



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Quality Review
Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning
2013-2014

Quality Review Report 2013-2014

The John Steptoe School for the 21st Century

Elementary-Middle School 181

**1023 New York Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Heather Lawrence

Dates of review: May 28 - 29, 2014

Lead Reviewer: Arisleyda Ureña

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The John Steptoe School for the 21st Century is an elementary-middle school with 1,044 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 86% Black, 10% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 92.4%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's curriculum is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and the instructional shifts to increase students' critical thinking and support their developing rigorous habits. (1.1)
 - The school's use of ReadyGEN for English language arts and Go Math in the lower grades, and Expeditionary Learning for English language arts and EngageNY modules for math for the upper grades, ensures that its curricula is aligned to the CCLS. The school also decided that at the lesson level for English language arts the instructional shifts focus was on non-fiction text and evidence-based explanation, and the focus in math is reflecting on real world problems and application. Efforts to build curricular coherence is evidenced by spiraling of skills across grade levels by developing and embedding learning activities that engage students in applying academic language, citing and supporting claims, writing across content, and using argumentative discourse. For example, a fourth grade learning task asked students to read, analyze, critique, and provide an opinion of a non-fiction book about earthquakes. In a grade 2 unit, samples of essential questions were, "How do writers develop their supporting reasons?" and "How do writers support opinions through reasons and explanations?" In grade 3, a curriculum unit required students to read informational texts with a focus on demonstrating understanding of the physical and /or behavioral adaptation of polar bears and whales. In grade 8, students read Macbeth and engaged in learning activities to answer the following essential questions: "Can we change our destiny? Do we have a way to determine things in our life?" Students were also required to further think and master the terms destiny, motive, and conscience. Moreover, rigorous learning tasks are embedded across curricula in all grades and subjects that provide students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, with opportunities to develop their writing abilities to meet the standards of the CCLS and content standards. Unit tasks, writing assignments, and research projects across grades require students to think and write critically about the content, theme/topic, and make real world connections and require students to apply words stems such as "agree," "support your statement," "agree and disagree" in reading, writing, and speaking. Thus, alignment to the CCLS and integration of the instructional shifts prepares students for college and careers readiness.
- Leadership makes purposeful organizational decisions to improve teachers' growth and students' performance. (1.3)
 - School leaders use resources to make instructional goals more transparent and attainable through various initiatives. To attain one of its goals to increase parental involvement, school leaders partnered with the District's family advocate, its parent coordinator, Learning Leaders, and the re-constituted school leadership team (SLT). The administration also allocated additional resources to support the school's instructional goals by purchasing additional SMART boards, laptops, iPods for pre-kindergarten, document cameras, and resources for teachers and classrooms, thus integrating technology to increase student learning. To support the school's goals, the

administration met with the Beacon Center to establish expectations and goals for assisting students and families. An outgrowth of this work has resulted in students receiving targeted after school tutoring and interventions. A partnership with Inside Broadway provides opportunities for guest artists to visit classrooms and expose students to different careers in the arts. In addition, a partnership with New York Psychotherapy and Counseling Center helps the school in addressing the individual needs of families and students. As a result, the school community as described by parents is a “family that is coming together to make sure that students succeed” which is evidenced by increased students’ scholarship.

- School leadership redesigned the school’s program based on observable teachers’ strengths, students’ needs, and grade level needs. The administration also scheduled multiple types of meetings in order to provide staff opportunities to plan and discuss student progress, and develop next steps and interventions. The school’s schedule also affords teachers common preparation and lunch hours for additional meeting time, and content area enrichment where teachers from the upper grade push-in into the lower grades to provide support in the classroom. The principal committed to sustaining an Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) class on every grade to ensure that students with disabilities receive targeted academic support, and she allocated funds to create another special education class and hired an additional special education teacher, thus making concerted efforts to align decision making to the vision and mission of developing an inclusive school culture and increasing academic opportunities to address individual student needs. As a result, teachers and administration share mutual accountability for students’ progress and academic success, resulting in students’ improved reading levels and academic achievement across grades as evidenced by the significant decreased number of students who are at-risk of repeating the grade.
- The school fosters a culture of learning that strategically supports the academic and social-emotional growth of students and adults. (1.4)
 - A partnership with the New York Psychotherapy and Counseling Center provides social-emotional supports to students via ongoing support to teaching parents, students, and teachers, on how to identify triggers and deescalate behaviors. The Beacon Center provides the school with academic support to ensure that students receive targeted academic interventions to ensure academic progress while developing effective academic behaviors. Taken together, these partnerships provide students and the school community with ongoing social-emotional interventions and identify next steps for student and family interventions. Efforts to support students’ attendance include guidance and support staff calling homes, arranging home visits, and counseling for the student and family members. Moreover, parents stated that they believe the school cares for their children’s well-being. Regular weekly meetings are conducted to address the needs of families and students, hence allowing the staff to develop outreach strategies to ensure that families are supported so that students attend school. In addition, the School Based Support Team (SBST), parent coordinator, and guidance counselor, work collaboratively to provide students opportunities to engage the school community in targeted workshops, anti-bullying awareness, family events, and several school activities to promote healthy relationships and community building. Furthering these efforts, the school

also works with the Department of Education's Office of Youth Development and liaisons from the support network to provide a variety of social services to address family and student needs. Parents shared that the school has different methods for communicating information about their children's academic progress and guidance support, and also cited various workshops they attended as helping them to understand the school's grading policy, the CCLS, and bullying. Furthermore, in the student meeting, students shared work products and clearly explained how the support they received from their teachers helped them to improve their work and learning. Consequently, parents and staff agree that everyone is invested in supporting school-wide initiatives and goals designed to improve student learning and achievement. As a result, students' stated that they "feel safe," "our teachers and principal encourage us to succeed," and "we are getting ready for college," thus resulting in improved school's attendance.

- School leaders use the observation process, student data, and focused feedback to support teachers' instructional practice and professional growth. (4.1)
 - Written observation reports give teachers specific feedback on areas of strengths and areas in need of improvement, with recommendations for next steps aligned to a specific competency of the Danielson Framework to further support teachers' practice. A majority of observation recommendations given to teachers focused on Danielson's domain 3, in particular competencies 3b, 3dc, and 3d. Moreover, recommendations included meeting with the administration to discuss specific teaching strategies, and/or scheduling a one-on-one meeting with coaches from the support network who provided professional development on questioning techniques and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Additionally, supervisors use ADVANCE observation data, students' performance data, and student work to develop targeted teacher support. As a result, school leaders ensure that all teachers, including those who are new to the profession, receive feedback, mentoring, and appropriate help to hone their instructional practice. To address areas of concerns, administration allocated time and resources that included ARIS Learn, Gazette's protocols, off-site professional development, inter-visitations, and information around Hess' Cognitive Rigor Matrix and Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK), all of which hone staffs' instructional practice. Furthermore, some observation reports identified individual teacher's receiving support relative to alignment of lesson plans to the CCLS, strategies for increasing student engagement, and effective questioning techniques to improve instructional practice. The administration's strategy to organize teacher groups via grade teams to further support teacher development in domains 1 and 3, has resulted in setting clear expectations for school wide instructional practice. As a result, analysis of mid-year ADVANCE data demonstrated an increased number of teachers scoring effective in domain 3 and competency 3b, questioning techniques.

What the school needs to improve

- Deepen teaching practice to consistently ensure all learners can access active discussions and appropriate tasks requiring them to demonstrate high levels of thinking and participation. (1.2)
 - The school's instructional focus this year is to increase student engagement, students' ability to form and support opinions and make real world

connections, and increase students' autonomy with learning. With this goal in mind, the administration and lead teachers have established norms for classroom instruction that include learning objectives, posting of the CCLS for the lesson, including the instructional shifts and a motivation and a 'Do Now', and providing both direct instruction and guided practice. These efforts are emphasized to increase learning opportunities that integrate higher order thinking (HOT), Depth of Knowledge (DOK) questions, clear and explicit instruction, high levels of student engagement, and independent work. Although in one of the classrooms visited a teacher had students support each other by giving feedback, forming opinion about a text, and self-assess their answer, this was not a consistent practice amongst the other teachers who had students in groups. In other classrooms, teachers did not consistently provide high-level questions and opportunities for discussions, structures were not in place for all students to contribute, and a small number of students mainly dominated discussions. In many classrooms, teachers posed a range of questions to the class, called on an individual student to answer, restated the answer given by the student, and continued by asking another question or moving to the next learning activity, thus limiting opportunities for students to engage in high-level discussions and thinking. Also, in classrooms visited, students engaged in completing the same learning activity, students were not afforded an opportunity to reflect about their work, and learning tasks inconsistently provided targeted multiple entry points and scaffolds for all learners. Thus, current teacher practices miss out on providing opportunities to engage all students in appropriate learning, minimizing high levels of thinking and challenging discussions.

- Strengthen assessment practices across classrooms and grades so that adjustments are timely and effectively meet students' diverse learning needs. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams meet weekly to discuss units of study, look at student work, and develop common rubrics and assessments aligned to the curriculum. Discussions often include teachers' noticing of strengths and needs within their own classrooms. However, this information does not lead to focused decisions about implementation or monitoring of specific instructional strategies to improve student learning based on identified skills gaps. As a result, there are missed opportunities to develop timely instructional adjustments and implement them over time to ensure that student learning is maximized across the school. Teachers also use data from individual student conference summary sheets and collect information from a range of classroom assessments that inform small group instruction based on patterns of error in solving problem or responding to particular tasks. However, teachers' practices for checking for student understanding throughout lessons are inconsistent. For example, a teacher asked, "Do you understand?" in one class, while in other classrooms teachers used exit slips, surface level questions, and notes to measure student understanding, thus opportunities to target support and advance learning for all students is not consistent.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The John Steptoe School for the 21st Century	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score			X				
Instructional Core							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			X				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
School Culture							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?			X				
Systems for Improvement							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products?				X			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			X				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed