



Client name	School District of Philadelphia
School name	Edward T. Steel
Principal name	Jamal B. Dennis
Address	4301 Wayne Avenue Philadelphia, PA 19140
Review date(s)	October 12-13, 2017
Lead reviewer	Renée Perdue
Team reviewer(s)	Benita Stephens

School Quality Review Report School District of Philadelphia

Edward T. Steel PreK-8

Thursday, October 12, 2017 – Friday, October 13, 2017

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1 The School Context

1.1 Introduction

In October 2017, Cambridge Education was awarded a contract against RFP-499 to provide School Quality Reviews (SQRs) to six School District of Philadelphia (SDP) schools. The SQR program includes the following:

- a School Quality Review (SQR) orientation for principals
- a two-day SQR for each school
- a meta-analysis report of the school findings

The SQR report contained herein was prepared by the Lead Reviewer based on the evidence collected and the assessment made by the full SQR team (Lead Reviewer, Team Member Reviewer). Evidence was collected via classroom observations; interviews with the administration; and focus groups with students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

1.2 Background information about the School

School performance

2015-2016 School Progress Report for Edward T. Steel School

Overall: 12% Intervene (decrease from 22% in 2013-2014, but increase from 11% in 2014-2015); City Rank-132nd out of 138; Peer Rank-12th out of 12

Achievement: 3% Intervene (decrease from 12% in 2013-2014, and from 4% in 2014-2015); City Rank-117th out of 138; Peer Rank-12th out of 12

The Achievement domain measures performance on standardized assessments, including PSSA, Keystone Exams, ACCESS for ELLs, and reading assessments.

Progress: 18% Intervene (decrease from 28% in 2013-2014, but increase from 17% in 2014-2015); City Rank-95th out of 132; Peer Rank-11th out of 12

The Progress domain measures growth on standardized assessments and progress towards graduation (for high schools only).

Climate: 11% Intervene (decrease from 24% in 2013-2014 and 12% in 2014-2015); City Rank-125th out of 140; Peer Rank-12th out of 12

The Climate domain measures school climate and student and parent/guardian engagement.

Comprehensive plan

Parents, guardians, community members, teachers and staff worked collaboratively to design a school improvement that was accepted by the district three years ago. However the school never received additional resources to implement the plan and as a result the school has not acted on the plan. The current principal received a copy of this plan from parents/guardians just this year.

The current school website states:

Our Vision

The vision of the Edward T. Steel Elementary School is to become a professional learning community that will create a culture of "Unlimited Possibilities" and "Equity for All Students" that is fostered by a set of guided principles embedded in the hearts and minds of people throughout the school.

Our Mission

Our mission is to provide a safe, clean, standards driven environment where all children are given a chance to achieve at high levels through a variety of experiences that are relevant, rigorous and fun. The Steel School's staff, parents and community are committed to providing a productive learning environment that shares common values, practices collective inquiry, engages in collaborative team building, strives for continuous improvement and is action and results oriented.

With the home page including a message from the principal:

Message from the Principal

From: The Desk of Jamal Berry Dennis, Principal

We are gearing up for an extremely exciting year. This year, our major focus will be on building "Professional Learning Communities."

Through this process, we fully expect to transform our school into a results-oriented institution where all students, staff members, and stakeholders meet their fullest potential. It is our challenge to greatly reduce or totally eliminate our children from the below-basic category.

Our ultimate goal is to improve every child's reading level across all content areas. In addition, we are striving to increase our daily instructional time, implement a successful attendance initiative, as well as, decrease our incidents of disruptive behavior.

Our road map includes:

- Grade groups functioning in PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES"
- Data drives instruction - PLAN/DO/STUDY/ACT
- Daily ATTENDANCE monitoring with INCENTIVES and CELEBRATIONS
- On-going DIFFERENTIATED professional development A.M. and P.M. WALK THROUGHs
- A GOOD LESSON that includes an ASSESSMENT that is aligned to the FOCUS standards/skills of the grade
- Meaningful, immediate FEEDBACK to staff and students

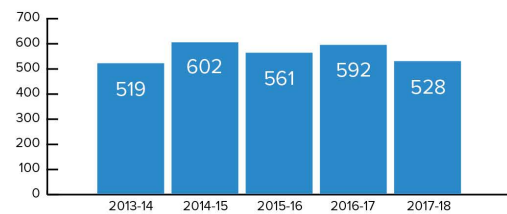
Other contextual factors

- The immediate neighborhood surrounding the school is largely residential, and community members reported high crime in the area. The findings from several focus group conversations included the fact that Edward T. Steel School is the last neighborhood school in the surrounding community, with multiple charter schools opening in recent years. One stated challenge is that charter schools select and reject students, leaving a perception that those who cannot get into the charter schools have to go to Steel School. With limited and decreasing staff and an increase in students with emotional, trauma, and special education needs Steel School Community continues to be challenged with culture, progress, and achievement.

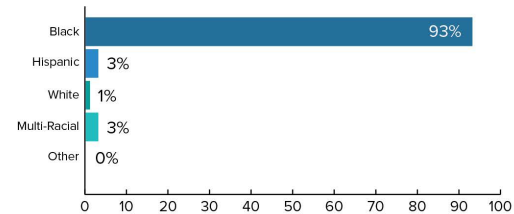
School demographic and performance data

Edward T. Steel School At a glance

Enrollment



Race/Ethnicity Breakdown



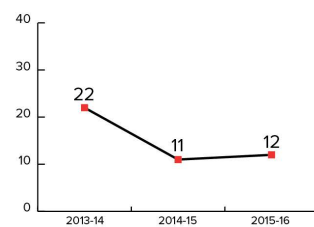
Students living in this catchment area choose to go to:

- Steel (60%)
- Khepera Charter School (5%)
- KIPP Philadelphia Charter School (3%)
- Wissahickon Charter School (3%)

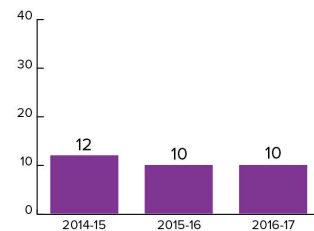
Students attending this school come from the following catchments:

- Steel (81%)
- Mastery @ Cleveland (7%)
- Kenderton (1%)
- EW Rhodes (1%)

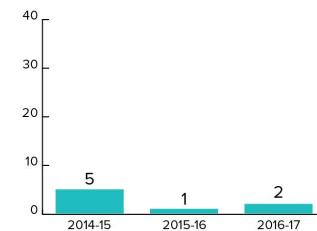
3-Year SPR Trend



ELA Achievement



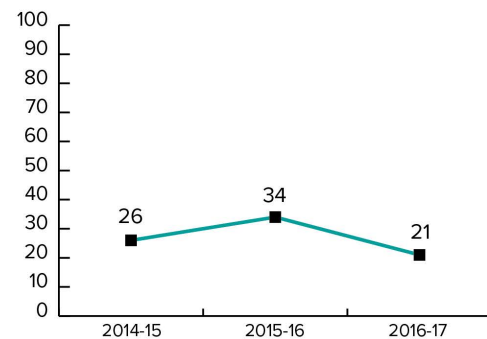
Math Achievement



% students scoring proficient or advanced on state tests (PSSA and/or Keystone)

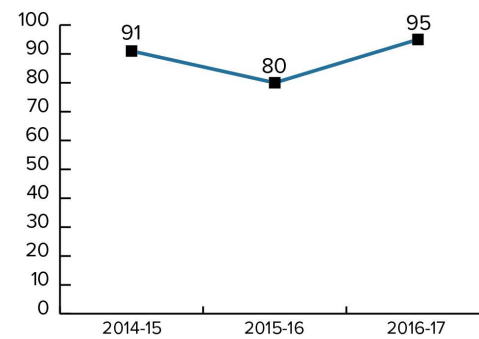
Attendance

% of students attending 95% or more of school days



Suspensions

% of students receiving zero suspensions



2 SQR Main Findings

In this section of the report, the SQR team provides an overview of the factors that are most significantly supporting and limiting effective student learning. (Please see sections that follow for more details and descriptions of the evidence for each finding.)

2.1 Factors that support effective student learning:

- Edward T. Steel PreK-8 School has established system for tracking and acknowledging student behaviors. (*Domain 1, P. 4*)
- There is universal access to technology, standards-based frameworks and curricula, and aligned assessment data platforms. (*Domain 1, P. 5*)
- Documentation of systems and structures exists, and if the systems and structures were implemented consistently, they would lead to improved conditions of culture and impact positively on student learning. (*Domain 3, P. 9*)

2.2 Factors that limit effective student learning:

- The current culture of the school community is reactive and driven in large part by unsafe and inappropriate behaviors. (*Domain 4, P. 13*)
- An overall lack of implementation and follow through of quality systems and structures negatively impacts on the culture of Edward T. Steel School Community (*Domain 4 P. 14*); the quality of learning and teaching (*Domain 1 P. 5*); and places strains on relationships within the community with school leaders, staff, students, and parents/families (*Domain 5, P. 15*).

3 Individual Domains

In the sections below, each domain received a rating based on the evidence collected during the SQR. The judgments have been broken down into *Factors that Support Effective Student Learning* and *Factors that Limit Effective Student Learning*.

3.1 Domain 1: Quality of Learning & Teaching

The Quality of Learning & Teaching requires intensive school-wide support with some features requiring support in targeted areas.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. In 17 of the 19 classes observed, lesson objectives were clearly posted.
 - a) 4 of the 17 lesson objectives posted were written in language accessible and understandable to students. For example, one lesson objective was written as, “I can count tens and ones to find a number.” and “SWBAT (students will be able to) label geographic features of Europe.”
 - b) 10 of the 17 lesson objectives posted were written in standards-based language. For example, “SWBAT identify and choose appropriate procedures to compute fluently with multi-digit numbers IOT [in order to] solve problems involving operations with decimals and fractions,” and “SWBAT use a variety of methods IOT (in order to) add and subtract multi-digit whole numbers.”
 - c) 14 of the 17 lesson objectives were written in language that was clear and accessible to students. “Students will be able to read and identify the main idea” “SWBAT use pictures to tell key ideas about a story.” “Students will be able to solve problems using addition and subtraction.”

The school’s consistent posting of objectives ensures that students and teachers have a common reference point on what is to be learned in the lesson. The school can continue to improve the impact of this practice by reviewing and increasing the quality of learning objectives and reinforcing the purpose of posting learning objectives for every lesson. Although objectives were posted in the majority of classrooms visited (17 of the 19), the learning activity was often misaligned and teachers and students made no visible link to the posted objective. Therefore, the impact of the school-wide expectation to post learning objectives is currently a matter of compliance and does not positively impact student learning. It is important for teachers to understand the purpose of posting, referencing, and assessing learning objectives for every lesson and to remain committed to this practice throughout all lessons. The school can continue to improve the impact of the practice of posting learning objectives by dedicating time in each lesson to ensuring students are able to explain the learning objective, and to ensure students know how they will be assessed on each objective by the end of the lesson. This will also help to increase students’ ownership of their learning.

- ii. Teachers manage student behavior effectively and support the development of the social and emotional learning needs of their students in about one third of the classes observed.
 - a) The use of Class Dojo is prominent and shared throughout grades and classrooms.

Students, parents, teachers, and administrators spoke of the Class Dojo system as a positive reinforcement for expected behaviors. More than half of the classes (10 of 19) were observed taking time to acknowledge and record Class Dojo points based on positive behaviors.

- b) During the focus group conversations with teachers, 3 of 11 mentioned the theme of care for students while 6 of the 11 teachers mentioned positive reinforcement as an expectation at the school.
- c) While in classrooms and hallways, some interactions included positive reinforcement and demonstration of care. For example, a teacher took time to speak one-on-one with a student placed in the hallway for misbehaving. When the teacher returned to the classroom, they stated to the class “Thank you for working independently while I was outside of the door.” Another example included a teacher who reviewed a student’s workbook and said, “See I told you, you could do it.” A third-grade math class included students shifting in their seats to fold hands or place materials in the proper corner of the desk while the teacher reinforced expectations by awarding Class Dojo points and saying, “I like the way (students’ names) are waiting patiently. I like how (students’ names) are ready to share.”

Teachers in some classes are effectively using Class Dojo points as a means of managing student behaviors and communicating with parents. The school could continue to grow this effective practice by ensuring all classes utilize the system with a thread of positive reinforcement. Parents appreciate the communication of assignments and photographs posted stating, “My child comes to school all day, it is good to see what they are doing. I like the pictures.” However, currently the use of the system is up to individual teachers. This means when a student moves from one grade to another or one class to another the use of Class Dojo is inconsistent. The impact of these inconsistencies is in student behavior as well as communication gaps with parents. During a class observation one student reported, “They would never act like this in Ms. (teacher’s name) but they know he’s (referring to the current teacher) not going to do nothin’ about it.” Consistent reinforcement of positive behaviors and the use of a tracking system like Class Dojo would benefit students, teachers, parents, and the overall culture for learning within the school.

- iii. Teachers have access to and incorporate digital technology into their lessons.
 - a) Whiteboards, computers, and laptops were evident throughout the school.
 - b) Teachers in many classes were observed using interactive whiteboards connected to the internet to acknowledge and record positive behaviors by awarding Class Dojo points.
 - c) Additionally, some teachers used the interactive whiteboard to share lesson examples and videos. For example, in a first-grade class, observed students had earned a “dance party” where the teacher played an educational jam video for students to sing and dance along. All students were engaged, singing and dancing along with the video. Students handled themselves well and clearly enjoyed this special experience earned by the class. Once the video concluded, the teacher and students transitioned smoothly into the math lesson. All students were engaged and showed evidence of a clear routine, ensuring effective use of instructional time, and wasting no instructional time on behavioral challenges.
 - d) Curriculum and other shared school-wide documents are stored in Google Drive, making access universal and allowing teachers and staff to retrieve from any computer. Additionally, during a PLC, observed participants received the agenda via email prior to the meeting.

The school can effectively build on the use of digital technology by focusing on meaningful uses to enhance students’ learning throughout classes and grades. There were only two classrooms where

students used computers; all other observed technology use was by adults (teacher, staff, and leaders). The school community could benefit from clear procedures and systems to ensure access, use of, and maintenance of digital technology. Support for integrating digital technology purposefully into lessons with students is a next step for the school.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. The use of assessment data from multiple sources to plan instruction that meets the learning needs of all students and guides student grouping is scarce.
 - a) School leaders, administrators, and teachers have access to several data management sources including spreadsheets and analysis. Assessment data systems include, and may not be limited to:
 - i. IRLA (Independent Reading Level Assessment)
 - ii. AIMSweb (a universal screening, progress monitoring, and data management system)
 - iii. PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment)
 - b) Although school leaders and teachers have access to and spoke of data systems, there was no evidence of ongoing use of this data when planning instruction for individual or small groups of students. Currently, data is not sufficiently understood nor utilized to meet the needs of students.
 - c) Of the 19 classes observed, none had evidence of student groupings. In classes where learning was observed, students were all working on the same worksheet or workbook pages, reading the same books, or copying the same writing from books or the board.
 - d) Teacher centered, whole class instruction is currently the norm throughout the school and as a result students' learning is limited.
 - e) None of the teachers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement, "We receive the instructional resources and materials needed to support all of our students in the classroom."
 - f) Classroom observations of reading in grades K-8 included whole class independent reading of the same text across the board.

The school has structures in place to support student learning, such as teacher teams engaging in professional learning communities (PLCs), administrators and coaches providing feedback on teacher lesson plans, and instructional specialists coaching individual teachers. The school could benefit from focusing on collecting, analyzing, and using formative data regularly to plan subsequent lessons and design student groupings. It was reported that K-2 teachers receive ongoing professional development, resources, and supports aligned with the reading curriculum. As a result, these teachers could speak to goals for students related to their reading levels. Leveraging this sporadic practice to include all classes and grades would greatly impact the ability of teachers, staff, and leaders to more effectively plan for and meet the learning needs of students. Regular practice of collecting formative data and using the results to tailor learning experiences for individuals and small groups of students is a consistent practice of effective schools.

- ii. Learning tasks are not rigorous, interesting, or accessible to students with different learning styles. As a result, student learning is shallow.
 - a) Consistently, the learning tasks observed were low-level and sometimes ignored by students. Tasks observed included fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and recall questions.
 - b) There was no evidence of guided practice, targeted instruction, teacher modeling, or discussion before students were given tasks to complete. In some cases, teachers gave directions or read the instructions from the top of the workbook page.

- c) There was no evidence of the use of rubrics, project-based learning, or the use of exemplars to demonstrate what high-quality work looks and sounds like.
- d) In 12 of the 19 classrooms visited, the learning objective and agenda did not match the learning tasks.
- e) 15 of the 15 students interviewed in the students' focus group, ranging from first to eighth grades, reported that work is "boring" or "too easy" and that behaviors and "drama" are the focus. Students also reported "favorite subjects" as gym, recess, arts, and dance in the auditorium during indoor lunch recess.

School leaders and teachers could enhance student learning by focusing on increasing the quality of learning tasks and regularly incorporating opportunities for students to learn in a variety of modalities, including speaking and listening as well as project-based learning.

Students do not feel ownership of their learning, as classwork (mostly worksheets) is largely uncollected or unscored. This contributes to students' lack of ownership, disengagement, and subsequently disruptive behaviors. Teachers are frustrated and finding themselves following a textbook or "giving assignments to keep student busy" while they monitor behaviors.

- iii. Opportunities for students to work collaboratively in groups, engage in stimulating academic discussions, or receive and utilize actionable feedback is absent from the culture of the school.
 - a) Teachers in focus group conversations mentioned data sources available (listed previously) however; none of the teachers currently share that data with students.
 - b) Students interviewed during focus group conversations said they know how they're doing when you see your test results on the interim reports. One student mentioned his teacher will speak with him one-on-one if he requests it.
 - c) 17 of the 19 classroom environments observed include clusters or groups of student desks. However, every learning task observed included independent worksheets or workbooks; no collaborative group work was observed.
 - d) Student work samples, notebooks, and folders did not have feedback. Students received scores without explanation. Students could not speak to specific goals for themselves, the class, or the school.

The Steel school community is currently in a place where they are reacting daily rather than purposeful planning and implementation of quality learning experiences for students. Teachers speak to the desire to plan purposefully and the importance of focusing on daily student progress; however, efforts are exerted managing behaviors and reporting disruptive behaviors. Staff and leadership speak of students as "these students" instead of "our students," reinforcing a mindset that the challenges are not owned by staff or leadership.

3.2 Domain 2: Curriculum & Assessment

Curriculum (written) & Assessment requires support in targeted areas.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. The school district of Philadelphia has provided written curriculum aligned to state and district standards of learning to all schools across the district. Teachers and school leaders are aware of this curriculum.
 - a) The School District of Philadelphia provides The Comprehensive Literacy Framework PreK-5 including instructional milestones by grade and skill progression from the PA Core Standards, and PSSA rubrics.
 - b) During focus group conversations, teachers spoke to the use of the standards and

state/district curriculum provided.

- ii. Steel school leaders and teachers have made recent decisions about the type of periodic assessments for its school community. As a result, the periodic common assessments are more strongly aligned with the written curriculum, state standards, and state tests.
 - a) Access is given to all teachers and relevant staff to common assessment systems aligned to the curriculum, state standards, and state tests. These common assessment platforms include:
 - i. IRLA (Independent Reading Level Assessment)
 - ii. AIMSweb (a universal screening, progress monitoring, and data management system)
 - iii. PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment)

Having access to quality written curriculum and aligned assessments places in the school in stronger standing to ensure students are progressing against standards. Now that school leaders, teachers, and staff have access to quality written curriculum, the next step could be to focus on effectively implementing the written curriculum. When making decisions about how to effectively tailor the planned or written curriculum, teachers and leaders should use the data contained in the above referenced platforms for periodic assessments as well as ongoing formative assessments from classroom learning.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. The implemented curriculum is neither rigorous nor balanced enough to sufficiently challenge all students.
 - a) In 19 of the 19 classrooms visited, students were either engaged in low-level, whole class tasks (such as copying from the book/board, or completing a worksheet that required little thinking) or disengaged and focused on their friends or distracting behaviors (such as play fighting, chasing, standing in the doorway of the room with students from other classes).
 - b) In 2 of the 19 classrooms, teachers had distributed math manipulatives, such as interlocking cubes. In the third-grade class, these manipulatives remained in the center of student tables to be collected at the end of the lesson (students reported they are “not allowed to touch the cubes without permission”). In the first-grade classroom, students were given step-by-step instructions about where to place a certain number of cubes. The process was micromanaged and more about assessing students’ ability to follow teacher instructions than it was to enhance conceptual understanding of base ten in mathematics.

The current gap between the written and learned curriculum is contributing to the lack of growth and achievement of students. In an attempt to control behaviors and ‘manage a class’, the quality of learning in classrooms falls into the realm of busy work including worksheet copies, sitting still, and working from textbooks. As a result, learning lacks rigor or challenge, lacks engagement or interest by students and adults, and an overall disregard throughout the school.

- ii. Although the written curriculum and newly adopted periodic assessments are aligned to state standards, the data is not sufficiently utilized (by administrators or teachers) to make decisions about individual, group, or class learning.
 - a) Teachers and staff are aware of data platforms available and the theoretical alignment with written curriculum. There was no evidence in documentation, lessons observed, nor discussions during focus groups that demonstrate the use of data generated from these

assessments.

- b) Despite a calendar for the review of assessment data, lesson plans, and observations in classrooms, these practices occur infrequently. This means student and teacher assignments are made without deep knowledge of strengths or areas for improvement. There was no evidence that formative data, such as student work samples or exit slips, are utilized for instructional and learning purposes.

Although there is access to a standards-based curriculum, literacy frameworks, and common assessments, the use of these important resources is inconsistent, at best. Behaviors in classrooms, hallways, and common areas such as the library and cafeteria, are distracting and unsafe. School leaders and teachers report a feeling of being overwhelmed and ill-equipped to support students in crisis. As a result, the daily focus remains on student behavior.

Teachers in grades K-2 received training or professional development on the new curriculum, however, teachers in other grades reported no access to supports such as coaches and professional development. As a result, teachers are “Doing the best we can to teach the curriculum.” Teachers require dedicated, structured, regularly-scheduled time to work in professional grade-level/departmental teams to:

- unpack standards and the curriculum to plan effectively
- select common formative performance tasks to assess the impact of teaching on learning
- review student work samples and common formative performance tasks to make decisions about student groupings and future learning
- discuss and share evidence of quality, effective instructional practices that enhance learning for individual, small group, and all students.

- iii. There was no evidence of quality homework or extended-day activities used to reinforce and extend classroom learning experiences.

- a) Students reported a few after-hours events at the school, including back to school night, movie night, and pizza parties for certain students based on Class Dojo points. For homework help or clubs and sports, students turn to the local Boys and Girls Clubs since the school doesn’t offer afterschool programs. Students in upper grades (5-8) reported having a range of homework anywhere from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. Inconsistent policies around homework and extended learning result in:

- i. Incomplete homework. Teachers reported, “These students don’t do homework, so why assign it?”
- ii. Piles of unscored homework. Students reported, “They [teachers] don’t even look at the homework, so most kids don’t do it.”
- iii. A sense that homework is not important.
- iv. Parents reported the inconsistent and sporadic nature of homework and project assignments makes it difficult to reinforce at home. Some parents reported relying on Class Dojo communications, however, not all teachers communicate via Class Dojo. There was no evidence of formal communication about homework or extended-day activities shared by the school.

Inconsistencies in grading and homework policies contribute to the confusion and strain on students and parents/guardians. A lack of afterschool programing is a missed opportunity to further student learning through homework help or other potential interventions.

3.3 Domain 3: Instructional Coaching, Management, and Accountability

Sub-Domain 3.1: Instructional Leadership

Instructional Leadership requires intensive school-wide support.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. School leaders planned and designed school systems to monitor the effectiveness of learning and teaching.
 - a) School leaders shared electronic documents regarding a school-wide plan with goals for achievement, schedule for observing and offering feedback to teachers, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a means of supporting quality instructional practices throughout the grades and subjects.
 - b) The school's website [message from the principal](#) contains a Road Map for improvement: "Our road map includes:
 - i. Grade groups functioning in PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES'
 - ii. Data driven instruction – PLAN/DO/STUDY/ACT
 - iii. Daily ATTENDANCE monitoring with INCENTIVES and CELEBRATIONS
 - iv. On-going DIFFERENTIATED professional development
 - v. A.M. and P.M. WALK THROUGHs
 - vi. A GOOD LESSON that includes an ASSESSMENT that is aligned to the FOCUS standards/skills of the grade
 - vii. Meaningful, immediate FEEDBACK to staff and students"

The principal makes efforts to engage staff in meaningful practices and has thought about and documented key practices including in his message on the school's website. The principal has experiences with these practices and speaks to a strong desire to implement these practices into the school community.

- ii. School leaders collect a wide range of data to assess the impact of learning and teaching on student outcomes and ensure teachers have access to data systems.
 - a) Data systems/platforms selected by school leaders enable staff to generate reports, graphs, and charts based on the student data collected. These systems also allow users to sort by subgroups, grades, ratings, teacher, classes, etc.
 - b) Formative assessment data platforms align with school, district, and state standards and assessments.

Understanding the importance of making data-informed decisions school leaders collect a wide range of data and have made efforts to ensure teachers have access to these systems. Access and awareness are the first steps.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. School leaders do not follow the planned school-wide systems to monitor the effectiveness of learning and teaching through frequent observations of lessons, regular analysis of student work, and systematic review of plans. When any of these activities occur, they are infrequent and remain at the surface level, reinforcing a culture of compliance and reactive management instead of a culture of continuous improvement through deep, shared understanding.

- a) Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been established and there is documentation to support this initiative. However, due to adult absences (only 56% of teachers attend 95% or more), behavioral challenges (serving students with traumatic experiences in their history, violent behaviors, community conflicts that “come into the school”), and other distractions (outbreak of fleas and bedbugs) take away from the planned PLC schedule.
- b) Day 1 of the Quality Review (October 12, 2017) was the second PLC meeting of the academic year.
- c) The district has set a goal of observation/feedback as frequently as three per day. School leaders have designed an observation/feedback schedule with responsibility divided among all three administrators. During a focus group conversation with the leadership team, two of the three administrators were present and admitted that this schedule is not adhered to because their time is spent trying to keep the school safe. During the focus-group conversation with teachers, 9 of 11 have yet to receive feedback from an observation while two reported a visit but no formal feedback, yet.
- d) Within the school documents there is an articulated system for reviewing lesson plans which includes teachers’ submission of lesson plans via Google Drive by Thursday each week. The principal stated that he tries to review and offer feedback by Saturday noontime so teachers have “the remainder of the weekend to make revisions.” When asked, the principal and co-principal could not recall how often they have reviewed plans this academic year. When asked, 1 of the 11 teachers thought there might be feedback on one of the lesson plans submitted. This system is not yet practiced regularly, and as a result, is not a part of the fabric of the school.
- e) The principal stated his belief in the value of the coaching structure and a desire for this model to improve instructional practices throughout the building. 3 of 11 teachers in the focus group thought they heard something about the coaching program but haven’t seen anyone in their classrooms. One teacher added that this might be something a teacher in trouble needed (meaning a less effective teacher, like one who struggles with management).

In conversation, the principal expressed good knowledge of effective educational practices and a strong desire to support his teachers in making these practices a reality. However, in day-to-day routine, these practices are not evident. One teacher stated that these practices are currently “in theory,” which summarizes well where the school is currently. The principal has good ideas and most teachers and staff agree with these ideas. A lack of consistent action and follow through are eroding these relationships.

A lack of consistent, prioritized, and thorough actions contributes to the ineffective nature and course of the school community. The principal has good ideas about systems and structures that would focus on the impact of teaching on learning and if implemented would have a positive impact on the quality however, a lack of implementation makes the planning, knowledge, and supporting documents inadequate.

- ii. Although there is access to valuable and varied data sources, there is no evidence of school leaders utilizing data in decision-making processes. Teacher and student assignments are sometimes made based on behaviors however, this practice is haphazard and inconsistent.
 - a) A review of lesson plans revealed no reference to differentiation strategies, data-driven student groupings, or daily formative assessments.
 - b) During focus-group conversations, teachers reported the expectation is to use data from

the various systems however they do not currently have the time to regularly access these systems. 7 of the 11 teachers present use Class Dojo regularly to manage and track behaviors of the class.

- c) 19 of 19 classrooms observed included whole group instruction with expectations that students generate the same product using the same process and materials.
- d) There was a disconnect between the written objective and schedule on the board and the actual activity in 17 of the 19 classrooms observed.

Although there is a collection of data, evidence of the use of this data is lacking. As a result, students are not learning and the quality of their learning experiences is lacking rigor and coherence. The school could begin to improve by selecting a few high-leverage strategies to focus on, school-wide. The school would see greater return on their efforts by following through with a few key strategies consistently, every day for the remainder of the academic year, instead of creating loads of policies that are documented but never make it into practice. Quality instructional leadership includes taking strategic, prioritized, and consistent actions aligned with these beliefs and designed systems.

Sub-Domain 3.2: Management and Accountability

Management and Accountability requires intensive school-wide support.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. School leaders speak to and model high expectations and a belief that all students deserve quality educational experiences daily.
 - a) The principal established a theme of “Care” during the 2016-2017 academic year. Two of the teachers and one parent was aware of this. #SteelStrong is a theme this year and includes slogan posters in the main office and some parts of the school. Students seemed to like #SteelStrong and explained with pride that Steel is to represent their school's name.
 - b) The principal and several teachers (5 of 11) mentioned an emphasis on positive behavior reinforcement as opposed to always being penalty driven. Students like when teachers acknowledge good behaviors via Class Dojo, and parents look for the Class Dojo points as well.

The principal and most staff members believe in and share a desire to support students to achieve their highest potential. Currently, high expectations are around behaviors and how one presents oneself. As a result, around the principal and certain staff members students are polite, confident, and amiable.

- ii. School leaders implement effective measures to promote good attendance for students.
 - a) Daily attendance is tracked by teachers and reported in the main office of the school.
 - b) Morning announcements include recognition of classes with 100% attendance from the previous day.
 - c) Doorway signs recognize classes with positive attendance and help to make public the importance of attending school every day.
 - d) Class incentives are awarded to classes with 100% attendance, and students are excited about receiving incentives such as pizza, movie night, pencils, and other awards from a prize collection.

Due to focused, consistent efforts student attendance is on the rise. Students appreciate the attention and feel like teachers, staff, and the principal care about their attendance.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. School leaders speak to a general vision/mission where all students learn and are successful. Students, teachers, staff, and parents are unclear what the vision is and as a result the community is not united in a common purpose.
 - a) During the initial conversation with the principal outlined five core elements that should be present within the school: (1) Growth mindset, (2) Solution-orientation, (3) Belief of US over I, (4) Care, and (5) Data-driven. No other focus groups could speak to these core elements by name nor by description.
 - b) The school's [website message from the principal](#) includes:
"This year, our major focus will be on building 'Professional Learning Communities.' Through this process, we fully expect to transform our school into a results-oriented institution where all students, staff members, and stakeholders meet their fullest potential. It is our challenge to greatly reduce or totally eliminate our children from the below-basic category. Our ultimate goal is to improve every child's reading level across all content areas. In addition, we are striving to increase our daily instructional time, implement a successful attendance initiative, as well as, decrease our incidents of disruptive behavior."
 - c) During a focus group session, one staff member left the room when asked about the vision of the school, stating, "I cannot do this." Others stated, "We don't really have one," And, "I'm not sure. We do focus on caring for all students." These responses illustrate the frustration and murkiness of the work, which stems from inconsistencies in practice and communication.

A lack of shared understanding of the vision and mission contributes to the disjointed culture and increases the likelihood that efforts are limited in impact. High functioning schools and organizations have a clearly articulated vision that is shared by all members of the community and ensure all members have awareness and knowledge of how their actions should impact the achievement of the vision. Leaders then effectively track inputs, outcomes, and impacts of individual and team actions ensuring continued progress toward the achievement of the vision.

- ii. Although school leaders speak to a commitment and philosophical belief of high expectations for all students, day-to-day actions/interactions are not aligned with this belief. As a result, learning, teaching, and behaviors are well below acceptable standards throughout the school.
 - a) There is a lack of follow through with initiatives including Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), School Leadership Team meetings, coaching interactions, feedback on lesson plans, and classroom observations, to name a few.
 - b) School leaders designed an observation/feedback schedule with responsibilities shared by all three administrators. The district has set a goal of observation/feedback as frequently as three per day. During a focus group conversation with the Leadership Team, two of the three administrators were present and admitted that this schedule is not adhered to because their time is spent trying to keep the school safe. During the focus group conversation with teachers, 9 of the 11 stated they have yet to receive feedback from an observation, while two reported a "visit" but no formal feedback yet.
 - c) After five questions about instructional leadership and practices during a teacher focus group, one teacher explained that much of this "is in theory." Documents provided by school leaders speak to this notion of "in theory" but not yet experienced nor observed in practice.

- iii. School-wide policies and practices are written in some documents and shared on an electronic drive. However, the lack of consistent implementation of these policies and practices yields a reactive culture where behaviors are distracting and dangerous to the well-being of students, staff, and others within the school.
 - a) The school principal works weekly with a coach.
 - b) There is a co-principal assigned to the school as well as an assistant principal.

There is evidence that school leaders have thought about instructional practices, systems, and structures that focus on learning and teaching. However, the day-to-day implementation is inconsistent, at best. Teachers do not receive regular feedback on curriculum, instruction, or collaborative practices. Instructional practices are underdeveloped and learning is lackluster, inconsistent, and overall, insufficient. Leadership unintentionally contributes to the reactive school culture in crisis by spending most of their time focused on behaviors, dealing with parent-family issues, and not on learning and teaching. Students engage in distracting and sometimes violent behaviors instead of meaningful academic exchange; during reviewers two day visit the police department was in the school four times.

The majority of staff are in survival mode, creating a divided culture. High-performing schools, districts, and organizations work collaboratively toward a clearly articulated, shared vision and mission, with core values to define the ways they work. Subsequently, all initiatives and priorities are aligned and further define the day-to-day work of individuals and teams. Regular, consistent implementation of aligned systems and structures help high-performing schools, districts, and organizations to embody core values and reach and exceed the shared goals and objectives.

3.4 Domain 4: The Culture of Learning

The Culture of Learning requires intensive school-wide support.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. School leaders and some staff model and reinforce expectations of appropriate behaviors.
 - a) Every observed interaction between the principal and teachers, staff, students, and parents demonstrated care and a desire to support individuals/families.
 - b) The principal, co-principal, and counselor were present in classrooms, teacher meetings, and in hallways, interacting with children to correct and remind them of appropriate behaviors.
 - c) Positive behavior strategies were observed in 3 of the 19 classrooms visited. 4 of the 19 classrooms observed included praise and positive reinforcement, with statements from the teachers like, "I like the way ---(student's name)--- is sitting with her hands folded," And, "It is nice to see ---(student's name)--- group is ready to begin their work," And, "Now that the class is ready, I am going to award class Class Dojo points."

The principal articulated the importance of modeling and reinforcing expectations with students, staff, teachers, and parents/families. With some focus on positive reinforcement some classroom interactions reflect this initiative with some staff working to implement these techniques. The principal and a core group of teachers/staff work consistently to reinforce appropriate behaviors. Continued focus on positive, functional relationships focused on learning, progress, and growth will support continued momentum forward.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. The reactive culture of the school unintentionally reinforces an environment that is chaotic, distracting, and unsafe.
 - a) Behaviors were the topic of conversation in every interaction observed between school leaders, staff, teachers, leadership team, teacher teams, parents, families, and students. We did not observe any exchange focused on the quality of learning and teaching.
 - b) During classroom observations of learning, students and staff were distracted multiple times per class period with negative behaviors within the class, disruptions from students in hallways and doorways, as well as announcements over the loud speakers in 19 of the 19 classrooms visited.
 - c) Focus group conversations with teachers revealed a challenge in keeping students engaged in their work or task at hand when inflammatory lockdown announcements are made. The co-principal reported that the language used during lockdown announcements is scripted and mandated by the district.

Staff are constantly reacting to disruptions to learning. Low staff attendance rates contribute to the intermittent policy reinforcement and sporadic implementation of systems, like PLCs. School leaders, teachers, and staff find themselves responding to a range of emotionally fueled inquires in the school, daily. Parents, families, and staff reported feeling ill-equipped to serve the needs of students who have experienced great trauma in their young lives. The principal, teachers, and parents reported Steel serves a large population of students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, and students being raised by adults other than their birth parents, including foster parents, aunts/uncles, and grandparents. To better understand how to serve the students, parents, families, and community of Steel, we first need to know and deeply understand the contributing factors and root causes. Teams can then unpack factors within their control and begin to plan forward in realistic, strategic, and meaningful ways.

- ii. Relationships between the district, school leaders, teachers, staff, parents/guardians, and students are strained and contribute to an overall sense of frustration, overwhelmed, and unsafe conditions.
 - a) School leaders reported that teacher and staff attendance is a challenge and that the following factors contribute to these absences:
 - i. Vacancies for teaching and other key positions such as fulltime social workers,
 - ii. Teacher resignations early in the year,
 - iii. Coverages and changes to schedules due to absences, and
 - iv. Daily behavioral challenges from a core groups of students suffering from trauma and those with emotional disabilities.
 - b) During focus group conversations, teachers reported
 - i. a lack of follow through with school initiatives such as PLC meetings,
 - ii. disruptions to learning from hallways and students popping in and out of classroom doors, and loud speaker announcements, and
 - iii. vacancies for key positions like social workers and counselors when students are suffering and in need of services they are not qualified to provide.
 - c) During focus group conversations, parents and guardians shared
 - i. a concern for their child's safety when in school, especially during transition times and specific areas in hallways and stairwells,
 - ii. a sense of distrust with the district due to a lack of follow through on previous school development plans and promises of additional resources never received, and

- iii. concerns about police presence in the school and several instances of lockdown without proper communication and explanation.

Several factors contribute to the unsafe and reactive culture of Steel school community. Perceptions and a continuously reactive approach to misbehaviors stem from a sense of being overwhelmed, understaffed, and ill-equipped to support students in significant need. A lack of clear communication and proper follow through contribute to these perceptions and unsafe conditions.

3.5 Domain 5: Family and Community Engagement

Family and Community Engagement requires support in targeted areas.

Factors that support effective student learning:

- i. Parents volunteer regularly within the school and have created an informal system for ensuring they are present during different times throughout the school week.
 - a) During the parent focus group meeting, parents reported keeping a weekly schedule, informally amongst themselves, to ensure they are volunteering in the school at different times throughout each day. This stems from a desire to “keep our kids safe, especially when going to other classes or lunch.”
 - b) Parents reported speaking with certain teachers regularly at morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up. They also reported participating in family movie night and awards assemblies when such events are scheduled.
 - c) Parents appreciated Class Dojo updates and the ability for their child(ren) to earn points and rewards via this system. They also noted that some teachers use the system while other teachers do not.

The core group of parents we met with reported a sense of pride in the school community and many have been members of the school community for years demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the school.

- ii. A core of the parent population desire to be partners in their child(ren)’s education and development.
 - a) There is a core group of parents that continue to be involved in their child(ren)’s education and development despite strained relationships with individual teachers and school leaders.
 - b) Parents reported their participation as parents as insufficient saying things like “we want to do more.” And “they only ask us to show up for certain things. We used to have family events, we want to do that again.”
 - c) Parents present in the focus group ranged grades, number of years in the school, and levels of leadership with the parent groups.
 - d) The parents involved longer support newer parents coming into the fold.
 - e) Additionally, parents present for the focus group included birth parents, foster parents, grandparents, working parents, and those without employment, native English speakers, and bilingual parents.

Parents want their children to do well and shared a desire to do more within the school community. This desire could be channeled and leveraged to have a positive impact.

Factors that limit effective student learning:

- i. Communication is inconsistent and sporadic placing strain on the relationships between the school and parents within the community.
 - a) Parents reported that police visits to the school spread throughout the community like wildfire and students often come home with stories and “tall-tales” about why the police were there.
 - b) Parents reported receiving notices from the school the day after an event or even the week after. School leaders reported a policy of sending written communications the day of the event. This disconnect is one example of the strained nature of the relationship between the school and parents, families, and the community.
 - c) Inconsistent use of systems such as Class Dojo and data systems leave parents wondering how their child is doing in school and create gaps in understanding between the school and parents/families. Teachers, school leaders, students, parents, and families reported that some teachers use Class Dojo while other do not.

Currently parents and families are invited to participate in what they see as superficial ways. The core group includes parents and guardians with a strong pulse on the community as well as educated parents who understand the needs and availability of resources from district, city, and state resources. Increased collaboration between school leaders and the school leadership team with parents and families would enhance the successes of the school community. Currently, students are underserved and parents/families are aware of this fact. Efforts from parents and the community sometimes run in parallel with the school however, they are not currently aligned strongly enough to have a long-lasting impact that benefits students.

