

School Quality Review



SUMMARY REPORT – SPRING AND FALL 2017



MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Office of Innovation & Information

Department of Innovation Development
Department of School Transformation

The Office of Innovation & Information works to accelerate the pace at which Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) identifies, develops, and scales solutions to the district's most important and persistent challenges. Composed of four major departments, the office directs the research, promotion, development, and implementation of innovative educational programs and practices while promoting equity for all. Working to build capacity of district and school staff, the office has expanded organizational development to enhance skills of classified and certificated staff through the development of MPS University. Additionally, the office works to increase the effectiveness of the district's information technology infrastructure, providing advanced services that are optimized and responsive to the needs of students, staff, and families. Finally, while district and school reform continues to be a vital component of the overall strategic plan, the office provides instructional implementation supports and strategies through the Transformation Network, which is made up of eight instructional zones aligned by school specialty.



“Transformation is often more about unlearning than learning...”

—Richard Rohr

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Analysis.....	3
Existing Data.....	4
Student Suspensions.....	4
Student Attendance.....	5
Effective Leaders	6
Ambitious Instruction.....	7
Supportive Environment	8
Empowering Families	9
Next Steps	10



INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

In October 2016, 42 Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) were identified as “Fails to Meet Expectations” on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) report card. In February 2017, the district agreed to conduct a broad perspective school review process. Twenty-one schools were reviewed in the spring of 2017, with the remaining schools reviewed during the fall of 2017. In addition, in the fall of 2017, five schools that were not categorized as “Fails to Meet Expectations” on the DPI report card were chosen to serve as comparison schools.

The purpose of the School Quality Review (SQR) process was to reflect on school performance, engage in dialogue to identify strengths and opportunities, and determine what interventions, if any, are best suited for the schools. The process was led by the Office of Innovation & Information and aligned with the MPS Framework for Teaching, Learning and Leading. The process was benchmarked with other urban districts and included guidance and input from the Office of School Administration, Chief Academic Office and Chief Operations Office. The Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association (MTEA) also offered guidance towards the process and provided feedback.

PROCESS

The spring SQR started February 6, 2017, and ended March 9, 2017. The 21 high-needs schools (Signature Schools) reviewed were:

Bradley Technology and Trade High School	Metcalfe Elementary School
Carson Elementary School	North Division High School
Clemens Elementary School	Obama School of Career and Technical Education
Elm Creative Arts School	Pulaski High School
Emerson Elementary School	Roosevelt Middle School of the Arts
James Madison High School	Sherman Multicultural Arts School
King Elementary School	South Division High School
LaFollette Elementary School	Vincent High School
Lancaster Elementary School	Washington High School of Information and Technology
Lincoln Center for the Arts	Wisconsin Conservatory of Lifelong Learning
Marshall High School	

The fall 2017 SQR started November 6, 2017 and ended November 30, 2017. The 20 Signature Schools and five comparison schools (*) reviewed were:

Alliance School	Hawthorne School
Audubon High School	*Humboldt Park School
Audubon Technology and Communication Middle School	Jackson School
Auer Avenue School	*Kilbourn School
Barbee Montessori School	*MacDowell Montessori School
Bay View High School	Maple Tree School
Brown Street Academy	Milwaukee Community Cyber High School
Cass Street School	Milwaukee High School of the Arts
Clarke Street School	Pierce School
Fratney School	*Reagan High School
Gaenslen School	Riverside University High School
*Grantosa Drive School	Thoreau School
Hamilton High School	

The SQR process collected data from a number of sources. Schools engaged in a self-study while regional teams engaged in a similar study of the school. A school visit from an observation review team provided an opportunity to view classroom practices and hold focus group conversations with parents, teachers, students, and community partners. Prior to the visit day, teams reviewed the school self-study, regional studies, and existing data to prepare for the visit. Facilities provided a summary of needs and aspirations for each school. Current data on academics, behavior, and staffing was also part of the data-review process.

The observation review team consisted of district staff, including staff from the Office of the Superintendent, Office of School Administration, Office of Academics, Office of Human Resources, Office of the Chief of Staff, Office of Finance, and Office of Operations. The Office of Innovation & Information’s Department of Innovation Development research and evaluation staff served as the lead facilitators on each team. Representatives from MTEA were part of the observation review team as well, and a parent and/or community member was optional. The principal and school leadership team had an opportunity to participate, engaging with members of the observation review team at various points throughout the day.

ANALYSIS

Staff from the research and evaluation team analyzed the self-study, regional team study, focus group responses, classroom observational data, and facilities reports for each school. Data was analyzed using a structure based on the substantive framework developed by the Charlotte Mecklenburg School District (CMS) (2014), where data is grouped into six areas. For the purposes of this summative report and future analysis, the six areas in the CMS framework are integrated with research out of the Consortium for Chicago School Research (CCSR)¹, who found that schools need to have organized systems in five key areas in order to show improvement in student outcomes. The translation from one framework to the other is an effort to align current school improvement focus with previous models.

Charlotte Mecklenburg School District Framework	5Essentials© Framework for School Improvement
Achievement	When schools have organized systems in each of the five essentials, they will see improvements in attendance and math and reading productivity.
Curriculum	When schools have organized systems in each of the five essentials, they will see improvements in the implementation of curriculum.
Teaching and Instruction	<i>Ambitious Instruction</i> - Instruction that is engaging and produces shared ownership, achievement, and accountability. Instructional practices also incorporate the varied identities of students. <i>Collaborative Staff</i> - Staff engage in a professional learning community that is predicated on relationships and partnerships with all stakeholders to positively impact each and every child’s social, emotional, and academic growth.
Leadership and Management	<i>Effective Leaders</i> - School leaders who implement high leverage instructional practices to transform school communities.
Learning Environment	<i>Supportive Environment</i> - Embracing equitable practices, building strong emotional-emotional competences, and creating learning environments that feel safe and welcoming to all students.
Partnerships with Parents and the Community	<i>Empower Families</i> - Families are included as equal partners in the education of their children.

The intention of this summary report is to provide a high-level review of findings across schools, illuminating similarities and differences for both the spring 2017 and fall 2017 SQR visits and to inform work on meeting the needs of the lowest-performing schools in MPS.

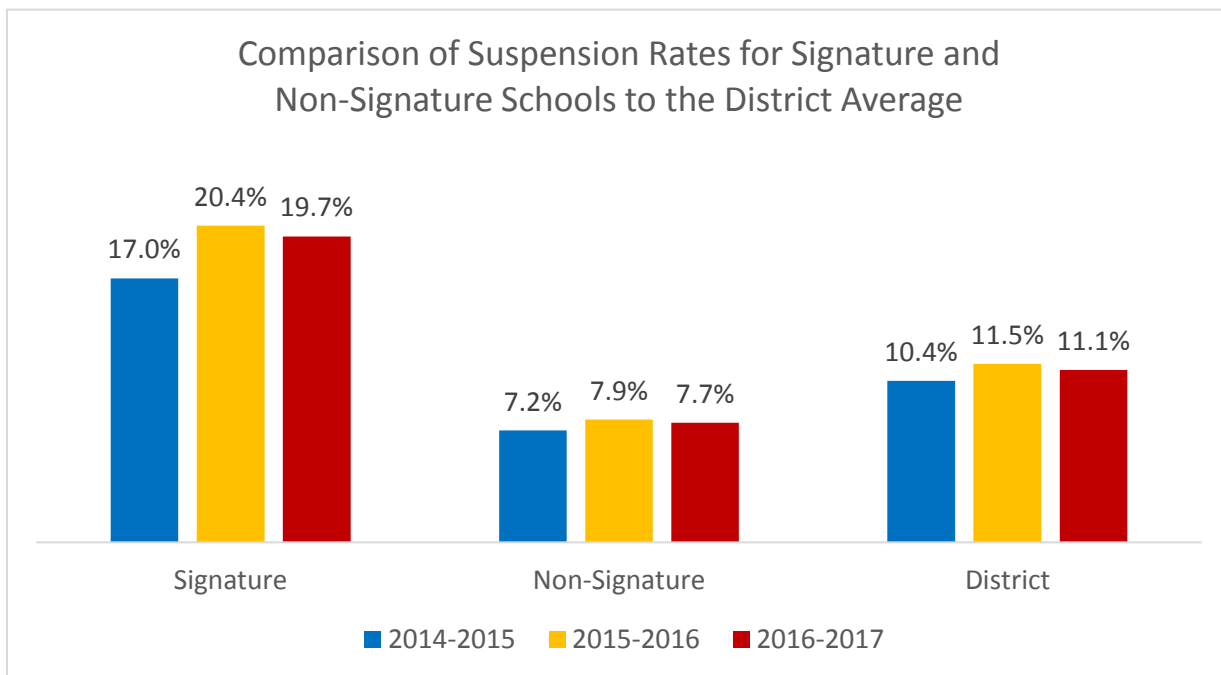
¹ Bryk, A.S., Sebring, P.B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J.Q. (2010). Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

EXISTING DATA

The data highlighted in this summary are intended to provide insights into conditions at schools involved in the SQR process, rather than an exhaustive accounting of school data. More details can be found in each school's SQR report.

STUDENT SUSPENSIONS

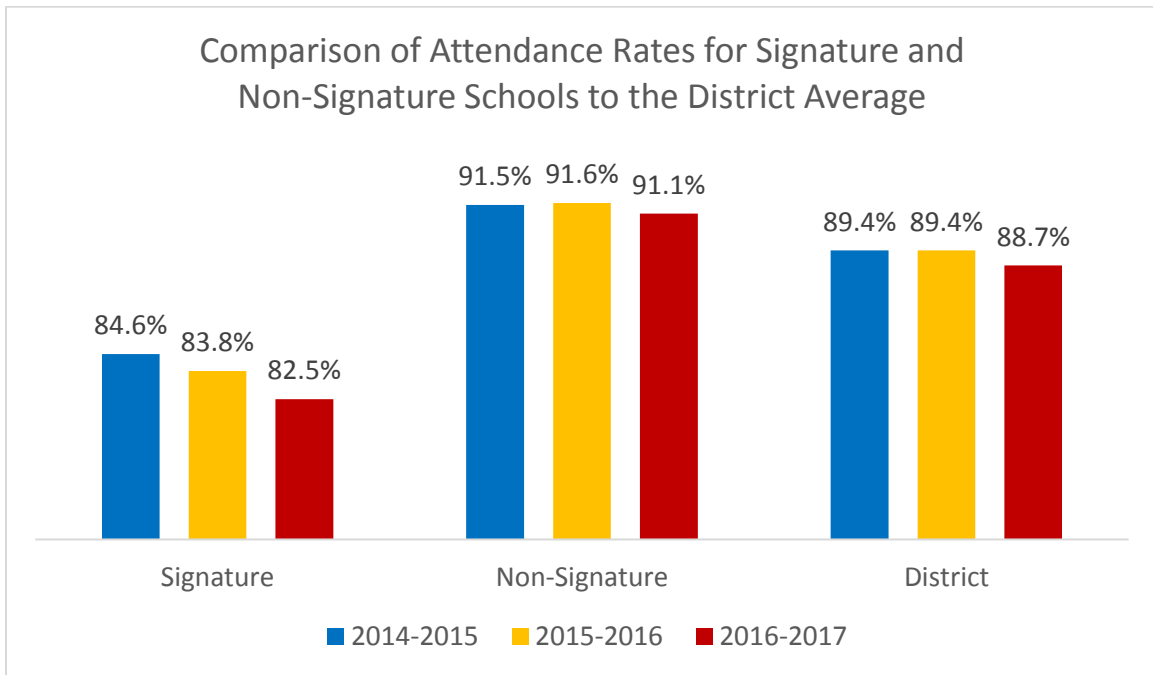
Chart 1. Differences in End of Year Suspension Rates for 2014-2015 through 2016-2017 School Years



Note: Students in signature schools are suspended at higher rates than students in non-signature schools.

STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Chart 2. Differences in End of Year Attendance Rates for 2014-2015 through 2016-2017 School Years



Note: Students in signature schools attend at lower rates than students in non-signature schools.



SCHOOL LEADERS WHO IMPLEMENT HIGH LEVERAGE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES TO TRANSFORM SCHOOL COMMUNITIES.

The SQR teams noted differences in leadership practices between Signature and non-Signature Schools. Effective leadership, according to the CCSR, is the “catalyst for change” when it comes to school improvement, so it is no surprise that schools demonstrated differences in this area. The SQR teams also noted that supportive central services administration is essential for effective school leadership.

Data from SQR focus groups, observations, and regional and school self-studies suggest that many Signature Schools differed in the degree to which the following are evident in their schools:

- Clear expectations coupled with consistently enforced accountability around systems, policies, and procedures at the schools
 - Behavior management in classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, and playground varied
- Recruitment, retention, and vacancy/substitute fulfillment:
 - Instructional staff
 - Schools struggled with ambitious high-quality instructional practices in a majority of classrooms
 - Engineering staff
 - Schools encountered issues with overall appearance of sites and other maintenance concerns
 - An analysis of existing data on teacher, librarian, and counselor vacancies for the 2017-2108 school year revealed that Signature Schools represent 26% of the schools in MPS but account for 61% of these vacancies.
- Instructional leadership
 - Effective leaders focused on ambitious instruction that is student-centered and highly engaging
 - Effective leaders consistently applied high-level accountability



AMBITIOUS INSTRUCTION

INSTRUCTION THAT IS ENGAGING AND PRODUCES SHARED OWNERSHIP, ACHIEVEMENT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY. INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES ALSO INCORPORATE THE VARIED IDENTITIES OF STUDENTS.

In general, according to the data collected, most Signature Schools versus non-Signature Schools differed in the following areas:

- Student centered instruction practices (teacher-led vs. student-led)
- Academic engagement levels of students were generally found to be lower in Signature Schools and appeared to be correlated with instructional practices that utilized teacher-led simple recall versus student-led higher-level inquiry
- Clear expectations and consistent accountability regarding student behaviors, such as student movement during instructional time

It is important to note that almost every school visited during the SQR process had pockets of high quality, ambitious instruction taking place, though these pockets existed mostly in the primary grade levels.

In keeping with the belief that all students want to learn and that families want their children to succeed, the analysis of the SQR data focused on student engagement as an outcome of multiple factors within the control of the adults in the school and in MPS in general. High-quality ambitious instruction is seen as one such factor that directly influences levels of student engagement. Relatively low levels of student engagement tended to be displayed at Signature Schools. Observation data consistently pointed out that Signature Schools overall experience lower levels of student engagement as it relates to the classroom as seen in the relatively higher levels of classroom disruptions from observations and reported in focus group data.



SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

EMBRACING EQUITABLE PRACTICES, BUILDING STRONG SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES, AND CREATING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT FEEL SAFE AND WELCOMING TO ALL STUDENTS.

Most school entrances and office-level hallways were decorated with student work pieces and were inviting. As observations moved away from this area and especially towards upper-level classrooms, the nature of the hallways and the general feel of the school shifted. Some key differences noted through the SQR process between many Signature School versus non-Signature Schools were in the appearance of the school, especially as one moved away from the official entrance point and hallway of the school.

Most schools that are Signature Schools tended to be described as:

- Gray and darker
- Having a general feel of uncleanliness
- More cluttered
- In need of more maintenance and repairs
- Less welcoming and inviting in upper grade levels

As previously mentioned, student engagement tended to be relatively less evident at Signature Schools. A supportive environment is also seen as a quality of the school experience the school can control. Student engagement is also then used as a finding in this section. Observation data consistently pointed out that Signature Schools overall experienced lower levels of engagement as seen:

- Through behavior management: Many Signature Schools were noted as having lower levels of clear and consistent accountability around expectations of behaviors
- In-school movement and transitions issues around:
 - Lunch
 - Bathroom
 - Station transfer
 - Unsanctioned student hallway movement



EMPOWERING FAMILIES

FAMILIES ARE INCLUDED AS EQUAL PARTNERS IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN.

The schools reviewed had a mix of parental/guardian support. Some schools had several parents/guardians attend focus groups, while others had a few but committed number attend or none attend focus groups. Although many parents/guardians expressed frustration at the school's lack of progress, they were generally supportive of their child's school and believed that progress was possible.

Similarly to parents/guardians, schools ranged in the number of community partners who attended focus groups. One school had 10 partners attend, but another school had none. Partners tended to be very supportive of schools, and some expressed a desire to align more closely with the school and with each other to address school needs.

While the involvement of partners in focus groups varied from school to school, there was a general consensus among teachers, parents/guardians, and the community focus group participants that there were potentially untapped partnerships that could be established.



NEXT STEPS

It is important to note that while this summary report has broken down the school experience into components, one area will influence all other areas. The interrelated nature of these essential components such as ambitious instruction, is best analyzed taking into account the impact of leadership, relationships with families and the community, and the state of the learning environment. The Essentials of School Improvement research base suggest that schools that are strong in effective leadership and strong in at least two out of the remaining four components, are ready for school improvement. It is with this in mind that the following next steps are presented.

Suggested list of next steps:

- SQR process will be linked to the Essentials of School Improvement as a framework for school improvement and data analysis.
- During the off years of the SQRs, the district will follow up with previously visited schools (for example the Commitment Schools) to learn from a district vantage point how schools are sustaining their academic growth. If not, what happened?
- Central Services staff will be trained to use SQR data to make informed decisions regarding high needs schools.
- Professional capacity on the Essentials of School Culture and Climate survey will be a goal for Central Services staff in order to ensure that the district supports schools in the area of professional development.
- Instructional rounds will begin to utilize Essentials of School Improvement language and data.
- A research-based cluster of schools that are strong in effective leadership will collaborate toward a district model of school improvement.



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This policy also prohibits discrimination under related federal statutes, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (race, color, and national origin), Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (sex), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (disability), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (disability).

The following individuals have been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies:

For section 118.13, Wisconsin Statutes, federal Title IX: Matthew Boswell, Director, Department of Student Services, Room 133, Milwaukee Public Schools, 5225 W. Vliet St., P.O. Box 2181, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53201-2181 (414) 475-8027.

For Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), federal Title II: Jeff Molter, 504/ADA Coordinator for Students, MPS Department of Specialized Services, 6620 W. Capitol Drive, Room 216, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53216. (414) 438-3677 TTY: (888) 692-1408.

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James R. Gorton (414-475-8161; gortonjr@milwaukee.k12.wi.us), Manager, Employee Rights Administrative Division (ERAD), has been designated to respond to requests for disability-related job accommodations. Therese Freiberg (414-773-9927; freibetm@milwaukee.k12.wi.us), EEO Compliance Officer, ERAD, has been designated to respond to internal complaints regarding employment discrimination. ERAD can be contacted in the Office of Human Resources at Milwaukee Public Schools, 5225 W. Vliet Street, Room 128, P.O. Box 2181, Milwaukee, WI 53201-2181.