

SchoolWorks

School Quality Review Report



Mission Hill School

Boston, MA

November 8-9, 2021

About the SchoolWorks School Quality Review

SchoolWorks provides objective on-site reviews of academic programs conducted through document review, classroom observation, and interviews/focus groups. During our reviews, school practices are measured against SchoolWorks Quality Criteria – a research-based set of standards linked to positive student outcomes.

Purpose

SchoolWorks was engaged by the Boston Public Schools (BPS) to conduct a two-day site visit, or Emergency Review, to meet BPS School Accountability purposes. SchoolWorks is a national education consulting company and provider that is Massachusetts-based and has extensive experience in leading and conducting school quality reviews (SQRs).

Protocol and Process

The SQR process places a team of reviewers from SchoolWorks and team members from a local organization, into a school to collect and analyze data about school programs and practices. The SQR utilizes multiple sources of evidence to understand how well a school is working. It extends beyond standardized measures of student achievement to collect evidence in relation to the protocol's criteria and indicators. Evidence collection begins with the review of the key documents that describe the school and its students and may include collection of data via online surveys administered to various stakeholder groups. Key documents reviewed by the site visit team prior to arrival on site include curricula and related teaching documents, professional development (PD) records, and student assessment results. These provide the team with initial information about the school's programs and the students it serves. While on site, evidence collection continues through additional document reviews, classroom visits, and interviews with key school stakeholders. After collecting evidence, the site visit team meets daily to confirm, refute, and modify its hypotheses about school performance, and then communicates its progress to the school's leadership. The team listens to the school's responses and makes every effort to follow up on evidence that the school indicates the team should collect. The site visit team uses evidence collected through these events to develop findings in relation to the protocol's criteria and indicators.

The SQR places a high value on engaging the school in understanding its own performance. The process may be described as an open, frank, professional dialog between the school and the site visit team. The professionalism of the school and team is essential in the process. Both the school and the team have clear roles and responsibilities that are designed to promote good rapport and clear communication. All team members are governed by a code of conduct. Honesty, integrity, objectivity, and a focus on the best interests of students and staff are essential to the success and positive impact of the site visit process.

The report documents the team's findings for key questions within each of the four domains identified in the SQR protocol: Instruction, Students' Opportunities to Learn, Educators' Opportunities to Learn, and Governance and Leadership.

Domains and Key Questions

DOMAIN 1: STUDENT PERFORMANCE
DOMAIN 2: INSTRUCTION
1. Do classroom interactions and organization ensure a classroom climate conducive to learning for all students?
2. Is instruction intentional, engaging, and challenging for all students?
3. Do teachers regularly assess students' progress toward mastery of key skills and concepts and utilize assessment data to provide feedback to students during the lesson?
DOMAIN 3: STUDENTS' OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN
4. Does the school identify and support its diverse learners?
5. Does the school foster a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion and ensure a safe, supportive environment for all students?
DOMAIN 4: EDUCATORS' OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN
6. Does the school design professional development and collaborative structures to sustain focus on instructional improvement?
7. Does the school's culture indicate high levels of collective responsibility, trust, and efficacy?
DOMAIN 5: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE
8. Do school leaders guide and participate with instructional staff in the improvement of teaching and learning?
9. Do school leaders guide and facilitate intentional, strategic efforts to ensure the effectiveness of the school's program and the sustainability of the organization?
10. Does the Board provide competent stewardship and oversight of the school?

Domain 1: Student Performance

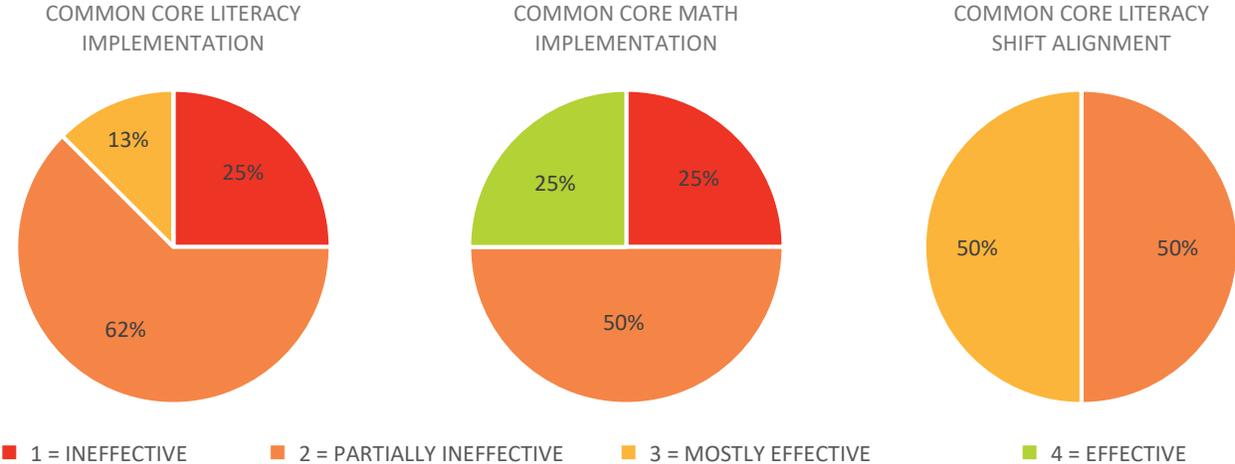
Finding

The school's performance data reveals students of marginalized groups – African American, Hispanic, students with disabilities and English learners – in grades three through eight performed significantly worse than students who are White. Current Fall 2021 baseline Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) Growth data are consistent with Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data from the past.

- For example, in 2018, 68% of White students in grades 3-8 met or exceeded standards on the 2018 MCAS in English language arts (ELA); the same was true for 6% of Black students, 7% of Hispanic students, 8% of students with disabilities, 10% of English learners and former English learners, and 6% of economically-disadvantaged students.
- Similarly, that same year, while 54% of White students in grades 3-8 met or exceeded standards on the 2018 MCAS in mathematics; the same was true for 0% of Black students, 4% of Hispanic students, 2% of students with disabilities, 5% of English learners and former English learners, and 0% of economically-disadvantaged students.
- In 2019, 68% of White students in grades 3-8 met or exceeded standards on the MCAS in English language arts. The same was true for 12% of Black students, 17% of Hispanic students, 5% of students with disabilities, 21% of English learners and former English learners, and 10% of economically-disadvantaged students.
- That same year, 60% of White students in grades 3-8 met or exceeded standards on the MCAS in English language arts. The same was true for 4% of Black students, 7% of Hispanic students, 0% of students with disabilities, 13% of English learners and former English learners, and 0% of economically-disadvantaged students.
- Baseline data from the NWEA MAP assessments in literacy and math show that marginalized populations are not being served at the school. These assessments were administered in the Fall of 2021 and highlight the fact that students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLs), and students who identify as Black or Hispanic are achieving lower growth than their White peers. For example, baseline math data from grades 3-8 reveals that while only 20% White students are achieving low or low average growth, 86% of Black students are achieving low or low average growth, as are 69% of Hispanic students, 100% of English language learners and 92% of students with disabilities.

Domain 2: Instruction¹

Common Core Implementation



Classroom observation data indicates that, at the time of the visit, the large majority of observed instruction did not reflect high quality implementation of common core standards in literacy or mathematics.

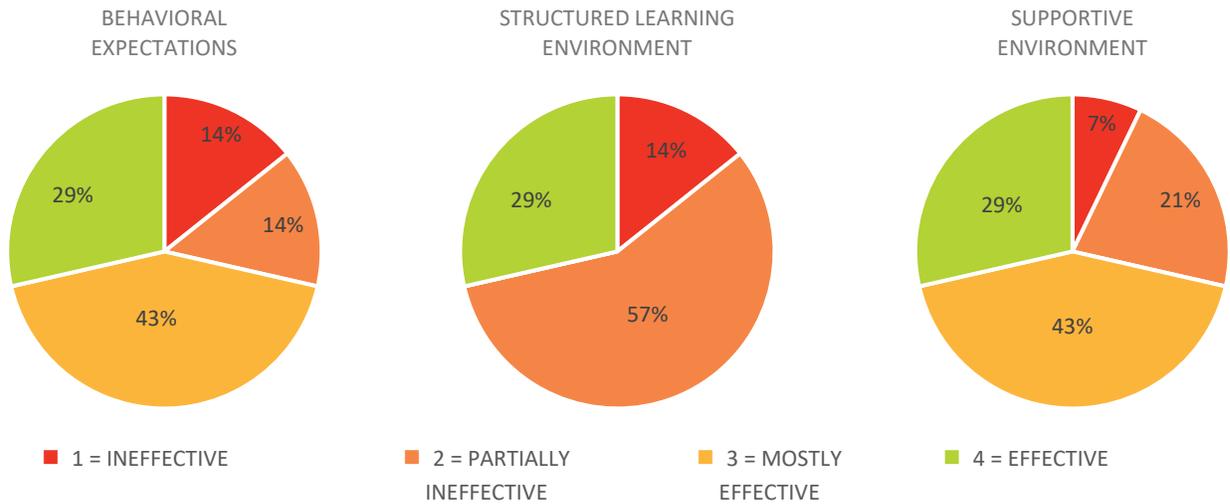
- There were no observed examples of effective common core literacy implementation. Thirteen percent (13%) of observed classes reflected mostly effective implementation of common core literacy standards, while 87% of observed classes demonstrated partially ineffective or ineffective implementation of literacy content standards or instructional shifts.
- Only 25% of observed classes demonstrated evidence of effective common core math implementation; 75% of observed classes demonstrated partially effective or ineffective implementation of math content standards, instructional shifts, or standards for mathematical practice.

¹ Fourteen classroom observations were conducted throughout the two school days during which the school review was conducted by the school review team. Observations were 20 minutes in length, across grade levels and content areas.

KEY QUESTION 1

Do classroom interactions and organization ensure a classroom climate conducive to learning for all students?

Classroom Climate



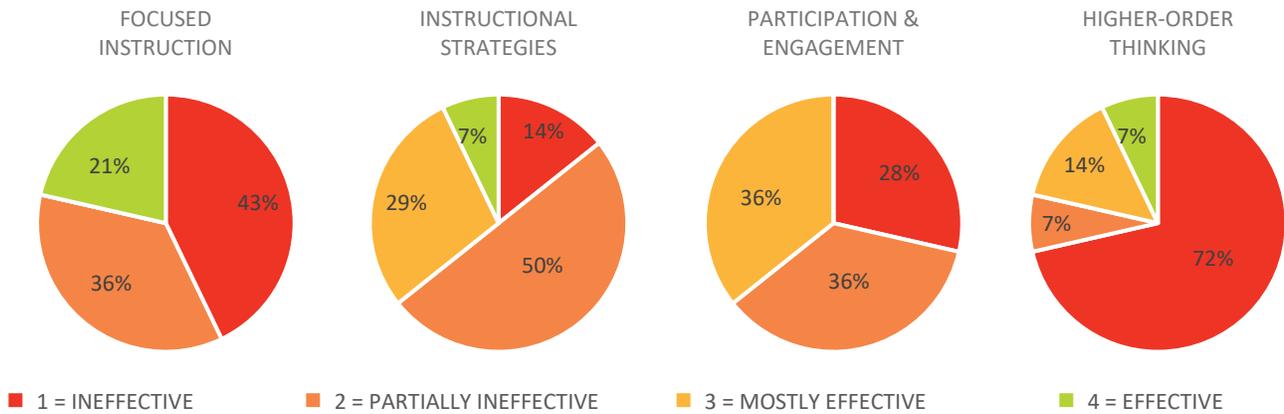
Classroom observation data indicates that, at the time of the visit, the large majority of observed classrooms did not reflect effective implementation of behavioral standards, a structured learning environment, or a supportive learning environment. As a result, the school does not provide a physically or emotionally safe climate for the majority of students.

- Only 29% of classes demonstrated effective behavioral expectations, while 71% of observed classes demonstrated behavioral expectations that were ineffective, partially ineffective, or mostly effective.
- Only 29% of classes demonstrated structured learning environments that were effective, while 71% of observed classes demonstrated learning environments that were ineffective or partially ineffective.
- Only 29% of observed classes demonstrated effective supportive environments, while 71% of observed classes demonstrated supportive environments that were ineffective or partially effective.
- Throughout the course of the visit, the site visit team observed students horseplaying and running throughout the hallways, knocking over trash cans purposefully in classrooms, calling other students “dummies,” and in one instance, a student holding up the extended end of a paper clip to another student’s head and threatening, “this is a weapon.” In another example, a student proclaimed to a classmate, “This is why I f*ing hate you!,” and in another incident, a student commented to a site visit team member, “This school is so horny.” The majority of these incidents were not ignored or remained unaddressed by school staff.

KEY QUESTION 2

Is instruction intentional, engaging, and challenging for all students?

Purposeful Teaching



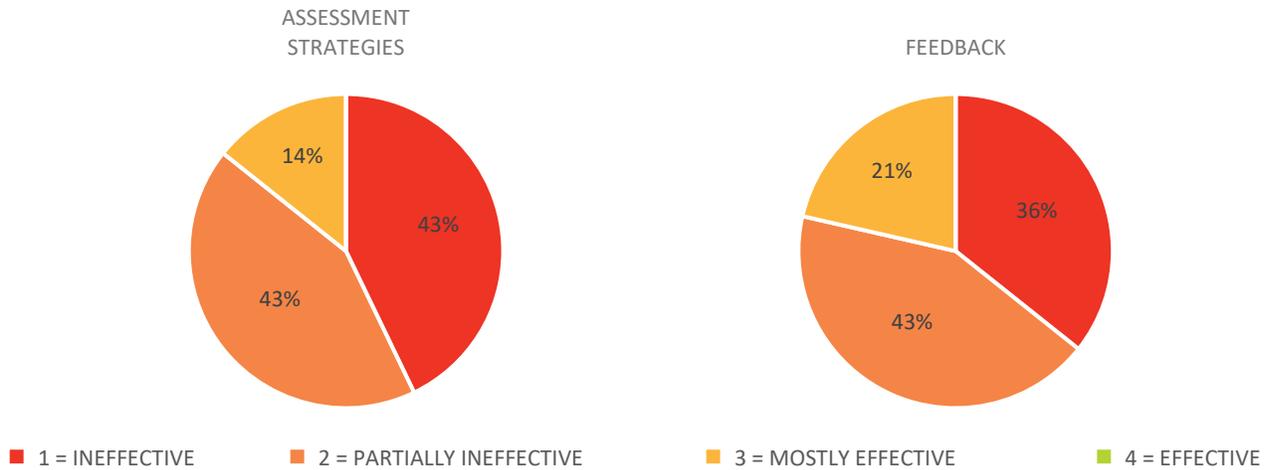
Classroom observation data indicates that, at the time of the visit, the large majority of observed instruction did not reflect high quality purposeful teaching.

- Only 21% of observed classes demonstrated effective focused instruction, while 79% of observed classes demonstrated focused instruction that was ineffective or partially ineffective.
- Just 7% of observed classes demonstrated effective instructional strategies, while 93% of observed classes demonstrated or mostly effective, partially ineffective, or ineffective instructional strategies.
- No observed classes demonstrated effective participation and engagement, while 36% of observed classes demonstrated mostly effective participation and engagement, and 64% of observed classes demonstrated participation and engagement that was partially ineffective or ineffective.
- Only 7% of observed classes reflected effective or mostly effective higher-order thinking, while 93% of observed classes demonstrated higher-order thinking that was mostly effective, partially ineffective, or ineffective.
- Site visitors did not observe adequate or effective use of resources to serve English language learners or students with disabilities. For example, while site visit team members observed multiple adults in each classroom, those adults were not strategically deployed in support of the school's diverse learners. No examples of tiered or scaffolded instruction were observed.
- Finally, as a pattern throughout the school, site visit team members noted a lack of grade level instruction and higher-order thinking in classrooms. One notable example included an upper grade-level classroom reading in a round robin format with an assignment to draw a picture at the end of the lesson.

KEY QUESTION 3

Do teachers regularly assess students' progress toward mastery of key skills and concepts and utilize assessment data to provide feedback to students during the lesson?

In-Class Assessment & Feedback



Classroom observation data indicates that, at the time of the visit, the large majority of observed instruction did not reflect the presence of effective in-class assessment strategies and feedback to students.

- None of the observed classrooms demonstrated effective assessment strategies. Only 14% of observed classes demonstrated mostly effective assessment strategies, while 86% of observed classes demonstrated assessment strategies that were ineffective or partially ineffective.
- None of the observed classrooms demonstrated effective feedback to students. 21% of observed classes demonstrated mostly effective feedback, while 79% of observed classes demonstrated partially ineffective or ineffective instructional strategies.

Domain 3: Students’ Opportunities to Learn

KEY QUESTION 4

Does the school identify and support its diverse learners?

Finding

While the school has a process for identifying struggling and at-risk students, it does not consistently implement appropriate supports.

- In focus groups, staff reported that the school has a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) during which teachers can discuss concerns they have for students. Staff described referring students to the Student Support Team (SST) that includes the school social worker, nurse, and other staff on the student’s team, although not special education teachers. Multiple staff members reported using data such as NWEA MAP, MCAS, and Lexia as a basis for referrals. That said, the team did not find evidence of effective purposeful instruction or tiered instruction in practice at the time of the visit.
- While some staff described intentional services provided to students identified through MTSS, others indicated that there were not sufficient supports and that this was an area of need for the school. Examples of supports provided included a Learning Coach (special educator) for each grade band, online academic support programs such as Lexia, and reading intervention blocks conducted by special educators trained in rules-based reading programs such as Wilson. Other staff members reported inconsistent or lacking supports. For example, some staff stated that there used to be more supports specifically for Tier II students, but that these supports are noticeably fewer this year. Others stated that there were no consistent or specific intervention materials being used throughout the school. The team did not find evidence of adequate supports for struggling learners throughout the school, as further evidenced by student academic and growth data.

KEY QUESTION 5

Does the school foster a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion and ensure a safe, supportive environment for all students?

Finding

In the past, the school has had a clear focus on establishing a strong culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion; however, at the time of the visit, the school’s leadership² did not emphasize this work to the extent it had been prioritized in prior years.

- The school does not appear to have a strategic approach to its diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), as well as anti-racist work. For example, staff members reported that the equity task force (or similar committees) had been disbanded. Staff members were also quick to note that the school’s staff membership is not as diverse as it had been in prior years. More specifically, staff members reported that many of the teachers on leave at the time of the visit were teachers of color, and that the Instructional Leadership Team’s (ILT) racial composition was less diverse at the time of the visit than it had been in prior years. According to school staff, this has negatively impacted students’ and families’ perceptions about the school.
- School staff members reported that in prior years, the school’s leadership had prioritized issues pertaining to DEI in curriculum and instruction across the school. At the time of the visit, some staff members reported a focus on topics such as culturally-relevant pedagogy in some grade-level meetings; however, there was limited evidence of a schoolwide focus on similar topics. Instead, staff members reported that the schoolwide focus in the 2021-22 school year was on improving data-driven instruction and standards-based teaching and learning. While some members of the leadership team were able

² Throughout this report the term “leadership,” “leadership team,” or other similar terms refers to non-instructional academic or educator staff with administrative or leadership duties at the school.

to discuss this shift as an explicit, data-driven strategy to better serve students of color, staff members, on the whole, did not make this connection.

- While school staff reported valuing DEI, classroom observations revealed that diverse learners' needs are not being met, as evidenced by the classroom observation data collected on the day of the visit. Further, incident report data through October 29, 2021, showed that a disproportionate number of incidents were reported for male students (80%) of color (Latinx/Hispanic made up 30% of reported incidents while Black/African American students made up 40%). Incidents are also disproportionately reported for students with disabilities, consisting of 47.2% of total incidents.

Domain 4: Educators' Opportunities to Learn

KEY QUESTION 6

Does the school design professional development and collaborative structures to sustain focus on instructional improvement?

Finding

There are multiple professional development (PD) opportunities available to, and utilized by, staff at the school; however, it is unclear to all staff how PD has effectively addressed school priorities, improvement goals, and identified areas of need.

- Staff reported a large number of PD topics and opportunities. Examples over the past few years have included Welcoming Schools; diversity, equity, and inclusion work; and UnboundEd. Staff reported that these PD opportunities have been largely well-received. Staff has leveraged district supports over the past couple of years, including the addition of an instructional coach, district curriculum in grades K-2, 3-5, and 7-8, as well as various special education and planning supports.
- The school has an instructional coach whom staff reported has been working on coaching and feedback at the school. While leaders reported that the feedback the instructional coach provides to teachers is always written and presented in a template that includes adherence to Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the indicators of the Culturally Responsive Instruction Observation Protocol (CRIOP) Pillar 5, effective elements of class, and a column for ideas, considerations, and things to change, teachers reported receiving informal feedback from the coach. For instance, teachers reported that the instructional coach has been focused on improving practices with an emphasis on standards-based expectations. Standards-based expectations were a focus of the UnboundEd PD in which staff participated during the previous school year, and the instructional coach has worked to integrate standards-based practice into feedback on teacher practice.
- BPS has also provided PD opportunities for staff at Mission Hill. These include PD sessions planned in collaboration with the Office of Data and Accountability (ODA). Staff reported other BPS PD sessions on data-driven instruction, standards-based teaching practices and assessment, as well as introductions and practice with various protocols.
- While staff reported several PD topics, opportunities, and sessions, the majority spoke to the need for PD to be more school-focused on transformation and school-specific priorities and improvement goals.

Finding

While structures are established for educators to collaborate regularly to learn about effective instruction and students' progress, these structures lack a systemic and cohesive focus.

- Educators reported that there is Common Planning Time (CPT) included in the schedule at the school. CPT occurs once per week for each teacher for one hour. While this structure is occurring, teachers reported a variety of topics included in CPT. For example, some teachers noted that CPT is used for curricular planning, student concerns, and assessment reviews. Others reported that there has been a focus on creating systems and culture this year during CPT. Stakeholders also reported that there has been an ongoing cultural shift being undertaken in the past 6-to-18-months with regard to CPT that

includes shifting staff perspective and understanding of the purpose of this time and what actually occurs during these meetings.

- Teachers reported that the school is a collaborative space because they are a “democratically-run school.” Staff reported that there was a strong culture of collaboration and sense of investment by staff. Staff also noted that this became challenging when veteran educators were removed; it was unclear to them to what degree the traditional democratic decision-making process was still in effect, due to district-mandated changes in leadership and governance. Staff reported needing a reset of expectations to clarify how the school should function moving forward.
- Staff also reported that while there are collaborative structures schoolwide, how collaboration is functioning is different at different grade levels. For instance, educators reported that the departmentalized structure in grades seven and eight are a barrier to providing the same collaborative experience as educators provide in grades one through six.

KEY QUESTION 7

Does the school's culture indicate high levels of collective responsibility, trust, and efficacy?

Finding

Some (but not all) educators' mindsets and beliefs reflect shared commitments to students' learning.

- Students reported that teachers have high expectations for them at the school, and that they feel supported by teachers. Examples included a homeroom teacher giving a student the opportunity to re-do work on which the student did poorly because she wanted to make sure that student learned, as well as another teacher using anchor charts and questioning to make sure students really understood a concept.
- The school has an ILT that includes leaders and teachers. Staff reported that the work of the ILT has been to work with the staff on mastery student responses and looking at student work. Teachers also reported that the ILT's goal is to focus on instruction, but they are also trying to balance a need to build systems and structure for behavior. The ILT, according to staff, is currently leading teams in data-driven instruction, which primarily includes two key types of meetings: Weekly Data Meetings in which teams of teachers review student data; and Lesson Internalization Meetings in which teams of teachers collaboratively prepare to teach a key lesson.
- Staff members noted that there has been a focus on the transformation work of the school. However, they indicated that they felt it was difficult to focus on academics when students were having a difficult time socio-emotionally, and staff were being impacted by staff removals and repercussions at the beginning of the year. Site visit team members heard from multiple stakeholders that teachers and staff were committed to students at the school, but complexities in the culture, community, and leadership were impacting the work. The lack of formal systems and structures was also noted by multiple stakeholders as being a barrier to transformation. This is aligned to data in Domain 2 on the overall negative classroom climate and lack of purposeful teaching. Blaming external factors versus one's locus of control and by looking at students from a deficit versus asset viewpoint shows a disguised commitment to student learning.

Finding

The school does not currently reflect a safe, trustworthy, and growth-oriented professional climate.

- Adults do not hold themselves or students accountable for appropriate behaviors or actions. Students reported that teachers at the school wanted to “help with our emotions” and “bond with us.” However, some students noted that there are reports of bullying and multiple incident reports with no action from adults, or no changes in behavior from aggressors. Although some students reported feeling that the school was a safe space, others stated that the school does not take enough actions with regard to ensuring their safety. In fact, the site visit team observed many instances of school staff members ignoring inappropriate student behavior or comments, or ineffectively addressing the situation.

- Staff reported that there are challenges around communicating with parents and the community. Staff also reported that there are inconsistencies in implementation of schoolwide policies by all staff, and that the inconsistencies create a challenge for the school community
- Parents also reported that there are safety issues at the school. They attributed the safety issues to a lack of accountability and ownership, changes in leadership, and being without a schoolwide system for behavior and classroom management. Parents reported that behavior management looks different from classroom-to-classroom and that this contributes to the safety issues. Stakeholders reported safety concerns with a recent fire drill, and site visitors observed multiple instances of unsafe behavior and inappropriate language between students.
- Staff repeatedly reported concerns about recent events during which leadership and teachers were removed from the school. These events permeated throughout responses to questions asked about curriculum, professional development, operational system, and structures, as well as climate and culture.

Domain 5: Leadership and Governance

KEY QUESTION 8

Do school leaders guide and participate with instructional staff in the improvement of teaching and learning?

Finding

School and district leaders are working to develop systems to ensure that the school has a coherent, comprehensive, and aligned curriculum.

- Multiple stakeholders reported that the school has a transformation plan for the 2021-2022 school year. This transformation plan, according to staff, includes goals to implement the district’s curriculum. Examples provided by staff of district curriculum and assessment shifts as part of the transformation include Focus EL and StudySync, as well as NWEA MAP testing and the use of interim assessments. Staff reported that the district provided numerous PD opportunities around the new curriculum over the last few years.
- Staff reported that the instructional coach has been a consistent support in how to improve classroom instructional practices since August 2020 when he started. Staff noted that changing to new curriculum over the past two years has been a major shift at the school; previously, teachers had written their own curriculum based on themes for decades. While the instructional coach noted that he meets with all lead teachers weekly, teachers noted that they might have weekly meetings with the coach, who observes instruction and gives feedback on instruction that is connected to schoolwide instructional goals.
- Teachers reported that classrooms all start and end the day with a class meeting at the school. It was noted that instructional time looks very different across classrooms, although there has been a focus on group and partner work in the past that has shifted with the transformation plan and the need for more focus on instructional practices.

KEY QUESTION 9

Do school leaders guide and facilitate intentional, strategic efforts to ensure the effectiveness of the school's program and the sustainability of the organization?

Finding

The school and its leaders do not ensure effective and inclusive, transparent decision-making across the organization.

- Staff reported that the school has historically been a democratically-run school in which teachers, students, and families have a voice and are a part of decision making, but the clarity of that model has been diluted in recent history. Some staff reported that this led to an absence of clear structures for decision making. Other staff indicated that clarification around the democratic model needs to be revisited if the school will continue to use that model. Further, other staff members reported that their voices were heard, and the democratic model remained intact until recently when there were changes in leadership.
- Multiple stakeholders reported a lack of consistency at the school. They noted that different leaders use different approaches in terms of decision making and communication. Decisions and systems around behavior management and discipline emerged as a theme with all stakeholders. For example, stakeholders reported that the school does not have a clear and consistent system for behavior management across classrooms and throughout the school. In addition, staff also noted that many changes to the school have been made out of necessity as a result of the COVID pandemic and shifts from remote, hybrid, and in-person learning.
- While stakeholders reported that the school utilized distributive leadership structures in the past, it is unclear how many of those systems and structures remain. Some staff reported that teachers are expected to be on a leadership team. Leadership teams (e.g., ILT, Family Engagement) meet on Tuesdays, and there are staff meetings on alternating Tuesdays for one hour.
- Stakeholders reported that the Governing Board makes decisions around school policy with input from staff and students. There are teacher and student representatives on the Board. Examples of decisions made by the Board include the decision to move to hiring co-leaders to run the school, as well as uniform policies. While staff and families were able to speak to the general role of the Governing Board, they reported a lack of clarity around which decisions the Board makes, which decisions the teachers make democratically, and which decisions are made by the district.

KEY QUESTION 10

Does the Board provide competent stewardship and oversight of the school?

Finding

The Mission Hill Board has acted in an advisory capacity but has not effectively fulfilled their role in overseeing the effectiveness of the school's academic program, ensuring the school's organizational viability, or serving as fiduciaries of the school.

- The Board exists as a school committee with options for additional oversight. For example, the Board is not fully responsible for hiring, firing, or evaluating the principal (i.e., it can be done in partnership with the district). However, the site visit team did not find evidence that the school board has effectively overseen the school's academic program, or taken action to address its underperformance; that the school board has participated in the evaluation of school leadership (or identified a process for doing so); or has fulfilled its obligations as a policy-making body (for example, at the time of the visit, the

school lacked a policy for completing fire drills as required, further endangering student safety).

- When asked about academic oversight, Board members shared limited knowledge of the school's academic performance; one Board member stated, "Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad," which demonstrates a gross lack of awareness of the school's academic standing and performance. Other Board members stated that they were new to the Board and had not received previous reports on academic performance but understood they would be provided reports at upcoming meetings.
- When asked, the Board could not provide information on the academic gaps of performance between students who are White and those who are of color that attend Mission Hill. This further evidences the board's lack of awareness around its ability to serve the school's most vulnerable students.
- The Board reported that they do not provide full financial oversight but instead, when asked, stewardship, fundraising, and oversight. One board member indicated that the school's budget was provided by Boston Public Schools, and suggested that they do not have autonomy over allocation of the school's financial resources, but instead indicated that the board's role in relation to school finances was primarily to fundraise in order to close funding gaps. Finally, a review of documents showed, and focus group conversations clarified, that a 501c3 has existed that was established at one point by the Mission Hill Board to support fundraising efforts. Further conversation clarified that this has not existed over the course of the past year (maybe more) and is not linked to school finances in any way.
- In a focus group, Mission Hill Board members described there have been recent elections to fill Board vacancies, hardships over the last few months due to transitions of staff and leadership, and a willingness to continue to commit to the school. They demonstrated diversity of experience and interest that could be of benefit to Mission Hill, including members who are students, teachers, and community members. It is unclear whether membership reflects the demographic diversity of the school's students.

Appendix A

Site Visit Team Members

The site visit to Mission Hill School in Boston, MA took place on November 8-9, 2021. The following Team Members conducted the visit.

- Megan Tupa, Team Leader, SchoolWorks
- Farah Assiraj, Team Member, Boston Public Schools
- David Bloom, Team Member, Boston Public Schools
- Jerome Doherty, Team Member, Boston Public Schools
- Yozmin Draper, Team Member, Boston Public Schools
- Jodi Fortuna, Team Member, Boston Public Schools
- Sarah Jay, Team Member, Boston Public Schools
- Efrain Toledano, Team Member, Boston Public Schools

Appendix B

Summary of Classroom Observation Data

During the site visit, the team conducted 14 observations, representing a range of grade levels and subject areas. The following tables present the compiled data from those observations.

SUMMARY OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATION DATA
 Percentage of Observations Within Each Rating Category by Indicator

