



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Stephen Decatur School

Middle School 35

**272 McDonough Street
Brooklyn
NY 11233**

Principal: Jacklyn Charles-Marcus

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Reviewer: Audra M. Watson

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Stephen Decatur is a 6th through 8th grade middle school located in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. The school was restructured from a kindergarten through 8 to a middle school four years ago under the leadership of a new principal. The building is shared with another school.

There are currently 284 students enrolled. Ninety-nine percent of students are Black and the remainder are Hispanic. The main language spoken is English. Less than 2% of students are English language learners and 22% are special education students. Eighty percent of the students have Title 1 eligibility which is slightly lower than similar schools but higher than City schools. Attendance, at 87.1% is lower than that found in similar and City schools.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a clear vision for the school and is respected by all members of the school community.
- The school is effectively managed on a day-to-day basis.
- Effective communication structures are in place to support the goals of the school.
- The principal and school leaders frequently observe classrooms to monitor instruction and student achievement.
- The leadership of the school is committed to the continued growth of teachers and affords a variety of professional development opportunities to all staff members.
- Teachers and leaders use a wide variety of data and assessments for setting goals and monitoring student achievement.
- Staff work collaboratively to produce strategic and short-term plans with objectively measurable and specific time frames.
- Staff and students feel valued, safe, and supported.
- Student attendance is a high priority and there are effective monitoring systems in place.
- The school has a range of partnerships with community based organizations and numerous after school activities to support students.

What the school needs to improve

- Make instructional programs consistently relevant to the academic needs of individual students.
- Ensure that all teachers have high levels of content knowledge and effective strategies to engage all their students.
- Provide better instruction for special education students.
- Improve the use of data for planning interventions and monitoring the progress of all students.
- Ensure that all leaders and staff have high expectations of students' progress and performance.
- Continue to work on involving parents in the life of the school and in contributing to the progress and performance of their children.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

The school has been transformed under the leadership of its current principal. She has brought a sense of stability and order to the school. Consequently, a welcoming environment is in place for students, teachers, and parents. The principal's vision for the school is understood and supported by staff, students and parents. The principal, the cabinet, teachers, parents, and students are all focused on '3 A's for Success': 'Attitude, Attendance, and Academics' as part of the school's mission to improve student outcomes. A small group of parents are particularly active in the school community.

A wide range of assessments are currently being used by the school to monitor student progress. The school uses this data mainly to support academic interventions for students. Teachers are hard working and committed to working collaboratively to support student achievement. Hallways are lined with samples of student work. Classroom doors are decorated with the insignia of the college from which each teacher graduated. Teachers have high expectations of students and the principal is working to ensure these expectations are borne out in improved student performance. The school recognizes the need to ensure all students are actively engaged in lessons and that instruction meets the needs of all students.

Technology integration has been a major focus in all classrooms and a vehicle through which staff intend to accelerate student performance. Students in grades 6 and 7 have unlimited access to laptops and all students can access the grant funded technology laboratory. Project Stretch, a technology driven after school program, offered by the Beacon program has been particularly successful in supporting 6th graders in developing academic skills.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal has articulated a goal of increasing student performance in level three by 15 to 20 percentage points. To facilitate the attainment of this goal, during the past year, the school has expanded its use of assessments to increase the amount and kind of information available to all staff about student performance. In addition to State and City assessment results, the school uses Princeton Review, San Diego, Jamestown Reading Navigation, mock State assessments and Rally as supplementary assessments to monitor student progress. The data is gathered consistently and is used to track student progress at approximately four to six week intervals. Additional information, collected from classes daily, is also used to determine areas of focus for classroom teachers. Administrators, coaches, and the school's success team keep an assessment binder of school, class, and individual student data for periodic review, discussion, and feedback to the school staff.

The principal plays the primary role in consistently reviewing cohort data to determine student progress from the point of entry into the school and on. This is to measure the progress of all students and grades in relation to similar schools and the school's own past performance. Specifically, she regularly monitors cohort statistics for attendance, mathematics, English language arts, science and social studies. Staff do an excellent job in collecting information for different groups of students. However, there is insufficient focus on the assessment data that is generated for special education students. In addition, while a wide variety of data is being generated, much of it is currently being used to drive academic intervention service grouping and test preparation strategies rather than in a wider context.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Staff and school leaders work collaboratively and effectively to produce strategic and short-term plans with objectively measurable and specific time frames. Aligned with the Comprehensive Education Planning process, this results in short and long term goals and the development of grade and subject pacing calendars focused on areas needing further attention.

Teachers are asked to create goals for their classes and departments aligned to the principal's performance review. The success team meets weekly to identify students for interventions. They review student progress based on assessment data and anecdotal information provided by teachers to determine the next steps for individual students during the intervention period. While there is a comprehensive school plan to focus on academic intervention services for students the school places primary emphasis on moving students between levels two and three. Consistent emphasis is not yet being made on improving the performance and progress of the students in greatest need of improvement.

The school conveys high expectations to students and families through one-on-one conferences and reports. Students are generally aware of their strengths and weaknesses as the principal and some teachers regularly discuss assessment results with them. This information is used to focus interventions more carefully. All members of the school community are aware of the current level of student performance for students with whom they work. This information is analyzed by the success team, school based support team and school leadership team at which time they determine plans for students.

While there is a small group of parents consistently and actively involved in goal-setting with their children, many parents are not sufficiently involved in this process. The school continues to outreach to parents to assist them in supporting their children. It uses various communication mechanisms such as phone calls, monthly calendars and the partnership with the Beacon program to keep parents abreast of school goals and strategies for promoting academic success. The school recognizes the need to continue this work so that all the community can share its goals to improve student performance.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The mandated curriculum is supplemented in a variety of ways such as the 4 Square writing techniques. The Australian and United States Services in Education coach provides professional development to classroom teachers and push-in to support the implementation of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Workshop. The school is very well resourced for technology and plans to make increased use of these facilities to accelerate learning.

Teachers are held accountable for monitoring student progress. Teachers, the principal and assistant principal, have a group of ten students with whom they work. They are required to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students in their groups and use the information to meet individual student needs. While teachers are able to use data to differentiate instruction in small groups, they generally use data in their own classrooms to address whole class needs rather than for planning for individual students. As a result, sufficient attention has not yet been paid to making instruction relevant to the needs of all students. The active engagement of students in instructional programs is inconsistent across grades and classes. Planning and the use of data are insufficiently rigorous to engage special education students.

Budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions support the school’s goals and are based on emerging information. An example of this is the way in which the budget has been used to acquire additional assessments about student progress. Teacher strengths determine which teachers provide supplementary support to individual students. A review of after-school attendance revealed that students most in need did not participate. These students now receive an additional 50 minutes of instruction, three days a week, during the school day.

The caring and supportive atmosphere engendered by the cabinet is an area of strength. The principal is supportive and conscientious. Students are known and respected. Moreover, they are aware of the expectation that they attend and succeed in college. For these reasons, students admire and are highly respectful of all staff members, particularly the principal.

Following a review, clear structures and procedures have been implemented to monitor attendance record keeping. Consequently, the attendance rate has increased and the school is working towards its goal of 90% attendance. Classroom teachers, attendance teachers, and the school parent teacher association president conduct outreach to families when students are not in school.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Staffing is a priority for the principal. Having inherited a school with many out-of-license teachers and students performing well below grade level, important staffing decisions were made. Two key determinants in finalizing hiring decisions are high expectations for

students and subject area licenses. While staff have high expectations of students, the principal is working to place content area specialists in every classroom that can more effectively use student-level data to make short and long term plans for individual students.

There is a strong commitment to professional development. Opportunities are afforded to all teachers including participation in State and national conferences. Professional articles are provided and two professional texts a year are required reading. Teachers are currently reading texts on differentiation. The school has not yet fully aligned professional development with student level data in order to facilitate the continued improvement of student outcomes.

The cabinet frequently conducts formal and informal observations. Feedback is given regularly and informs weekly planning meetings. The reorganization of classes for proximity of literacy and social studies teachers and mathematics and science teachers enables intervisitations to take place more readily. Collaborative planning is directed by the literacy and mathematics coaches. During planning meetings, teachers analyze student work, review pacing calendars and discuss student progress. Teachers also pinpoint areas of difficulty for students and glean suggestions for next steps from their colleagues.

During the past four years the principal has made a series of significant changes. She has created stability and has respectfully engaged stakeholders in the goal of increased student performance. School tone, safety and security have radically improved. Parents, teachers, and students hold her in high regard and acknowledge her ability to focus them around common goals. There are clear organizational structures in place for the smooth running of the school. Morning announcements, books of the month, and problems and quotations of the day contribute positively to stability, consistency and the focus on student academic achievement.

A strong working relationship has been forged with the school's Beacon program. A family dynamics program has been instituted to provide after school services for students and support services such as the General Education Diploma and parent workshops to families. The impact on the school has been a decrease in the number of students performing in level one and an increase in the participation of parents.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's Comprehensive Education Plan has delineated areas for development. May planning, retreats, the success team, the school-based support team and weekly common planning time are all key structures. They have been developed and utilized by school staff to revisit stated goals, analyze data, monitor student progress and modify plans as needed. Currently, grade level data is available for each student class and grade. However, despite this wealth of information, the best use of data is restricted to measuring student progress in intervention services. Diagnostic assessments are given at the end of the year to assist in goal setting.

Sufficient emphasis has not been placed on improving the performance and progress of special education students. Moreover, while data is used very well to target interventions

for students in level one and two, emphasis on working to support higher achieving students has not yet been an area of careful analysis. The principal is working on using the information revealed by a variety of assessments to create more specific plans for students as it relates to their individual work in classrooms. There is a great deal of information generated from multiple diagnostic measures which are used to revise plans and goals that have been delineated. This is a key function of the success team and carried out on an ongoing basis by the principal.

Subject teachers review student data and develop goals. Effective use is then made of weekend retreats and sessions after school and on Saturday to review, analyze and plan for the coming school year. Administrators, teachers, the parent coordinator, parent representatives and the school business manager review all available information to plan for improved student performance, motivation, and parent involvement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Stephen Decatur School (MS 35)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.	X		
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.	X		
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.	X		
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.			X
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	