



Meriden Public Schools

Quality Review Report

Hanover Elementary School

**208 Main Street
Meriden
Connecticut
06450**

Principal: Miguel Cardona

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

The school has 603 students enrolled from kindergarten through grade 5. Around 58 percent of students are White, 27 percent Hispanic, 11 percent Black and four percent Asian American. Around 12 percent are English language learners (ELLs). These figures are broadly in line with the averages for the district except for the proportion of Hispanic students, which is a little lower. The main language spoken in the school is English, with Spanish spoken as a first language by a minority of students.

The proportion of students eligible for free or reduced cost lunches is 44 percent, which is lower than the district average but considerably higher than for the state. Fourteen percent of the students receive special education services. This proportion is in line with the district and state averages.

The school is the district base for bilingual classes and English language learner classes for students in grades 3 through 5. Provision for kindergarten through grade 2 is made at a different school, but a number then transfer to the classes at Hanover Elementary. The school also has an early intervention program for students in pre-kindergarten, which serves the wider community. In common with three other schools in the district, the school runs the 'Apple' program, for students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten who are identified as needing additional help, but are not special education students.

Attendance is around 97 percent, which is in line with the averages for the district and state. A minority of students travel substantial distances to the school by bus. Most of these students attend for one of the particular resource groups at the school.

The principal has been at the school for five years and knows the local community very well.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- The leadership of the principal is strong and throughout the school, there is a very good climate for student learning and personal development. Strong teamwork underpins the great majority of the school's work.
- The teachers use the school's behavior program consistently and effectively and, as a result, the students' behavior in class and around school is very good. Relationships at all levels are excellent and the students have very positive attitudes to school and to learning.
- The large majority of students, at all levels of achievement make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The special education team is a well-coordinated, well-focused unit and intervention programs make a strong impact on students' progress, particularly for the youngest children.
- The teachers use a wide range of assessments of students' progress to plan their work. They use a good set of strategies to help students learn and they match work well to the students' needs.
- Links with parents are strong and parents fulfill many useful and different roles in the school. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) supports the school well.

Areas for Improvement:

- Improve progress and achievement in reading and mathematics for the bilingual students by:
 - finding better ways to enable these students to access the curriculum for their grade, using their current levels of language acquisition;
 - enhancing the instructional materials and library media resources with more dual language and Spanish text books;
 - making further links with parents to promote reading skills;
 - reviewing scheduling to enable the bilingual teaching team to meet more regularly; and
 - furthering professional development for all teachers in the needs of bilingual students in general education classes.
- Improve the arrangements for students to take books home to make better use of the existing high levels of parental support for their children's education.
- Develop school improvement planning by:
 - using data more strategically to set targets, benchmarks and challenging goals for the school;
 - setting out more precisely within the plan, the accountability of individuals and groups for its different elements;
 - establishing clearer mechanisms and timescales for the systematic monitoring, evaluation and revision of the plan; and
 - sharing the plan more widely with staff and parents.
- Draw together the different systems for collecting data into a coherent, widely accessible system.
- Make greater use of the capacity of students and parents to contribute to school improvement through:
 - more systematic gathering of their views about the work of the school; and
 - increased opportunities for students to use their skills for cooperation and collaboration.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

This school meets minimum requirements.

Although it is not meeting the full set of requirements for adequate yearly progress (AYP) under federal legislation (the school is in its fourth year of needing improvement), the school enables the great majority of students to reach proficiency and to achieve well. It is failing to meet requirements for Hispanic students and particularly those who are at early stages of learning English. Although there are improvements that the school should make, there are significant factors of family transience, school transfer arrangements and district curriculum over which it has little control. These pose significant barriers to raising achievement for this group.

The majority of students make good progress at all levels of achievement. There is some variation in progress between grades and subjects but none indicative of fundamental weaknesses or problems. The students' progress is particularly strong in grades 4 and 5 and they are well prepared for their next school. Mathematics is generally stronger than reading. Writing meets state requirements in each of the three higher grades. There is little significant difference between subgroups of students other than previously referred to. Male and female students do equally well, although the school checks this aspect less rigorously. The school has established a home-school reading incentive program but in the view of parents, it is not yet fully effective in establishing sufficiently secure links between students' reading at school and reading at home.

The special education students also make good progress, socially and academically. A minority make sufficient progress to exit special education or achieve proficiency. Those programs, which serve wider school populations, help students adjust well to school life and help their teachers to address difficulties and future needs.

The behavior of students is very good. The staff makes consistent use of the strategies in place and these are widely understood by the school community. Relationships at all levels are excellent and there is strong teamwork, collaboration and cooperation evident in many aspects of the school's work. The school does not capitalize sufficiently on the students' excellent attitudes, behavior and skills. There is no students' council or consultative process to take account of their views.

The quality of teaching is very secure and in some aspects, it is good. Teachers differentiate their work well to ensure that students have the right tasks to enable them to learn. The students work well in groups. This, combined with the students' good behavior, allows the teachers to focus their teaching intensely on small groups at specific times. The teachers use computers well in classrooms to help students learn.

The teachers use assessments well to check students' progress and to plan work. These assessments are collected and stored in various places by different people. It is not always easy to find information quickly or evaluate it against other parameters or other sets of data because there is no unified data storage and analysis system. The curriculum is sufficiently broad, with arts playing an important role.

The school is very well led and managed by the principal, who receives increasingly strong support from the new instruction supervisor. The principal has a very secure understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement through constant vigilance, informal dialogue, frequent visits to all parts of the school and from evaluation of students' achievement data. The data and grade teams play an increasingly strategic role in driving forward the quality of work in the classroom. However, the School Improvement Plan (SIP) is not a precise enough management tool. It is too general in the targets it sets and does not specify, with enough clarity, who should do what and when or how progress will be checked.

Relationships with parents are good. There is a wide range of social events, which are well attended. The PTO is very active and raises substantial sums for the school. Newcomers are made to feel welcome

and throughout the year, there is good communication between the school and parents. The school does not make enough use of their partnership by seeking systematically their views or in supporting their children's reading.

Criterion 1: Student achievement in the core subjects

The students' achievement is at proficient level and meets minimum requirements.

On the most recent set of state test data, the school is one of the top two schools in the district. It exceeds the district averages for the proportions of students reaching proficiency and goal levels in reading and mathematics in grades 4 and 5. In grade 3, the school outperforms the district average for the proportion of students reaching proficiency but does not do as well with the proportion attaining goal level. In grade 5, the school exceeds district figures by a good margin and a good proportion of students reach the advanced level in both reading and mathematics.

The students make good progress overall and at all levels of achievement. Good proportions move from proficiency to goal and beyond and this proportion increases from grade 3 through to grade five. In-school assessments confirm steady progress in kindergarten through grade 2. This continues and accelerates through grades 3, 4 and 5. Achievement is not as high as the state averages in grade 3 but the gap closes through grades 4 and 5. By grade 5, the school matches the average for the state in reading and mathematics for the proportion of students reaching proficiency and goal.

When examined by subgroup and gender, there is some variation in performance from year to year and between subjects and grades. However, there is little discernable trend and no substantial or significant differences. The one exception is the achievement of the Hispanic group, which very largely contains the ELL students. Hispanic students make progress but it is not as rapid as for other subgroups nor is it sustained. There are several contributory factors to the underperformance of these students. There is a high level of transience in this group. Those learning English in the bilingual classes often arrive with limited or no English or may transfer in from the other district bilingual school. They have only 30 months under state rules before they must transfer back to their designated school. Very few stay at Hanover and most have less than two years at the school. The attendance rate for some of these students is poor or exacerbated by extended visits to home countries. These factors are largely beyond the school's control. However, some matters are within its powers to improve. There are too few dual language Spanish and English books to help students in the early stages of reading and to help parents take a greater part in supporting their children's learning. The school's custom and practice of not letting class reading books go home with children, disproportionately disadvantages this group. For older students, pacing of learning to that of their English speaking peers and to meet the required curriculum, does not work well. The resources used are not always appropriate to the language skill-level of students in different grades.

The school has improved its performance in recent years. In 2005, it was failing to make AYP in several areas, including reading. The most recent set of data shows it failing to meet this requirement only in the achievement of the Hispanic group of students and the economically disadvantaged. The school data suggest there is a considerable overlap in these groups.

The special education students make good progress. The records show that the majority makes good progress against the targets on their individualized education programs. About 10 percent exit from special education and a good proportion reach proficiency in one or more aspects of their work.

The school sets annual improvement targets in its SIP but these are all at 10 percent. For some areas of its work, this is an over-ambitious target and for others it is not demanding enough. The school does not break its targets down into finer details, for example, by achievement level or gender. However, the achievement and progress data show that the school provides well for students of all levels of achievement.

Criterion 2: The quality of instruction through teaching, learning and curriculum, and the use of data to promote learning

This area of the school's work meets minimum requirements.

There are some strong features, particularly in the use of differentiated work. The school follows the district curricula in English language arts, mathematics and science. Art and music feature prominently in students' work. Art in particular, affords a wide range of experiences because it has a dedicated resource room. Music has lost its resource room as the school has grown and is in danger of being marginalized. Social studies is less prominent.

The teachers make good use of the information they have from data teams and their own in-class assessments to plan for their students. They set work at about the right level for different groups and it engages them sufficiently to keep them motivated and productive. In two younger-age classes, groups of students were engaged in independent reading and writing tasks and using computers to improve their reading and comprehension skills. This allowed the teacher to focus on her particular group and deliver good quality intensive instruction without having to monitor what was happening elsewhere. The students' self-discipline and ability to work well with one another were also key factors in the success of these lessons. They helped each other and showed independence for example, by checking spelling against word banks.

The students have reading books at just the right level of difficulty. These make them think and use their reading skills to the fullest but are not at frustration level. The students, however, do not take these books home. Neither do they take home the books from the additional reading program trolleys. This does not appear to be school policy but is more custom and practice, with teachers anxious about losing precious resources. This practice creates discontinuity between reading in school and at home. One older student said she did all her reading from her own books at home. The school misses a chance to involve parents more substantially and to work with them on specific needs for individuals. Set against the students' abilities to cooperate and their good behavior, the school's practice is even more mystifying. The school could use its excellent behavioral reward system as an incentive for taking books home and looking after them. Applied to all, it would also meet some student and parent criticisms that the system disadvantages those students who always behave well and live up to expectations.

Teachers point out that students can take books from the media resource center. These books, however, are not graded for difficulty and the students have little to guide them in their choices compared to their graded classroom books. The teachers duplicate small pamphlet readers for students to take home but these are a poor substitute because without color and 'feel' they are uninviting. At times, the duplication and stapling is poor and one that was seen, had initial words and letters cut off.

Although writing skills are proficient, there are very few examples of students writing at length. Generally, teachers should examine the worksheets they give to students to determine whether they add to or detract from opportunities for students to write in all subjects.

Other examples of good teaching that were seen include hands-on investigative work in science and mathematics. In science, where teachers' subject knowledge is least secure, the district curriculum is a sound framework. Straightforward and practical, it provides a good range of opportunities for scientific thinking and students enjoy the activities. Teachers need to get to the hands-on aspects of the lessons sooner in some classes and not spend so long on introductions and procedures. In a mathematics lesson, the use of two dice as a quick way to practice number facts kept students engaged and working at a good rate. The teachers also need to explore ways of linking the writing requirements in science with English and mathematical skills. This will help avoid the feeling that time for science is at the expense of time for English and mathematics. .

The teachers manage students' behavior very well. This is a major factor in the positive climate of the school and the overall quality of teaching. The school has looked closely at how best to meet the needs of the small number of students who present challenging behavior. The current mix of in-class and small group support works well and helps meet the needs of these students and their peers.

Professional development is secure although perceived by staff as better at school level than district level. There has been a strong focus on reading skills and its impact as seen in the steady rise in achievement. Common grade planning time and sharing of plans contributes positively to the strong collaboration between teachers and the unified feel evident in classrooms. Further professional development is needed in science.

There is good collaboration between general education teachers, special education teachers and paraprofessionals. They share lesson plans regularly to ensure continuity of experience for all groups of students and co-teach many classes. One of the special education teachers regularly functions as the lead teacher in a class, enabling the class teacher to work with the students with special education needs. This is exemplary and very effective inclusion teaching.

The school has a sufficient range of extra-curricular activities. It is about to expand these substantially to enable more after-school support for all those students, where assessment shows they are still hovering around the borderline for proficiency. Coupled with a visit to the YMCA for sporting and leisure activities, this initiative has the potential to provide an additional high-quality service to students.

Criterion 3: Students' personal character development

This area of the school's work exceeds minimum requirements.

The students are very upbeat about school and see it as a positive, worthwhile experience. Behavior is good throughout the school. Older students say misbehavior very rarely spoils their lessons and they feel teachers are fair and consistent in the way they use positive behavior support. There are regular celebrations of achievement and good communication between home and school ensures any potential problems are addressed quickly. The work of the early intervention team and the teachers working with the Apple project makes a substantial contribution to identifying issues and finding ways to promote good behaviors. As a result, the students who have been through these programs settle very well into kindergarten.

Relationships are excellent. There is high respect between adults and students and between peers. This pervades the school. Everyone is friendly, supportive and helpful. The students are polite and well mannered. Students hold doors open for adults and adults for students. In classrooms, students readily take on small tasks to smooth daily routines. The students feel safe and secure in school. They know they always have someone to turn to if they have a problem. The older students feel strongly that there is no bullying or unacceptable behavior. Younger students feel likewise about school but not about the buses. Because there is no supervisor on the bus, problems occasionally break out. The drivers work well with the school to report and record such instances but young children remain vulnerable to unacceptable behavior.

The school does not capitalize sufficiently on the students' high standards of behavior and cooperation. There is no student council, although the students say they would like one. They have many ideas about how to help improve the school but need a forum within which to express their views. They have clear views about the good quality of what they experience in school. They feel the teachers work very hard to help them develop academically, socially and as young citizens.

Attendance is good and reflects the students' enjoyment of school. There are clear routines to check on absences and the school and parents use these well. The school has high expectations of all the students and they respond well to the challenges they are given. However, the extended visits overseas made by a small number of families, undermines the school's efforts to raise achievement, particularly in reading.

Criterion 4: Effective leadership and management

This area of the school's work meets minimum requirements.

The principal leads the school very well. He has a high profile through regular visits to all classrooms. This includes those classes providing a district resource who otherwise would receive little monitoring. He visits classrooms and talks with students about their work and learning. He gives regular feedback to teachers about their work and knows the general strengths and areas for improvement accurately. The new instructional support teacher works well with the principal and teachers and increasingly contributes to school improvement.

The school focuses well on raising achievement, and meeting AYP is foremost in everyone's mind. At the same time, the school has maintained and strengthened the impact it makes on students' personal development. The shared commitment and ability to continue to improve are strong.

There is increasing devolvement of leadership to teams within the school. This is working reasonably well for the most part but is still relatively new. The special education team is strong. It meets regularly to review progress of and support for those students. It makes good use of the wide range of specialist support such as educational psychologist, social worker and occupational therapist, as well as others from beyond the school's staff where necessary. The team's records show that the students make good progress.

The bilingual teaching team works hard but has too little time to meet regularly because of scheduling difficulties. Their monthly meetings do not focus sufficiently on the curricular and instructional changes needed to make a bigger impact on achievement for this group of students.

Grade and data teams work well together and regularly share plans and evaluate students' progress. However, there is a tendency to leap to solutions without full analysis of the problem. For example, in their meeting the grade 1 team explored assessments of students' spelling skills. These showed a significant proportion needing extra help. The team considered a range of possible strategies but did not look closely at the breakdown of those students who were under-achieving. When finally examined, this showed a very high proportion of males. Such information is essential when considering the most effective strategies to bring about improvement.

To achieve more efficient and effective analysis of data, the school needs to bring together the information it holds in a more coherent fashion. Currently, it holds students' achievement and other data on different computer systems. Some, it still records and analyzes by hand. The computer systems do not link to each other. This makes it difficult to carry out more sophisticated analysis of relationships, trends and patterns.

The school's improvement plan follows the district format. It sets out the key areas for improvement but does not address these rigorously. For example, it sets the same improvement goals of 10 percent rises in achievement for areas where current proportions reaching proficiency vary from 16 to 65 percent. For the former, the target is insufficiently challenging and for the latter it is a high demand. The plan sets out the tasks needed but is insufficiently clear about who should do them or who will regularly check they are being addressed. It does not lay down timelines or interim benchmarks to gauge progress. Nor is there a systematic approach to review and revision. The school relies too much on intuitive knowledge of how well it is doing. As the demands of the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation increase in future years, the school will need a much more tightly focused strategic approach to improvement.

The district makes a reasonable impact. It is sufficiently flexible to allow the pre-kindergarten staff to set their own improvement agenda rather than attend professional development that is not relevant. The science curriculum is a positive development. Their impact on raising the achievement of the bilingual students is insufficient and there are significant concerns over the security on buses for very young children.

Criterion 5: Partnerships with parents and community

This area of the school's work exceeds minimum expectations.

The school has a very good relationship with its parent community. Good quality information is available on a wide range of matters, in Spanish as well as English. The admission process is clear and the school provides good support through the wide range of services available at the school or to which it has ready access. Some parents would like to see information about the services available at school or district collated into one document rather than in individual pamphlets or papers.

The school provides other routine information in substantial quantities. This covers the wide range of social and informative events organized by the PTO. These are well attended and provide strong links between the school and families. The PTO raises substantial funds for larger projects but also for small stipends for teachers to spend on each class.

The school provides good information about students' progress. There are regular formal conferences between teachers and parents, which are supplemented by informal meetings and contacts when there are concerns from either party. Parents feel the school is very approachable and its openness stems from the principal. He is highly regarded and respected throughout the school and wider community.

The one area where the school does not link as well as it might is in reading and the use of the school's books at home. Other homework is generally well received by students and parents. There are sufficient after school activities to extend and strengthen the students' educational experiences. Local resources are used where possible and the upcoming link with the YMCA will strengthen these further.

There has been parent representation on the school improvement team but as this team has now merged with grade and data teams, parental input is less secure. The school does not survey or systematically gather parents' views and misses opportunities to hear ideas from its stakeholder community.

There is a strong respect for the diversity of the school and local community. The school understands the needs of particular sectors of its population. It embraces the inclusive approach to education well and is alert to the issues that remain.