive Education Plan is collaboratively developed and long-term and interim measurable objectives are established. At mid-year a full analysis of student progress is conducted and necessary adjustments are made. Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive the next phases of goal setting and improvement planning.

Cluster meetings are seen as a key element in the ongoing monitoring of student achievement. Teachers are able to quickly revise plans and strategies. There is a feeling that "kids don't get lost" in this school but instead are engaged and challenged. There is a sense that the school knows where it is and wants to go. It uses its capacity to flexibly realign its practices and resources in order to further improve academic outcomes.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Mark Twain Intermediate School (I. S. 239)	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>			<b>X</b>
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.</b>	<b>∅</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>			<b>X</b>
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>

\* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	<b>∅</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.			<b>X</b>
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.			<b>X</b>
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		<b>X</b>	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			<b>X</b>
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.			<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.			X
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.			X
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.			X
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.			X
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.			X
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.			X
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.			X
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.			X
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.			X
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.			X
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X