

# Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School

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Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School, located in one of the most impoverished communities in Washington, DC, serves approximately 390 students in grades 9–12. The law-themed school teaches students to solve complex problems, think critically, and advocate for themselves and their communities.

- ◆ High (9–12)
- ◆ 99% Black
- ◆ 69% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

The school has a strong culture of data-driven instructional decision making. To reinforce the schoolwide culture, leadership is committed to setting a clear vision and high expectations for teachers and students.

The school uses a two-pronged assessment program that provides teachers with information required for data-driven instructional decision making. The school employs a full-time Quality Assurance Manager to administer assessments, prepare data, train teachers to use the data system, and assist teachers with data interpretation. Using structured time built into the school's schedule, teachers can collaborate around data analysis and use. Teachers analyze various data to inform their instruction and engage students in using data to monitor their own learning.

## A Two-Pronged Assessment Program

A two-pronged assessment program is the hallmark of Thurgood Marshall Academy's data-driven instructional decision making. This program uses diagnostic and benchmark assessments in core content areas. The first prong is a web-based diagnostic assessment in math and reading that students take at the beginning and end of ninth and tenth grade. The test produces grade-level equivalences to help determine whether a student is below, at, or above grade level.

The second prong consists of English, math, and science benchmark assessments administered to ninth and tenth graders every six to eight weeks. These faculty-developed assessments use items from a web-based assessment system and the school's curricular materials and are aligned to the District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System. Staff collaborates to tailor benchmark assessments to skills and concepts taught each quarter. Test results help determine whether students have mastered the targeted skills, objectives, and standards, and teachers use the results to plan or modify instruction.

## Collaborative Progress for Instructional Improvement

Using structured time built into the school's schedule, teachers collaborate in data-driven instructional decision making. In grade-level and content meetings, they analyze diagnostic test data to plan their courses, identify students' strengths and weaknesses, make placement decisions, and address curriculum needs.

A half-day professional development session held within one week after each benchmark assessment allows teachers and administrators to collaborate in analyzing data and developing Classroom Instructional Plans (CIP) to improve teaching and learning. The Quality Assurance Manager prepares the data in a user-friendly format, and the Academic Director and Assistant Director for Curriculum and Instruction facilitate the sessions. Administrators and teachers examine assessment results to identify trends and patterns question-by-question, student-by-student, and class-by-class. They look closely at data for students with disabilities to note any achievement gaps. Extending beyond data analysis, the collaboration process includes discussion of potential instructional changes to improve students' mastery of objectives and essential skills.

Each teacher uses the results of data analysis to create a CIP, which includes data-driven goals and strategies for instructional improvement. The CIP helps teachers individualize instruction and incorporate targeted skills, objectives, and standards into instructional activities throughout the school day.

### **Using Data to Support Struggling Students**

A public charter school based on the belief that *all* children have the right to a first-class education, Thurgood Marshall Academy functions as a youth development organization and provides rigorous curriculum and in- and after-school support—such as academic tutoring, personalized mentoring, and extended summer programs.

Staff uses data to ensure struggling students receive appropriate support. All incoming ninth- and tenth-grade students take diagnostic tests in math and reading. Their scores identify any areas of weakness and help determine the need for intensive intervention. If students score below the fifth-grade level, they are assigned to remediation classes, targeting areas of deficiency and helping students master skills needed for grade-level English or math classes. Students take diagnostic tests again at the end of the semester to assess their growth and need for additional support. Students who struggle academically are encouraged to participate in after-school programs to help them with basic skills and homework.

### **Engaging All Students in Data Use**

Students at Thurgood Marshall Academy are expected to be active partners in learning. To increase student buy-in and responsibility, teachers regularly provide students with their assessment data, such as benchmarks, quizzes, and unit exams. Teachers then help students use the data to monitor their academic progress and set learning goals. They also regularly work to help students understand expectations, objectives assessed, and their assessment scores, as well as help students formulate strategies for improved learning. Working with students to set a class average for assessments motivates and reminds students to work hard toward achieving the class goal.

For the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) test, the Quality Assurance Manager makes classroom presentations to help students analyze and interpret their PSAT scores. Each student has to complete a report by analyzing their own PSAT data, comparing their scores with other scores across the country, and identifying areas for improvement in each content area.

All students must prepare an annual portfolio that includes ongoing analysis of their progress, personal learning reflections, and personal and academic goals. At the beginning of each school year, teachers provide detailed rubrics to students to help them understand the expectations and the evaluation criteria for their portfolios. As students progress through each

year, the expectations in the portfolio become increasingly rigorous, and teachers meet with students during an advisory period to share data, discuss progress, and develop improvement plans. After analyzing a wide range of assessment and behavior data, students write reflections on how they have achieved their goals based on data analysis results. For the academic component, a student needs to write six detailed, thoughtful reflections and create one graph. At the end of each year, students present their portfolios to a two- or three-member committee of teachers, administrators, community members, and parents.

According to administrators, teachers, and students, the portfolios have a positive impact on student learning. Throughout the portfolio development process, students learn how to compile information, track data, reflect on their progress, set goals, and practice their public speaking skills. The portfolios enable students to assess their progress, help students develop action plans to improve performance, and motivate students to reach their goals. Alumni believe that completing the annual portfolio contributed to their academic success and was one of the best educational and personal experiences at Thurgood Marshall Academy.