



NYCDOE

Quality Review: Final Report

The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

The John L. Steptoe School

Public / Middle School 181

**1023 New York Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Dr. Lowell Coleman

Dates of review: October 12 - 13 and 16, 2006

Reviewer: Margaret Lee

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Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The school population comprises 1249 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. Over 92% of students are Black, almost 6% Hispanic with small numbers of students from other groups. The school has more than twice the City average of students newly arrived in the country, the majority coming from the Caribbean. Eighty four percent of students are Title 1 eligible. There are 106 special education students, and 86 English language learners.

Attendance was 91.6%, in the last full school year, average for schools across the City but below similar schools. There is a large student turnover at grade 5 level with many students leaving for neighboring middle schools with specializations in specific curricular areas.

The principal is in his third year at the school and during that time the school has been transformed into a place where students and their families are valued. There has been a high staff turnover recently with ten new staff members employed this year. Three members of staff have been working in the school for more than 23 years.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal leads a committed team who work hard on student academic improvement.
- School programs are well managed with some providing enriching experiences for students in music and art.
- The allocation of support staff for teachers across all grade levels is exceptionally well provided for.
- The principal, teachers and the parent co-coordinator readily welcome parent input into school decision-making.
- Students are well behaved, disciplined, respected and made to feel valued.
- The school is effectively organized and runs smoothly.
- The school is successful in reducing student absences and lateness.

What the school needs to improve

- Increase the variety and use of interim assessments to provide an ongoing picture of student achievement.
- Support teachers in their understanding and use of data to target instruction more closely to the needs of individuals and groups of students, so that differentiated student-centered learning becomes more consistent across the school.
- Sharpen the focus of professional discussions between teachers, teacher leaders and coaches to concentrate on evaluation of learning and sharing of effective strategies.
- Link student work in classrooms with work in after-school programs and other additional learning support to build concepts and skills more thoroughly.
- Further develop strategies for engaging and motivating middle school students to become more active partners in their learning.
- Set measurable interim goals for school improvement, based on student performance data, and use these for regular review and revision of plans.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school with undeveloped features.

The school principal is concerned to improve student achievement and self-esteem. He has established organizational systems to support teachers' collaborative working. A well resourced teachers' center has recently been established for this purpose. Staff are well supported to improve teaching by coaches, staff developers and academic intervention teachers designated to work at each grade level. The quality of instruction to meet student needs varies across and within grade levels.

The three assistant principals work separately but come together to coordinate a range of support for teachers. They provide good leadership and administer their responsibilities diligently, utilizing their expertise to good effect. The next steps for the school include ensuring that teachers are consistently using data to focus more accurately on what needs to be done to raise achievement.

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.

Data collection and teachers' use of it is managed effectively in lower grades. There are guided reading levels and teacher observations. Diagnostic tests are also used where appropriate. The school is implementing the use of running records to add to the range of assessments. The school recognizes that it needs to collect, analyze and use student data more efficiently in order to improve instruction. In recognition of the need to extend the effective use of teacher-based assessment strategies, a new technology program to record student progress results for the school has been purchased. The program informs staff where the students need help and points to relevant teaching strategies. It is intended that all teachers will use this school computer database to assess each individual student in the future. Teachers are not fully familiar with this program as yet, and it is too soon to judge its impact.

Teacher-based interim assessments strategies, for example student portfolios, are being used at middle school to good effect. The selection of the range of interim assessments has been chosen for being informative and conveniently administered by teachers. The school relies also on standardized State tests to identify student progress.

The progress of special education students in self-contained and collaborative classrooms is carefully monitored. Case conferences are held with parents following ongoing assessments. Caring staff make annual summative assessments of these students' individual progress. There is good sharing of student promotion portfolios which are passed onto the next teacher in the following year. There is insufficient awareness of learning rates and performance levels of particular groups, for example ethnicity and gender, within the school population. The school is aware of its progress over the previous

three year period. It measures and documents rates of progress across grade levels based on State tests.

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.

Data shows the need to raise achievement in the upper grades, particularly in mathematics. The school has been working to assist teachers to gain better understanding of the standards of instruction required across all grade levels in the school. For example, as part of a familiarization for grade 3 and 4 teachers to fully appreciate the nature of good literacy teaching in the lower grades, inter-classroom visits were undertaken. This enabled staff visiting upper grade classrooms to understand the next stages for their students and helped them to prepare students for progression into higher grades.

The school documents particular middle school students’ learning needs and progress. Here, students are pre-tested and individual learning plans are developed. These are helpful in progressing and targeting the learning for individual students. Plans for special education students are managed well with good documentation about progress, the curriculum and changes to lesson plans. Support for English language learners is effective, with well above the average proportion reaching levels 3 and 4 in English language arts than in similar schools. Learning goals to target improved achievements of particular groups of students within classroom are not yet formalized. Common teacher preparation time for grade levels is not used as productively as it could possibly be to discuss students’ work, review data, and carry out related lesson planning.

The links between student work in classrooms and the work to be completed in after-school programs and any additional learning support is not well enough connected or related to the learning needs as identified by classroom teachers.

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.

In some circumstances, data is used to determine the curriculum. For instance, in response to observations of students, non-fiction texts are used more frequently in class to increase reading motivation. Teachers are developing pacing calendars for the curriculum at grades kindergarten through 2. These teachers are also structuring the timing of data collection so that it coincides with particular points in curriculum delivery.

The school has recognized that it could make a difference in students’ personal and academic development through enrichment programs, including the creation of a specialized performing arts facility. This is currently a work in progress. The assistant principal of the middle school is leading the way in developing extension activities to raise achievement. For example, to increase the percentages of students reaching the higher levels in mathematics, students are expected to show reasoning for the answers to

problem-solving tasks. Further, the school wishes to ensure that students are fully functional in technology and will develop two computer laboratories this year. There is a range of student clubs with enriched activities for the higher achievers.

The school budget is allocated according to the learning needs of students so that each classroom has good range of relevant resources and teaching materials to support students' learning.

There is evidence of differentiated teaching or group work in some classrooms, but this is not consistent. There is an expectation that the workshop model for lesson planning and teaching will be followed. Teachers who use student-centered teaching practices use them effectively. However, this approach is currently not being used by all teachers across the grade levels. In the middle school grades in particular, these strategies to strengthen student engagement are not commonly used. In preparation for a concerted effort on targeting student improvement, staff have completed a survey about their current practice. The survey seeks information about teacher awareness of student needs and interconnections between instruction, resources and curriculum planning. The principal views this as a step towards increasing teacher accountability at all levels.

The principal and senior staff maintain high standards of behavior in school. They constantly remind students of expectations and take action where infractions occur. Disruptive students are withdrawn into a special program to work in a separate class. The management of this program and general student behavior and discipline, especially in the middle school, is well controlled and managed with few students repeating attendance in the group. Students feel valued and respected. The school is vigilant about lateness and student attendance levels, although attendance remains below that of similar schools.

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.

The assistant principals were selected by the principal for their strengths and skills at their designated grade level. The staff leaders, coaches and staff developers use their experience well to best help teachers.

Professional development focuses on the regional calendar, rather than being determined by the school's knowledge of teachers' strengths and areas for development. There is limited planning for targeted school-based development specific to the needs of students. Coaches facilitate conversations between teachers to increase awareness of ways to improve learning and achievement, but this focus is not always carried on in grade and other meetings. Teachers recognize the value of inter-classroom visitations and the practice is being extended. There are some outstanding teacher practices which produce very good student work, but these teachers are not known to other teachers. Some teachers are individually very good at reflection on their work but peer-reflection between teachers on their effectiveness is not occurring.

The principal is accessible for all staff concerns. He is visible throughout the school, maintaining a calm purposeful, working atmosphere. He regularly conducts teacher observations and learning walks to monitor teaching quality. Teachers are accustomed to informal observations of their work and appreciate the professional input.

The senior administrative team is very vigilant in establishing and maintaining high standards for student movement during classroom breaks. The school runs smoothly as a result of the visible direction staff give to students.

School partnerships work well for students' benefit. There is an after-school program which welcomes students in the school, and from neighboring schools, to participate until early evening. This is the BEACON/Toast Project and Project Arts – Dance Studio and Medgar Evers College involvement.

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

Planning for continuous school improvement is well underway with a number of outstanding aspects being addressed. The key one is the implementation of computerized diagnostic testing system which is being introduced into the school and will serve as a pilot project for schools in the region. The school committees, leadership teams and faculty groups are in place and schedules for teacher meetings are established. The school is preparing to give higher priority to the quality of instruction to improve student rates of success.

The increased range and available use of diagnostic and classroom-based assessments to complement existing assessment procedures provides teachers with valuable additional information and related teaching strategies for discussion at faculty and grade level meetings. The middle school curriculum has been modified based on outcomes of teacher discussions about student work maintained in portfolios.

The principal encourages all staff to become familiar with the Comprehension Education Plan. Copies are available in the teachers' center. Tracking interim and long-term goals to ensure that the school makes the desired progress through the use of measurable targets is not evident. Goals and plans for grade or classroom levels are being developed, an initiative well led by the responsible assistant principal and coaches. There is little planning with interim diagnostic measures and review of the generated information.

The school is aware that, based on State tests, improvements need to be made to increase the percentage of students reaching the higher performance standards. However, there are no objective measurable goals for grade levels or the school.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: The John L. Steptoe School (PS 181)	∅	✓	+
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 knows and respect students and responds 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 are characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5		X	