



Science, Technology, Engineering Preparatory Academy

MN Charter School District 4200

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2014

In Operation since Fall 2011

(Grades 6-12)

Dakota County, Minnesota

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STEP Academy Identifying Information

STEP Academy, Minnesota Charter School district #4200, is an innovative 6-12 grade Charter School with a Science, Technology, and Engineering focus. STEP Academy opened to grades 6-11 in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota, in fall 2011, and now serves grades 6-12.

STEP Academy Contact Information

STEP Academy is located at 4100 East 66th Street, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota 55076
Main contact person is Mustafa Ibrahim, Executive Director (phone: 651 289-6120; email 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: At MN STEP Academy, our students will achieve our Vision as they 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.

STEP Academy Enrollment, 2011-2014

STEP ACADEMY'S ENROLLMENT ¹ BY GRADE, 2011-2014									
School Year	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL	Attrition ²
2011-12	59	51	44	28	11	15	N/A	208	N/A
2012-13	27	38	39	23	12	7	6	152	-27 %
2013-14	34	38	35	30	14	14	5	170	+12 %
2014-15 (Projected)	25	34	38	35	30	14	14	190	+12 %

STEP Academy continued enrolling students after October 1, the date for the “snapshot” of enrollment figures reported above. The school opened with just 156 students enrolled on Sept. 3, 2013. Student numbers gradually rose through the fall, to 182 just before winter break, then to 192 by May; there were 192 students enrolled the last day of school. STEP Academy’s Average Daily Membership was 181.01.

Authorizer Information

STEP Academy’s authorizer is Innovative Quality Schools (contact: Phillip Moyer – phil@iqsmn.org; phone 612-597-1405).

STEP Academy was authorized by Anoka Community/Technical College in 2010, and opened in the fall of 2011. In 2012, the College determined that it was not going to continue 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. The school was initially granted a two-year contract, from July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2014; STEP Academy’s contract with IQS was renewed in the spring of 2014 for a five-year term beginning July 1, 2014.

Board of Directors Information

The table below shows all the members of STEP Academy’s governing board during 2013-14.

Name: Last, First	Affiliation	Date Ap- pointed	Term Expi- ration	Contact
Abdullah, Amena	Teacher/Director, File Folder #447116	10/1/11	6/30/14	651-332-6369; ame- na@stepacademymn.com
AbouAiad, Tamany	Teacher/Director, File Folder #447125	2/5/12	6/30/14	651-289-6120; tamany@stepacademymn.com

¹ Based on October 1 student enrollment figures.

² Based on percentage change from the previous fall.

Name: Last, First	Affiliation	Date Ap- pointed	Term Expi- ration	Contact
Ahmed, Abdullahi	Parent/Chair	8/16/11	6/30/14	952-393-7939; abdu-lahi@stepacademymn.com
Gothmann, Allison	Secretary/Teacher, File Folder #467730	2/19/13	6/30/14	612-229-9927; Allison@stepacademymn.com
Hassan, Abdirah- man	Community/Director	2/1/12	6/30/14	612-384-6002; abdirah-man@stepacademymn.com
Mohamoud, Mo- hamed	Community/Director	11/20/12	6/30/14	612- 558-4929; mohamed-moh@stepacademymn.com
Olmsted, Sandra	Community/Vice- Chair	9/25/12	6/30/14	612-330-1079; sandra@stepacademmmn.com

STEP Academy's Board of Director are responsible for setting goals, ensuring that the school's goals are met, and approving or disapproving the major decisions made by the Executive Director. STEP Academy's Board also undertakes long-term strategic planning and oversees the finances to make sure the school is fiscally sound.

Charter school board training covering the three mandated topics was held during the summer of 2013, with the University of St. Thomas. Training at UST was carried out August 7, and was attended by all currently serving board members except those who had attended training the previous fall. Training will be held for all Board members serving during the fall of 2014.

A board election was held in April 2014, and two new members elected, who will be seated in July. The STEP Academy board amended its Bylaws to approve a change in the configuration of the Board which will be effective the 2014-15 school year: the configuration shifted from three teachers, three community members and one parent to two teachers, four community members, and one parent.

Staff Information

STEP Academy Teaching Staff 2013-2014

Teacher	File folder #	Assignment	Left during 13/14?	Not returning 14/15?
Abdullah, Amena	447116	Arabic 6-12		
Borghol, Marwa	446832	Arabic 6-12		
Abou Aiad, Tamany	447125	Math 7-12		
Chowdhury, Zinat	432535	Science 7-12		
Ritchart, John	415920	Science 7-12		
Hickman, Blake	446461	Phy. Ed. 6-12		
Gothmann, Allison	467730	6 th Grade		X
Roddy, Lisa	332484	6 th Grade		
Larson, Kathleen	451536	Language Arts 9-12		X

Teacher	File folder #	Assignment	Left during 13/14?	Not returning 14/15?
Welsh, Nicholas	450616	Social Studies 7-9		
Fruechte, Melissa	460203	Social Studies 9-12	X	X
Smit, Tim	476213	Social Studies 9-12		
Yesberger, Anna	464343	Special Ed.		
Nelsen, Wayne	343848	ELL		
Kooiker, Merredith	452105	RTI		

STEP Academy 2013-2014 School Management and Faculty Information

Name	File Folder number	Assignment	Years employed	Left during 13/14?	Not returning 14/15?
Mustafa Ibrahim		Executive Director	2		
Mohamed Abdurahman		Assistant Director	3		
Dawn Madland	346539	Academic Dean	1		
Shannon Benalshaikh		Office Manager	3		
Zahra Hasan		Administrative Asst.	1		

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 2013-14 school year, and all members of the team plan on returning for the next school year.

Director’s Professional Development Plan

Mustafa Ibrahim, director of STEP Academy, attended the following conferences during 2013-14:

- 6/30/13 – 7/3/13. National Charter Schools Conference in Washington, DC; attended sessions relating to governance, teaching and operations.
- 7/31/2013. Capstone Conference for Charter Schools. CliftonLarsonAllen. University of Minnesota.
- 8/1/2013. 5th Annual Charter School Law Conference. ISES, Booth Lavorato and MN Association of Charter Schools. University of St. Thomas.
- 9/10/2013. Fundamentals of Budgeting. . Nonprofits Assistant Fund. Minneapolis.
- 10/8/2013. Fundamentals of Nonprofit Finance. Nonprofits Assistant Fund. Minneapolis.
- 12/10/2013. Building Your Board’s Financial Leadership. Nonprofits Assistant Fund. Minneapolis.
- 1/22/2014. Leading Instructional Improvement: You and Your Team. Urban Leadership Academy. University of MN.
- 2/25/2014. Helping Leaders Grow: The Importance of Renewal and Self-Development for Sustaining and Retaining School Leaders. Urban Leadership Academy. University of MN.
- 3/20/2014. Teacher Led Schools—Great Environments for Teachers...Great Outcome for Students. IQS. Avalon School. St. Paul.
- 6/29/14 – 7/2/14. National Charter Schools Conference in Las Vegas; attended sessions relating to gov-

ernance, teaching, and operations.

Charter School Purposes

STEP Academy is organized and operated to achieve its primary purpose of improving pupil learning and student achievement. STEP Academy seeks to do this by operating a college preparatory program centered on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). With an extended day of 7 hours, STEP Academy offers students an accelerated and integrated remediation approach that is intended 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. In addition, STEP Academy addressing four additional purposes of charter schools specified in the Minnesota Charter Law:

- To 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 high 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 and 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 8th grade EXPLORE, and 10th grade PLAN assessments. A final measure of student learning 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.

Description of the School

STEP Academy provides a small learning community for students in grades 6 – 12. 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. Parental engagement through a robust Parent and Teacher Organization (PTO) ensures that STEP Academy is responsive to the needs of its students, families, and the community that it serves.

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 that are consistent with the Federal No Child Left Behind Program.

STEP Academy offers the following to support student learning outside the regular school day and year:

- Basketball was offered as an extracurricular activity for the first time in 2013-14; another extracurricular activity was student council. Also, STEP Academy students participated in a University of Minnesota science fair competition, and in an essay contest sponsored by the Center for School Change at Macalester College.
- STEP Academy benefitted from the services of student volunteers during 2013-14. In particular, three volunteers from the Inver Hills Community College Human Services program did service learning hours at STEP. These are students who plan to become teachers, via the Urban Learners program at Metro State University.
- STEP Academy offers an extended day, running seven hours.
- Though STEP Academy is not offering a summer session in 2014, the school continues to support student learning during the summer months by sponsoring an at-home summer reading program for all students, and by providing the Grand Rapids Academic Summer Program (GRASP) for middle school stu-

dents. The summer reading program was created by STEP's reading teachers, and asks students to track what they read, and to report back on this in the fall, when there will be prizes offered for summer readers. GRASP is a nine-week correspondence program designed to help students maintain reading and math skills while on summer break.

- Finally, during August 2014 STEP Academy offered an orientation to the school, for families of new students entering STEP. This was held the week prior to the beginning-of-the-year open house, which all students and families were encouraged to attend to meet teachers and get ready for the new school year.

STEP Academy Highlights from 2013-14

Highlights from 2013-14 included the following:

- STEP Academy was rated a Celebration Eligible school by MDE, based on strong spring 2014 student performance on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments in both Reading and Mathematics.
- In the summer of 2013, STEP Academy's technology was upgraded to increase bandwidth, which has enhanced the school's ability to provide integration of technology into instruction.
- STEP Academy held its first Board elections in April 2014, successfully transitioning from the start-up Board to an elected Board, which was seated July.
- STEP Academy's connection with post-secondary institutions, especially Inver Hills Community College, was enhanced during 2013-14.
- STEP Academy began implementing the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach during 2013-14, to support students who are behind in basic reading and/or math skills; initial results show improvement in reading fluency for students in RTI.
- STEP Academy began implementing the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) model for behavior management during 2013-14; staff received professional development around PBIS and identified an approach for implementing it at STEP.
- In the spring of 2014, STEP Academy was honored to be granted re-authorization of its charter contract, for the maximum five-year term.

Performance Summary

STEP Academy's accountability plan is built upon outcome measures that focus on student achievement as a result of the school's programmatic and organizational practices. The academic goals address the major academic subjects as well as the requirements of the State of Minnesota Accountability

Plan under No Child Left Behind; nonacademic goals reflect those additional outputs that STEP Academy deems important in measuring the effectiveness of the programmatic model; STEP Academy's organizational goals establish the benchmarks for effective management of financial, human, and physical resources. This section addresses academic performance during the 2013-14 school year, in the six areas identified in the authorizer's provisions regarding Evaluation of School/Student Performance Indicators.

1. The school will make adequate yearly academic progress (AYP) as determined by the Department of Education.

STEP Academy did not make adequate yearly progress in Proficiency based on spring 2014 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) results. In Math, STEP Academy's Blended Index Rate was 54.9. In Reading, the Blended Index Rate was 44.3.

STEP Academy did meet AYP targets in Participation, with 100% of students testing in reading and 99.3% in math; and in Attendance, with an overall attendance rate of 91.7%.

Note: Under the state's waiver of federal Title I requirements, the AYP system is being superseded by a Multiple Measurements Rating (MMR) system consisting of four measurements: Proficiency, Student Growth, Achievement Gap Reduction, and Graduation Rate. Proficiency is measured in terms of the proportion of students testing at the Meeting or Exceeding Expectations level on the spring MCA's; Student Growth and Achievement Gap Reduction consider changes in MCA scores for students testing two consecutive years at a given school. In each are there are a total of 25 points possible. STEP Academy's MMR's for 2014 show the school earning 18.39 points in Proficiency, 19.19 points in Growth, and 21.28 points in Achievement Gap Reduction (no rating in Graduation Rate due to lack of data). These ratings result in STEP Academy being defined as a Celebration Eligible school in the MMR system, again this year.

2. MCA Proficiency: Students will perform as well or better than comparable sites as measured by the MCA's.

Three comparable schools have been identified for purposes of comparing achievement data. There are two charter schools that serve a similar population to STEP Academy: Higher Ground and Dugsi Academy. The third comparison school is Harding High School, which is part of the St. Paul district. The table below shows results in terms of proportion of students proficient on spring 2014 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, for STEP Academy and the comparison schools.

MCA Results, 2014		
	Proportion Proficient³ – Reading	Proportion Proficient – Math
STEP Academy	32% (37/115)	46% (51/112 students)
Higher Ground Academy	39%	57%
Dugsi Academy	19%	12%
Harding High School	31%	24%
Average for comparison schools	30%	31%

MCA Proficiency performance is rated per the following four-point rubric:

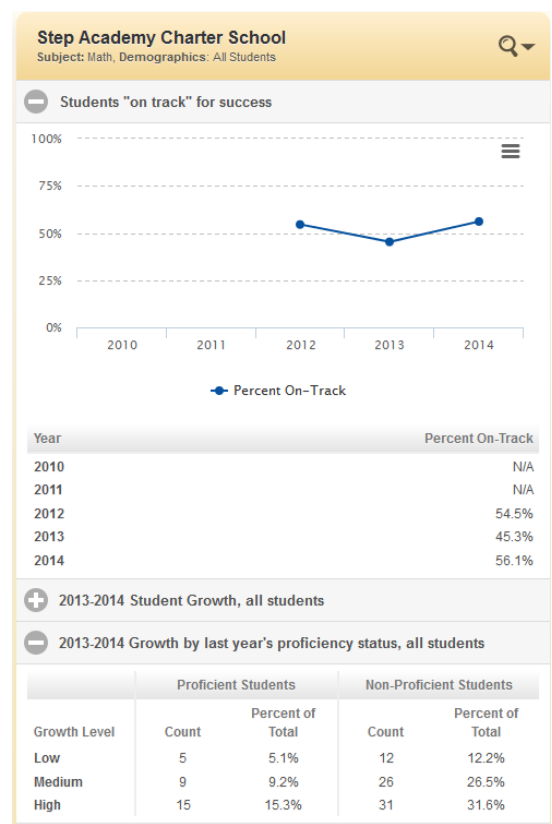
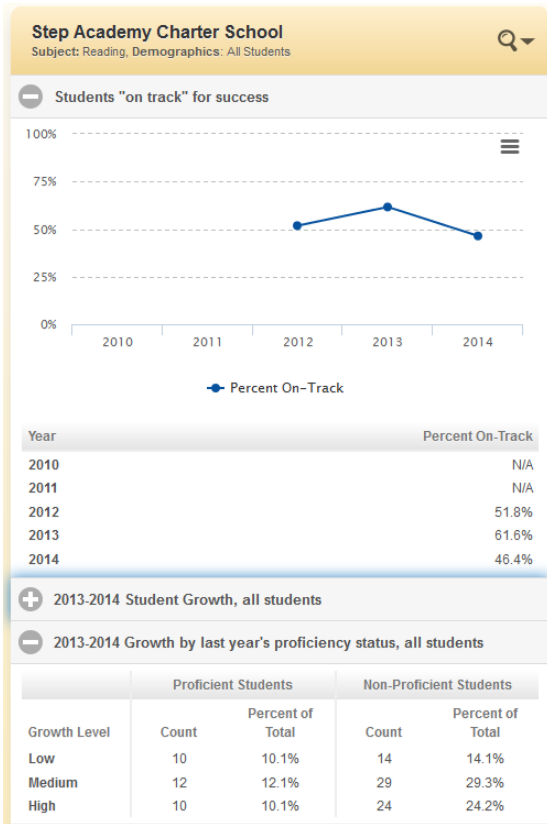
- (a) Does not meet expectations: >10 percentage points below comparable sites
- (b) Approaching expectations: between 5.1 and 9.9 percentage points below comparable sites
- (c) Meets expectations: within 5 percentage points of comparison groups
- (d) Exceeds expectations: exceeds comparison sites by more than 5 percentage points

Based on this rubric, STEP Academy meets expectations in Reading, with the proportion of students testing proficient within 5 percentage points of the average of the comparison schools; and exceeds expectations in Mathematics, with the proportion of students testing proficient 15 percentage points above the average of the comparison schools. Compared to 2013, the proportion of students who tested proficient in Reading is slightly lower (32% compared to 36% last year), but the proportion testing proficient in Math was significantly higher (46% compared to 32%).

3. MCA Growth: Students who are continuously enrolled for 3 years are making growth as measured by the MCA.

The charts below show STEP Academy’s Growth data from 2014, from MDE’s Minnesota Report Card webpage. The intent would be for most students, particularly those who are non-proficient, to have High growth. The left chart is Reading data, and the right is Math. This data is based on a comparison of two years’ results on the MCA’s, i.e. 2013 and 2014.

³ Results shown are for students enrolled October 1 only.



4. MCA Growth Comparison Groups: Students who are continuously enrolled for 3 or more years are making greater growth than comparison groups.

The table below shows publicly-available MCA Growth data for STEP Academy and the three comparison schools. For this measure, STEP out-performed the average each of the three comparison schools, in both subjects.

MCA Growth Comparison Results, 2014		
	Proportion Making High / Low Growth – Reading	Proportion Making High / Low Growth – Math
STEP Academy	34% / 24%	47% / 17%
Higher Ground Academy	25% / 27%	32% / 24%
Dugsi Academy	21% / 32%	15% / 56%
Harding High School	23% / 33%	27% / 29%
Average for comparison schools	23% / 31%	25% / 36%

5. Continuously enrolled students will perform at or above the national median on the MAP assessment.

STEP Academy students took Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests three times during the year, in the fall, winter, and spring. The table below shows results from the spring in Mathematics and Reading (some students also took the Language Usage and General Science MAPs, but not a representative group). Results are listed for all students who tested in the spring of 2014, then students who had been enrolled for the past two years as of spring 2014, and finally, results for only students who had been enrolled for the past three years. Results here clearly indicate benefits to students who remain at STEP Academy consistently: in both subjects, over half the students who had been at STEP for two years scored above the median, and the proportion above the median was significantly greater in Reading when narrowing the group to students enrolled three years or more.

STEP Measures of Academic Progress Results, Spring 2014			
Subject	At or Above median – all students tested	At or above median – enrolled 2 years	At or above median – enrolled 3 years
Mathematics	49% (91 of 184 students) (2013 result: 50%; 77 of 154 students)	64% (54 of 84 students) (2013 result: 73%; 33 of 45 students)	67% (26 of 39 students)
Reading	44% (81 of 183 students) (2013 result: 45%; 69 of 155 students)	54% (45 of 84 students) (2013 result: 64%; 29 of 45 students)	72% (28 of 39 students)

6. Other Academic Measures

In addition to the above measures based on test results, there are three additional academic measures defined in the authorizer’s Student Performance Indicators:

- *Each high school student prior to graduation will successfully complete some type of postsecondary credits.*

STEP Academy opened serving grades 6-11 its first year and during 2012-13, the second year of operation, there was only one senior who met graduation criteria. The student body remains heavily weighted toward the earlier grades, as is apparent from the Enrollment by Grade table above, and during 2014 there were five graduates, only one of whom had completed post-secondary credits. STEP Academy leadership is seeking to change this Performance Indicator for the next term of the charter, as not all graduates will be able to complete postsecondary credits before high school graduation. For instance, English Learner students may be behind in credits and face a major challenge to graduate on-time, without also seeking postsecondary credits.

STEP is building relationships with postsecondary institutions and putting in place programming to support students enrolling in Post-secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO). During 2013-14, two students enrolled in PSEO courses during the first semester, and three during the second semester. Beginning in 2013-14, a developmental English course was offered via concurrent enrollment in STEP Academy and Inver Hills Community College. Students took the Accuplacer exam in the spring of 2013, and were able to begin attending the class in the fall of 2013 if they qualified based on scores. This course, known as Inver Prep, was offered on-site at STEP. Inver Prep was designed to help students transition to college by ensuring they have the English skills to write at a college level. Fifteen students enrolled in Inver Prep, and 10 completed the course (the others moved away, dropped out, or were unable to maintain the required GPA to remain in the course).

- *21st Century Skills Assessment*

The EXPLORE and PLAN assessments were given during 2013-14, to 8th and 10th graders respectively. Thirty-five 8th graders took the EXPLORE, and thirteen sophomores took the PLAN. These students' results on this test will be compared with results in future years.

- *Graduation with five or fewer years of high school*

As noted, only five students graduated from STEP Academy in 2013-14. Of the five 2014 graduates, only one was a fifth-year senior, the others graduating after four years. As the school continues to operate, students' time enrolled will be tracked, and STEP expects to continue to graduate virtually all students who remain continuously enrolled in grades 9-12, in fewer than five years.

7. Additional School Performance Indicators

In addition to the Academic Performance indicators (items 1-6 above), STEP Academy's Accountability Plan includes the following elements.

C. Student/family responsibility

1. *Student attendance* (percentage of students who attend 90% of the time)

Review of attendance data in June shows that, of the 212 students who attended at least part of the year, 154 or 73% attended at least 90% of the days enrolled. This is a small improvement over 2012-13, when the proportion of students attending at last 90% was 70% (based on 143 of 204).

2. *Students will indicate the level of satisfaction with the school in the areas of safety, acceptance and learning.*

STEP Academy administered student satisfaction surveys during 2013-14, but school leadership ex-

pressed concerns that some students, particularly middle schoolers, did not make a sincere effort to fill them out honestly. The Academic Dean commented as follows:

We gave this survey in April at the beginning of our testing season and will reassess the effectiveness of the process we used. When we look at other data that might reveal safety issues, ie fighting, bullying, accidents do to building issues... we have had almost none of these. Behavior policy violations are tracked in our JMC program.

D. Parents will report a positive school climate and challenging academic program

STEP Academy did create a parent survey which was given to parents at an April parent event, but of the approximately 60 attendees, only 12 responded, and only eight completed the whole survey. The STEP Academy Leadership Team is exploring alternative strategies to obtain input from parents. A written survey may not be the best option due to language barriers. An alternative may be to have Parent Teacher Organization volunteers ask parents to do verbal questionnaires.

E. Teachers will report their level of satisfaction with the school and with their professional roles with the school

STEP Academy administered surveys to teachers twice during 2013-14. The first was toward the end of the first semester, and asked about professional development needs; the second, given at the end of the school year, asked staff's opinions about the school Leadership Team (given to all staff, not only teachers). These surveys provided useful input for school leadership, to inform professional development planning and planning for the upcoming school year, but do not provide information about teachers' overall level of satisfaction.

F. Student follow-up (acceptance into post-secondary institutions, by the time they graduate or later)

As is shown in STEP Academy's School Enrollment table earlier in this report, the student population has been heavily weighted toward the younger grades; the school opened serving grades 6-11 its first year, and there were still only a few seniors in 2013-14, and only five graduates. Of the five graduates, STEP had been notified as of October 2014, that two were accepted into post-secondary programs for 2014-15.

STEP Academy continues to encourage and assist seniors in their efforts to be accepted into post-secondary schools, by providing college tours, taking students to college fairs, and helping them with the application process to colleges and universities, including financial aid applications. In September 2013 STEP took students to the Minnesota National College Fair, at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Seniors took the ACT during 2013-14, and many students took the Accuplacer (this was taken by all 9th graders, and was a prerequisite for the Inver Prep course).

G. Innovation areas (completion of high school standards in middle school helps to access post-secondary learning in high school; extensive internships, after school learning and other opportunities allow students to meet high school standards independently; cost benefit analysis of students completing post-secondary credits)

See the “Innovative Practices” section of this report. STEP Academy helps students access post-secondary learning, and offers extended days, and an extended year for select students, as described there.

Innovative Practices

Innovative practices being implemented at STEP Academy include:

- 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. STEP is building relationships with postsecondary institutions and has put in place programming to support students enrolling in Post-secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) beginning in 2013-14. Also during 2013-14, STEP began to offer the Inver Prep course in developmental English, through collaboration with Inver Hills Community College, as described above in the section on “Other Academic Measures.” Students took the Accuplacer exam in the spring of 2013, and were able to begin attending the class in the fall of 2013 if they qualified via Accuplacer scores. Approximately 15 students are enrolled in the course for the fall 2013 term.
- STEP Academy is implementing the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach, to identify and serve students in need of additional support. Planning for RTI implementation was carried out in the spring of 2013, and RTI implemented beginning December 2013. The RTI program focused primarily on students in need of interventions in Reading, with 25 of 27 students served receiving intervention in Reading, the remaining two received help in Mathematics. The Year-End Report on STEP Academy’s RTI program stated the following:
 - The program initially included one fulltime Reading Interventionist, and later included two more interventionists for one hour per day. (One in Reading, and one in Mathematics). Students received fifteen twenty-minute intervention sessions four times per week, with a focus on improving Reading Fluency and Mathematics Computation. Students were chosen to receive services based on a combination of MCA, NWEA, and AIMSWEB benchmark scores, and these scores were also used to select appropriate interventions for students. Most of the students served scored significantly below grade level, and would be classified as “Tier 3” students. Students were progress monitored using AIMSWEB passages on a regular basis, and the RTI team met every 46 weeks to discuss student progress
 - Based on student progress, STEP Academy’s Reading RTI program can be judged to be very effective. 76% of students served showed improvement in reading fluency scores, with 68% making very significant gains. While only 24% of Reading students achieved the end-of-year goal, this is partly

explained by the focus on Tier 3 students, who entered the program several years behind in their reading skills⁴.

- The primary focus for next year will be to expand the RTI program to serve more students. STEP Academy plans to hire a dedicated Mathematics interventionist, as well as freeing up some time for the Special Education teacher to work with students on interventions. This additional staffing will help us to expand RTI service from primarily 6th and 7th grade to grades 6-8.
- STEP Academy utilized local experts to enhance educational programming and leadership. During 2013-14, Lesa Clarkson of the University of Minnesota provided staff development to enhance the math program. Dr. Clarkson is an expert on curriculum design for urban learners and in particular in strategies for engaging students in math. Also during 2013-14, the principal of Higher Ground Academy, a high-performing charter school in St. Paul, trained the STEP Academy Leadership Team (the Academic Dean learned about Higher Ground's teacher observation and evaluation system, their process for evaluating student credits, curriculum alignment and flow, and school policies addressing work with students and parents). STEP Academy secured the services of two Innovative Quality Schools cadre members with expertise in RTI, to assist the school in effective implementation of RTI interventions. Cheryl Reed, with whom the school began working during 2012-13, continued to provide training and coaching in implementing RTI in reading, and the school began working with Karen Erickson on RTI in math.
- STEP Academy continues its efforts to engage parents and help them understand how to help their students succeed in the American school system. As part of this effort, STEP Academy contracted with the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent to provide "Parent Power" workshops (see www.ndcad.org/parent.html). The Network provided four sessions of two hours each, which were each attended by 10-15 parents. STEP hosted a parent night in May 2014, to share a meal with parents and help them learn about the school. The director reported on the school program overall, the assistant director discussed STEP's assessments, and the Somali cultural liaison from the St. Paul Public Schools spoke about assessments and about the American education system overall. There were activities for students and younger siblings. The parent night was attended by approximately 30 parents.
- STEP Academy has a weekly staff session, after school on Wednesdays, for review and analysis of student data, and discussion of how to adjust instruction to meet student needs.

Financial Performance

STEP Academy is in a strong position financially, having steadily built a positive fund balance over its first three years of operation. This section first summarizes the school's financial performance over the past three years; then there is a summary of school finances for 2013-14.

⁴ Nineteen of the 27 students served were Tier 3 students.

STEP Academy Financial Summary, 2011-2014				
	Total Rev.	Total Exp.	Ending F.B.	F.B. - % of Exp.
FY 2012	\$2,536,561	\$2,215,515	\$321,045	14.5%
FY 2013	\$2,531,660	\$2,340,555	\$512,152	21.9%
FY 2014 (estimated)	\$2,328,246	\$2,266,148	\$574,250	25.3%

The audit for FY 2014 is underway. The school director had overall responsibility for the management of the finances and worked with the Board of Directors to monitor finances, report financial information to the school board monthly, and establish, monitor and revise the annual budget.

The school director was assisted by a business office assistant, and by cmERDC, the accounting agent STEP Academy contracts with to help ensure that proper classification of all transactions were kept and reported to the MDE on a timely basis. The School board adopts revisions to the budget as needed during the school year, if there are significant revenue or expenditure changes. Like other schools, STEP Academy is dealing with the state hold-back each year and we have established an operating line of credit with a local bank to help ease cash flow issues.

The tables below show STEP Academy's budget for 2013-14: the original budget as approved by the Board prior to the beginning of the school year, and the final-revised budget. The Revised figures are un-audited but expected to be close to final. These figures show the school building a healthy positive fund balance: end-of-year total fund balance stood at \$321,000 at the end of FY12, the school's first year of operation, climbed to \$512,152 at the end of FY13 and is projected to climb to \$574,250 at the end of FY14. This is 25.3% of projected revenues.

Step Academy Budget, 2013-2014		
	Original	Revised
General Education - Fund 01		
REVENUE		
<u>Local Sources</u>		
Fees From Patrons	3,000	4,200
Interest Earnings	30	30
Gifts & Bequests	5,000	-
Insurance Recovery	-	9,853
Total Local Revenue	8,030	14,083
<u>State Sources</u>		
General Education Aid	1,652,546	1,700,319
Lease Aid	210,000	242,028
Spec Education Aid	35,000	35,000
Total State Revenue	1,897,546	1,977,347
<u>Federal Sources</u>		
Title Programs Aid	125,937	98,707
Federal Special Education Aid	21,541	30,990
Federal Charter Grant (FCG)	87,052	86,729
Total Federal Revenue	234,530	216,426

Step Academy Budget, 2013-2014		
	Original	Revised
TOTAL REVENUE	2,140,106	2,207,856
EXPENDITURES		
Salaries	909,131	845,354
FCG Salaries	-	1,569
Special Education Salaries	39,500	41,565
Title Program Salaries	8,000	76,000
Benefits	259,232	274,019
FCG Benefits	8,428	3,456
Special Education Benefits	12,852	12,710
Title Programs Benefits	14,034	19,374
Purchased Services	52,775	42,460
FCG Purchased Services	37,520	31,597
Communication	6,506	12,019
FCG Communication	214	294
Postage	-	20
FCG Postage	1,280	2,070
Utilities	81,600	81,600
Insurance	6,080	7,632
Repair & Maint Svc	35,000	41,975
Pupil Transportation	232,797	242,510
Staff Development Conference & Travel	1,900	2,626
FCG Staff Development Conference & Travel	1,383	3,044
Title Programs Staff Dev Conference & Travel	2,000	2,249
Special Education Staff Dev Conference & Travel	2,049	1,000
Operating Rentals & Leases	6,000	7,000
Building Lease eligible for lease aid	300,000	276,000
Field Trips & Athletics	15,000	23,235
State Special Education Pupil Contracted Svs	2,700	370
Federal Special Education Pupil Contracted Svs	3,850	2,190
Staff Tuition Reimbursement	-	1,664
Instructional & NonInstru Supplies/Materials	20,950	30,548
FCG Instructional & NonInstru Supplies/Materials	21,200	18,327
Title Programs Inst & NonInst Supplies/Materials	2,286	1,525
Federal SpEd Instru & NonInst Supplies/Materials	775	1,575
Fuels	120	120
Food	2,500	3,100
FCG Food	1,000	1,000
FCG Furniture & Technology Equipment	24,455	26,103
Loan Interest	1,000	-
Dues/Membership, Fees	21,139	21,639
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	2,135,256	2,159,539
FUND 01 REVENUE LESS EXPENDITURES	4,850	48,317
FOOD SERVICE - FUND 02		
REVENUE		

Step Academy Budget, 2013-2014		
	Original	Revised
Local Sources		
Food Sales To Pupils	500	700
Food Sales To Adults	1,800	1,500
Total Local Revenue	2,300	2,200
State Sources		
Lunch	2,726	3,240
Breakfast	302	248
Total State Revenue	3,028	3,488
Federal Sources		
Lunch	5,050	9,287
Free/Reduced Lunch	59,002	67,539
Breakfast	26,620	37,876
Total Federal Revenue	90,672	114,702
TOTAL REVENUE	96,000	120,390
EXPENDITURES		
Repair & Maintenance	-	1,000
Operating Rental & Leases	1,591	279
Instructional & NonInstru Supplies/Materials	-	1,012
Food	93,969	103,417
Dues/Membership, Fees	901	901
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	96,461	106,609
FUND 02 REVENUE LESS EXPENDITURES	(461)	13,781
ALL FUNDS REVENUE	2,236,106	2,328,246
ALL FUNDS EXPENDITURES	2,231,717	2,266,148
ALL FUNDS REVENUE LESS EXPENDITURES	4,389	62,098
Beginning Fund 01 Fund Balance 07/01/2013	512,152	512,152
Estimated Ending Fund 01 Fund Balance 06/30/2014	516,541	574,250

Future Plans

STEP Academy's plans for the future include:

- STEP Academy will continue to encourage students to take PSEO courses. More students took PSEO courses this year than last but the total number was still small. To this end, school leadership has been in contact with St. Paul College and with Normandale Community College. The former may make sense for STEP students residing in St. Paul, many of whom live close to St. Paul College. The long-term plan is for the majority of students to take some college classes by the junior year, either via PSEO or at STEP, through concurrent enrollment.

- RTI will be expanded in 2014-15 to include 8th grade as well as grades six and seven, and will address math as well as reading/literacy (see more-detailed description above, under Innovative Practices).
- STEP Academy plans to begin offering drivers' education in 2014-15.
- STEP Academy is getting a science lab at its facility for fall 2014; this will expand capacity for science learning, which is an important part of the school mission and vision.
- Vision and hearing screening will be offered at STEP next year. Teachers have recognized a need for this, and the school is working with a local agency to provide screenings starting in 2014-15.
- STEP Academy plans to emphasize work with English Learners in professional development provided during 2014-15. The school serves many EL students, and the staffing model includes just one EL teacher (another will be added if the EL population increases further), so there is a need to get mainstream teachers working more effectively with EL's. Providing training for teachers in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) approach may be one strategy to accomplish this.
- Another area for emphasis in 2014-15 will be refining and enhancing the school's behavior intervention system. STEP Academy utilizes the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) model, with the school's specific approach referred to as *Community, Academics, Respect and Excellence*.
- Finally, STEP Academy plans to continue increasing its integration of technology into the program as a way of engaging students. For instance, STEP makes extensive use of SmartBoards and Nooks in classrooms. A course on technology and digital citizenship is offered, and offerings in technology will be enhanced for 2014-15 with the addition of a technology integration specialist to the school staff.

Summary of IQS Oversight Findings

An IQS Cadre Oversight Team made multiple visits to STEP Academy during 2013-14 to review the school's operations and recommend a decision on continuation of the charter contract, which was approved for a further five-year term beginning July 1, 2014. STEP Academy was scored in five areas⁵ of school performance (Note: The ratings are: 0- 1.9: Does not meet expectations; 2.0 – 2.9 Approaching expectations; 3- 3.9 Meets expectations; 4-4.9 Exceeds expectations).

The ratings were as follows:

1. School Model (Is the school operating consistent with the approved model including providing a learning environment which includes the state curriculum standards?); 2.0

⁵ There was a sixth area, addressing follow-up of items that were identified in the IQS Transfer Evaluation of STEP. These 19 items, included in Appendix A of the initial IQS/STEP contract, have all been addressed; STEP Academy received a rating of 3 on this item.

2. Governance (Is the governance of the school providing quality policy leadership consistent with the laws and the contract?): 3.25
3. School/Student Performance (Is the performance of the students and the school meeting expectations?): 2.75
4. Finance (Is the financial management of the school making appropriate use of taxpayer dollars and is the school planning for its future?): 3.0
5. Operations (Are the day-to-day operations of the school meeting statutory and contract requirements?): 3.0

School Improvement Plan

A formal school improvement plan is being developed by the Leadership Team during 2014-15. While there was no formal plan in place during 2013-14, the Leadership Team met weekly to analyze data and plan for improvement. The Leadership Team also gathers input from staff during staff meetings, and from parents during PTO meetings, to inform ongoing planning and decision-making for school improvement. In addition to the elements noted in Future Plans and elsewhere in this report, notable improvement planning elements for 2014-15 include applying for Celebration School status, and beginning to utilize Apex Learning. STEP Academy is eligible for Celebration School status based on its 2013-14 MMR ratings, and is happy to be able to apply for this recognition. Apex Learning is a credit-recovery program which will allow STEP to provide classes to seniors who are behind in credits.

Annual Report Approval

This report will be present to the STEP Academy Board on December 16th, 2014, and will be posted on the school website and will distribute to all staff and parents of students enrolled at STEP.