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QUALITY REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Meriden Public Schools

Quality Review Report

Francis T. Maloney High School

**121 Gravel Street
Meriden
Connecticut
06450**

Principal: Robert Angeli

Dates of review: October 29 - 30, 2007

Reviewer: Cheryl Baker

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**Cambridge
Education**

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Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school:

Francis T. Maloney High School serves 1,342 students in grades 9 through 12. White students account for 51 percent of the population. Hispanics represent 34 percent of students while Black students represent 12 percent. The remaining 3 percent are Asian Americans. English language learners (ELLs) are 6 percent of the student population. The main language spoken by these students is Spanish. Students with special education needs are 12 percent of the population. Over 46 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price meals. This exceeds that of other Connecticut high schools. Attendance averages 90 percent, which is below the state high school average.

The school has experienced a significant influx of new staff in recent years including the principal, an assistant principal and several department chairs.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well:

- The principal has demonstrated leadership in implementing the district data initiative and has put structures into place to support the analysis of data.
- Shared leadership and collaborative decision-making supports staff ownership of the work necessary for school improvement.
- The school's program of studies is broad and comprehensive, affording students a wide array of interesting choices. The extra-curricular program extends opportunities for students to develop in the arts, athletics, civic involvement, career exploration and character development.

Areas for Improvement:

- Provide sustained professional development and support for the differentiation of instruction based on increased understanding of students' discrete learning needs.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the current ability grouping arrangements to allow all students the appropriate challenge, opportunity and support to realize their potential.
- Increase regular monitoring and evaluation of the impact of teaching on improving student learning. Support this by continuing to develop and analyze common course assessments, based upon uniform pacing guides.
- Endeavor to increase instructional time by extending the school day, increasing elective courses, decreasing study halls and creating structured opportunities for regular academic support after school hours.
- Continue to devise positive interventions and outreach to increase students' attendance and promptness and make academic achievement possible for all.
- Continue to enforce behavioral expectations for students and enlist full compliance from staff to support measurable and consistent discipline management across the school.
- Continue efforts to extend avenues of two-way communication between the school and students' families.

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall Evaluation: The school's overall performance

This school needs improvement.

This school is in year four of needing improvement as defined by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. The principal has the skill and willingness to address the school's challenges. He is able to guide the staff in learning how to make better use of the information available to address the needs of all students. He has successfully focused the school on its needs through good collaborative practice and staff are united in their desire to improve.

The school's academic achievement has improved slightly on state tests over the last four years but performance is below that of schools across the state on virtually all measures. The school's improvement plan sets reasonable goals for improvement and newly organized data teams provide a structure for monitoring achievement.

The school offers a broad curricular and extra-curricular program for students. The instruction is not sufficiently differentiated to meet the range of students' needs, and student engagement varies among subjects and course levels. Students are tracked in six instructional levels which, overall, do not provide the quality of teaching and learning required to raise achievement to the extent required.

Student behavior has been a challenge for the school. Under the current administration, incidents of misbehavior have decreased from previous high levels. Most students want to learn and grow as individuals. The extra-curricular program is effective in providing avenues for character development.

Efforts to increase parent involvement in the school have increased under the current administration. Avenues of communication have been expanded. While parent engagement is strong among music and athletic supporters, only a small group of active parents takes advantage of the opportunities available to engage in the governance of the school.

Criterion 1: Student achievement in the core subjects

The students' achievement is at basic level and needs improvement.

Students at Maloney High School perform below their peers at the district's other high school in reading and above them in mathematics. The school is achieving adequate yearly progress in mathematics while the district is not. The school's performance on state tests has improved slightly over the last five years. However, the school has not met goal for any groups and is below the district and the state on this measure. Scores on the Scholastic Achievement Tests (SAT) in English and mathematics are below state averages. Similarly, average pass rates for Advanced Placement (AP) examinations are well below state averages. These, with other data, indicate unsatisfactory progress for the school's higher achieving students.

Students' progress at the grade level is measured by course credits earned towards graduation requirements. While most students achieve the progress projected for their high school experience, some lower achieving students do not. The school's retention rate is considerably higher than the state average. Its graduation rate, while improving, is below that of the district and the state. The rate of college acceptance is also lower than state averages. Among the school's sub-groups, Hispanic students and those qualifying for free or reduced meals perform below their peers on state tests, as do students with special education needs or ELLs. Boys perform better in mathematics while girls out-perform boys in reading.

The school provides honors and AP courses for high achieving students. While these students are often at the top of their graduating class and most continue on to college, the school's low SAT and AP scores draw into question the effectiveness of this provision. The school's tracked ability groupings are aimed at providing students with the appropriate level of challenge. However, the consistent low performance on state tests of the sub-groups most represented in the lower ability classes indicates that this is not effective in helping the students to progress.

Under the current leadership, the school has begun to analyze its overall performance and that of its sub-groups. The School Improvement Plan sets appropriate goals and benchmarks for improvement of the identified groups, particularly in reading and mathematics. Additionally, data teams have been formed to study student achievement more closely in order to understand students' needs.

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 needs improvement.

The school's curriculum is broad and varied. Outside of the core academic areas, students have the opportunity to explore studies in, for example, the fine and performing arts, the practical arts, health and physical education, world languages and career-related courses. The extra-curricular offerings are also rich with strong music, performing arts and athletics programs successfully taken up by many students. Clubs and activities extend opportunities for civic and community involvement and the development of students' personal interests. Local colleges and universities present avenues for rigorous coursework, SAT preparation and summer enrichment. The mathematics curriculum is under revision across the district and alignment with state standards has increased. Pacing guides and the development and administration of common course examinations has helped to direct and monitor instruction. The English curriculum has not yet undergone similar updating. Like other disciplines, this lacks pacing documents and common course examinations. However, the school has instituted a common approach to writing that has been adopted across the content areas and has increased the amount and quality of writing by students. The school's test scores in mathematics and English, while below state averages, have shown modest increases over time.

Time and funding for professional development are limited. The primary focus in this area has been training in the school's writing program. Teachers have also received presentations related to instructing students with special education needs or ELLs in regular education settings. Twenty-two percent of teachers have less than two years experience. The school provides them with trained mentors although finding adequate support for these teachers has presented a challenge. Training in the understanding and use of data to plan and differentiate instruction has not yet been a focus for professional development. Opportunities for routine collaboration are limited by the schedule, currently only teachers on the grade 9 team have common planning time. These teachers meet daily to address students' needs and collaborate on curriculum and instruction. Other staff may collaborate on an ad hoc basis or on committees, such as the new data teams, but this practice is not yet established within the school.

The quality of teaching and learning is not satisfactory overall. Instruction is usually directed at the whole class followed by individual or group work. The range of teaching styles is limited and does not engage or challenge students sufficiently. Differentiation of instruction, using data on individual student needs, tends to be limited to students with individualized education programs. It is anticipated that the district's initiative on the use of periodic assessments will help to direct teaching at students' individual or group learning needs. Active engagement is common in disciplines that are performance or project-based, such as technology education or graphic design but is less frequent in other disciplines.

Students' engagement and behavior varies. Both are good in higher ability tracks and present challenges in lower ability tracks. The school's four ability groupings place students in classes with varying levels of challenge. Objective data is not used to identify students' abilities and placements are based on performance in previous courses and teachers' recommendations. Poor behavior or lack of compliance

with course expectations sometimes influence level placement recommendations as may parental requests for either greater or lesser challenge. Within academic disciplines, there are generally-agreed grading expectations, but there are no school-wide grading policies. There is some variance among teachers in the amount of homework and extension projects provided for students. Until recently, when mathematics tutors were hired for extra help during the school day and after school, there was no organized extra support for students. With the exception of mathematics, where common assessments are increasing, there is little analysis of student work as it reflects on teaching and learning beyond the classroom.

Criterion 3: Students' personal character development

This area of the school's work needs improvement.

Students show a range of attitudes towards learning. Some display good work habits and intellectual curiosity, others are not especially motivated to learn. In general, students in challenging classes and in remedial settings are well focused on learning. Attendance is well below the state average for high schools and has been a significant problem for the school. Attendance is higher, overall, in honors and AP classes. An attendance plan is in place that sets expectations for teachers to contact the homes of absent students to encourage attendance and verify legitimate reasons for absence. Improved record keeping has reduced cutting of classes. Provision for transportation to school is limited to students living more than two miles from the school, which lowers attendance even further in inclement weather. Students are allowed to be absent for 29 of the 180 school days and still earn credits, which is a barrier to increasing attendance to within state averages.

Overall, students get along well with one another. Friendships appear to be formed among students from similar backgrounds or interest groups. Occasional bullying and name-calling can lead to altercations among students. Some students display behaviors in class that interfere with the learning of others. Disrespect towards teachers sometimes challenges the delivery of instruction and diminishes learning for all. Administrators and teachers have been working to improve these conditions by instituting common expectations and consequences. The creation of the grade 9 team, aimed at providing students with a small learning community of supportive adults, is beginning to show evidence of increased cohesiveness and improved behavior. Administrators are leading staff in developing increased understanding of conditions faced by some students, which may aggravate tendencies for disruptive behavior, low motivation for academic achievement and poor attendance.

The school's mission, which is displayed throughout the school, promotes respect for achievement. The school has been working with a consultant to refine its method for fostering the values embodied in the mission. While this statement of purpose presents an overarching standard of expectations, students' character development is more influenced by their participation in athletics, clubs and organizations that foster qualities like sportsmanship, community service, and acceptance of others. Students involved in these numerous and diverse activities find good avenues for showing initiative, taking responsibility and contributing to the wider community.

Criterion 4: Effective leadership and management

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

The school's principal, now in his third year, has provided adept leadership in addressing the school's behavior challenges and focusing the staff on improving in their use of data to inform instruction. He has educated himself and his fellow leaders and put structures in place to help teachers to analyze the results of student assessments at the school, district and state level. He has also developed a working relationship with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) to support the institutionalization of the school's mission and expectations. This includes sending staff to participate in accreditation teams as a means of broadening teachers' views of best practice. Leadership is

collaborative and inclusive with regular meetings among administrators and department chairs. These leaders are also responsible for increasing the use of student assessment and other data to make decisions, especially, regarding teaching and learning. The principal communicates with staff regularly, which adds to openness and trust among all stakeholders and increases the focus on the school's aims and values. Faculty and department meetings support the participation of all staff in school-wide initiatives. Thus, there is a strong awareness of where the school needs to improve and a shared commitment to work together to move the school forward.

The school's ability to make effective interventions to improve the quality of teaching is hampered by several factors. First, assistant principals frequently need to address behavioral issues, limiting their capacity to carry out their roles as instructional leaders. The principal's time is similarly diverted by these and other administrative responsibilities. Department chairs, some of whom have evaluative responsibilities, also have substantial teaching loads. This, and a lack of supervisory training for newly appointed chairs, limits their effectiveness in supporting teachers through the observation of instruction. Finally, the teachers' contract places significant limitations on the opportunities of administrators to observe and evaluate the teaching of tenured staff.

Recent district initiatives in increasing the use of data, instituting common periodic assessments and updating the mathematics curriculum bode well for improved student performance. The school would benefit from funding for sustained professional development, positions to offset the demands on administrators to deal with discipline issues, and greater contractual support for the direct supervision of instruction.

Criterion 5: Partnerships with parents and community

This area of the school's work needs improvement.

The school has been working to include families as partners. The principal has formed a parent advisory board to enlist more parents in collaborating on school issues. This supplements the work of the school improvement committee which contributes to developing the School Improvement Plan and involves parents in school governance. Booster clubs involve a good number of parents in supporting special interests such as sports and music competitions. The school has formed a bilingual parent group to better involve the community, demonstrating its increasing commitment to embrace and respect the diversity of its population.

The school has also increased efforts to communicate with parents with the message board at the school entrance and improvements and updates to its website. Mailings from the administration and guidance department inform parents of future events and important school news. The school's student newspaper and literary magazine have been revived recently and are distributed widely. Published materials are translated into home languages and translators are available at events such as parent-teacher nights where parents learn about teachers' course expectations. While parents are generally pleased with the increase in communication, more information regarding the progress of their children would be welcomed. Few parents have been asked to contribute information to the school regarding their child's needs nor are parents routinely enlisted in helping the students to improve.

Community resources that support student learning include opportunities for college level study at the local community college and enrichment opportunities at a nearby university. The school's career center effectively provides students with opportunities to explore career-related work experiences. This is a strong supplement to the work of the guidance department and complements the school's career-related courses. The Maloney One to One program, coordinated by the career center facilitator, also pairs at risk students with mentors from the Meriden community.