



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



# **Quality Review Report**

**Marathon School**

**Elementary - Middle - High School 811**

**61-25 Marathon Parkway  
Queens  
NY 11362**

**Principal: Joan Washington**

**Dates of review: March 28 - 29, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Jo Cheadle**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Marathon School is an elementary, middle and high school with 356 students from kindergarten through grade 12. The school population comprises 37.8% Black, 24.2% Hispanic, 20% White, and 18.1% Asian students. The student body includes 17.4% English language learners. Boys account for 63% of the students enrolled and girls account for 37%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 - 2007 was 86.4%. The school is not in receipt of Title 1 funding.

Marathon School is a District 75 school, serving students with a wide range of complex learning needs. The main site is housed in a specially resourced building, where mainly high school aged students study. Students also study in inclusive settings at nine other elementary, middle and high schools within the Queens Borough.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal leads the school with an impeccably clear vision for its future, and planning and decision-making ensure the full realization of this vision.
- The leadership team comprises extremely capable and complementary leaders who ensure the school runs in a highly efficient and effective way.
- There are high levels of collaboration between all staff with a total focus on doing what is right for the students.
- All members of staff are committed to continually learning and adapting in order to meet student needs in the most effective way.
- While success is highly celebrated, there is not a trace of complacency and there are incredibly high expectations in all aspects of the school's work.
- The core curriculum is extremely well organized and excellent use of technology supports both learning and teaching.
- Leaders make superb use of an extensive range of data to reflect on outcomes, evaluate their success and drive the direction of future work.
- There are excellent opportunities for professional development to meet individual and whole school needs.
- The school shows great respect for the power of parental contribution and makes every effort to ensure full participation.
- Leaders and faculty share an intrinsic awareness of their accountability to provide the best experiences for all students.

### What the school needs to improve

- Carry out further detailed analysis of outcomes for disaggregated student sub-groups.
- Further extend use of data analysis to make comparisons with other schools in order to celebrate success and perfect existing programs.
- Enhance student integration opportunities by supporting their greater involvement in extra curricular clubs and activities.
- Explore ways to facilitate shared planning opportunities, particularly with the involvement of paraprofessionals.

## 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 outstanding.**

The extraordinary success of this school lies primarily in the strength of the vision for its future. The principal articulates this vision with extreme clarity and unequivocal commitment to its realization. In her eyes, the vision will be realized when the main site at Marathon School serves only the oldest students who need specialized care as they transition towards their adult lives. All other students will be educated with their age appropriate peers in inclusive general education settings. The whole school community shares the vision unanimously. They show enormous respect for the intelligence and dedication of their inspirational principal. Her leadership of the administrative and teaching teams has empowered each of them to recognize how truly accountable they are to providing the best possible opportunities for each of their students. To this end, they are ready to learn continually, adapt their practice and consistently rise to the challenges that face them. The teams work with high levels of mutual trust and professional respect. Staff members openly appreciate the value that each member brings. To improve further, leaders recognize that they must facilitate more opportunities for teachers to plan alongside the paraprofessionals who work so closely with each student.

The school makes excellent use of data at all levels of its work. Through rigorous and ongoing data review, the school knows exactly at which point of its journey it now sits. Although there have already been many successful outcomes, leaders and faculty set themselves incredibly high expectations. At this school, there is a total absence of complacency. Because the extent of the school's inclusion work is ground breaking and unique, comparing themselves to other schools is difficult. However, leaders understand that data analysis must relate more specifically to the progress of all student sub-groups to facilitate meaningful comparisons when they are able to take place. They also readily accept the need to make ongoing improvements to students' integration opportunities. One area yet to be given full attention is facilitating students' participation in extra-curricular and after school clubs.

The work of the school's inquiry team is an excellent example of the school's use of data to facilitate continual development. The team's focus is on the extended use of augmentative communication devices for non-verbal students. Members have carefully collected and analyzed data to establish where and how students currently use these devices most successfully. Planning to extend usage includes excellent opportunities for professional development for all staff. The school has also paid close attention to the areas cited for improvement in the last Quality Review. "At a glance" student overview sheets and end of year checklists are now fully in place to ensure that data is easily accessible and useable. Student portfolios also contain up-to-date and relevant data.

## **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 the student's progress over time.**

**This area of the school's work is outstanding.**

An excellent data set supports the school in every aspect of its work. Leaders fully embrace the purpose of data analysis that enables them to “get through the layers” of understanding about each student. The school's knowledge of individual students is flawless. Leaders and faculty talk about each student with an intrinsic awareness of their home contexts, social and personal needs, medical history, performance over time and academic potential. The school's monitoring of the progress made by English language learners is particularly strong. This data provides very important research information about the success of special education students learning in bilingual settings. There is also extensive information pertaining to students with autistic spectrum disorders, comparisons of boys' and girls' and data that support an acute awareness of cultural influence on student progress. Leaders are aware of the uniqueness of their school in its approach to, and belief in, inclusive education. They understand that comparisons with other schools are a vital way of measuring success and driving further improvement. They recognize that it may be necessary to locate schools further afield to ensure that comparisons are truly meaningful. In addition, not all data analysis regarding the progress made by pertinent sub-groups is currently at the same high level of sophistication to aid such comparisons. For instance, data is not yet disaggregated and compared using the dual criteria of ethnicity and gender.

Data drives decision-making processes at all levels of the school's work. Leaders ensure that excellent training for staff supports the extensive and continually more sophisticated use of data. The current work of the inquiry team exemplifies this. The team has collected and analyzed baseline information to identify student needs. This information influences decisions for whole school professional development. Teachers easily demonstrate the purpose of their daily use of data to drive instruction. They give examples of check lists for small progress steps in learning to play the guitar that support the teacher in modifying tuition for individuals. They talk about agreeing success criteria for students in social studies that enables the teacher and the student to measure progress towards an overall goal. Data is second nature to the staff. It empowers them to serve the students exactly as their needs dictate.

**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 outstanding.**

There are high levels of collaboration in setting goals for student outcomes. Teachers are acutely aware of the school's priority developments and fully understand that their classroom work must influence overall school improvement. Leaders and faculty carefully analyze data to identify those students for whom improvements are most necessary. Detailed analysis enables them to indicate precise aspects of student performance that need attention. Furthermore, teachers make very regular interim checks to measure progress towards the goals they set. One example of a current school focus for a specific student group is the enhancement of communication for non-verbal students. Another is

the encouragement of a heightened awareness of time linked to emotional response for students with autism. This work involves the development of students' use of the past tense in oral and written contexts. Teachers and support staff collect ongoing data relating to each specific goal and the level of prompt required for each student to move towards overall achievement. Examination of the collected data drives teachers to rethink their strategies and resources to ensure that students are successful.

Parents are very aware of the challenging goals set for their children. They talk knowledgeably about short and long-term targets and fully understand that time scales for achieving these targets are very individual to each student. Excellent communication between the school and parents ensures that there is consistency in understanding and uniformity in ways to promote good levels of progress in school and at home. Parents are highly appreciative of how the school values and encourages their involvement. The school supports parents "through their fears" and helps them to see their child's full potential. Parents recognize that the school has extremely high expectations for their children and supports them in every way to "surpass these expectations". Evidence of this also comes from the students themselves. They give examples of the goals that are set for them. They talk about the way that teachers challenge them to reach these goals and tell them "don't give up". They share the same high expectations for themselves in their aspirations to go to college and find meaningful employment. Students recognize the challenges they face in learning, but "are not gonna be cheated out of college". This level of confidence and belief is a true testament to the school's success.

**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 student learning.**

**This area of the school's work is outstanding.**

The school has an excellent core curriculum that fully meets students' needs and facilitates excellent assessment of their progress. Teachers regularly measure outcomes to ensure that progress is steady and continuous. They adapt their instruction and teaching strategies on an ongoing basis to ensure that students learn effectively. Teachers are skillful in using a range of instructional programs to enhance students' skills and knowledge. They measure the ultimate success of their work by the ease with which students are eventually able to learn alongside their peers in an inclusive general education setting. The enablement of integration is the driving philosophy behind each instructional decision. Teachers know that outcomes are successful when students perform with increased independence and accuracy. For example, when a student is able to read aloud in an inclusive "drop everything and read session" as a result of effective tuition through the Wilson program. Computer technology enhances both learning and teaching extremely well. The school makes expert use of a range of communication devices, computer programs and technical hardware to aid learning and promote integration. Additionally, a range of meaningful, enjoyable and motivating activities ensure that students are thoroughly engaged in learning. These include work site placements, lessons with a "therapy dog" and a wealth of inclusive opportunities in general education settings. Such opportunities lead students to state, "School is perfect the way it is". However, because leaders and faculty hold themselves highly accountable to students, they acknowledge that they could do even more to achieve full integration for all students. While students participate in superb extra activities at the main school site, such as swimming and fencing, there are fewer opportunities for them to attend after school clubs and participate in extra curricular activities alongside their general education peers. The

desire to help every student to do his or her best is remarkably clear. One teacher explained this by saying that “these kids can’t do that” would never be heard at this school.

**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 outstanding.**

Through very regular observation and analysis of outcomes, the principal and her assistants have extremely good knowledge of staff strengths. They are also acutely aware when teaching requires further improvement. Excellent professional development opportunities ensure that the teams’ skills and knowledge grow continually. There is also a strong focus on learning from each other and many chances to watch colleagues teach and observe model lessons. The positive influence of shared practice is magnified by opportunities for special education teachers to work alongside their general education colleagues. The benefits reaped for both parties are excellent. Teachers new to the school are also very well supported in this way. In addition, there are excellent links with a range of dedicated partners, who share the school’s educational philosophy. These include like-minded principals at inclusion schools, work placement partners and a range of training facilitators. Moreover, the strategic decision to appoint new staff with dual certification in special and general education aids the school’s overall goal to effectively support students in fully inclusive settings. While paraprofessionals at the school are involved in many training opportunities, limited time is available for them to plan alongside teachers. Both teachers and support staff recognize that involvement in the planning stages of instruction would positively influence the effectiveness of instruction.

**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 outstanding.**

Every endeavor undertaken, every development and improvement, every professional dialogue and adaptation of program or instructional strategy is methodically aligned to move the school, its staff and its students towards the achievement of its vision. Excellent strategic long-term planning is the foundation and driving force behind the school’s outstanding success. Leaders use their analysis of data to present an extremely clear picture of where the school has come from. They make maximum use of rigorous teacher assessment to measure progress and pinpoint where outcomes are in need of improvement. They set extremely relevant yet challenging goals, and establish relevant measures for success within appropriate timeframes. The process of review and evaluation involves ongoing adaptation of action plans and realignment of goals to ensure positive results. The school works to realize its vision with a dogged determination and ultimate commitment to do what is right for its students.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Marathon School</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>					X

**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 students progress over time.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?					X
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?					X
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?					X
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?					X
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>					X

**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 students learning.**

<b>To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?					X
2.2 focus 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?					X
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?					X
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?					X
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?					X
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?					X
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?					X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>					X

**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 student learning.**

<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?					X
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?				X	
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?					X
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?					X
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?					X
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?					X
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>					X

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent does the school . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?					<b>X</b>
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?				<b>X</b>	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?					<b>X</b>
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?					<b>X</b>
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?					<b>X</b>
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?					<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					<b>X</b>

<b>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.</b>					
<b>To what extent do . . .</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>➤</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>◇</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
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?					<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					<b>X</b>

<b>◇</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>+</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>✓</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
<b>➤</b>	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
<b>Δ</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>