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Queens adds new Modern Red site at PS 96

A great many changes are taking place at Public School 96 in Queens, New York. The moment you walk through the front entrance, it is apparent that learning is taking place. The walls are covered with posters asserting to all who enter that it is a Modern Red Schoolhouse site and that the partnership of students, staff, and parents leads children down the road to academic and personal success.

If you arrive early enough, you will meet the entire school in the auditorium and hear the Pledge of Allegiance recited. Then, before anyone leaves for classrooms, the principal, Kathy Collins, leads everyone in a recitation of the PS 96 School Mission Statement. If someone has forgotten it, there is no need to worry because large, beautifully mounted copies are at the front of the auditorium as a reminder to all.

In their classrooms, students reviewed the mission statement before it was “published.” Many of their comments are included in the display, emphasizing that the statement is both *by* students as well as *for* them.

That is how the day now begins in this kindergarten to sixth-grade school in Queens.

Welcome winds of change

It hasn't always been like that. This Title 1 school in Community School District 27 in South Ozone Park has faced all the challenges confronted by inner-city schools. There have been four principals in six years, a 35 percent turnover in staff, and nearly a 30 percent mobility rate among students. Materials and supplies are often scarce, leaving the principal and teachers to fill in the gaps with their own resources. The building is crowded with children; all adults not assigned to a regular classroom share space. Even the principal shares her office so that every inch of available space is used for students.

When expected academic progress was not made after four years, PS 96 was designated a priority school. As the

newly appointed principal, Collins decided that her school would become part of the Comprehensive School Reform Design (CSRD) and was able to obtain an Obey Porter grant, one of only 10 granted citywide. PS 96 was on the way to becoming a Modern Red Schoolhouse site.

Some skeptics, but all committed to children

The initial stages of implementation were met with some skepticism on the part of some staff and parents, but it was clear that all were committed to the children of PS 96, and everyone kept an open mind.

Many questions and concerns were expressed as training began, but it soon became apparent that Modern Red Schoolhouse was the design that was best suited to meet the needs of the PS 96 school community. The principal, teachers, parents and members of the CSRD State Support Team attended training sessions on Saturdays, before and after school, and during lunch periods.

Their commitment is clearly demonstrated by the results seen in the school. In October, classrooms had everyone reading the same page of the same book. Today every classroom has a learning center, and children work in small groups with and without adults. Grouping takes place across grades, based on the reading level. Early

continued on page 2 (Queens ...)

Inside this issue ...

- ☐ Capstones at César Chavez3
- ☐ Reading strategies and new site manager4
- ☐ Recognition and new consultants5
- ☐ Map of MRSH sites6

Queens ...

continued from page 1

Childhood Coordinator Andrea Binder states, "Working in small groups offers children more self esteem."

Focusing on standards

Students are engaged in activities that directly support instruction. As you walk from classroom to classroom and through the halls, you see displays of standards-driven products by the students, along with the posting of the standards, reflecting what is being taught and learned. If you stop and listen, you can hear children reciting standards and challenging one another to work harder and produce better products. It is clear that teachers are excited and enthusiastic and recognize what Modern Red has brought to their instructional experience.

United Federation of Teachers Chapter Chairperson Jackie Brandwein states, "The staff has done the work and brought the ideas into the classroom. Modern Red gave us a direction, a format, a way to go, and their staff are responsive to our needs. Now we work in an enthusiastic atmosphere of collaboration, camaraderie and cooperation. This program has done wonders for this building!"

Classroom teacher Tracey Ryan adds, "There is a change in atmosphere in the school. I see more of the staff working together to achieve a specific goal."

When teachers were asked what's working, the list was long: more individualized instruction, focus on needs, reallocation of staff, everybody's participation, more involvement of the student, short activities for short attention spans.

"We have a clear and comprehensive plan, and the kids are involved in the plan," says Ryan. The plan involves higher-level thinking activities, less frustration, smaller groups, no labeling, success for all children, the fostering of independence, and improved discipline. Staff members agree that all children are producing and are so involved they do not want to stop.

"Modern Red offers new approaches to instruction along with techniques and strategies. As a result, we have an environment that enhances learning and positively impacts student performance," states teacher Maryann Veltri.

Strong, accommodating role for parents

The principal and staff are keenly aware of the need to include parents in the process. Task force meetings accommodate working parents. As a result, the school has experienced a marked increase in parent participation in school activities in general.

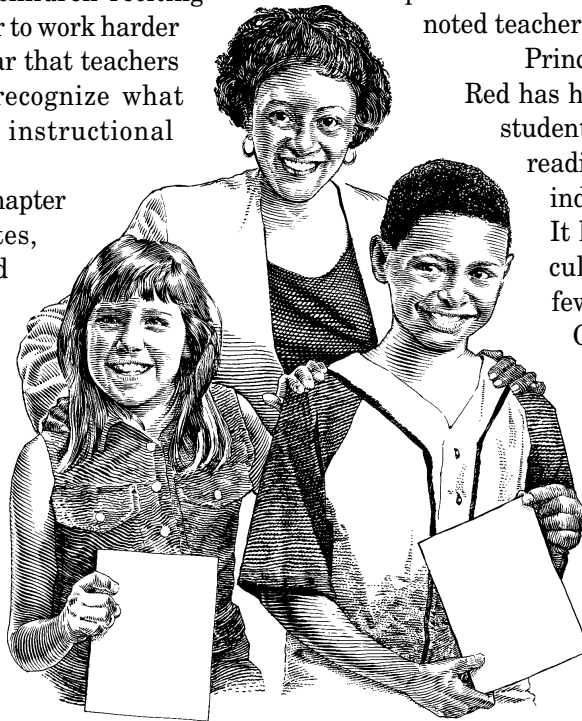
"There is a real sense of community within our building since implementing the Modern Red design. Staff and parents collaborate for the benefit of our children," noted teacher Lela Holder.

Principal Collins goes on to say, "Modern Red has had a positive influence on teachers, students and parents. Students really enjoy reading classes. We are able to give more individualized attention to each child. It has had a tremendous effect on the culture of the school. We experience fewer overt behavior problems, and the Community Involvement Task Force has been able to make inroads in involving parents and the community in all aspects of the school."

PS 96 is an exciting place to be. It is a school where children always come first — a perfect example of how changes can be made when the principal and staff are open and willing.

While there is still more to be accomplished, it is evident that the partnership between PS 96 and Modern Red Schoolhouse will greatly impact the lives of the children in that community.

Fran Dixon, the State Support Team member assigned to PS 96, put it best when she said, "It's been a delight to work at this site because I have been able to watch the metamorphosis that has taken place. The school has become a true learning community where student achievement is at the heart of everything. The principal, staff, and parents are united, making children the true beneficiaries." 📌



Capstones at César Chavez

Sheets of thick butcher paper cover the hallway walls at César Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy, the pieces 10 feet long, over 4 feet high. Students from Randy Littlefield's history/public policy course swarm over the sheets, little by little turning the cream-colored surface into a multicolored world map.

"Do you know what this part of South America is called?" queries a visitor of one group of students as they get the ragged edges of the bottom of Chile and Argentina just right.

One grabs a book and looks it up. Patagonia? Tierra del Fuego? A Spanish-speaking student helps to translate that phrase for her classmates — without looking up from the coast of Africa.

Three faculty members, 60 students

The César Chavez charter school, situated in a renovated EPA office building in southwest D.C., opened this fall with 60 ninth-graders. The school's three faculty members have used three Modern Red Capstones — The Constitution, Rain Forest, and Population — to help ground the curriculum. But "use" is far too simple a verb for what these teachers have done, modifying the Capstones where necessary, adding to them to take advantage of the world of Washington, D.C.

From Monticello to the 1960's Civil Rights movement

As part of the Constitution Capstone, students and faculty visited Monticello, where Thomas Jefferson's political legacy emerged. Guest speakers who had worked for civil rights in the 1960s came to class at Chavez. Among them: Attorney Robert Fitzpatrick of D.C., who graduated from law school, headed straight to Mississippi, and found himself at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s side. Three Little Rock natives talked about Arkansas before, during, and after segregation: Dr. Faustine Jones-Wilson, editor-in-chief emerita of Howard University's *Journal of Negro Education*; Dr. Rosella Bardley, principal emerita of D.C.'s Eliot Junior High School; and Virginia Walden, executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice and one of the first graduates of a desegregated Central High School.

Students used these personal stories, and their own research, when they prepared and then made speeches on the issue of school segregation, part of their culminating experience this fall.

Rain forests in the Hart Senate Building

Second semester is equally exciting, as faculty prepared Chavez students for a mock world council on rain forests, which took place during three weeks in March. Lisa Jacobs Raymond, the school's public policy point person, reserved a hearing room in the Hart Senate Building for the council meeting, while several D.C.-based rain forest experts were recruited to listen to the presentation, all to make the experience for the Chavez students as real as possible. The maps and other work in Mr Littlefield's classroom readied the students for the geopolitical issues associated with rain forests.

In Beth Fighera's language arts class, work surrounding Lorene Carey's memoir *Black Ice* prepared students to write first-person narratives of those who live or work or explore in the rain forest. In Jill Russo-Downey's science class, experiments with fast-growing plants have served as a starting point for work on and discussion about genetics and biodiversity.

Students split into three groups to prepare presentations about three different rain forest areas: Washington State's Olympic Peninsula, Papua New Guinea, and the Amazon basin. But the intricacies of Tierra del Fuego are first.

Furrowed brows, the scratch of pencils, the occasional erasure are testimony to the educational groundwork being laid in this extraordinary school setting. All those responsible are to be congratulated. 📌



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Integrating reading strategies across the curriculum

The Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute in San Antonio, Texas, had a great month in February. In particular, teachers from Wheatley, Harris, Connell, and Rogers middle schools were involved in two Saturday training sessions that focused on integrating specific reading strategies across the curriculum. Michael Benedict and Ann Ritchie, two MRSB consultants from the Pittsburgh area, facilitated these innovative sessions. The key objective was to provide participants with tools and strategies they could use to assist their students in improving scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Our goal in every MRSB workshop and training session is to render practical assistance to teachers and ensure the relevancy of substance and technique in the classroom. We are pleased by the many favorable evaluations from these sessions. Teachers spoke highly of the content material used to address specific TAAS objectives.

Swapping roles to achieve solid instruction

The focus of the first session was geared toward vocabulary development and summarizing skills. Consultants modeled various ways in which these skills can be incorporated into daily lessons. Our consultants played the role of teachers while the participants took the role of students.

Participants were encouraged to implement the techniques and share the effectiveness of the lessons during the second session. The enthusiasm of this activity centered on group information, practice, and exchange, thus prompting interested newcomers to attend the second Saturday session. In turn, the second session emphasized how to use graphic organizers, point of view, statement of facts, inferences, and generalizations across content areas.

One teacher told us, "This is not touchy-feely stuff. These are broad-based applications that can be used in all content areas — reinforcing learning goals across the spectrum."

Kathy Tackett, principal of Rogers Middle School, said, "I knew the sessions were successful when I heard teachers

in the halls the following Monday morning sharing with colleagues the techniques they had learned in the training sessions."

Sessions in this style provide a medium for insightful discussion among a grouping of educators from different disciplines and schools. This type of open forum produces a great interchange of ideas and experiences that participants are eager to share.

As one participant stated, "These tools breed success! I am grateful for this helpful information!"

We heard much the same from other participants and look forward to sharing this training with teachers at many other Modern Red sites. 📌

DePolo serves as new MRSB site manager in Northeast

We are pleased to announce another great addition to the MRSB staff. Genie DePolo has joined our staff as site manager for New Jersey and the Northeast. DePolo brings more than a decade of special education, administrative, and higher-education leadership to the Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute.

In addition to her experience as an assistant principal of special education, a dean of special education, a classroom teacher, and a curriculum developer for the New York City Board of Education, DePolo serves as adjunct instructor at Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry and the Bronx, New York, providing courses in the History of Education in America, Special Education Pedagogical Strategies, and Special Education from the Federal and State Perspective.

DePolo's expertise in the Modern Red Schoolhouse design was honed as a member of our National Faculty and site coordinator at Hansberry Middle School in the Bronx, a former MRSB site. She holds degrees and certificates from the Herbert H. Lehman College of the City of New York and the College of New Rochelle. In mid-December, she began working with MRSB sites in New Jersey, Queens, and Yonkers.

We are happy to have this valuable new addition to the MRSB family. 📌



Modern Red's support to schools recognized in recent report

The February 17th issue of Education Weekly reports the public release of An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform. Commissioned by five education groups, the guide was completed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in Washington, D.C. The comprehensive, consumer-oriented guide provides information about 24 reform models in six areas — evidence of positive effects on student achievement, year introduced in schools, number of schools, support the developer provides to the schools, first-year costs, and first-year costs with current staff reassigned.

We take pride in AIR's reporting that MRSB is "Strong" in the support we provide to our schools. As reported in the November 1998 issue of the STANDARD, we are really quite proud of our schools' accomplishments.

A question of assessments tools and techniques

Readers will notice that AIR reports that Modern Red Schoolhouse has "no research" for evidence of positive effects on student achievement ... because AIR based its conclusion on definitions that precluded the use of local or state test scores as evidence. As all of our clients know, Modern Red has relied heavily on state assessments to evaluate the effects of our design, and we have benchmarked student gains against district or state outcomes.

Recognizing the difficulties of proper assessment, the report's researchers concluded that "more research is needed." The relative "youth" of many of the reform models reviewed and the comprehensiveness of their goals (including MRSB's) make it difficult and, perhaps, premature to assess their effectiveness at this time. We at MRSB believe that when more-sophisticated forms of assessment are devised, our design and service will rank even higher in the next report. 📌

Modern Red trains new consultants

During the weekend of February 5th through 7th in Pittsburgh MRSB staff brought together more than 40 people for introduction to the design and discussions of their contributions to training at implementing sites. Sessions were conducted by Sally Kilgore on Friday evening, covering the origin, development, and components of the MRSB design.

On Saturday and Sunday concurrent sessions were held. June Gregory worked with potential trainers in change process and leadership development; Ron Heady and Tim Gaddis introduced potential trainers to design elements and special areas of consultation (reading and literacy acquisition, parent involvement, subject area specialties, and so forth).

Participants will now enter the "mentoring" phase of training, each paired with an experienced staff member or senior trainer for coaching and consultation. They will observe training, co-train with a mentor, and conduct training with a mentor present.

National faculty members and trainers

The number of National Faculty and National Trainers continues to grow. In September 1997 MRSB had 10; in June 1998, 20 more for a total of 30; in February 1999, 30 more for a total of 60.

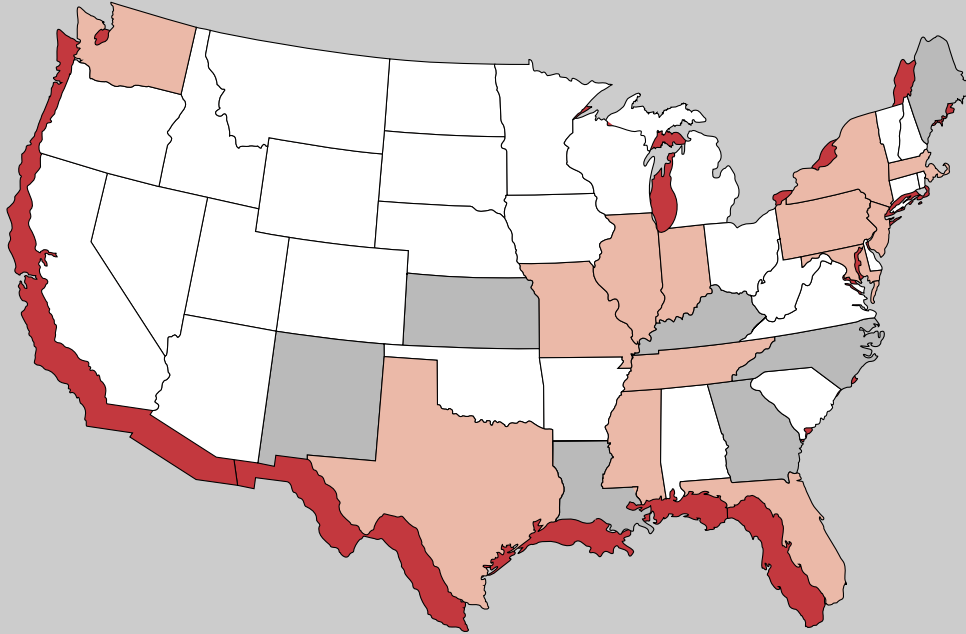
Categorized by what they do, National Trainers include nine elementary, one middle school, three secondary, and six central office staff (directors of staff development, curriculum and instruction specialists, etc.).

Teachers in place number 12 elementary, five middle school, seven secondary, and three instructional guides or equivalents. All are in-school curriculum developers.

Others include one full-time professor and 13 consultants (curriculum, staff development, and the like). Some are former superintendents; some are part-time college professors; some do workplace consulting, too. 📌

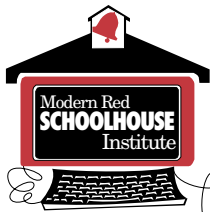


MODERN RED SCHOOLHOUSE SITES



Modern Red now has active sites in 13 states — Florida (6), Illinois (2), Indiana (2), Maryland (10), Massachusetts (2), Missouri (2), Mississippi (3), New Jersey (2), New York (2), Pennsylvania (2), Tennessee (2), Texas (16), Washington (1), and the District of Columbia (2).

Negotiations and discussions are under way to begin work with sites in Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, New Mexico, and North Carolina. Negotiations are also under way for additional sites in districts already under contract.



Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute
208 23rd Avenue North
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

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Ronald Heady, Executive Editor
email: rheady@mrsh.org
Jean B. Rose, Managing Editor
Natasha Swingley, Production

Correspondence welcome:
Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute
208 23rd Avenue North
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
phone: 615.320.8804
toll free: 1.800.275.6774
toll free: 888.ASK.MRSH
fax: 615.320.5366
home page: www.mrsh.org

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