

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Marathon School

Elementary-High School 811

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

Principal: Penny Ryan

Dates of review: February 23 - 25, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Louise Kapner

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Marathon is an elementary-high school with 368 students from kindergarten through grade 12. The school population comprises 39% Black, 25% Hispanic, 18% White, and 18% Asian students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 60% of the students enrolled and girls account for 40%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 88%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

Marathon is a unique school that provides a very inclusive education for very fragile students. Although the school is located across many sites, administrators and teachers are extremely cognizant of their students' needs and work collaboratively and diligently to ensure that all students are involved in well-matched and relevant activities. The energy and vision of the principal, appointed at the beginning of this school year, has enabled the school to continue on its successful journey to support the academic and social needs of its students in a highly nurturing environment. Goals, based on very effective review of data are clear, measurable and continually revisited to ensure progress. The school collects, reviews, analyzes and comprehensively organizes a wide range of relevant summative and formative student data specific to the needs of their students. The school's choice of highly comprehensive and well-matched assessments gives them a granular view of each student's functional, academic, therapeutic and social needs. Highly experienced staff use this information successfully to plan suitable and specific activities for each student that leads to improved achievement and social growth. However, a comparison of overlapping elements from the assessments, such as students' prompting needs and cognitive skills to further support the school's good work is not yet evident.

There is a very successful focus on teaching and learning. The use of standard-based well-paced curriculum maps for all content areas include essential elements to enable a high level of differentiated instruction that meets the diverse needs of the student population. Coursework is focusing on academics as well as providing context-appropriate learning activities that promote independence. Administrators effectively use their school-designed formal and informal observation protocols to monitor the implementation of the curriculum that ensure inclusion of suitable and relevant tasks to engage all students in learning and to identify staff's needs to improve instruction.

Through the efforts of all staff, students continue to make excellent academic, social and emotional growth. Widespread use of augmentative alternate communication devices is leading to a higher engagement of students in all school programs. Students are responsive during lessons, lead the school in the daily Pledge of Allegiance, and can operate machinery remotely and safely. Students are developing expertise and skills in building maintenance and culinary programs that prepare them for future employment. Internships and placements after graduation in suitable worksites show a continuing increase. Students are proud of their work and receive on-going praise and high-fives for their effort. Teacher responses are evident on displayed student work. However, an age and programmatic feedback system to help each student see and understand any response to their work is not yet a common practice. Staff are in frequent communication with families and often visit homes, using their considerable expertise, to ensure congruence between the school program and support for students at home. Some staff use a personal planning profile to gain greater insight into students' broader needs and lives. However, this practice is not yet consistent school-wide to further the school's efforts to meet the needs of their fragile population.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The standards-based curriculum is very well supported by school-designed courses and the use of communication devices to engage students in differentiated instruction that meets their diverse needs.
 - The Functional Academic Curriculum for Exceptional Students provides thematic, standards-based, and well-paced curriculum maps across all content areas including arts and technology. Café Marie teaches students culinary skills that they use in their work-site placements and for employment upon graduation. The school is rightly proud of their students employed by local retailers. The apartment living course, taught in a real-life context, helps students develop independent living skills.
 - Teachers make excellent adaptations to the curriculum so that all students are engaged in relevant and suitable activities for each lesson. One student worked on the computer while his classmates used a work sheet to complete a graphing task. For a subsequent activity, students showed mastery to questions by circling an answer or writing a full sentence. A communication device enabled a student to be an active participant in the lesson.
- Administrators, teacher teams and individual teachers effectively collect and analyze a wide range of essential data that supports their understanding of the needs of relevant groups and individual students.
 - Teacher teams continually monitor and adjust practice based on the regular collection of data. Effective monitoring of students' use of augmentative alternate communication devices highlight students in need of additional support for greater engagement in all activities. School-wide and classroom environments reflect attention to device placement, and purpose, so students learn to use and connect the device with its effect. This results in classroom environments that are more engaging and where students are enabled to do things independently such as remotely operating a paper shredder.
 - The school administers Scantron three times yearly to students performing at or above grade 2 in reading. As a result, some students in a 12:1:1 classroom have a departmentalized program for literacy and receive instruction using the Wilson reading program, which has enabled students to make significantly progress.
- Staff collaborate closely creating a respectful, highly supportive and inclusive environment enabling students to reach their potential. (1.4)
 - Classroom staff and related service providers engineer classrooms and individual augmentative devices that provide students with the ability to communicate and participate in activities. During regularly scheduled team meetings, staff carefully review students' use of the communication tools. Students are successfully initiating requests or making comments because of adjustments to the placements of their devices.
 - The student council actively engages students who are proud of their efforts around charitable activities, including 'Toys for Tots' and raising money for Haiti. They are awaiting a meeting with the principal to discuss expanding the after-school center to include musical instruments, drawing and painting. One student said the meetings

provide a place where “we could all talk about different things, issues about the school for the future, like going to college.”

- The principal’s vision includes data-driven, measurable and actionable school-level goals that provide a framework for, and are well supported by, the school community.
 - Well-written, measurable annual goals and interim objectives are broadly based and pertinent to each student’s academic, social and emotional needs well focused on raising all students’ achievement. The school leadership team and the parent-staff association embrace all constituents in decision-making to ensure that the school’s programs suitably prepare its students for their future. To raise awareness of the school’s needs parents are instrumental in initiating and maintaining contacts with key local and State politicians. Parents unanimously praise the high level of commitment of the principal, who is “open to concerns”, and to all staff for their efforts in “giving their children the best program available”.
- A comprehensive protocol enables administrators to focus effectively on teaching and learning and to identify suitable supports that enhance the faculty’s skills.
 - Administrators follow a comprehensive pre- and post-observation protocol that gives teachers a full spectrum of support to improve their practice. A self-designed ‘Collaborative Observation’ format very effectively provides a common lens for administrators to monitor, formally, teaching practices. Meaningful written feedback references the Santa Cruz professional teaching standards. This is used successfully to help staff recognize next steps to improving their practice and for administrators’ support of teachers with additional reinforcement. Hence, teachers engage in relevant professional development, such as establishing student goals, and the coach works with teachers around improving their instruction.
- High levels of services in school and at home, along with excellent external partnerships, provide students with multiple opportunities to support their academic, social and emotional growth.
 - Budgeting is used well to meet students’ needs in and out of school. Teachers receive extensive professional development in the effective use of students’ communication devices to maximize their effectiveness for learning. Individual and hallway devices help students’ communicate and they are responsive in engaging in activities. Staff members visit homes, and because of their training, can help parents use the devices at home. As a result, parents partner in their child’s education. One parent shared that the speech teacher was so helpful in her learning to work with her son.
 - The school has established comprehensive partnerships with well-varied sites that enable students to prepare for the next stage in their education. Students participate in ongoing vocational assessments from age 12, and at 14 they begin to receive excellent transitional services that ensure suitable placement upon graduation. Work-study programs at 22 different sites provide extensive opportunities for students to set personal goals and learn skills that support their attaining employment. Students who attend in the inclusion program have opportunities to graduate with a Regents diploma and attend college.
- Administrators and staff continually evaluate all of its instructional practices to ensure they are suitable and relevant in raising student achievement.
 - Administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals engage continually in relevant collaborative inquiry that supports student learning. Staff of the 6:1:1 program discuss progress of students using the Structured Methods in Language Education. They review students’ work, evaluate outcomes, and revise practices to increase student

learning and are now labeling items around the classroom to help connect students to relevant words. They use a dedicated inquiry space on ARIS to share best practices, common concerns and questions. Teachers proudly stated that their students are now able to connect sounds of letters to puzzle pieces and make connections to their reading.

What the school needs to improve

- Identify and organize common threads of student performance from the multiple assessments to make the information more accessible.
 - The school collects a vast amount of relevant data that is effectively used to understand individual and group performance and needs, and to inform instruction. Teachers use target response sheets and student specific goal sheets to track trends in student performance. Year-to-year results from the Brigance provide key summative information on student performance and progress around key cognitive areas. However, given the vast amount of information, the lack of a tool that aggregates and organizes overlapping data hinders comparing inter-assessment data for easing the identification of needs as the school continues to prioritize their planning.
- Develop appropriate age, grade-level and service category feedback for student work so that students can easily recognize how they are performing and own the clear next steps for improvement.
 - The school very successfully involves parents in their child's education. Administrators, teachers and parents' written and oral communiqués support a high level of reciprocal sharing around students' needs and progress. Parents eagerly await the daily logbook to see how their child performed. Student work is proudly displayed throughout hallways and classrooms. Final products often include visuals and written work to show mastery of skills. Teachers use stickers and check marks to show acceptance of work. However, students do not always have a clear understanding of their performance or next steps as written and visual prompts appropriate to each age and service category are not yet a consistent practice.
- Expand the use of the current person-centered planning protocol so that all families understand and can help their child meet expectations.
 - Parents are regularly involved and communicated with about the school. The parent coordinator ensures that all parents are involved in parent workshops, know about, and participate in legislative meetings so that the school receives suitable outside supports to meet its goals. High expectations are regularly shared, and if a child is out of school, good practice in contacting the home to make sure everything is OK is applied. The principal's introduction of the 'Person Centered Planning Profile' supports staff, parents and students working together to help understand each facet of a child's life to help them achieve. However, as this is a new tool, all families have not yet been involved in using the protocol to further help their children reach his or her potential.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Marathon School	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?				X
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?				X			
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				X			
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X			
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X			
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X			
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?				X			
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				X			
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X			
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed