



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Stephen D. McSweeney School

75X721

**2697 Westchester Avenue
Bronx, NY 10461**

Principal: Frank De Gennaro

**Date of review: February 3-4, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Beverly Ffolkes-Bryant, Ed.D.**

The School Context

Stephen D. McSweeney is a high school with 536 students from grade 9 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 100% special education students. Boys account for 67% of the students enrolled and girls account for 33%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 84.5%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
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	Additional Findings	Proficient
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Focus	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

The school maintains a supportive learning environment that conveys high expectations informed by the use of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. The school effectively communicates their expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness and successfully partners with families.

Impact

Structures that support the school's high expectations build buy-in and accountability amongst students and their families, thus providing a clear path towards increased student achievement and college and career readiness.

Supporting Evidence

- Students are expected to participate in work experiences commensurate to their cognitive ability and level of independence. There are 11 full-time worksites and 25 part-time community-based worksites, along with work in one of the three food service rooms and the school's wood shop. Since the majority of the students will not be receiving high school diplomas, students must be taught work skills that can be used and transferred to competitive and supportive employment in the community. The Job Developer has been instrumental in finding part-time worksites in the community, which has grown significantly from 7 to 25, an over 250% increase. Through a grant with the Federation Employment and Guidance Service Inc. (FEGS), the school is part of Project SEARCH, which provides a program for students with developmental facilities and builds their productivity for the workplace. Twelve students are working at various departments at Montefiore Hospital and 1 student has already obtained full-time employment after graduation. The result is a greater number of students getting hired at the worksites. Fifteen students were hired between the period of 2012 and 2014.
- Parents expressed great satisfaction with the way the school communicates its expectations for their children's learning. They like how the school is promoting the habit of self-advocacy in their children's development. Parents receive various forms of communication regarding the student progress from weekly telephone calls, letters and a progress report. After the initial orientation, parents receive an Intake and Orientation packet which includes a Parent Handbook that includes basic school information, homework tips for parents, a parent workshop schedule and information on the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). This partnership with parents is helping students to achieve more positive outcomes as evidenced by an increase in the Student Annual Needs Determination Inventory (SANDI) assessment scores.
- Work-study features include student visits to the school's full time work-study classes, monthly meetings with the work-study teachers and teacher communication with parents about the work-study program. The school prioritizes supporting student independence, emphasizing the importance of students being able to independently travel and use the district's Travel Training Program, which have successfully trained over 70 students, giving them the opportunity to go to one of the community-based worksites to work competitively in the community. The school has seen greater numbers of students being hired at their worksites.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

2.2 Assessment

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

The school consistently monitors progress through data analyses as well as during instruction. However, teacher feedback to students aligned to specific rubrics is not meaningful and actionable.

Impact

This lack of coherent assessment practices limits teacher teams and individual teachers from identifying more granular strengths and needs of student subgroups in order to differentiate instructional strategies and improve student learning outcomes.

Supporting Evidence

- The administration created Student Learning Datafolios (SLD) that track student progress towards their Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) goals, using a Tracking Form for teachers to check-off when the goals are attained. Fostering independence and ownership of their learning, students use Student Reflection Sheets to reflect on their progress on interim assessments. The SLDs replaced the previous student portfolios of collections of student work that represented a selection of their performance. However, in the absence of these portfolios, students are unable to reflect on their own work products and academic progress, identifying a portrait of strengths and weaknesses and recognizing accomplishments and growth. Although the SLDs are an extensive, thorough system of tracking student's IEP goals, an enhancement of student ownership and feedback are not evident to further identify skills and strategies to promote student success.
- The Structured Methods in Language Education (SMiLE) program has been introduced to fifteen classrooms this year in response to the Student Annual Needs Determination Inventory (SANDI) Standards report data showing that 237 students were emergent readers and/or between levels 1 and 2. As a supplement to the curriculum, SMiLE is a multi-sensory approach to teaching speech, reading and writing skills to varying populations, including autistic and intellectually disabled students. Administration has seen an increase in reading skills since program implementation.
- School rubrics were developed as a result of the literacy coach attending district training on Universal Rubrics. The rubrics represent Levels 1 to 4, based on tasks that are related to the Student Learning Datafolio (SLD) goals. Rubrics also assess whether the student was able to complete the task either dependently or independently (with or without prompts). Teacher comments, based on the instructional objectives of the lessons, are included. However, classroom assessment rubrics vary from teacher-to-teacher. In one classroom, there were rubrics that had many components for a task based on the content and structure, yet in another class, the rubrics only had one component with room for teacher comments.
- At one of the school's sites, student work products showed inconsistent teacher feedback with some teachers using one-word adjectives such as "nice" and "good" with no suggestions of next steps. This prevents some students from receiving meaningful information on what they do well and what they need to improve in order to be fully engaged in the learning process.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

All curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and instructional shifts. The curriculum offers a wide range of cognitive experiences and choice to facilitate student ownership of learning.

Impact

Curricular decisions build coherence and promote college and career readiness for all learners. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills across grades and subjects for all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses the Unique Learning System, a theme-based curriculum that is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), for literacy and math since 2011. Teacher teams review the program regularly to adapt the tasks to make them more cognitively appropriate for their students by providing continued alignment to the CCLS and the Learning Standards for Career Development and Occupation Studies at Three Levels. Staff also reviews the program to determine how it promotes different levels of thinking skills in their classrooms. Administration felt that the Unique Learning System needed to be extended to add more rigor to what was being taught based on evidence collected from observations and walkthroughs. Thus, staff receives various internet teaching resources to use, such as the Mastery Connect Common Core app software, and Google Images. Teams notice the trends used to inform instruction to create a shared, school-wide vision is reflected in the increased cohesion across grades, evident in the improved quality of curriculum maps, unit plans, and lesson plans. This ensures that the entire community is aware of what is being taught and its connection to the Common Core Learning Standards.
- To emphasize rigorous habits and higher order skills for all students, administration expects teachers to refrain from using worksheets and plan more life relevant tasks and lessons for the students using the Unique Learning System as a guide and as a way to provide cohesion to the instructional program. Teacher teams align the units to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) as well as the Learning Standards for Career Development and Occupational Studies at Three Levels and the Citywide Scope and Sequence so that students can go deeper into the work.
- Academic tasks embedded in school-wide units emphasize higher order thinking skills as well as real world situations and require students to fully explain their thought process. Projects on display require students to explain concepts, present to their peers and reflect on the tasks. In one classroom observed, students were studying Christopher Columbus, and were in groups discussing what they found from an article they were reading using various Thinking Maps. In another classroom, students were given supermarket circulars and had to create a budget of what they had to purchase for the week and determine why they had to purchase certain items from the curricula.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across classrooms, curricula extensions and high quality supports provide multiple entry points for all students and there are multiple opportunities for all learners to participate and take ownership of their learning.

Impact

Students demonstrate high levels of engagement and discussion that reflect higher levels of student thinking in their work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Planning documents as well as teaching practices embed the belief that every student has a voice and that they are capable of learning and should be exposed to the curriculum at any access level. The school also believes in preparing students for life beyond school and that their learning experiences relate to the real world. In addition, it is the school's belief that students learn best in a small, nurturing environment. In classes observed, small classroom settings and teachers' lessons reflect careful planning regarding the individual needs of students. Teachers incorporated a variety of teaching strategies and high quality supports to enhance the students' cognitive skills, creating a consistent, school-wide focus.
- Across the majority of classrooms, students are engaged in appropriately challenging learning activities. In one classroom, students were in assigned groups writing facts they learned in United States History using a prescribed Thinking Map for their particular cognitive level. Work products on display range from individualized activities to group projects and presentations. In another class observed, students were in groups reading an article about Christopher Columbus, discussing the important facts they read and creating various Thinking Maps based on the article. One group created a Multi-Flow Map on the causes and effects of Columbus' voyage, another group created a Flow map sequencing facts about Columbus and another group created a Circle Map with information about Columbus.
- Small group strategies and one-to-one conferences were conducted on a regular basis in classes observed. In one class, students were in Structured Teaching approach, where they were working in stations in a work system. Work systems tell the student what is expected of him/her during an activity, and how much is expected to be accomplished. After a given time, students proceed to another station. The goal of Structure Teaching is to teach students to work independently. Students were grouped in pairs and assigned to stations evident in classrooms observed and the teacher's lesson reflects careful thought regarding the individual needs of students in each station. This was emphasized particularly in literacy lessons which create a consistent instructional focus of "developing stronger, more comprehensive reading programs" as evidenced in the Student Annual Needs Determination Inventory (SANDI) data which shows consistent student growth.

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Professional collaboration is a high priority and faculty profit from varied opportunities to share and develop strengths as individuals from leadership structures that provide a means for teachers to have input on key decisions about curricular and teaching practices.

Impact

Structured professional collaborations have resulted in improved pedagogy and student progress on assessments. Shared leadership structures build capacity that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- One of the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) goals this year is: by January of 2015, all Professional Learning Communities (PLC) will have developed a PLC plan based upon a school area of need. These areas of need will be based on student achievement data and will improve student progress in reading, transition, communication, social development, independence and advocacy. In turn, teachers were required to submit a proposal to administration detailing which topic they wanted to research. PLC goals are aligned with the school/district goals. Teams maintain records of their findings in PLC binders. There are 11 different PLCs which meet more than twice weekly. At the Structured Methods in Language Education (SMiLE) PLC, one teacher stated that the impact of being on this team is the “school-wide professionalism” it has created. Looking at data for individual students with her co-teachers has shown positive impact on students’ learning. These practices have helped to build a reflective collaborative community that shares best practices gained from inquiry team work across the school to close student learning gaps.
- The Curriculum Planning Team meets before school in order to complete a curriculum map for the Attainment mathematics program for the 2015-2016 school year. Administration felt that although the Unique curriculum provided thematic units that integrated mathematics, they wanted something more rigorous. They discovered the Attainment program after attending the district’s Curriculum Fair this past summer. The team is currently creating a curriculum map using the Attainment program as a supplement to the Unique Learning system. At the meeting observed, the team discussed the various ways of modifying particular lessons and finding out what was applicable to best suit the needs of their students.
- The SMiLE professional learning community (PLC) is introducing and training teachers in the SMiLE program. They also examine SMiLE data of teacher’s classes to determine which teachers may need more training and support in a particular module. Members of the team visit classrooms and provide one-to-one support. This shared leadership has led the staff to establish a school-wide structure of identifying, targeting and assessing students to increase learning outcomes to be used consistently throughout the school.