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School Quality Review Report
School District of Philadelphia

John Marshall Elementary School

October-November 2016

Contents

1 The School Context

1.1   Introduction

In September 2016 Cambridge Education was awarded a contract against RFP-499 to provide School Quality Reviews (SQRs) to eleven School District of Philadelphia (SDP) schools. The scope of these Reviews is greater than a standard SQR, in that each SQR has a "Community Engagement and Feedback Focus", which involves collecting input from as many school community stakeholders as possible. The SQR program includes the following:

- a School Quality Review (SQR) orientation for principals
- a two-day SQR for each school (5 elementary; 1 middle; 5 high)
- The equivalent of a third day, during which an SQR team member collects additional stakeholder feedback via small group meetings, one-on-one interviews; phone calls, etc.
- Three community "town hall style" focus groups
- A Community Stakeholder Survey
- A meta-analysis report of the school findings

The SQR report contained herein was prepared by the Lead Reviewer based on the evidence collected and the assessment made by the full SQR team (Lead Reviewer, Team Member Reviewer; Canvasing Lead). Evidence was collected via classroom observations; interviews with the administration; and focus groups with students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders.

1.2   Background information about the School

John Marshall Elementary School serves approximately 402 students in grades K-5. The school is housed in a building that is 107 years old, and showing its age in terms of wear and tear (e.g., peeling paint and worn surfaces). The student population is slightly more than 50% African-American, and just under 30% Hispanic. Approximately 13% of the students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and a very small percentage (2.7%) are English Language Learners (ELL). The overall achievement level of all students is far below standard and an even wider achievement gap exists for special education students. Class sizes, particularly in the lower grades are large with some classes having more than 35 students. The school is led by a veteran administrator who has served as principal of the school for nearly a decade. The faculty is a mix of early career educators and veteran teachers who have been at the school for over 15 years. In addition to the regular K-5 academic curriculum, the school has purchased the Lexia online reading program to provide tutorials for struggling readers, and provides extracurricular classes in music and physical education. In both of these subjects, the teachers incorporate academic content into lessons, and the music teacher works with small groups of students outside of the regularly scheduled music classes.

1.3 School demographic and performance data

John Marshall ES

	Academic Year (e.g. 2014-15) Previous Year	Academic Year (e.g. 2015-16) Most updated data before QR
Grades:	K-5	K-5
Number of students enrolled:	404	402
Percentage of general education students:	84%	86.3%
Percentage of special education students:	16%	13.7%
Percentage of English language learner students:		2.7
In school suspensions:		
Out of school suspensions:	35	
Percentage of students that are Title 1 eligible:	100%	100%
Latest attendance percentage:	93.8	

Ethnic make- up of the students (percentages):	African American	52.2
	White	5.2
	Asian	0.2
	Latino	27.4
	Pacific Islander	0
	American Indian	0.5
	Other	14.4

State Test Results - Percentage of students at or above proficient (grade 3-8)

Subject Area	School 2012	School 2013	School 2014	School 2015	District 2015	State 2015
English Language Arts	32	24	28	22	32	60
Math	38	27	33	13	17	39.6
Science	40	35	33	42	37	67.7
Social Studies						
Others						

*The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) is an annual assessment administered in commonwealth classrooms in grades 3 through 8, and in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Science scores are usually from grade 4 and 8 for Elementary and Middle school.

Only grade 11 scores are included for High school (school, district, and state)

The Keystone Exams are one component of Pennsylvania's new system of high school graduation requirements. (data available for grade 11 in Algebra I, Literature, and Biology)

2   SQR Main Findings

In this section of the report, the SQR team has identified the factors that are most significantly supporting and limiting effective student learning.

2.1   Factors that support effective student learning:

i.   School leaders have established systems and structures to promote smooth and orderly school operations. Rules are posted in classrooms and hallways throughout the school, specifying expectations for student behavior, and a daily behavior pledge is recited by students during morning announcements.

ii. There is a positive and caring culture throughout the school, with staff members demonstrating a commitment to students' social and emotional well-being. Interactions between and among students and teachers are generally positive and respectful.

iii. Structures have been established for teacher collaboration (e.g., common planning time during the school day) and meetings are well-planned with a written agenda and opportunities for all teachers to contribute. The meeting discussions serve to support new staff members, share plans for lessons, share best practices, and disseminate strategies from professional development (PD) sessions.

iv. The school has a number of highly impactful and strategic partnerships with community agencies that support students and their families, and promote specific interests such as greater involvement of fathers in their children's school life, and expansion of students' academic aspirations through virtual and real-world experiences at local higher education institutions like Penn State.

v.   School leaders have established a focus on developing teacher leaders, which is evident in collaborative meetings and through actions that are spearheaded by these teacher leaders in the principal's absence, throughout the school (e.g., student behavior, organizing schedules, monitoring school routines, etc.)

vi. There is a small core of capable and committed teachers who demonstrate effective teaching practices that both engaged student interests and appropriately challenged their abilities.

2.2   Factors that limit effective student learning:

i.   Lessons reflect a lack of academic rigor that fails to match students' interests and ability levels. Questioning during lessons was commonly at the lowest cognitive level and students were seldom required to do more than sit passively during lessons.

ii. The learning environment in many classes was not stimulating either visually or cognitively. The environment was also hampered by poor management of student behavior, particularly in classes with more than 30 students.

iii. Many lessons showed little evidence of effective planning, with students having to either wait for directions on what they should do next, or for teachers to locate materials. Plans for the effective use of additional personnel were not evident in a number of classes with these persons either seated or moving around the room without either redirecting behavior or providing meaningful support for completing assignments.

iv. Lessons are repeatedly disrupted by non-emergency intercom announcements throughout the day, which disrupts the flow of instruction and contributes to off-task behavior.

3   Individual Domains

In the sections below, each domain received a rating based on the evidence collected during the SQR. The judgments have been broken down into *Factors that Support Effective Student Learning* and *Factors that Limit Effective Student Learning*.

3.1   Domain 1: Quality of Learning & Teaching

The Quality of Learning & Teaching requires intensive school-wide support.

Factors that support effective student learning:

i.   There is a nucleus of strong instructional practices by dedicated teachers who demonstrate highly effective teaching practices that engage students and advance their learning.

ii. Time has been structured to facilitate collaborative planning, and these meetings are well-organized, with written agendas and focused discussions around lesson planning, and dissemination of effective teaching practices.

iii. Teachers asked questions throughout lessons in order to assess student knowledge and understanding, and to adjust the pacing of lessons based on student responses.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

i.   The principal recently went on leave. A guest principal now serves as the school leader. The sudden transition is creating challenges in the way the school functions and has temporarily delayed and distracted the school from its efforts to improve student outcomes.

ii. While structures and procedures help ensure appropriate student behavior in common areas (e.g., hallways), behavior in many classrooms was not well-managed, with some classes having severe student misconduct (e.g., screaming without provocation, crawling into classroom closets and refusing to come out, hitting other students, etc.), that teachers did not demonstrate effective strategies to address.

iii. Many lessons did not show evidence of meaningful and strategic planning. There were extended periods of time where students were waiting to be engaged while teachers either searched for materials or tried to redirect the behavior of students who were off task. The resulting loss of instructional time has the cumulative effect of diminishing learning throughout the school.

iv. Lessons consistently reflected a lack of rigor, and thus were not aligned with the cognitive level of assessments. Questioning during lessons was limited to mainly factual recall, and students were required to do little more than passively receive information.

v.   During lessons, teachers do not routinely identify the learning objective or reference it throughout the lesson. While there were selected classes in which learning objectives were posted, they were not sufficiently emphasized to students during the lesson, nor could students communicate what the learning objective was when asked.

vi. The use of digital technology was limited throughout the school. This lack of technology integration prevents students from building their own technological literacy and diminishes their access to the world of information accessible through the Internet.

vii. Lessons were repeatedly disrupted with non-emergency announcements over the intercom that distracted students' attention and disrupted the flow of instruction.

3.2 Domain 2: Curriculum & Assessment

Curriculum and Assessment requires support in targeted areas.

Factors that support effective student learning:
i. The school provides extended-day and summer activities that enhance student learning through effective partnerships with external agencies that provide meaningful and engaging learning experiences for students. These activities provide students with the opportunity to connect their learning in school with real-world experiences.

Factors that limit effective student learning:
i. The curriculum lacks sufficient rigor to provide the level of academic challenge necessary to ensure students are actively and meaningfully engaged in daily lessons. This limit on curricular rigor was evident in the assignments provided to students and in the questioning conducted during most lessons.
ii. Opportunities are limited for students to engage in projects or in-class activities that stretch their thinking or problem solving skills, and the lack of these opportunities diminishes student readiness for the next grade.

3.3 Domain 3: Leadership, Management and Accountability

Leadership, Management and Accountability requires support in targeted areas.

Factors that support effective student learning:

i. School leaders have created systems and processes for the orderly daily operation of the school. Rules for student behavior are posted prominently in classrooms and corridors throughout the school. During morning announcements, students recite a positive behavior pledge that sets a unifying tone for the morning.

ii. School leaders have built a structure for developing teacher leaders, who are demonstrating their leadership skills through their work with the collaborative teacher meetings, and their effective coverage of many administrative functions throughout the school both during the principal's absence and as a partner with her when she is on campus.

iii. The school leadership has established processes for developing and monitoring plans for school improvement. The team meets regularly to discuss progress towards plan goals and adjust plan strategies as needed to better address the goals.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

i. While teachers have collaborative planning periods during the day, and opportunities to share resources and seek professional support for improving professional practices, several teachers demonstrated they need more intensive support through in-class coaching or some other type of intensive intervention. These teachers were struggling with issues ranging from classroom management to effective delivery of instruction, and learning in these classes was being negatively impacted.

ii. Although teachers are observed and provided feedback on their performance, there is not a robust system of follow-through to ensure that teaching that is below desired performance standards is improved. This results in a lack of accountability that reduces the overall quality of teaching and learning in the school.

iii. There is not a common set of high expectations for teachers and students that is demonstrated through daily lessons. While there are some classes that reflect a culture of high expectations, that is not the case throughout the school.

iv. Measures to ensure regular attendance by teachers and students lack rigor and effectiveness, and absenteeism by both groups negatively impacts learning throughout the building. Absenteeism has an especially negative impact on student learning because both teacher and student absences result in disruption in effective instruction and lost instructional time.

3.4   Domain 4: The Culture of Learning

The Culture of Learning requires support in targeted areas.

Factors that support effective student learning:

i. The school has a positive and caring culture, and staff members visibly demonstrate a commitment to students' physical safety and social-emotional wellbeing.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

i. The learning environment in many classrooms was not cognitively or visually stimulating. In several classes, there were few displays of student work or anchor charts, or other displays that communicated expectations for learning or recognition of student success.

ii. In every class where student behavior was an issue, teachers actively attempted to address the issue; however, there were few instances where this was handled quickly and effectively. In classes where there were large numbers of students (30 or more), much of the focus in the room was on quelling disruptions and trying to maintain order, activities that were not conducive to an effective learning environment.

iii. The physical environment of the school is not conducive to supporting student learning. For example, classrooms have only one outlet, meaning access to technology is very limited. The school does not have sufficient classroom space. First and second grades had over 40 students. In order to decrease the class sizes, the Special Education class was moved to the library. By doing so, the library was closed, resulting in students not having access to library books and other materials they may need to support their learning.

3.5   Domain 5: Family and Community Engagement

Family and Community Engagement requires support in targeted areas.

Factors that support effective student learning:

i.   The school has a high priority on keeping families informed about their children's performance in school and has restructured the traditional teacher conferences into Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT), in which teachers and parents plan and create goals for students based on data. This new structure makes these conferences more meaningful and helps parents have a better understanding of how to support their children's learning at home.

ii.   The school has developed a program that focuses on helping fathers play a stronger role in the lives of their children. The program's outreach to fathers brings them into planned school activities, which are scheduled throughout the year. It also educates them on their critical role in their children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, and helps to strengthen both their comfort with being in school and their understanding of their importance in their children's lives. The Strong Families recently certified the program as a Father Friendly Flagship Agency (3FA).

iii.   The school has worked to ensure that parents of students in their first years at the school (grades K and 1) are supported in their efforts to build strong learning habits in their children as they start school. The school's FAST (Families and Schools Together) program is an 8-week event that provides a wealth of resources, including funds for school supplies, opportunities for families to meet and talk with other families and engaging activities for children. This program provides a positive first experience with school that establishes the expectation for parental involvement throughout the elementary school years.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

i.   There was little evidence of a recognition or formal celebration of the school's cultural diversity or the achievement of its students. While there are murals throughout the building that display a range of famous African-American figures, there was little of that heritage incorporated into lessons or scheduled celebrations of diversity in the school calendar. The lack of this type of meaningful recognition of diversity limits opportunities for students and teachers to connect around the strengths that diversity brings to the life of the school.

4 Community Engagement and Feedback Focus

This section of the report pertains to the wider Community Engagement and Feedback Focus component of the SQR process. These activities included two community focus groups, small group meetings, one-on-one interviews, as well as a community stakeholder survey. Community members and stakeholders provide valuable contributions to the improvement of schools, and they supplied a significant amount of meaningful feedback that enhanced the overall SQR process.

4.1 Areas of Strength for the School:

i. The leadership has positioned staff throughout the school to be resourceful in helping the school to run smoothly.
ii. School stakeholders are regularly invited to share their ideas and expertise with the school.
iii. Staff members are vested in working to improve the school.
iv. There is a strong sense of teamwork. All stakeholders will work to promote the success of the school.
v. The school's program to involve fathers is great and has been recognized for their work in helping to connect fathers with their children's work in schools.
vi. The afterschool program is great and provides a safe place for students to do homework and get extra help with academic skills that need additional time.
vii. The school is open to new ideas, and welcomes the support of outside organizations in support.
viii. The school listens and values the community's opinion.

4.2 Areas of Improvement for the School:

i. The school needs more resources, including more counselors for students, more teachers and teaching assistants, and an updated playground.
ii. There should be more outreach and community events held at the school.
iii. The first and second grade classrooms have too many students in them. Teachers can't manage that many students.
iv. Although there are multiple annual holiday concerts and student recognition events, parent perception is that there are too few opportunities to see their children perform/participate in such events.
v. The school has offered parent portal workshops several times but attendance was low. As a result, some parents don't know how to use parent portal as a way to stay informed about their children's progress.

4.3 Stakeholders' views regarding school improvement:

i. Parents would like to have more school and/or community resources involved in supporting the school, e.g., counseling students in the after-school program
ii. Hire and train additional aides so that more time can be spent in each class, and so that behavioral and emotional needs can be appropriately managed.
iii. Create smaller class sizes by hiring more teachers.
iv. Provide more support and guidance for parents on how to use the parent portal.
v. Host more holiday or cultural recognition programs that students can participate in to enhance their learning.

Appendices

A. Community Stakeholders' Input

Families, community members/partners, staff and students shared their perspectives on a range of topics. The following are quotes collected during the School Quality Review and FACE Canvassing activities.

The following are typical of the comments made about the principal:
  – The school is making progress but not at the rate the school district has requested.

The following are typical comments made about the teachers:
  – I have worked with this school for the past 21 years and I have never had any issues with staff.
  – Many of the students do not come prepared for school; however, the teachers do above and beyond to make sure students get what they need. Teachers go out of their way to make sure students are engaged.
  – Compared to private school which have smaller classes and an aide, the aide in our kindergarten works 4 hours in each class.
  – Need aides in classes larger than 20 students especially with all of the emotional and behaviour needs. There are 42 students in each 1st and 2nd grade classes.
  – My child is above grade level and is not being challenged.

The following are typical comments made about school culture:

  – The location is best for our children, and all of the students walk to school.   The school has a lot of children with behavior issues and the school works well in meeting the needs of students. Climate Manager is aware of how to work with students with behavior and emotional needs.
  – When I spoke to the teacher about my child being bullied during lunch she responded with, "It didn't happen in my classroom so it's not my responsibility."

The following are typical comments made about communication:

  – Parents receive information regularly from: Family Engagement Liaison, flyers, and robo calls as well as parents receive communication from teachers individually. Letters are sent home to announce important information.
  – The SPED teacher communicates with me often.
  – I can't get answers. I don't understand.

The following are typical comments made about engaging families and community members:

  – There are not any holiday or cultural recognition programs for the students to participate in.
  – The school goes out into the community for Kindergarten round up.
  – It would be helpful if events were offered at different times so that I (parent) could participate.
  – I don't know how to access or use the parent portal.

B. Community Survey Data

The following quotes were taken from the open-ended responses of the School Community Survey:

What are some of the strengths of the school and its relationship with the local community?

- Leadership - positioning staff in the school who are resourceful
  Collaborative - stakeholders share ideas and expertise
  Flexible staff - staff who are vested in working to improve the school
  Team Work - stakeholders will work to promote the success of a project
- Open to new ideas, open to welcoming other organizations to service the community, honest, listen & value the community's opinion.

In what ways can the school improve its relationship with the local community?
- The school needs more resources, financial and human capital.
- More outreach & community events held at the school

As a community member, how would you like to contribute or participate in the life of the school?
- Counsel the young students in the OST after-school program

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