

Minneapolis Public Schools

Quality Review Report

Anthony Middle School

**5757 Irving Avenue South
Minneapolis
Minnesota
55419**

**Principal: Jackie Hanson
Dates of review: May 11 – 12, 2009
Reviewer: John Francis**

Cambridge Education (LLC)



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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

Anthony Middle School is located in the Southwest quadrant of Minneapolis. There are 530 students enrolled in grades 6 through 8 with slightly more male students (55 percent) than female (45 percent). The student body comprises 61 percent White, 24 percent African-American, 8 percent Hispanic, 6 percent Asian American and 2 percent American Indian students. The school hosts six city-wide special education classes and special education students account for 19 percent of the school population. Six percent of students are designated as English language learners. Twenty nine percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, which is below the figure for the district.

In 2007 – 2008 the school's attendance was 95.69 percent, which is above the district average of 92.9 percent and the state figure of 94.9 percent, and higher than the district threshold expectation of 95 percent. The principal is in her tenth year as the leader of the school with an established faculty, many of whom have over 10 years experience.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- Achievement in both math and reading are high and are above that of the district and state.
- The administration has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and key areas for improvement and works well with the faculty to create a professional learning community.
- Students apply themselves enthusiastically to all aspects of school life and are interested and eager to learn.
- Most teaching is imaginative and motivating, engaging students' interest through a variety of approaches, and providing opportunities for students to develop good learning and social skills.
- Relationships at all levels are very positive and create a strong school culture and secure environment in which students thrive.
- Attendance is high and above the district average.
- There is strong parental support for the school and many volunteer to work with students.

Areas for Improvement:

- Strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - Ensuring that teachers set clear, measurable, and where appropriate, differentiated learning objectives, which are evaluated at the end of the lesson;
 - Planning extension work that provides greater challenge for the highest achieving students; and
 - Extending the support for the lowest achievers, especially for African American, American Indian and English language learner students.
- Raise achievement in science, particularly for higher achieving students through a more focused, problem-solving approach.
- Establish clear goals for class teachers and students so that they have a better understanding of how they can improve, and develop milestones that enable the progress towards these to be monitored.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

Anthony Middle School sets high expectations for its students and the faculty. During her years at the school the principal has created a clear vision and mission for the long-term future of the school. Parents and the faculty support this in their desire for students to achieve well both academically and socially. As a result, all contribute well to the smooth running of the school and the high standards achieved.

In 2008 the school's performance in the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) tests was well above that of the district and the state in both reading and math. Reading is particularly successful across all grades with a high proportion of students who met or exceeded the standard. In grades 6 and 7 this was more than twice that of the district. This is a similar picture in math; however, at grade 8, standards were closer to the district and state figures. Science at grade 8 is an area for development. While standards were better than those of the district, they were only in line with the standards in the state. With all groups meeting their targets in reading and math, the school made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2008. Through detailed analysis of exam results and other data, the school meets the needs of the vast majority of its students well. Its challenge is to ensure the same consistent progress and levels of achievement for its highest and particularly the lowest 10 percent of students.

Teachers are skilled at engaging students' interests and use a variety of strategies. Careful planning and sharing of learning objectives with students, helps students understand what they are aiming to achieve. However, learning objectives are not always specific or differentiated enough to enable teachers and students to use them at the end of a class to accurately judge the gains made. In addition, planning sometimes lacks a sharp focus on the needs of the highest and lowest achievers: those who finish early or those who need additional support. The wide range of approaches used by teachers, for example, through 'pair share', an awareness of students preferred learning styles and making tasks relevant to real life, engage students' interest. This generates great enthusiasm among the students and positive relationships, which mean that they are willing to try, knowing that teachers and other students are supportive of all their efforts. The quality is maintained by regular monitoring by the administration and carefully targeted professional development programs.

The curriculum has breadth and balance and is enhanced by additional elements such as health education, music and two foreign languages. The curriculum for those students in the City Wide classes is well targeted towards their specific needs and the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program prepares students in grades 6 and 7 for college eligibility. However, in some instances, such as in some science classes, goal setting, curriculum and planning are not flexible enough to respond to the needs of the highest achievers.

Parents are appreciative of the wealth of information that they receive from school and the openness, accessibility and commitment of the teachers. The school's very positive culture and the quality of relationships mean that all students relate well to each other. Behavior in and around school is almost always consistently good and attendance is high. The school is successful in producing young people who are fully prepared to move on to the next stage of their school life.

Domain 1: Student Achievement and Progress

The students' achievement and progress fully meets expectations.

In the 2008 MCA tests, the school's performance overall was well above that of the district and the state with broadly similar achievement for males and females. All groups met their targets in reading and math and the school was the only middle school in the district to make AYP. In reading, there was a

good level of consistency across grades 6 to 8 in the proportion of students who either met the standard or exceeded it, with particular strengths in comprehension, vocabulary and fiction. At grades 6 and 7, the proportion of students who exceeded the standard was more than twice the district figure, and was only a little below at grade 8. In math, again, students' achievement in grade 6 and 7 was well above the figure for the district and state, particularly for those exceeding the standard. Standards were closer to the district and state figures at grade 8. In science at grade 8, standards are in line with the state but better than the district. While African-American and American Indian students were the lowest achieving groups in the school, their results were still above those for the district in reading and math, with African American students making safe harbor in both subjects. However, this lower achievement has been a consistent trend over time.

In terms of growth, grade 6, 7 and 8 students, overall, were well above the district level in reading and math with a high proportion of students in all groups making some growth in math. However, those students who were English language learners (ELL) showed weaker growth overall when compared with the district, although almost 40 percent of them made exceptional growth. In reading, over 80 percent of students in grade 6 made some growth, with almost half of them making exceptional growth. The picture in reading is stronger than in math and shows improvement on previous years. This is also an improving picture for ELL, special education students and those qualifying for a free or reduced price lunch, with greater growth than similar students in the district. Both special education and free or reduced price lunch students made safe harbor in reading and math. Goal setting both for teachers and students is an area for further development. Too few give sufficiently clear expectations for the end of the year or intermediate milestones to provide checks on progress towards these.

Domain 2: Quality of Learning, Teaching and Assessment

The quality of learning, teaching and assessment fully meets expectations.

Teaching engages students' interest through a range of strategies and approaches, for example, 'pair share', awareness of students' learning styles and making tasks relevant to life. This is something that students commented very positively on. They appreciate the practical, hands-on approach to learning used by most teachers. Teachers' secure subject knowledge is a key component in lesson planning. This is illustrated well by a grade 7 English language arts class where planning was extremely detailed, giving students very clear direction as to how the lesson was building over time to a finished article. There were clear directed notes for the current lesson and next steps discussion, all leading towards the finished essay.

While most teachers use the information they have on student achievement to differentiate their planning, in some classes the differentiation was less effective. In some math classes, for example, all students were working on the same task at the same level. As a result, there were wide variations in understanding, competency and speed of working. Higher achieving students completed their task quickly but there was nothing of consequence for them to move on to which would extend their learning. In some instances, they were already looking ahead at the following day's topic and getting a head start on this, which perpetuates the cycle. These students need a different approach or topic that allows them to demonstrate their mastery. At the other extreme, lower achieving students struggled with the concept but were left alone for much of the lesson. Sharper differentiation and, where appropriate, scaffolding are aspects that need to be addressed in order to raise the math standards to where the school wants them to be.

In all classes, learning objectives are clearly displayed and shared at the start of lessons so that students know what they are working towards. However, not all of these are sufficiently specific or measurable. In addition, in a few lessons, time is not managed well enough to create the opportunity at the end of the lesson to come back to the original objective as an assessment piece, which would enable teachers and students to judge how successful they have been in achieving it.

A strong feature of most lessons is the very good use that teachers make of technology to engage students' interest and take advantage of the flexibility that they bring to instruction. This was exemplified well in a couple of history classes. In grade 6, students in a class studying the Great Depression used an activity prepared by the teacher for the interactive whiteboard. By tapping segments of a blanked out square on the board, students exposed sections of a picture and commented on what they thought they were seeing as the whole picture unfolded. This created a great link between history and English with some high level speaking and listening skills being developed. At grade 8, a data projector was used effectively to show a video clip relating to their study of World War 2. In other classes, good use was made of document projectors to illustrate students' work or demonstrate key points for the lesson.

The quality of teachers' questioning is a consistently strong element in most lessons. Skillful questions engage students at different levels, presenting many opportunities for them to respond at their level. In addition, strategies such as 'pair-share', where students discuss the question with their neighbor, help them to clarify ideas and thoughts. They respond well to this approach, particularly the less secure students who gain great confidence in their ability to contribute meaningfully to class discussion. Students feel comfortable in knowing they can make mistakes in safe conditions. As a result, students are conscientious and show high levels of commitment and concentration.

Teachers use bulletin boards in classrooms effectively to reinforce their expectations. As well as displaying the rubrics and standards, there are displays of high quality work from students that shows, for example, what an A grade piece of work looks like. While this is valuable in setting out high expectations, it would be even more useful as a guide for students if the work also indicated clearly which standards were illustrated, including different levels. This would help students know what levels they were working at as well as where they needed to be.

Domain 3: Curriculum

The quality of the curriculum fully meets expectations.

Teachers plan the curriculum in line with state standards. Many go beyond this with additional topics that introduce greater rigor to the learning, for example, the Health Education course established by the physical education teacher. At grade 6, the curriculum is well structured to ensure that students make a good start to middle school. This sets the school's expectations for the future with regard to independence and application. In addition, the school uses the AVID program well at grade 6 and 7 to prepare students for college eligibility. To ensure high quality delivery of this, 12 core teachers have attended AVID training. The school uses fall workshops and quarterly data retreats to ensure that the curriculum meets the expectations of the state and district. To aid this, collaborative planning looks through students' standards, aligning these with prior achievement. This is done at both grade and subject department level and all departments meet weekly to evaluate learning. This is facilitated through reducing advisory time, a conscious decision by the school to maximize opportunities for collaborative planning time. While this provides a good base for planning, it does not always recognize the specific needs of the very highest or lowest achievers, something the principal is very aware of. However, the school does offer additional tutorial classes in reading and math three times a week, and Reading 180 and Accelerated Math are geared to individual students' needs. The special education students in the city-wide classes are well served by knowledgeable teachers who pitch work at an achievable, yet suitably challenging level. Good planning takes students learning forward sequentially, building on what they know and can do.

Teachers make good use of a wide range of additional resources and materials such as high quality literature, audio and video materials and technology to enhance learning. Practical, hand-on learning is a feature of many subjects, such as science labs. This is used well to build skills of collaboration and inquiry. However, too few examples of this approach challenge the highest achievers, who often complete elements of their assignment using their own background knowledge and understanding

without having to complete the investigation. Here, curriculum development has not always taken into consideration prior learning in planning work at a suitable level for these students.

The school also offers additional subjects such as music, French and Spanish, and all students take two electives based on areas of interest. Homework, to extend learning beyond lessons is set regularly, although there is an imbalance in the amount set at different grade levels and it is a little more structured at grades 7 and 8 than at grade 6.

Domain 4: Leadership, Management and the Use of Data

The quality of the leadership, management and use of data fully meets expectations.

The principal has very clear and well-articulated vision for the school, developed over many years. As a long serving principal she has been able to establish, refine and embed systems, procedures and expectations that have improved the school's performance in all areas over time. The new assistant principal brings additional skills to the table that benefits the school. Together they have a clear strategy for the school and know how to continue to move it forward. All staff in the school know the students and their families well and clear routines ensure that the school runs very smoothly day-to-day.

The school has a strong academic record over time and there is a strong desire not only to maintain this but also to enhance it. The principal, as the main data analyst, has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses across the school. The school-used data is a suitably rigorous way to identify the groups of students most in need of improvement. MCA II test scores are used to identify students in the D range in both reading and math. From this, students are assigned to class tutors to support with academic assistance and remediation in skill areas. This is extended in the math to include students in the P range. Math teachers work with the D students and send weekly progress reports home and for P range students, this is addressed through differentiated work in class and after-school study programs. The targets set for the year for all subgroups from this analysis are measurable and challenging. Quarterly analysis of data by 'fails' and those students at the grade boundaries help to target planning and resources for weaker students, and is also used as an accountability model for teachers where students show lack of progress. However, the data sets lack intermediate steps that provide enough focused information to allow short-term gains to be evaluated and earlier interventions to be put in place where there is evidence of slippage.

The administration has a high profile around school and, as a consequence, has a secure understanding of the relevant strengths and weaknesses in instruction or subjects. There is a regular program of classroom visits by the principal and assistant principal as well as many informal opportunities taken to 'drop-in' on classes. From these visits there is detailed performance feedback, which is appreciated by teachers. Using these evaluations, monthly staff meetings discuss professional development goals and the formulation of the school improvement plan. Professional development includes priority goals identified by the principal, particularly the focus on data analysis and differentiation. In addition, the principal visits common prep sessions and there is a lot of informal networking. Teachers appreciate the direct involvement of the principal in curricular issues.

Domain 5: School Culture

The quality of the school's culture fully meets expectations.

The school is a calm, caring and welcoming environment. Students are very positive about relationships across the school and there is a clear sense of mutual trust and respect. There is great regard among students for the diversity of the school population. From the time they enter school in grade 6, there is a strong focus on building relationships between students and with the faculty. Parents are very positive about the strong focus on respect that the school fosters, although a few have concerns over the profile of African American students and feel they are under-represented in some aspects of school life. However, the review found nothing to suggest this was an issue in the school.

Students feel secure in school and trust adults to keep them safe. Movement around the school is well ordered and transition between lessons is rapid so that no learning time is lost. The school carried out a consultation exercise with students over the time needed for transitioning and, while some feel it is still too tight, the majority understands the reasoning behind this. Behavior is good overall but there are marked differences between the numbers of referrals for disruptive behavior, with around 60 percent of these written for African American students – twice the level of White students. Nevertheless, there has been a consistent and steady decrease in both the number of referrals and the number of suspensions over the last three years. Strategies in place have reduced suspensions significantly, with the latest figures showing a 41 percent drop over the year. Behavior in class reflects the high expectations established over time. Students respond well to the lively and engaging instruction, showing self-confidence and maturity. They listen well to the teacher and each other and rise to the challenges set for them. In most classes they have an active role in lessons, often taking the lead in discussions demonstrating a good level of confidence. Teachers work hard to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to take on leadership roles in the class.

Attendance overall is good and above the district and state levels. However, having identified a drop in attendance for special education students and those on free or reduced price lunch, strategies to reverse this trend are being explored. The school is very much into rewarding positive achievements and takes every opportunity to celebrate students' successes. Awards for 'student of the month' honors students who have made great progress in the academic field are regularly given, but there is also recognition of those who go above and beyond in all areas, not just academic but in attendance, attitude, social responsibility and citizenship.

Domain 6: Links with Parents and the Local Community

The quality of the school's links with parents and the local community exceeds expectations.

Over time the principal has developed a strong culture of parental involvement and is proud of the number of parents who volunteer to work with the school on various projects and activities during the year, around 40 percent of families on average. Parents are seen very much as part of the 'Anthony' team. However, the school is aware of the need to reach out to those parents who live outside the neighborhood and to find ways of involving them more in the life of the school. Many parents have a long-term involvement with the school and there is a very committed and dedicated Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) that raises substantial additional funds for the school through their activities. The administration is very open to suggestions from the PTO and keen to empower parents. This commitment is also reflected in the involvement of the site council in many aspects of the school's work. The site council contributes to many key elements of the school's work. However, this sometimes lacks a clear direction and rationale for its meetings and needs to do more to find a more clearly defined role and purpose.

Parents are enthusiastic about the quality of communication between the school and home. The parent 'portal' is popular, enabling them to have instant access to students' grades and assignments, updated eight times a year. In addition, parents welcome the regular reports and conferences with teachers. They appreciate the range of other communication strategies such as weekly mailings, e-notes and a quarterly newsletter that keep them informed about all school happenings and future events. There is a strong culture of 'open house' where parents can sit in on classes if they wish to. Parents appreciate the amount of time teachers give freely to the school and the students. Teachers are seen as very open and accessible and there are good communications and links. Parents consider this to be a real partnership.

Links with the wider community are not as strong as those with the parents and the school does not have as wide a range of business partnerships as it would like. There are, however, positive educational links with Hamelin College and the University of Minnesota that bring benefit to the school.