



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Stephen Decatur School

**Middle School 035
272 MacDonough Street
Brooklyn
NY 11233**

Principal: Jacklyn Charles-Marcus

**Dates of review: April 3 - 4, 2008
Lead Reviewer: John Francis**

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

Overall evaluation

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

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Stephan Decatur School is a middle school with 235 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 87% Black, 11% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Native American students. The student body includes 1% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006-2007 was 86.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 79% eligibility.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has a vision and drive that inspires the faculty and the parents.
- Large amounts of valuable data are gathered and used well to understand and evaluate the performance of individual students.
- The school clearly identifies and targets students most in need of improvement and there are good systems to track their progress.
- Teachers make good use of class level data to plan differentiated instruction and appropriate interventions.
- The high level of respect seen among all members of the faculty and student body ensures the smooth running of the school.
- The school uses data and other evidence well to inform good quality professional development.
- There are good opportunities for teachers to improve their skills through good use of common planning time and classroom intervisitation.
- There are very good procedures to support those teachers new to the school.
- Well-used regular assessments inform key areas of strategic development and enable the school to make timely adjustments to procedures.
- There is a strong and effective focus on the use of technology to build students' skills and enhance instruction.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop a more detailed system to analyze and evaluate the progress and achievements of students by gender and ethnicity.
- Set clear and measurable goals for classes and subjects building in regular points for evaluation to take place.
- Improve the overall quality of instruction by focusing classroom observations more closely on the learning outcomes for students.
- Develop additional systems to raise the levels of attendance and reduce lateness that involve parents more actively in the process.

Part 3: Main Findings

Progress made since the last review

The school has made some progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal is well respected by the faculty and the parents who recognize her vision and the way this is driving progress. Some key aspects of the school's work have improved since the last Quality Review. There is now a clear, shared understanding across the school of where it is being effective and what it needs to develop.

The school makes good use of regular, periodic assessments to inform key areas of its strategic development. Supported by the work of the assistant principal, the school is gathering a good deal of valuable data and using it well at individual student level to target improvement. Where it is less effective is in further breaking down this data to evaluate the achievement and progress of specific groups of students, for example by gender or ethnicity. This prevents the school having all of the information it needs to investigate, for example, students' different learning styles and devise a wider range of approaches to instruction. The school does not yet set clear and measurable goals for classes and subjects or build in regular points to evaluate progress. Nevertheless, it is increasingly using the analysis to make timely adjustments to procedures across the school.

The school is very effective in targeting those students most in need of improvement, or close to grade level and there are good systems in place to track their progress and achievement. Here, teachers make good use of class level data to differentiate instruction and plan interventions. The detailed work of the inquiry team is leading the school in this field.

The climate in the school is very positive. The high levels of respect among all members of the faculty and student body leads to a very calm working environment and ideal conditions for learning. However, not all teachers capitalize on this. While across the school there are examples of good instructional practice, not all is at the level of the best and further work is needed to raise the quality overall. Where instruction is effective, teachers make thoughtful use of data, clearly seen in the quality of the differentiation of the tasks for students, the pace of the lesson and the probing nature of their questions. While teachers have good opportunities to improve their skills through the effective use of common planning time and classroom intervisitation, they are not always directed to observe this best practice. However, this is better for those teachers new to the school. They receive good quality support through close mentoring, professional development opportunities and common planning time.

The school has areas in need of improvement but there are strengths on which to build. The use of technology as a learning and instructional tool is well developed. Use is made of classroom observations and data from a range of sources to plan good quality professional development. This is raising teachers' understanding of the role of data in their everyday planning and instruction as demonstrated in the improvements to achievement. However, while attendance rates are improving slowly, there is insufficient innovation in the way the school challenges students to raise their levels of attendance.

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 the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school uses a commercial system to organize and synthesize its data at student, class and subject level. This provides staff with a wide range of timely data with which they can evaluate overall trends in students' achievement and progress. The school uses this information well to identify those groups whose progress is giving concern, which they subsequently target. The monthly review of this data enables the school to track the progress of these students closely.

The school is less effective in breaking data down further by gender and ethnicity. There is no consistent understanding in the school of the achievements of these distinct groups, or indeed combinations of these, to evaluate the impact of classroom instruction or interventions. This is an important omission as the school has created an all male class in grade 6 to investigate the impact of single sex instruction on the achievement of male students. While the school has a clear baseline starting point, the lack of comparable data from the other mixed-gender classes, makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of this initiative objectively.

The tracking of special education students is a strong feature as is the tracking and targeting of those students just below grade level.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Through subject departmental meetings, grade conferences and inquiry team meetings, the school frequently reviews data to track changes in students' achievement or changes in their rate of progress. The work of the inquiry team is also instrumental in monitoring the progress of those students just below grade level and developing appropriate interventions to help them make increased progress.

Whole-school targets are set but lack some of the more detailed information needed, such as by class or subject. The use of baseline data gives the school a clear picture of where individual students are at the beginning of their schooling. However, the school more closely aligns targets for improvement to a figure for overall gain, which is the same for all students and groups. Nevertheless, teachers make effective use of the available data to plan their instruction to align with the needs of their students.

The school monitors those who are just below grade level closely. Following the analysis of data on these students, it created smaller classes of low achieving students at each grade. These classes have their own effective program of instruction based on an additional analysis of their specific needs.

The secure relationships with parents ensure a good two-way exchange of information. Parents appreciate the information they receive on achievement and the good access to the administration and guidance counselor when they have issues to address.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

Administration is very adept at accessing a wide range of grants to supplement the budget. The school has benefited from the careful targeting of these resources. It has directed a lot of energy and funding into developing a wide range of good quality technology. All students in Grade 8 have their own laptop computer, used in all classes, and all classrooms have interactive white boards for use by teachers and students. Their regular and effective use enhances instruction and learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Students and parents consider the curriculum to be suitably broad and have particular praise for the Family Dynamic Program. Aligned to their technology focus, some students complete certified training in computer skills leading to the formation of the ‘Mouse Squad’. As a result, the school has a good core of knowledgeable students who can offer specialized assistance when technology problems arise in class.

Teachers engage in regular discussions on the data available to them, which alongside the outcomes from classroom observations drives the quest for quality and enhanced progress.

Students have great confidence in the administration and are comfortable approaching teachers or the guidance counselor. They know all issues are open to discussion and in confidence. Good behaviour and the short time allowed for transitioning ensure that lessons start promptly.

Attendance rates are improving, but only slowly. There is insufficient innovation in the way the school challenges students to raise their levels of attendance.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The principal uses the results of her regular formal and frequent informal classroom observations in a variety of ways to improve instruction. Oral and written feedback is given and she identifies common areas for development, which then form part of regular agenda items for common planning time. However, the observations focus too much on the teachers’ performance and not enough on the outcomes for students. There is no explicit link made between the two elements of the process. Nevertheless, very effective use is made of the information from observations and the analysis of data to inform good quality professional development. The administration and coaches plan and manage this well. Along with this, the doubling of common planning time provides the opportunity for good quality, detailed professional discussions around grade and department developments.

Teachers make effective use of the open-door arrangement for classroom intervisitation to share skills and improve their instruction. The school organizes appropriate support and continuing professional development for new teachers, who are involved in all meetings and collaborative planning. The use of double periods for conferencing gives extended opportunities for them to have in-depth discussions with their mentor.

All stakeholders have great faith in the ability of the administration. The school deals with discipline appropriately and there is a clear staged response to any incident. This ensures the resolution of issues at the lowest possible level of intervention.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is well developed.

There is a clearly shared and articulated vision for improvement that is bringing about change and embedding the programs that are generating success. Good, whole-school planning is the aspect of the school's work that is driving the improvements seen since the last Quality Review and this is beginning to influence progress in all other areas of the school's work.

The school has clearly thought out its long-term goals, which continue to raise expectations and challenge all members of the learning community. While the school evidently bases planning around these goals, some of the planning elements still lack measurable outcomes and timeframes to enable it to identify the successful achievement of the goals.

Good use is made of regular assessments to inform key areas of strategic development and the school uses all the available data well to make timely adjustments to procedures across the school. There is a clear identification of what teachers need to do to improve their instruction or their class management techniques. The evaluations from observations contain achievable points for improving instruction. Most classes are now working in a standards based environment, which leads to effective differentiation within the class instruction. Evaluations also enable teachers to produce their own goals for achieving competency.

The work of the assistant principal in using data analysis to drive forward performance is beginning to show clear improvements in student achievement. Using this data, an array of initiatives and interventions are beginning to yield significant improvements in some groups of students, particularly those that are the close focus of the inquiry team.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Stephen Decatur School	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
Quality Score			X		

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

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?			X		
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?		X			
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?			X		
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?			X		
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X		

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus 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 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?				X	
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X		

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?			X		
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?				X	
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X		

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.					
To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?			X		
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?			X		
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?			X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 4					
			X		

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.					
To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?				X	
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?				X	
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?				X	
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?				X	
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5					
				X	

◇	Outstanding
+	Well Developed
✓	Proficient
➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features
Δ	Underdeveloped