



**Science, Technology, Engineering Preparatory Academy**

MN Charter School District 4200

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2017

In Operation since Fall 2011

(Grades 6-12)

Dakota County, Minnesota

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## STEP Academy Introduction

STEP Academy, Minnesota Charter School District 4200, is a grades 6-12 charter school with a Science, Technology, and Engineering focus. STEP Academy opened in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota, in fall 2011, and moved to a new location in St. Paul, for the 2016-17 school year. STEP Academy provides students a STEM-focused learning experience emphasizing science, technology, computer literacy and mathematics. STEP Academy has built a solid record in terms of academic growth and diminishing the achievement gap by effectively educating all students. In 2016, STEP Academy applied for a grade-level expansion from a 6-12 program to a K-12 school; this was approved in the fall, so the school is expanding to serve grades K-12 beginning fall 2017.

As a Minnesota public charter school, STEP Academy is committed to mobilizing the resources necessary to offer urban students a rigorous academic experience that prepares them for college, grounds them in civic responsibility, and positions them for successful careers in a competitive knowledge-based global economy. STEP Academy is committed to diversity as it is guided by the following core values:

- STEP Academy values diversity in all its forms included, but not limited to, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and religious diversity.
- STEP Academy values the assets and talents of each student.
- STEP Academy values the partnership of parents and community organizations in supporting urban students' leadership development and academic success.
- STEP Academy values a teaching and learning school community that sets a premium on professionalism and creativity.
- STEP Academy values critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and the application of knowledge to real world challenges.
- STEP Academy values the application of technology in ways that stimulate learning, encourage innovation, and inspire creative solutions to social issues.
- STEP Academy attracts students from families throughout the greater Twin Cities. As a charter schools that effectively serves urban youth, STEP Academy promotes academic excellence and professional preparation

## STEP Academy Contact Information

STEP Academy is located at 835 5th Street East, St Paul, MN 55106. Main contact person is Mustafa Ibrahim, Executive Director (phone: 651 289-6120; email [Mustafa@stepacademy.com](mailto:Mustafa@stepacademy.com))

## STEP Academy's Mission and Vision

**Vision:** *MN STEP Academy is a 6-12 Charter School in Inver Grove Heights, MN. It is our vision to promote college-readiness by ensuring that all students are motivated to academic excellence, can qualify to obtain college credit while in high school, are fully prepared to enter college and graduate, with the critical knowledge and skills required for employment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers. As a public school open to all students, it also reaches out to students who are underserved by traditional schools and are underrepresented within STEM fields.*

**Mission:** *Our students will explore Science, Technology, and Mathematics as well as other supporting coursework and critical thinking skills, as a vehicle for college success. Through faculty mentoring, innovative teaching and classroom technology, and participation in experiential learning, students will readily translate what they learn to real world environments. In collaboration with local community, state, and private colleges and universities, STEP Academy students will be encouraged to qualify for and take post-secondary educational courses prior to graduating from STEP Academy.*

STEP Academy's authorizer is Innovative Quality Schools (contact: Milo Cutter – [mcutter@iqsmn.org](mailto:mcutter@iqsmn.org); phone 651-234-0900). The 2016-17 school year was the third year of a five-year charter contract.

STEP Academy was initially authorized by Anoka Community/Technical College in 2010, and opened in the fall of 2011. In 2012, the College decided to discontinue its role as an authorizer of chartered schools. At that time, the Board of STEP requested that IQS serve as their authorizer, which IQS agreed to do after a review of STEP.

## STEP Academy Enrollment and Student Attrition

STEP ACADEMY'S ENROLLMENT <sup>1</sup> BY GRADE, 2013-2016										
School Year	K-5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL	Attrition <sup>2</sup>
2014-15	0	33	51	52	52	40	20	16	264	+55%
2015-16	0	26	30	49	35	43	31	18	232	-12%
2016-17	0	24	50	37	50	44	39	34	278	+20%
2017-18	156 (K-6 total)		44	56	42	42	35	37	412	+48%

<sup>1</sup> Based on October 1 student enrollment figures.

<sup>2</sup> Based on percentage change from the previous fall.

The 2017-18 figures in the table above are actual enrollment as of late October. The new elementary-grades program is essentially full, with just three un-filled slots available.

## Governance and Management

The table below shows all the members of STEP Academy’s governing board during 2016-17. Teacher member Deborah Bartlett was added to the Board in September, replacing Amena Abdullah, who passed away during the summer. Community member Mohamed Hagi Aden left the Board in November; a new community member, Amina Mohamud, was added to the Board in February.

<b>Name: Last, First</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Date Ap- pointed</b>	<b>Term Expi- ration</b>	<b>Contact</b>
AbouAiad, Tamanny	Teacher / Secretary, File Folder #447125	7/1/14	6/30/17	651-289-6132; <a href="mailto:tamanny@stepacademymn.com">tamanny@stepacademymn.com</a>
Bartlett, Deborah	Teacher, / Secretary File Folder #461717	9/21/16	6/30/17	651-289-6120; <a href="mailto:dbartlett@stepacademymn.com">dbartlett@stepacademymn.com</a>
Hagi Aden, Mohamed	Community / Vice Chair	7/1/14	12/21/16 (resigned)	Islow02@yahoo.com
Hassan, Abdirahman	Community / Direc- tor	7/1/14	6/30/19	612-384-6002; <a href="mailto:ahassan@stepacade-mymn.com">ahassan@stepacade-mymn.com</a>
Hurre, Mustafa	Parent / Director	3/15/16	6/30/17	952-288-0012; <a href="mailto:mhurre@stepacade-mymn.com">mhurre@stepacade-mymn.com</a>
Mohamud, Amina	Community / Vice Chair	2/15/17	6/30/19	612-876-7145
Olmsted, Sandra	Community / Chair	7/1/14	6/30/17	612-330-1079; <a href="mailto:solmsted@stepacademymn.com">solmsted@stepacademymn.com</a>
Yassin, Khadar	Community / Treas- urer	7/1/14	6/30/19	612-281-0731; <a href="mailto:khadar@stepacade-mymn.com">khadar@stepacade-mymn.com</a>

STEP Academy’s Board of Director is responsible for setting goals, ensuring that the school’s goals are met, and approving or disapproving the major decisions made by the Executive Director. The Board reviews policies over a five-year cycle. STEP Academy’s Board also undertakes long-term strategic planning and oversees the finances to make sure the school is fiscally sound. Training for Board members, in Governance, Personnel and Finance, is provided by Augsburg University.

## Staffing

### STEP Academy Teaching Staff 2016-2017

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>File folder #</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Left during 16/17?</b>	<b>Not returning 17/18?</b>
Abou-Aiad, Tamanny	447125	Math		
Bartlett, Deborah	461717	Special ed.		
Begum, Rejia	415343	Math		
Borghol, Marwa	446832	Arabic		
Benz, Diane	369051	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade		
Chapman, Jessica	473968	HS English Language Arts		
Chowdhury, Zinat	432535	MS Science		
Cole, Nicholas	474188	Physical Education		NR
Elharawy, Mona	416352	Building Sub		
Henley, Hannah	496105	HS Social Studies		
Nelsen, Wayne	343848	ELL		
Nupen, Matthew	425244	Digital Design / STEM Integration		
Olson, Luke	485672	HS Math		
Ritchart, John	415920	HS Science		
Roddy, Lisa	332484	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade		NR
Serig, Bridget	409033	Reading RTI		NR
Tholen, Keeley	463199	AVID		
Welsh, Nicholas	450616	MS Social Studies		

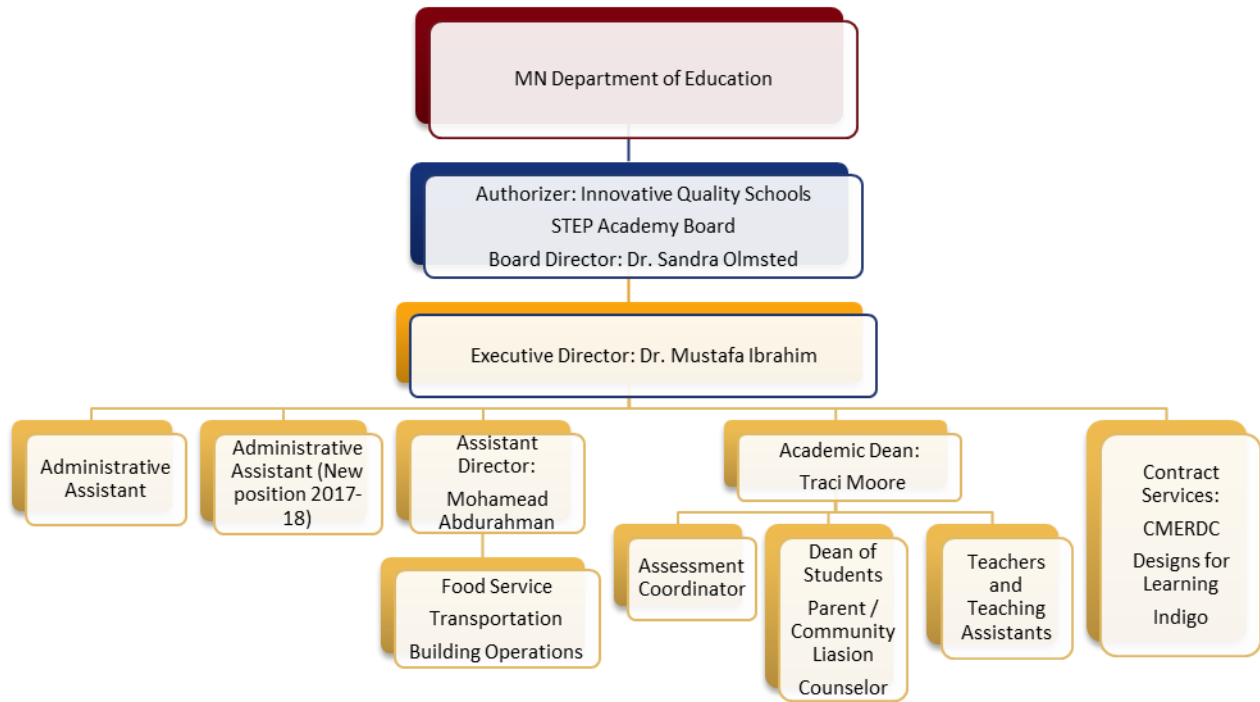
All but three of STEP Academy's licensed teachers from 2016-17 returned for the 2017-18 school year, yielding a retention rate of 83%.

## STEP Academy 2016-2017 School Management and Faculty Information

Name	File Folder number	Assignment	Years employed	Left during 16/17?	Not returning 17/18?
Mustafa Ibrahim		Executive Director	5		
Mohamed Abdu-rahman		Assistant Director	6		
Traci Moore	362417	Academic Dean	1		
Sarah Kawle		Counselor	2		NR
Matthew Kenutis	483419	Dean of Students	2		
Fahmo Osman		Admin. Assistant	2		

STEP Academy is led by a Leadership Team consisting of the Executive Director, Assistant Director, and Academic Dean. STEP Academy's management team as a whole, shown in the table above, was consistent throughout the 2016-17 school year. STEP Academy's Leadership Team meets regularly and each member takes responsibility for continuous improvement in their respective areas of management: the director manages board activities, mission and vision reviews, and the financial health of the school; the assistant director manages operational growth including food service, transportation, and facilities; and the academic dean manages development in the areas of curriculum, student achievement and data, teacher professional development, and instructional programming. Through the creation and monitoring of goals and action steps in each management area, the school continues to identify areas in need of attention and pathways to success.

STEP Academy's organization chart for the expanded school, effective fall 2017, is below.



## Director’s Professional Development Plan

STEP Academy’s director, Mustafa Ibrahim, is not a licensed school administrator, though he is enrolled in the University of Minnesota’s administrative licensure program for K-12 principals. Mr. Ibrahim’s professional development activities during 2016-17 included the following:

- IQS Charter School Board Training (July 25, 2016)
- New Charter Schools Training, MDE (July 28-29)
- IQS Leadership Conference. How Things Work: Improving School Performance (August 4)
- IQS Fall Leadership Meeting (November 7)
- Employment Law for Charter Schools (November 17)
- AVID District Leadership (ADL) Session 3 training, Minneapolis (March 1, 2017)
- IQS School Leadership Meeting (May 1)
- National Charter Schools Conference, Washington, DC (June 11-14)
- IQS Board Member Training (July 26)

## Professional Development for Teaching Staff

STEP Academy teaching staff receive training throughout the year to build their capacity to succeed in this school’s unique learning environment. For 2016-17 STEP Academy leadership established four staff development goals, which were addressed as described in the table below.



Goal	Documented Actions	Measure(s) / Results
By June 9, staff will receive training on processes and procedures that improve the overall operations and function of the school as a system.	Trainings: 1) Emergency Procedures 2) End-of-Day Procedures 3) Lunchroom 4) Behavior	Successful Processes & Procedures after training: Multiple trainings were offered throughout the school year as planned, and attended by all staff.
By June 9, STEP Academy will increase staff capacity to handle student behavior issues	1) Love & Logic Lessons 2) Beginning of the year procedures Power Point presentation  A third action was the implementation of the ENVoY program for nonverbal classroom management. STEP Academy has had all-school training in this system which helps educators establish respectful relationships with students, focusing on influencing behavior through nonverbal cues.	1) Staff will express an increase in classroom management success: Toward the beginning of the school year, staff conversations and planning often focused on student behavior issues, but these issues declined significantly throughout the year and were minimal by spring. Lunchroom EA's were decreased due to the lesser need.  2) There will be a decrease in behavior referrals from classrooms from the September/October count and the April/May count: Review of referrals data showed that there were 503 referrals in Sept./Oct., and 495 in April/May, so the change was minimal. However, staff believe progress is being made in this area, through implementation of PBIS schoolwide, now supported by ENVoY for classroom management.
By June 9, STEP Academy teachers will have built curriculum documents for all classes that include Minnesota Standards Placement, Content Units, Materials, and Assessments.	1) Curriculum Document Training 2) ELA Curriculum Work Sessions 3) Math Work Sessions 4) Curriculum Work Sessions	Thorough Curriculum Documents: Training and work sessions were carried out as planned; STEP Academy has curriculum documents for every class as of spring 2017.
By spring 2017, 80% of STEM Academy staff will agree or strongly agree to both of the following statements: "I have a better understanding of the elements of a STEM Program than I had a	1) STEM Integration Coordinator on staff to work with teachers 2) STEM Trainings	2016-17 staff were surveyed at the beginning of the 2017-18 school year (8 licensed teachers responded). Results included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I have a better understanding of the elements of a STEM program than I had a year ago" – 62.5%</li> </ul>

Goal	Documented Actions	Measure(s) / Results
year ago." and/or "I know how to access ideas for integrating STEM concepts into my curriculum."		Agreed/Strongly Agreed; rest of respondents Neutral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I know how to access ideas for integrating STEM concepts into my curriculum" – 63% Agree/Strongly Agree; 25% Neutral; 12% Disagree.</li> </ul>

## Finances

STEP Academy relocated for 2016-17 to a previous parochial school building at 835 E. 6th St., St. Paul, Minnesota. This move allowed the school to expand without the need for build-out. The school entered a ten year lease with the building owners to occupy the 53,382 square feet building from the landlord. STEP Academy completed its first year in its new location. While the move and expenditures related to the move did cause the academy to dip slightly into their fund balance in FY 2017, the new location is allowing for expanded classroom space, science labs, a media center, and elementary recess space.

Increased enrollment, expanded programming and a stable learning environment has set the academy up for a financially solvent future.

STEP Academy Financial Summary, 2014-2016				
	Total Rev.	Total Exp.	Ending F.B.	F.B. - % of Exp.
FY 2014	\$2,255,199	\$ 2,186,780	\$580,570	26.5%
FY 2015	\$2,855,960	\$2,510,436	\$926,094	36.9%
FY 2016	\$2,986,618	\$3,045,491	\$867,221	28.5%
FY 2017	\$ 3,397,640	\$3,441,918	\$ 822,944	23.9%

## Academic Performance

This report on STEP Academy's Academic Performance data is organized around Appendix No. 1 of STEP Academy's contract with its authorizer, Innovative Quality Schools. In particular, it addresses item 3 of Appendix No. 1, Evaluation of School/Student Performance Indicators. For each element of the Performance Indicators, currently available data is summarized.

## School / Student Performance Indicators: Authorizer Contract, Appendix 1

### **A. General Provisions:**

- 1) The school has a process for determining the student's academic levels of performance when they enter school in order to establish a baseline from which improvement can be determined. "Enter school" means at any time, not just at the beginning of the year.
- 2) Performance is assessed against the expectations in the contract.
- 3) NCLB expectations provisions are addressed as required by current federal law<sup>3</sup>.
- 4) NCLB expectations provisions are addressed as required by current state and federal law or waivers provided to Minnesota.
- 5) A growth model or value added growth model method of data analysis will be used. The key cohort used to make contract renewal decisions will be the group of students that have been enrolled at the school for three or more years. While the performance of all students will be included in the analysis, it is the "three year cohort" on which the school will be judged for contract renewal purposes.

The General Provisions elements are being addressed at STEP Academy. It is worth noting, with reference to items 3-4, that the No Child Left Behind Act has been superseded by the waiver system under which Minnesota continued to operate during 2015-16; the Multiple Measurements Rating (MMR) system which the state adopted under the waiver starting in 2012, is addressed in item E, below. MMR is to be replaced with a new accountability system under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) starting 2017-18.

### **B. Academic Performance:**

- 1) Every Graduate will meet one or more of the following requirements:
  - (a) A career plan will be developed not later than 9<sup>th</sup> grade. For students beginning at STEP after 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they will develop their plan within their first year at STEP. Students may modify their career plans at any time.
  - (b) Meet the requirements of the School for graduation; and,
  - (c) Complete a successful work experience; and/or
  - (d) Complete two or more post-secondary classes successfully; and/or
  - (e) Complete a one-year certificate program and pass the test for that career; and/or
  - (f) Complete one year of post-secondary education; and/or
  - (g) Complete an AA degree or more.

These requirements for graduation are being addressed. Preparing students for college, including giving them opportunities to earn college credits before completing high school, is a key innovation which is in place at STEP

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<sup>3</sup> During 2016-17 Minnesota continued to operate under its federally-approved waiver of NCLB requirements.

Academy. STEP is building relationships with postsecondary institutions and has put in place programming to support students enrolling in Post-secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO). Twenty-nine students enrolled in PSEO during 2016-17, an increase from twenty-two the previous year. These students, 14 seniors and 15 juniors attended seven area colleges and universities and earned PSEO credits.

2) Attendance: % of all students attending 90%

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Metric (target)	90%	90%	91%	93%	95%
<b>Actual</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>92.0%</b>	<b>89.6%</b>		

Review of the past two years' attendance data showed:

- 2014-15: Of a total of 296 students who were enrolled for any part of the school year, 170 or 57.4% were in attendance 90% or more of the days enrolled
- 2015-16: Of a total of 274 students enrolled, 252 or 92.0%, were in attendance 90% or more of the days enrolled.
- 2016-17: Of a total of 308 students enrolled, 276 or 89.6% were in attendance 90% or more of the days enrolled.

3) Academic performance (Cross-cohorts)

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
(a) School-wide MCA Reading - % proficient, target <sup>4</sup>	42%	48%	54%	60%	66%
<b>Actual</b>	<b>35.6%</b>	<b>48.8%</b>	<b>39.0%</b>		
(b) School-wide MCA Math - % proficient, target	55%	60%	65%	69%	73%
<b>Actual</b>	<b>39.2%</b>	<b>45.7%</b>	<b>41.4%</b>		
(c) School-wide MCA Science - % proficient, target	50%	56%	62%	68%	74%
<b>Actual</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>49.5%</b>		

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<sup>4</sup> All results are for October 1-enrolled students.

Proportion of students proficient in all three areas increased from spring 2015 to spring 2016, but then declined slightly in Reading and Math to 2017, remaining below targets in all three subjects. STEP Leadership carried out a Root Cause Analysis to identify causes for the 2017 MCA results:

- Reading: Root Cause Analysis: RTI changes in 2016-17 (shift away from individualized instruction targeted to students’ specific needs and individual skill levels), student turnover, and students coming in low at 6<sup>th</sup> grade, which is difficult to remediate. Changes for 2017-18 include an additional reading class being added for all 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, realignment of RTI, and addition of a Reading Coordinator who will look at data throughout the school year and lead the effort to adjust the reading program to ensure student success.
- Math: Root Cause Analysis: RTI changes in 2016-17, student turnover, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students without math classes (or taking classes that were not relevant to MCA tested material). Changes for 2017-18 include realignment of RTI, addition of another part time RTI teacher, and addition of a Math Coordinator.
- Science: Root Cause Analysis: Better test preparation, better alignment of standards instruction. Changes for 2017-18 to ensure continued good performance in Science: Additional science teacher hired for biology, and separating out the task of one teacher preparing all students for MCA tests. Coaching for the biology teacher will be provided by STEP Academy’s veteran science teacher, to ensure alignment of science standards and test preparation for biology.

**C. Individualized Student Performance (Same Cohorts)**

1) Three-year student growth as measured by the MCA-III

(a) Growth z-score (0 = 50%ile of all schools in MN)	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Target	.10	.15	.15	.15	.15
<b>Actual</b>	<b>0.0785</b>	<b>0.1971</b>	<b>-0.1125</b>		

These results are based on MCA growth in Reading and Mathematics for students who take the test two consecutive years at the school; a z-score greater than zero means the student improved more than the state average on the MCA from one year to the next. MCA Growth results show that STEP Academy maintained a positive Growth z-score based on spring 2015 and spring 2016 MCA results in Reading and Math, but this was not maintained for the 2017 results. Reasons for decline in z-score results are likely the same as the reasons noted in the Root Cause Analyses noted above.

2) Students making one or more years of progress as measured by MAP: see table below

(a) MAP: % students who met proficiency targets the prior year will make at least 1.0 years of growth the following year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Target	60	63	65	66	67
<b>Actual</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>56%</b>		
(b) MAP: % students who did not meet proficiency targets the prior year will make at least 1.2 years of growth the following years until they meet the proficiency targets (this is “closing the gap” indicator)					
Target	55	59	62	63	64
<b>Actual</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>59%</b>		
(c) MAP: % students who are proficient in reading and are continuously enrolled at STEP for five or more years and attend 90% of the time					
Target			80	85	90
<b>Actual</b>					

Analysis of the past three years of MAP test results, dividing students based on whether they had a previous-year score and if so, whether they were proficient the previous spring (defined as scoring at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile), showed the following. The below summary breaks the results out by subject, whereas the summary in the above table combines Reading and Math results. STEP Academy will be switching from the MAP to the FAST as its assessment of student growth, for the 2017-18 school year.

2014-15:

- Math total: 134/189 met / exceeded projected growth (71%). There were previous-spring scores for 110 / 189; of these 110, 59 were proficient the previous spring, 51 not.
- Of the 59 who were proficient the previous spring, 47 met or exceeded growth targets
- Of the 51 who were not proficient the previous spring, 33 met or exceeded growth targets
- Reading total: 127 / 192 met / exceeded projected growth (66%). There were previous-spring scores for 111 / 192; of these 111, 49 were proficient the previous spring, 62 not.

- Of the 49 who were proficient the previous spring, 28 met or exceeded growth targets
- Of the 62 who were not proficient the previous spring, 37 met or exceeded growth targets

2015-16:

- Math total: 102/150 met / exceeded projected growth (68%). There were previous-spring scores for 96 / 150; of these 96, 55 were proficient the previous spring, 41 not.
- Of the 55 who were proficient the previous spring, 41 met or exceeded growth targets
- Of the 41 who were not proficient the previous spring, 23 met or exceeded growth targets
- Reading total: 84/149 met / exceeded projected growth (56%). There were previous-spring scores for 96 / 149; of these 96, 55 were proficient the previous spring, 41 not.
- Of the 55 who were proficient the previous spring, 30 met or exceeded growth targets
- Of the 41 who were not proficient the previous spring, 19 met or exceeded growth targets

2016-17:

- Math total: 84/134 met / exceeded projected growth (63%). There were previous-spring scores for 62 / 134; of these 62, 45 were proficient the previous spring, 17 not.
- Of the 45 who were proficient the previous spring, 24 met or exceeded growth targets
- Of the 17 who were not proficient the previous spring, 8 met or exceeded growth targets
- Reading total: 73/127 met / exceeded projected growth (57%). There were previous-spring scores for 50 / 127; of these 50, 33 were proficient the previous spring, 17 not.
- Of the 33 who were proficient the previous spring, 20 met or exceeded growth targets
- Of the 17 who were not proficient the previous spring, 8 met or exceeded growth targets

#### **D. Performance in comparison with other comparable sites (Cross-Cohorts)**

<b>MCA Results in Math Grades 6-8: Proportion Proficient, STEP Academy and Comparable Sites</b>			
<b>School</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>STEP Academy</b>	<b>42.5%</b>	<b>52.3%</b>	<b>46.9%</b>
Higher Ground Acad.	53.9%	45.6%	44.0%
Dugsi Academy	8.1%	5.6%	5.8%
Parkway Montessori	24.5%	26.0%	24.9%
<b>Average for comp. sites</b>	<b>29.3%</b>	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>26.9%</b>

<b>MCA Results in Reading, Grades 6-8: Proportion Proficient, STEP Academy and Comparable Sites<sup>5</sup></b>			
<b>School</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>STEP Academy</b>	<b>35.4%</b>	<b>49.4%</b>	<b>40.6%</b>
Higher Ground Acad.	46.7%	58.1%	60.4%
Dugsi Academy	28.4%	13.9%	15.1%
Parkway Montessori	32.4%	34.0%	29.8%
<b>Average for comp. sites<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>35.2%</b>	<b>38.0%</b>	<b>34.9%</b>

<b>STEP Academy Performance Compared with Comparable Sites, Grades 6-8 MCA</b>					
	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Target	0	+3%	+6%	+8%	+10%
<b>Actual: Reading</b>	<b>+0.2%</b>	<b>+11.4%</b>	<b>+5.7%</b>		
<b>Actual: Math</b>	<b>+13.2%</b>	<b>+23.5%</b>	<b>+20.0%</b>		

These results show STEP Academy easily out-performing the comparison schools' average in terms of proportion of students proficient in reading and math, for 2017 as it has in the previous two school years, by a wide margin in Math.

### **E. Multiple Measurement Rating (MMR)**

With Minnesota's transition from its ESEA Flexibility waiver under No Child Left Behind to the Every Student Succeeds Act during 2016-17, the Multiple Measurement Ratings are no longer being computed and will not be released for 2017. The below tables show the proportion of possible points earned by STEP Academy and its comparison schools on the state's Multiple Measurement Ratings, in Growth and in Achievement Gap Reduction (not limited to grades 6-8), for the previous two school years.

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<sup>5</sup> This chart shows STEP Academy's performance the past two school years in comparison with two charter schools that have similar demographics and the St. Paul district middle school closest to STEP's new site.

<sup>6</sup> Weighted based on number of students in grades 6-8 at the three comparison schools.



<b>MMR Growth, STEP Academy vs. Comparison Schools, 2015 and 2016</b>		
	2015	2016
<b>STEP Academy</b>	<b>65.8%</b>	<b>74.6%</b>
Higher Ground Academy	60.4%	25.2%
Dugsi Academy	32.2%	0%
Parkway Montessori	27.0%	29.1%
<b>Average for comparison schools</b>	<b>39.9%</b>	<b>18.1%</b>

<b>STEP Academy MMR Performance Compared with Comparable Sites</b>					
	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Target	+01	+01	+02	+04	+04
<b>Actual: MMR Growth: %ile above compared with sites with comparable demographics</b>	<b>+26.9%</b>	<b>+56.5%</b>			
<b>Actual: MMR Gap closing: %ile above compared with sites with comparable demographics</b>	<b>+26.0%</b>	<b>+58.1%</b>			

<b>MMR Achievement Gap Reduction, STEP Academy vs. Comparison Schools, 2015 and 2016</b>		
	2015	2016
<b>STEP Academy</b>	<b>72.6%</b>	<b>80.4%</b>
Higher Ground Academy	64.8%	29.4%
Dugsi Academy	38.7%	5.6%
Parkway Montessori	36.2%	32.0%
<b>Average for comparison schools</b>	<b>46.6%</b>	<b>22.3%</b>

## **F. World Language Acquisition**

- 1) Students proficient in four or more world languages
- 2) Students proficient in three world languages
- 3) Students proficient in two world languages
- 4) Students who receive the world language Proficiency recognition at graduation

STEP Academy offers Arabic, in all grades 6-12, for all students; and most are proficient or approaching proficiency by grade 12. This is an important, and popular aspect of the STEP Academy program. For the future, the school is planning to offer Chinese as a second world language, in the expanded school beginning fall 2017.

## **G. Student/Family/Teacher Measures**

- 1) Students, based on annual survey data, will report they feel safe at STEP, are respected, their views are valued and they are receiving an excellent education
- 2) Students who are continually enrolled for two or more years will report an improvement in engagement and hopefulness based on the Hope Analysis Survey. Engagement levels of 3.00 meet expectations. Annual growth of .75 per student meets expectations.

The Hope Analysis Survey was not utilized during 2016-17 but student surveys were carried out in the spring. Students in all grades were asked to respond to the survey, and there were a total of 81 responses. Survey results included the following:

- 66/81 students or 81% agreed that STEP Academy is “almost always” or “usually” a safe place to learn
- 67/81 students or 83% agreed that they “almost always” or “usually” felt respected by STEP Academy teachers
- 46/81 students or 57% agreed that their views are valued
- 61/81 students or 75% agreed that they “almost always” or “usually” received an excellent education at STEP.

## **H. Post-secondary (all STEP grads)**

- 1) Students meeting their career plan at graduation as provided in B (1) above and be accepted in post-secondary ed.
- 2) Students meeting their career plan at graduation with a STEM career plan and be accepted in a post-secondary school.
- 3) Students with a STEM career plan will be accepted into a postsecondary STEM major at some point in postsecondary.

In the fall/winter of 2016, STEP Academy administration reviewed available data on last year’s graduates and realized that this information is very limited. Some of the school’s 2016 grads are out of country – for instance,

school staff are aware of one student who has moved to Canada and one who is in Australia – and others are in different states, whereas several are at local community colleges or have lost touch with STEP Academy. A survey given to graduating seniors in the spring of 2017 did ask about their plans for next year; all but one of the survey respondents indicated they were planning to attend college, either technical/community or four-year (also, most of those who reported their intended focus area, listed a STEM-related subject). Retaining contact with alumni is likely to remain challenging, but STEP Academy does have a staff person assigned to this duty (beginning fall 2017).

## **I. Innovation**

This element of the Student/School Performance Indicators calls for an evaluation to test the hypothesis that *(1) Because of the seven hour day and the rigor of the learning experience, students will be able to move through the curriculum both in middle school and in high school at a more rapid pace than is usually the case. As a result, some students will complete some high school standards and all high school students will complete some secondary work. (2) Because of the digital platform, internships available to students and other learning options outside of school, students will be able to meet some learning standards and have STEP validate that learning.*

The envisioned research effort to evaluate the hypothesis has not been carried out; however, evidence from the program such as STEP Academy students' academic performance and ability to earn PSEO credits, suggests that the school is succeeding in these aspects.

## **STEP Academy Strategic Plan**

STEP Academy established a strategic planning process during 2016-17, beginning with focus groups, conducted with five groups of stakeholders in order to identify appropriate priorities for planning. The stakeholder groups with whom focus groups were held were: STEP Academy Board; Leadership Team; instructional staff (further split into five groups); students; and parents. Focus group results were analyzed to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges facing the school. STEP Academy's Leadership Team oversees implementation of the Strategic Plan, with support from a consultant from the University of Minnesota who is charged with monitoring the plan and checking in with individuals who are in responsible for the various elements.

In June 2017 the consultant presented a report summarizing the focus group results, including common findings among the focus groups. The common findings were:

### **Strengths:**

- There is a positive and safe school culture and open communication between leadership team and teachers
- The leadership team has good communication with teachers, staff, students, and parents
- There is a sense of community in the school

- There is a commitment to results oriented continuous school improvement on the part of the Board, Leadership Team and teachers
- Discipline is encouraged; students are expected to behave
- The new school location is an improvement
- The staff is committed and willing to adapt
- Systems and processes are being put into place
- There are high academic expectations for students
- Parents and students are generally positive about the school.
- Fiscal responsibility is evident; there is a good fund balance; audits are “clean”

Challenges:

- Attracting and retaining quality teachers
- Establishing competitive salaries
- The wide range of student abilities
- Providing an increased number of electives for high school students
- Establishing extra-curricular afterschool programs, intramural sports and other activities
- Increased development of the STEM curriculum and instruction; more labs and equipment
- Increased emphasis on student centered, project based teaching and learning
- English language proficiency level of parents; tends to inhibit teacher and parent communication
- Creating viable school community partnerships
- The tendency to say “yes to too much, too quickly”

Opportunities: All groups indicated they felt there were many opportunities for continued capacity building but priorities need to be established, and time and resources (human and fiscal) allocated to support development of these priorities. Several mentioned exploring a possible partnership with Metropolitan University’s Science Education program as well as exploring development of intramural sports programs with local charter schools.

In the spring of 2017, the Leadership Team began identifying Strategic School Improvement Goals, informed by the results of the focus groups. Planning and updating of goals continued through the summer, and will continue through the 2017-18 school year.

## Innovative Practices and Implementation

Innovative practices being implemented at STEP Academy include:

- STEP Academy begins preparing students for post secondary success from the moment they enter our school. Our small sixth grade classes (14 students) allow teachers to work closely and individually with students to get them on a positive learning trajectory. Sixth grade teachers instill study processes that students practice in seventh grade and ultimately fully apply in the AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) program that begins in eighth grade.
- With a school day of six hours, STEP Academy offers students an accelerated and integrated remediation approach that aims to move them to proficient and advanced levels within core academic subjects. A range of social supports that reflects the social development needs of urban students are integrated into the educational experience.
- STEP Academy remains a school with a dual focus on STEM and college readiness. However, many of its students need a boost in their literacy skills, in order to be able to take advantage of these aspects. Therefore, the school focuses intensively on literacy. Strategies to do this include the longer school day, a writing-coach program, and, beginning in 2017-18, an additional reading class for grade 7 and 8 students to help them prepare for college-ready reading. Staffing has been enhanced for 2017-18 with the addition of half-time Reading and Math Coordinators. The Coordinators will visit classrooms, act as instructional coaches, and monitor and manage curriculum alignment. Other duties of the Coordinators will include overseeing the use of data in their respective subject areas, helping teachers use data to inform instruction, and serving on the Student Success Committee in order to help make decisions regarding interventions. The literacy emphasis has been informed by root-cause analysis STEP staff carried out last year, based on feedback from their PSEO students.
- Through partnerships with business, social, civic, and cultural organizations, STEP Academy extends urban students' educational experiences into the broader community. Dedicated to the success of all students, the school's professional learning community supports creative instructional methodologies that respond to students' specific learning styles. STEP Academy harnesses cutting edge technology to develop all students' skills proficiency, encourage innovative teaching and learning, and create robust educational support systems.
- Preparing students for college, including giving them opportunities to earn college credits before completing high school, is a key innovation being put in place at STEP Academy. As a college-prep program, STEP Academy supports students to this end through the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program, World's Best Workforce Plan, and supports in place to help students enroll in college courses via Post-Secondary Enrollment Options, beginning with informational sessions and including individual and family counseling. The AVID program, established during 2015-16, was continued in

2016-17 and will be expanded to serve elementary grades beginning fall 2017. STEP Academy's AVID program helps students find their personal strengths and set their sights on an appropriate college and career path. The course teaches students how to apply study skills and planning strategies to their course work in order to find heightened academic success. Beginning in sixth grade, students begin to set goals and aspirations related to attending college prior to their high school graduation.

- STEP continues to build relationships with postsecondary institutions and maintains programming to support students enrolling in PSEO. A total of 29 students were enrolled in PSEO during 2016-17, 15 Juniors and 14 Seniors, all of whom earned college as well as high school credits from their PSEO courses.
- STEP Academy provides Arabic language instruction for all grades, a world language that is in increasing demand nationally. A second world language, Chinese, will be offered beginning 2017-18. STEP leadership found, based on student focus groups and student surveys, that students want another language offered, and have secured a teacher for this for the coming school year.
- STEP Academy employs a number of strategies to engage parents and help them understand how to help their students succeed in the American school system. The school offers a new family orientation night and an open house at the beginning of the school year, and multiple Family Fun Nights during the year. For instance, at one family night STEP Academy invited a student advocate from the PACER center who spoke about special education services, and a speaker from the state Office of Higher Education who addressed the process of applying for college including financial aid, and how parents can assist their students. Planning for transitions from middle to high school was also addressed. The St. Paul-based Network for the Development of Children of African Descent has also provided training for parents at STEP Academy, on how to support their children to succeed in school. STEP Academy's Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meets once a month. Finally, STEP Academy maintains a Parent Portal through which parents can monitor their students' attendance, grades, academic progress, and missing assignments.
- Finally, STEP Academy's innovative practices are demonstrated through the strategies it uses to address four of the additional purposes of charter schools specified in the Minnesota Charter Law:
  - *Increase learning opportunities for pupils:* STEP Academy does this by providing a STEM-focused, college preparatory program in a small learning community, creating a unique setting that is available for students who may not thrive in traditional secondary schools or otherwise be able to access this type of program.
  - *Use different and innovative teaching methods:* Innovative teaching methods in place at STEP Academy include PSEO; a Digital Design course offering engineering, technology, design and coding; an

AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination – STEP Academy was the first Minnesota charter school to offer this); and has included the Inver Prep developmental English course offered through collaboration with Inver Hills Community College.

- *Measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes:* In addition to the usual range of academic assessments, progress of students at STEP Academy is measured through performance on the Accuplacer, and through ACT's Aspire assessments. A final measure of STEP Academy's success as a college-prep program is through graduating seniors' acceptance into post-secondary institutions, which STEP Academy tracks.
- *Establish new forms of accountability for schools:* Accountability is guaranteed through STEP Academy's contract with IQS, which provides for academic, non-academic and organizational goals, each with measures of success.

## Future Plans

In the spring of 2016, STEP Academy applied for a grade-level expansion from a 6-12 program to a K-12 school. This was approved by the Authorizer, and then by MDE in October, so the school will expand with the addition of grades K-5 effective fall 2017. The primary reason for undertaking this expansion is demand from families: many families with students at STEP would like to send their younger children to the school as well. When families were surveyed, 174 children were identified who would have enrolled in elementary school at STEP if offered, for the 2016-17 school year. The leadership of STEP Academy is looking forward to extending the benefits of its successful program to younger grades; and the middle school program will benefit from having its own elementary program as its "feeder" school. STEP Academy leadership has created a description of the planned elementary program including classroom configurations, staffing, academic program, student supports, and professional development. Facility upgrades are minimal as the new grades will be served in the school's existing building. Staff-to-student ratio will be 13:1.

The elementary school model will be required to meet all state standards and be in line with STEP Academy's growth goals. The major component of the elementary school program will be the ability for students to have a consistent, K-12 quality school experience that provides them with the foundation for school success. STEP Academy's commitment to academic interventions, career and college readiness and rigorous curriculum will give elementary students the tools they need to succeed. The ability to educate younger students will have also impact secondary programming, since students will be better prepared for the high school curriculum. The overall program will be strengthened since STEP Academy will be able to positively influence the academic development of its young students, and thereby provide for them a strong foundation as they enter our secondary program.

As noted above, STEP Academy has implemented several innovative practices including Arabic language instruction, middle school accelerated learning opportunities, high school honors and college articulated programs,

STEM based curriculum and instruction and AVID classes and strategies, Response to Intervention (RTI) programs and teacher-led professional learning communities. RTI was first implemented during 2013-14, and has continued since with added staff and increased services. Students identified for RTI support in reading receive fifteen-to-twenty-minute intervention sessions four times per week, with a focus on improving Reading Fluency. Students identified in math receive thirty-minute intervention sessions three times per week, using the IXL online math program.

RTI will be incorporated into the elementary school program, as appropriate beginning fall 2017. During August 2017, parents of K-6 students are being asked to bring their children in for assessments prior to the start of the school year; reading and math level assessments will be administered with all students, and an English language assessment as needed. This way, students can be placed into an appropriate level for reading and math, and interventions begun right away when needed.

Instruction at STEP Academy will continue to be driven by data. Teachers have used NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data to provide focused instruction. The MAP is being replaced, for 2017-18, by the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST) which includes progress monitoring. The FAST provides a primary-grades assessment and incorporates curriculum based measures (CBM) type assessments. The use of the universal screening mode of EasyCBM will help RTI coordinators identify particular gaps in reading and math to make sure that intervention efforts are specific and modified as needed to ensure student growth. Assessment of reading fluency and comprehension for the elementary grades will also utilize the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessments of reading levels.

The incorporation of STEM will be emphasized in the primary grades with interdisciplinary units and teaching strategies that meet standards and engage students through STEM activities. By providing strong foundational courses to primary grades, STEP Academy staff will have a better understanding of the academic level of the middle school students. This will allow the school to increase the rigor in its middle and high school classes.



## Appendix: STEP Academy's Elementary Grades Program

Last year, STEP Academy successfully applied to expand its program to serve the elementary grades, K-5. The school was also successful in applying for a federal Charter Schools Program Expansion Grant, which will support the establishment of the elementary program in 2017-18. This description of the elementary program is taken from STEP Academy's successful CSP grant, submitted February 2017.

### **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM**

STEP Academy is applying for a CSP Expansion grant to support implementation of an elementary, grades K-5 program to begin fall 2017. A major benefit of the elementary school addition will be the ability for students to have a consistent, K-12 quality school experience that will provide them with the foundation for life-time success. Long-term, the ability to educate younger students will have a significant impact on our secondary programming, since students will be better prepared for our high school curriculum and Post Secondary Enrollment Options. STEP Academy elementary program is dedicated to providing a rigorous, engaging educational experience for the children in our care. Using the Minnesota Graduation Standards as a basis for all curriculum, we seek to help our students fall in love with learning through challenging, curiosity-evoking explorations. Our students' motivation to learn will be ignited through reading nursery rhymes, classic fiction, and trending nonfiction, examining the engineering of buildings or bridges through field studies and model building, analytically answering math problems, practicing the scientific process by designing experiments, and finding their voice through writing for authentic audiences. STEP Academy is devoted to providing students with a positive and active place to learn. Our goal is to have students who are excited to come to school every day.

### **Academic Approach**

From the moment our young scholars walk in to STEP Academy, they will be members in a school system that supports and prepares them as unique individuals for success in academics and life. Because of STEP Academy's small size and strong staff collaboration, we are able to monitor and continually act upon each student's individual social-emotional and academic needs, both accelerating and providing intervention services when appropriate. Timeliness is an important aspect of STEP Academy's dedication to meeting student needs. At STEP, we will conduct late summer universal assessments using the FastBridge Assessment Suite and Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessment to determine students' immediate academic needs, and then we will meet those needs with just-in-time intervention services. Through on-going formative assessments and progress monitoring, teachers at STEP Academy will continually make informed choices about what academic challenge

is right for each scholar next. Teachers and educational assistants will provide small group practice or acceleration in core subject-matter through creative scheduling, facility use, and staffing.

### **Literacy Program**

STEP Academy will use the *Core Knowledge Language Arts* curriculum through a balanced literacy approach to teach the Minnesota Graduation English Language Arts Standards. Balanced Literacy focuses on developing each student's ability to read, write, listen, and speak effectively. The Balanced Literacy Model focuses on five components that are critical to student literacy growth: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. In addition, students are challenged with increasingly complex texts combined with a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction. During students' minimum of 90-minute literacy period daily, teachers will regularly assess students' progress and meet with guided literacy groups at their instructional level while using a Daily 5 rotation for instruction. The Daily 5 is a Balanced Literacy instructional practice where students move through five literacy components each day (read to self, read to someone, work on writing, listen to reading, word work). Kindergarten/first grade and second/third grade will have aligned reading times in order for teachers to combine guided reading groups for efficiency. In their definition of Guided Reading, Fountas and Pinnell state that guided reading groups are temporary placements that are most effective when they are aligned to students' instructional reading levels determined by a benchmark assessment. This is exactly the process STEP Academy teachers will follow in determining guided reading groups.

### **STEM Program**

STEP Academy values the principles of STEM education for our students. According to the United States Department of Congress, STEM-related professions will outpace non-STEM positions by almost a 2:1 ratio in coming years. Change the Equation, a coalition of corporate members leading a movement to ensure that every young person in the U.S. is STEM literate, shared in their Vital Signs Report on Minnesota, that "not enough students--least of all minorities--have the chance to learn rich and challenging content that prepares them for college and careers. Black and Hispanic students also receive a disproportionately small share of STEM degrees and certificates awarded in the state" ([www.changetheequation.org/](http://www.changetheequation.org/)). STEP Academy wants to be an active participant in changing this equation.

STEM programming at the elementary level will focus on providing students with a variety of learning experiences, specifically focused in: ecology, engineering, economics, and entrepreneurship.

STEP Academy students will have the tools to learn, create, and explore. Every classroom in the school, K-5, will have a laptop cart of computers that will be used to enhance the educational experience for students. In addition to regular technology integrated lessons using Google Tools, students will use other web-based learning

sites such as Lexia, IXL, Study Island, and Khan Academy to support their academic growth. Beginning fall 2017, STEP Academy will have Chromebooks for all students (ratio of 1:1, grades K-12). Teachers will be able to take advantage of the blended classroom model of instruction with student access to laptops.

Through rigorous, hands on science curriculum and instruction, STEP Academy scholars will use *Pearson's Interactive Science Curriculum* to learn about the scientific world. Students will have engaging lab experiences with each new concept. *Interactive Science* leads students to understand scientific concepts through active investigations, data collection, and written documentation of their learning-key processes in STEM learning.

STEP Academy will use a balanced mathematics approach as recommended by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics that includes focus on computational skills and recall of facts, as well as problem solving and understanding multiple ways of solving problems. It will be taught in a sequential form, requiring conceptual understanding at developmentally appropriate levels. Students will learn the Minnesota Graduation Standards using hands on opportunities, cooperative learning, and many opportunities to communicate their understandings.

In addition to the regular science curriculum, STEP scholars will have the opportunity to work with other value added integrations, such as: The Science Museum of Minnesota's *Engineering is Elementary, Analytical Thinking Skills (ATS)*: a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Program through LogicMills, Singapore (a critical thinking skills curriculum accomplished through simulations, problem solving, and game play), Minnesota State Park System field experiences, Junior Achievement in our classrooms, and *LegoWeDo* programming opportunities. Through these experiences students will be grow and demonstrate their STEM skills by identifying and solving challenges.

### **Response to Intervention Program**

Students at STEP Academy deserve a system of support that capitalizes on their strengths and builds upon their areas of challenge. STEP Academy maintains a Multi-Tiered System of Support philosophy of student monitoring. This system serves as our Child Find special education process. We begin with late summer universal screening in the areas of math and reading. Our teachers meet with students and families individually in August to get acquainted and conduct assessments. Students are appropriately placed at their instructional levels from the first day of school.

We believe that the regular classroom is the place where the first, best instruction happens. For that reason, the programs and instructional strategies that are used must be of the highest quality. We carefully choose the curriculum sequence, materials, and tools to best teach the Minnesota Graduation Standards, individualizing wherever possible in order to meet each student at their zone of proximal development. We assign an Educational

Assistant to each classroom to support this first best instructional environment. Our classrooms use small group pre-teaching for ELL students and re-teaching for all students when power standards have not been achieved.

Students who show that they are not meeting standards receive our next tier of support. These groups meet daily with intervention teachers in the areas of reading and/or math. This instruction happens outside of their core subject class period and is in addition to the regular instruction in each subject area. Intervention teachers conduct more detailed assessments to determine students' specific needs, provide instruction in those skill areas, and progress monitor. If a student's progress monitoring scores show that he or she is not making progress, intervention techniques are changed in order to initiate improvements.

There are times when students do not progress, even with small group, targeted support. In these cases, we look to our special education program to evaluate students and determine the best course of action for their growth in the least restrictive environment.

Our special education program follows statute and is under the direction of a special education director contracted through Designs for Learning. Our special education teachers follow protocol for evaluations, writing Individual Education Plans, and holding to required timelines.

### **Behavior Management & Character Development Program**

STEP Academy has adopted elements of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as the framework for behavior management, schoolwide. PBIS is a prevention-oriented way for schools to organize evidence-based practices and maximize academic and social behavior outcomes for students. As an aspect of the school's positive behavior management system, STEP is building school culture around the elements of Personal Responsibility, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Excellence (PRIDE):

- Personal Responsibility:
  - Follow Directions
  - Show Self Control
- Respect:
  - Treat Others with Care
  - Consider the Learning of Others
  - Respond to Greetings from Adults
- Integrity:
  - Be Honest
  - Take Responsibility for Your Own Actions
  - Apologize

- Determination:
  - Keep Trying, Even When It is Hard
  - Make Good Choices
- Excellence:
  - Be Ready to Learn Every Day
  - Do Your Best

The values will be felt throughout the school through incentives, songs, posters, and school assemblies. Beyond the school-wide focus, all teachers and educational assistants will be trained in the strategies of ENVoY for classroom management (two days of training occurred in August 2017, with follow-ups scheduled for later in the year). This is a system whereby educators seek to build respectful relationships and positively influence students through nonverbal cues, including effective eye contact, voice patterns and body language (see <http://www.michaelgrinder.com/education-professionals/>).

### **Equity and Inclusion**

As of October 2016, STEP Academy served a population that is 99% African American, primarily East African and Somali and 98% of our study body are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunches. We do not have a traditional achievement gap to address. We believe that our job in serving the population that enrolls at our school is to provide the best comprehensive educational experience for all of them, that includes building a very close relationship with families, providing resources such as school supplies and directed community resources when appropriate, and offering rigor that may not always be expected in other educational settings.