



**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 Steven McSweeney School

X721

**2697 Westchester Avenue
Bronx
NY 10461**

Principal: Frank DeGennaro

**Dates of review: May 13-14, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Sheryl L. Watkins**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

The Steven McSweeney School is a middle/ high school with 536 students from grade 7 through grade 12. The school population comprises 34% Black, 57% Hispanic, 5% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 30% English language learners and 99% special education students. Boys account for 67% of the students enrolled and girls account for 33%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 82.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is developing.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Student progress is a result of a strong culture of trust and positive attitudes complemented by parent supports, enabling all students to grow into productive community members. (1.4)
 - All community members demonstrate mutually respectful behaviors that set a tone embracing the unique abilities of students and staff. Parents and students confirm their input into school-wide decisions. For example, students advocated for and now engage in increased numbers of recreational activities such as school dances and fashion shows, as well as the creation of a wheelchair basketball team that now engages in competitions with other Bronx schools. Parent support in the initiation, planning and execution of Family Fun days brings the school and community together. Last year, this well-loved event was attended by over 300 parents, staff and children. This year, pre-confirmation of attendance demonstrates projected participation of over 400 participants, demonstrating increased parent and family participation, supporting reaching one of the school goals. Students are known well by multiple staff members, as strategic staff assignments places multiple personnel within classrooms, such as occupational and speech therapists, thus meeting the needs of students both within and outside the classroom setting. This has led to over 60 students being decertified from receiving related services of speech, counseling, occupational and physical therapy. Attendance improvement is supported by a full time attendance teacher; April's attendance rose to 85%, higher than the overall average daily attendance last year. Vocational learning opportunities within the school enable students to prepare for community based learning experiences. Supports within school-based instruction for appropriate pre-vocational behaviors such as punctuality, attendance, following directions, the ability to work independently and the acceptance of supervision, all embedded within the school created Level 3 vocational assessment, ensures targeted instruction and support to ensure student's personal growth and employability. A full time dean of students ensures that when needed, the social-emotional needs of students are quickly addressed and supported. As a result of these initiatives, over 50% of the student population have demonstrated reaching competency for and currently participate in either full- or part-time community based instruction, with 14 students over the past two years obtaining full time, union affiliated career positions.
- The school's commitment to effective communication to students, families and staff regarding expectations for learning results in the personal growth of all students. (3.4)
 - High levels of family outreach in the form of communication notebooks, phone calls and numerous flyers and newsletters cement the focus on high expectations for career development, where mutual accountability between parents and the school is emphasized. Parents are aware of and can support instructional initiatives. For example, parents discussed the current unit of study, DNA, and how

students surveyed them for trait information from relatives to support their creation of student learning portfolios. In preparation for vocational endeavors, vocational assessments are conducted that include information from parents on students' likes dislikes, interests and career dreams. This ensures a continued and committed focus on the high expectation of students to be ready to enter the world of competitive or supported employment. Rotations through varied levels of vocational experiences, attention to pre-vocational competencies, such as listening skills and cooperation, ensures that students build the skills necessary to move into the world of supported or independent employment. Furthermore, the school conducts Transition Fairs, where routinely over 20 adult support agencies are present during parent teacher conference afternoons and evenings to assist parents in making post-secondary choices for their children. This is followed by group and individual parent and student tours of potential placements. As a result, over 50% of the graduating class has secured post-secondary services or jobs, with the remaining cohort currently in the final phases of making commitments to ensure the highest possible placement for their children's post-secondary experiences.

- Teacher development is driven by the Danielson Framework, ensuring that all teachers meet pedagogical expectations aligned to the schools goals. (4.1)
 - In their third year of using the Danielson Framework for teaching, all staff, including those new to the school or the profession, is well versed in the expectations for best professional practices. Currently, the school is strategically focused on questioning and discussions and using assessment to drive instruction. Feedback and next steps, often referring to the effective steps teachers took to address past recommendations. For example, teachers were directed to increase student-to student discussions in order to encourage increased communication skills, comments are included that reference student work products included within SLP's. Professional development, both individual and school-wide, ensures a continued focus on identified competencies related to questioning and discussion and providing students with opportunities to demonstrate thinking. For example, building upon the overarching professional development plan, select teachers engaged in intervisitations and co-teaching experiences aligned with their lowest performing areas of past observations. Specific growth plans for identified teachers has resulted in individual and overall increases in ratings from formal and informal observations. Data analysis related to teacher performance is conducted three times a year, identifying an increase from 78% to 89% of teacher ratings falling into the effective and/or highly effective range of performance since October 2013.

What the school needs to improve

- Extend teaching practices to include increased entry points and greater opportunities for student- to- student discussion to consistently demonstrate thinking so that all students can produce meaningful work products. (1.2)

- There are strong beliefs that students learn best when they are provided with hands on learning, provided with differentiated tasks, where student-to student discussion occurs, and the workshop model guides learning opportunities. All classroom visits confirm the application of the workshop model of instruction, where a mini lesson presented by the teacher is followed by individual student work, supported by paraprofessionals or present related service providers, and culminates in a share out by students of what they have learned. Students currently produce work products, often presented within monthly Student Learning Portfolios (SLP's). For example, learning tasks from the Unique Learning Systems program are tiered into three levels, where students are assigned to work in groups based on the results of the SANDI (Students Annual Needs Determination Inventory) that was administered in October 2013. Manipulatives, such as plastic coins and paper money are provided so that students have needed supports to complete math tasks. There are set expectations for student to student discussions during instructional periods, but uneven levels of opportunities for students to engage in conversations with other than adults present was observed during classroom visits. In addition, the majority of questions such as "who, what, or where" posed by teachers to students required only the recall of information, thus limiting opportunities for able students to engage in and potentially demonstrate higher levels of thinking in discussions with their peers. These practices limit students' ability to engage in learning activities that present high levels of challenge, or offer them opportunities to extend learning to include higher order thinking, thus hindering their production of work products that demonstrate extensions to their learning.
- Deepen and build upon practices related to analyzing common student assessment and achievement information so that results of student learning data consistently informs curricular and instructional decisions. (2.2)
 - The SANDI is administered early in the school year to provide information on student performance levels, and to drive the creation of IEP goals. Standardized rubrics that acknowledge level of performance connected to celebratory words: novice, apprentice, practitioner and expert, are consistently used to assess student work products, both in SLP's and on student work products. Data is collected on a routine basis using a school developed IEP tracking form that pays particular attention to independence and accuracy towards set goals. Teachers routinely ask students to demonstrate understanding during lessons by raising hands if they "got it" or need clarification. Teachers evaluate student work products in SLP's, however, little evidence of the analysis and comparison of student performance from one month's SLP to the next were evident. While teachers state, and students confirm a change in student groupings for instruction, these groupings did not reflect the analysis of current student performance information. Teachers routinely follow the curriculum, adding creativity to instruction, but do not consistently use assessment data from unit to unit, to determine if or what changes to curriculum or instruction are warranted, thus limiting improvements in student learning outcomes. While the administration reviews progress made from year to year, October 2012, May 2013, and October 2013, on the SANDI, the results are not consistently used to determine whether students are making interim progress toward increased achievement in individual or curricular goals, thus hindering

teachers with actionable information on how best to make instructional decisions to increase student performance levels.

- Develop systems with which to evaluate the effectiveness of curricular, instructional and teacher team work so that identified trends in performance leads to increases in students' progress. (5.1)
 - The ADVANCE on-line teacher classroom observation recording system for teacher effectiveness provides the administration with trend information on teacher ratings for both informal and formal observations. In addition funding for the SWIS (School Wide Information System) provides data related to behavioral infractions, and this information is used to guide school level decisions. Teachers are scheduled to meet at least twice per week to discuss curriculum and instruction. These meetings are sometimes attended by the one school based coach who focuses predominantly on literacy, but there are no formal structures in place for team notes or agendas to inform the administration of the work they are doing. As the school is just beginning to identify their inquiry goals for teacher team work, they are unable to identify what work is needed to increase student performance. In addition, processes are not in place to evaluate the effectiveness of curricular choices on student performance, nor are there systems to determine progress towards meeting individual IEP or group goals for students, other than in the areas of independence and accuracy. The lack of school wide systems to assess the effectiveness of teacher team work and student progress towards meeting school and individual goals prevents the school from building coherent data-driven targeted practices to improve the quality of school, team and individual decisions for curricular and instructional adjustments, in order to attain higher levels of student performance, in alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS).

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: The Steven McSweeney School	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