

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Stephen D. McSweeney School

Middle-High School 721
2697 Westchester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10461

Principal: Jean Marie Chin

Dates of review: March 20, 23 and 24, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Frank Jones

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Stephen D. McSweeney School is an Occupational Training Center with 481 students from ages 14 to 21. The school population comprises 38.4% Black, 53.5% Hispanic, 3.9% White, 3.3% Asian students and 0.9% American Indian. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 100% special education students. Boys account for 62.7% of the students enrolled and girls account for 37.3%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 82.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 64.3% eligibility.

As an Occupational Training Center, Stephen D. McSweeney School serves a range of student needs. It is a 12-month school for students with emotional deficits, developmental delays, visual impairments and those within the autistic spectrum.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Stephen D. McSweeney is a proficient school with several well-developed features. Under the astute and committed leadership of its principal, the school demonstrates the capacity to sustain the progress it is already making. The school has gathered a wealth of valuable data that it analyzes and uses effectively to place students on the school's vocational pyramid continuum, which identifies the vocational and job experiences students can access.

The school provides a caring and stimulating learning environment, which reflects its high expectations. Bulletin boards are presented impeccably and benefit from annotations, which direct next steps in learning. The principal and staff work hard to provide the best opportunities for students, who recognize this and develop in a culture of mutual trust. As one student stated, "They (teachers) taught me how to be proud of myself." The extensive curriculum provides a wealth of experiences and opportunities that the students benefit from immensely. Vocational lessons simulate the work environment, while visits to shops or engaging in philanthropic activities provide students with additional dimensions to their previous experiences. Community-based learning is exceptionally well planned and sharply differentiated so that the placements reflect accurately the skills and aptitudes of those students taking part. In contrast, some staff make insufficient use of data and the goals contained in the individual education plans (IEP's) when planning their instruction. On these occasions, tasks do not adequately address the skills and learning needs of different students.

The inter-disciplinary Inquiry Team has carried out some extremely effective work in evaluating available data and putting in place training in the use of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). Subsequent evaluation demonstrated the significant impact the project has had on non-verbal students. Professional development is available for all teachers, but it is not differentiated to match specific teacher development needs. The administration's classroom observations are irregular and insufficiently robust to have a significant impact on improving instruction. Similarly, there are too few opportunities for focused discussions between administrators and teachers that concentrate on enhancing the progress of student learning. However, this is a staff that is committed and eager to improve the life chances of each student in the school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's data-informed vocational pyramid enables the school to place students accurately in the least restrictive environments where they are able to function happily and extremely effectively.
- The extensive curriculum provides a wealth of experiences and opportunities that enrich and expand students' skills, knowledge and understanding, preparing them for the complex world in which they live.
- Parents value highly the communication they have with the school, the experiences their children are afforded and greatly appreciate the developmental progress their children make.
- The exceptionally rich and informative learning environment reflects the high expectations the school has for all students, who in turn experience learning in a culture of mutual trust and respect.
- The Inquiry Team has carried out extremely focused work to enhance student learning and their expertise and enthusiasm are beginning to have a significant impact across the school.
- The principal provides strong and intelligent leadership for a faculty that is committed in its desire to serve the needs of all students.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that all teachers utilize available data to inform their planning and goal setting and to differentiate instruction to meet individual student incremental learning goals as outlined in individual education plans.
- Increase the regularity of classroom observations by the assistant principals so they are better informed about the professional developmental needs of each teacher and can focus their support on improving their practice.
- Initiate regular one-to-one meetings between assistant principals and teachers to discuss the progress of their students, so that work is challenging and support is robust and timely.
- Ensure that each teacher has specific individual goals to improve their practice that emanate from classroom observation and are linked to targeted professional development.

Part 3: Main Findings

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

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

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

The school collects a range of extremely informative and pertinent data, including that issued by the State and other information from school-based systems. This provides an accurate picture of the performance, progress, and skill and communication capability of each student. The vast majority of students undertake New York State Alternate Assessments (NYSAA), which are aligned to State standards and judgments informed by alternate grade level indicators (AGLIS). In addition, carefully selected Brigance assessments are given according to student skill levels and the program students are following. These focused assessments provide a detailed record of acquired skills and deficits, which need to be addressed as prerequisites for accurate placement on, and progress along, the school's vocational pyramid (SVP). This is further supplemented three times per year by the Vocational Assessment Rubrics embedded within the New York State Standards in Career Development and Occupational Studies. The administration scrutinizes and uses this data effectively to inform transition planning and accurate placement at work sites. The remaining minority of students take State tests. Grades and end-of-unit tests, set by general education teachers, help monitor progress of each inclusion student. Effective use is made of this information to identify the levels of support that are required from the academic intervention service. Each teacher keeps a student portfolio, which is a useful record of progress in each student's skills, knowledge and understanding. However, teachers' ability to analyze and manipulate data is variable across the school.

The school's wide range of assessment, tracking and monitoring systems identifies accurately the diverse and complex needs of the student population. On entry, the school meets with parents to collect and engage in a detailed evaluation of the data they have at their disposal. This information is used well to provide a holistic view of the student's academic, personal, emotional and communication needs. This allows the school to place each student in a setting that provides a support in developing the skills that will enable them to function effectively in the least restrictive environment. The school has disaggregated data further to identify why English Language Learners are underperforming. As a result, the school introduced another bilingual class, which has resolved the problem.

Parents are kept informed regularly about their children's progress through formal contacts such as report cards, communication books and parent-teacher conferences. E-mails and phone calls support this good level of communication. Parents welcome the additional support and guidance they receive relating to travel training, bi-lingual instruction and Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS). In this way, parents are able to reinforce learning and, importantly, feel fully informed about the education process. They are, therefore, real partners in their child's education.

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.

The extensive range of academic, social and personal development data the school collects and analyzes effectively informs each student’s individual education plan (IEP). These plans provide academic and skills-based goals that relate directly to improving student performance on a continuum that will allow them access to work-related placements in the community. The pertinence of the IEPs is further enhanced by the information provided by the related services. This multi-disciplinary goal-setting process is particularly useful when activities are cross-referenced to include practice of known skills to reinforce and develop others. At times, insufficient care is taken to record progress against incremental targets, so their use in informing next steps in learning is diminished. The plans are generated in part by Brigance assessments. The goals and incremental steps required to achieve them provide an invaluable guide to sequential development. Many teachers are conscientious in monitoring the progress and skills mastery, which they record and reflect in the report cards. There is some inconsistency, however, as not all teachers use assessment data to inform them of progress towards student goals and influence their planning. They feel that the wealth of data is not particularly helpful and prefer to rely on their own experience to set tasks for students. Consequently, there is often a discrepancy between activity and student need. Teachers engage in continuous assessment processes through conferencing and working alongside students. When they use rubrics and annotations on student work to explain what needs to be done to improve further, as is the case in many classes, they become powerful tools for giving students direction.

The school is successful in achieving its prime aim of ensuring that all students are equipped with the functional skills that will allow them to operate post-secondary school in an environment which matches their capabilities. The school carefully monitors skill levels and uses this information to place students in appropriate settings. The Comprehensive Educational Plan is closely linked to the principal’s personal goals. Therefore, the document provides direction and purpose for the school, indicating future actions that foster development. The goals reflect the needs of the school and are generated from student performance data.

The school models high expectations for all students through the curriculum offered and that high quality learning environment that is prevalent across the school. Bulletin boards provide a rich source of information and reflect the high aspirations the school has for all concerned. Parents value highly the communication they have with the school, either through the more formal methods such as reports, or through ‘phone calls and other means of personal contact. They comment greatly appreciate the developmental progress their children make. One parent said to unanimous approval, “My daughter entered as a baby and has developed in to a young adult.”

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school provides an extensive curriculum aligned to State standards. It is rich in opportunities and, as such, expands students' skills, knowledge and understanding, preparing them for the complex world in which they live. The school's vocational pyramid continuum enables the school to place students accurately in locations where they are able to function extremely effectively and happily. The extremely successful vocational training in simulated situations, such as the "café", provides authentic settings, within which students can learn, rehearse and reinforce those skills and aptitudes that will enable them to meet the challenges of community-based learning. Great thought and care go in to placement of students in work-place settings, so that their skills accurately match the tasks they are required to do accurately. On one site, a student worked confidently in a pharmacy and was able to explain in detail what was required of him. On another, students were engaged in menial repetitive tasks. In each situation, the placement matched the students' skills. As a result, students meet with success, they feel valued and their self-esteem rises.

Successful differentiation of placement is not consistently mirrored in classroom practice. Too often teachers deliver a program that is underpinned by a pacing calendar rather than addressing individual student learning requirements. On these occasions, teachers do not make full use of data to inform their planning of activities or to differentiate their instruction in order to meet incremental learning goals as outlined in IEPs. When this happens, the rate of learning slows and students make limited progress.

The extremely positive culture reflects the trust and mutual respect that is prevalent. Students and parents speak highly of the principal and the care and commitment of the staff. Students feel secure in the fact that teachers will help them. As one student said, "Teachers are always there for me." Consequently, relations are harmonious and this is reflected in the interactions between all members of the school community.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The administration's classroom observations are too infrequent and lack rigor, so have only a limited effect on improving instruction. When they do occur, teachers report that they value the advice they are given and the support they receive. New teachers that are extremely well supported and their colleagues are only too willing to offer help and advice so that they settle quickly into the life, culture and expectations of the school.

Weekly meetings between teachers enable them to discuss issues of common concern and share strategies that inform their teaching and consequently enhance student learning. The Inquiry Team has been particularly effective in developing and promoting good practice in the use of PECS. Detailed analysis of data identified that this system was not having the impact on communication that was anticipated. Additional PECs

training for teachers and a thorough evaluation of the influence of this has been carried out. The result has indicated that there has been an increase in students' ability to articulate their need for support and, importantly, has reduced their frustration levels. Success in this area is illustrated by a reduction in behavioral incidents. A key factor in this improvement has been the interdisciplinary approach taken, involving the expertise of all providers.

Teachers welcome the professional development that is available for them. They evaluate their needs and select from a menu of opportunities that will enhance their practice. Administrators also provide advice and give firm direction, as required. However, teachers do not have specific goals that are supported by professional development to further improve their level of instruction. The lack of a cohesive, sequential structure results in teachers not gaining maximum benefit from a targeted approach.

The school works hard and successfully to make an impact in the community and at the same time provide valuable experiences for the students. Visits to theaters and the local store to purchase items for the café have a positive impact on students' skill development. Other experiences, such as working at the St. Peter's Community Service Program or engaging in philanthropic activities, give students a greater appreciation of their place in society.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and 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 proficient.

The school is clear about its purpose and direction as exemplified by its vision and goals. Goals are, for the main part, time scaled and have success criteria. However, on occasion they do not have robust benchmarks against which to measure progress as in the case of goal 1, "to improve the pedagogical skills of teachers". This results in insufficient rigor in the monitoring process because of subjectivity. Time lapses between monitoring stages are too great and limit the school's ability to make adjustments or refine goals.

Using the school's vocational pyramid, administrators and faculty are able to monitor and chart each student's progress as they strive to enter post-secondary placements in the least restrictive environment. The curriculum and teaching content of functional skills successfully enable this to occur. From entry, the school has a clear understanding of the holistic needs of each student and uses the information to place the student in an appropriate group. Staff provide the necessary programs and approaches to meet students' learning requirements. Where administrators identify that a student is capable of a more demanding setting, such as movement into an inclusion class, this is arranged swiftly so potential can be maximized. This is an indication of the administration's preparedness to make strategic decisions for the benefit of students. On-going assessments enable teachers to identify deficits and modify their instruction or alter their grouping. This attention to detail, coupled with a flexible approach to scheduling, ensures that student needs are met.

Most teachers are keen to develop their instruction. A lack of rigor in the evaluation of teaching and monitoring of performance detracts from the schools ability to target support strategies that are specific to individual teachers' development needs. However,

the support which is currently given is pertinent and welcomed by staff. The principal is very clear about what she wants for the students in her charge. She is extremely determined that they will receive the very best education to prepare them for post-secondary school life. She provides strong, purposeful leadership, and her passion is shared by her assistant principals and the whole school community.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

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| School name: The Stephen D. McSweeney School | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| Overall QR Score | | | X | |
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| Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| 1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students? | | | | X |
| 1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students? | | | | X |
| 1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data? | | | | X |
| 1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress? | | | X | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 1 | | | | X |
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| 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. | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + |
| 2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals? | | | X | |
| 2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)? | | | X | |
| 2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families? | | | X | |
| 2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps? | | | | X |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 2 | | | X | |

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DY0, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

| Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals. | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|------------------------------------------------|---|-------------------|---|-----------------------|
| <i>To what extent do ...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards? | | | | X | | | |
| 3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals? | | | X | | | | |
| 3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals? | | | X | | | | |
| 3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults? | | | | X | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 3 | | | | X | | | |
| Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do school leaders...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers? | | X | | | | | |
| 4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning? | | | | X | | | |
| 4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes? | | | X | | | | |
| 4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students? | | | | X | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 4 | | | | X | | | |
| Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning. | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent do...</i> | Δ | ➤ | ✓ | + | | | |
| 5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year? | | X | | | | | |
| 5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year? | | | X | | | | |
| 5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies? | | | X | | | | |
| 5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth? | | | | X | | | |
| Overall score for Quality Statement 5 | | | | X | | | |
| Quality Review Scoring Key | | | | | | | |
| Δ | Underdeveloped | ➤ | Underdeveloped with Proficient Features | ✓ | Proficient | + | Well Developed |