



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

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

**Middle School 239
2401 Neptune Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11224**

Principal: Carol Moore

Dates of review: February 4 - 6, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Andy McClean

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Mark Twain School for the Gifted and Talented is an intermediate school with 1252 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 8% Black, 6% Hispanic, 58% White, and 28% Asian students. The student body has no English language learners and 3% special education students. Boys account for 52% and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 96%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Mark Twain School is a designated exemplary site for the arts. Unique to the school is its cluster organisation, with nine clusters or mini-schools, three at each grade level. Students study four core subjects plus a second language. They also pursue a major talent area such as dance, strings, or voice.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal, through direct and visible leadership, communicates a clear vision for success to the whole school community.
- Students and staff ensure substantial progress of all students through their determined pursuit of shared goals.
- Well-embedded data systems produce the information necessary to enable the school to adjust instruction according to need.
- The school's supportive and challenging structure ensures that students' academic and artistic talents develop in depth.
- The school is a mutually supportive community, which takes account of the opinions of students and parents to reach decisions.
- The staff are deeply reflective and highly evaluative of their own performance and adapt readily to new challenges.
- All students show excellent motivation and behavior as a direct consequence of their teachers' belief in their abilities and talents.
- Detailed and focused professional development meets the school's identified goals.
- Teachers work very effectively to ensure the inclusion of all students, particularly special education students.
- The school provides students with skills to become lifelong learners through a wide and exciting curriculum, which successfully balances mandated learning with expressive arts.

What the school needs to improve

- Disseminate the best instructional practices already present in the school to all staff.
- Use data to differentiate instruction further so that all students fulfill their potential.
- Continue to support teachers in their understanding and use of data to improve planning and instruction.

Part 3: Main findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

The principal, ably supported by her administration and a highly reflective faculty, creates a vibrant learning community. In this stimulating environment, teachers support and challenge all students to aim for their best. Good progress to address aspects for improvement in the last Quality Review is evident. Teachers show greater differentiation in their instruction. Special education students receive equality of instruction in an inclusive curriculum. The school employs an experienced consultant specifically to address areas for improvement in English language arts. This results in a highly collaborative process through which the faculty is outstanding in its planning for improvement. Students have opportunities to take part in a wide variety of classes, which stimulate and engage them. Particularly effective is the cluster system in its focused use of data to identify student need. This is a significant improvement in the use of data since the last Quality Review.

Regular tutorials, at which students receive direct feedback and assistance to address difficulties, engender a spirit of cooperation. Students show great respect and appreciation for their principal and teachers. This occurs because students understand that their teachers will go the extra mile to help them. This is evident not only in their academic instruction, but also in instruction and coaching of the myriad of talents found among students. The manner in which teachers, particularly the principal, make themselves available enhances the whole school culture of teamwork. Parents appreciate the many well-established lines of communication, such as the school's flourishing website, which keep them fully informed of their children's progress. The website, created by staff and students, keeps the whole school community fully informed on academic and social matters.

Teachers form a mutually supportive and professionally reflective body. A major facet of this collegiality is the acceptance of the constant need to improve instruction. The school has already recognized the need to understand how to interpret data further and use it to differentiate instruction. Due to the principal's daily concentration on the improvement of instruction, teachers recognize the dissemination of best practice as a whole school target. Professional development is of a high standard. The curriculum is wide, with a very good balance between core subjects, foreign languages and talent areas. Students show great maturity in their attitude toward their education. Dedicated and well-motivated teachers inspire many students, particularly special education students, to reach for the heights. The school displays student work that merits great praise for its depth, color and variety. Parents acknowledge the partnership with teachers to achieve the best for their children. A very clear mission statement seeks to empower students as lifelong learners. The school achieves this aim through the dedication of all teachers coupled with the guiding force and perception of the principal and assistant principals. A well-established inquiry team works to address the needs of students identified by teachers as "challenging."

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

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

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

The school gathers a wealth of data to support its understanding of specific areas of need. This enables all teachers to have a detailed knowledge of students' progress or lack of it. When progress is limited, or attendance lapses, focused tutorials address ways to improve student engagement. The school has used data very effectively to identify the need to address student performance and progress in English language arts.

The school has no English language learners. Special education students receive very good support from teachers and all support staff. On entry to school, staff identify their needs and challenges. Teachers use data from previous schools to determine next steps and the best use of the school's resources. Regular tests and quizzes provide "live" data to measure students' progress. Teachers align such results to summative data to provide an effective picture of student progress.

The principal makes astute strategic decisions in employing specific staff to analyze data. Lessons learned from this analysis have begun to provide greater challenge to students. Teachers and administration realize the need to develop their understanding of data to address specific aspects of instruction. A very good example of this is the employment of a consultant to structure the planning of opportunities to improve comprehension of the written word in all subjects. All teachers understand a need to approach this curriculum challenge identified through data analysis. Backed enthusiastically by the principal, all teachers use this focused support to upgrade their knowledge of individual student and group progress.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

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

Teachers demonstrate very effective collaboration in their drive to use data to understand the best instruction necessary to raise achievement. Regular cluster and grade meetings, both in mandated time and outside the school day, result in an outstanding whole school approach to improve its use. An outstanding example of very innovative practice is allocation of a teacher new to the profession to a group researching better methods of data use in English language arts. The cabinet uses opinions obtained from such collaboration to produce detailed plans for improvement. Administration uses very well established communications with the cabinet, parents and the student organization to determine very challenging strategic goals for learning. The well-defined process begins prior to the start of the academic year to obtain teachers' own goals with new classes. The cabinet then sets challenging whole school goals. This results in a series of meetings to measure progress against such goals. The principal uses well established systems of communication to inform the whole school of its goals. The school uses "the bottom lines" such as "accountable" talk and organization for effort, to ensure all students and staff have no doubt about the demands. With this clarity of purpose and direct leadership, all teachers and students work in a mature and trustworthy fashion.

Teachers consult regularly with parents. An open door policy results in many parents feeling confident in approaching the school when test results show poor progress. The school informs parents of their children's academic progress in detail and on a very regular basis. Meetings held at the start of the year and then at regular intervals, result in parents' clear understanding of their children's progress. Discussions with teachers, students and parents also lead to a common understanding of targets for individual students. Excellent support staff and systems also inform parents and students of any issues relating to behavior and attendance. Parents understand their role in meeting the school's very high expectations. Teachers work many extra hours to assist students who struggle. Students show great motivation to attend Mark Twain and show a mature attitude towards their work. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their student due to the very well established use of information to guide instruction and personal support. Parents make regular use of teachers' availability to question their children's progress or lack of it. Students understand tutorials assist them in helping to focus on areas that need improvement. They respond in a very mature manner to these suggestions.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating learning for student learning.

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

The school provides outstanding opportunities for all students to demonstrate their gifts and talents. Students study a foreign language as well as the core curriculum and choose a talent to develop, for example dance, drama, music, media, or creative writing. The school ensures that it makes good links between the academic and creative arts aspects of the curriculum. Students produce an award winning yearbook linking media, creative writing and computing. All students participated enthusiastically in an African-American poetry event, attended by many parents. Classes outside the school day support athletes and there are extra classes to encourage all other talent areas. Staff record and measure student progress in all areas to inform their planning and instruction. They recognize from the results that they need to extend differentiation in all classes. Teachers understand the demand to avoid students repeating work they already can do. The school's self-evaluation has also identified the need to provide better-differentiated tasks, particularly for high achieving students.

In tutorials, students listen actively to suggestions for improvement and obtain their teachers' extra assistance. When students' personal problems interfere with their academic progress, the school provides supportive intervention programs. This results in students who live in an engaging and nurturing learning climate. Students trust their teachers implicitly and apply their energies to enjoying a very demanding and challenging school life. Support staff address poor attendance with rigor. Parents appreciate such measures and try to support the school in encouraging better attendance and time keeping.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to 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 has established effective systems of observation to monitor and improve teachers' instruction. Administration regularly carries out observations and provides individuals with feedback to celebrate strengths. Some intervisitation between teachers takes place. However, the school has not yet put in place structures to disseminate best practice consistently across the school. Professional development is regular and well planned to focus on English language arts. The school recognizes this as the area for curriculum development. Teachers use data to identify the needs of underperforming students. Technology assists staff to plan and place emphasis on specific areas for improvement. All teachers accept the need to improve their skills in the interpretation of data and use the information to extend the challenge all students. The faculty reflects upon instruction and shares their findings very effectively through cluster, grade and whole school discussions. Teachers welcome support and objective criticism from administration, coaches and colleagues. This attitude is instrumental in a culture of constant instructional improvement. Teachers new to the school and the profession appreciate the support and guidance they receive from mentors and colleagues. They use regular intervisitation to reflect on their own practice and plan for improvement. The school demonstrates respect for their opinions, for example, with the selection of a new teacher on a team to review writing comprehension. Clear demands on behavior, very good links with parents and the use of support services ensure the cooperation of students.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

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

The principal is very effective in communicating her clear vision for the future success of all students and has an open style of leadership. Consequently, all teachers understand the school's goals and make a good contribution to their implementation. The school's aim is to produce a community of life-long learners. The curriculum, with its successful balance of academic and talent-based activities, provides students with the skills to tackle new challenges. The school has good procedures in place to ensure regular and objective reviews of whole school goals. The principal and teachers respond promptly to address inadequate or slow progress and revise their plans accordingly. The evaluation of instruction, linked to a detailed scrutiny of test data, informs regular dialogue within the faculty. Teachers discuss work samples within grades and clusters to diagnose the need for instructional change. Students use technology to measure their own individual performance. The outcomes of these processes make a significant contribution to improvement in specific areas of need.

The school is rigorous in its scrutiny of progress towards achieving the strategic goals. A process, which begins in May, identifies the areas for improvement. Regular measures of the progress toward these goals typify the outstanding procedures in place to implement change. Teachers identify students at risk or those whose progress stagnates. Following conferences with colleagues in other subjects, parents and the students themselves, they institute a remedial program. Students then meet with tutors at planned intervals to measure improvement. The principal and teachers insist that students cooperate. Students respond with maturity to a culture that rewards and praises their successes both academic and in the field of their particular talents. The whole school evaluates its performance thoroughly and has a clear focus on student achievement resulting in the realization of student talent and potential. The school is also honest in its self-evaluation and its appreciation of aspects in need of improvement.

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?					X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X	

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped

* 1.3 was not scored due to no English language learners in school.