School Effectiveness Review

2017 - 2018

ConneXions: A Community Based Arts School

May 8-10, 2018
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Part I: Introduction and School Background

Introduction to the School Effectiveness Review

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) developed the School Effectiveness Framework and the School Effectiveness Review process in 2009. The School Effectiveness Review (SER) uses trained school reviewers to measure a school’s effectiveness against City Schools’ School Effectiveness Standards. The School Effectiveness Standards are aligned with City Schools’ effectiveness frameworks for teachers and school leaders.

The SER provides an objective and evidence-based analysis of how well a school is working to educate its students. It generates a rich layer of qualitative data that may not be revealed when evaluating a school solely on student performance outcomes. It also provides district and school-level staff with objective and useful information when making strategic decisions that impact student achievement.

The SER team, comprised of representatives from City Schools who have extensive knowledge about schools and instruction, gathered information from teachers, students, parents, and leadership during a two-day site visit. During the visit, the SER team observed classrooms, reviewed selected school documents, and conducted focus groups with school leadership, teachers, students, and parents. The SER team analyzed evidence collected over the course of the SER to determine the extent to which key actions have been adopted and implemented at the school. This report summarizes the ratings in the four domains and related key actions, provides evidence to support the ratings, and – based on a rubric – allocates a performance level for each key action. More information about the SER process is detailed in the School Effectiveness Review protocol, located on the City Schools website and available upon request from the Office of Achievement and Accountability in City Schools.

School Background

ConneXions: A Community Based Arts School serves approximately 481 students in sixth grade through twelfth grade. The school is located on N. Dukeland Street in the Hanlon-Longwood neighborhood of Baltimore, Maryland. The principal, Sidney Brooks, has been at the school for one year. For more information about the school's student demographics and student achievement data, please see the School Profile, located on the City Schools website.
### Part II: Summary of Performance Levels

Based on trends found in the collected evidence, the SER team assigns a performance level to each key action.

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#### Domain 1: Highly Effective Instruction

1.1 Teachers plan highly effective instruction. **Effective**
1.2 Teachers deliver highly effective instruction. **Developing**
1.3 Teachers use multiple data sources to adjust practice. **Developing**
1.4 School leadership supports highly effective instruction. **Effective**
1.5 Teachers establish a classroom environment in which teaching and learning can occur. **Highly Effective**

#### Domain 2: Talented People

2.1 The school implements systems to select, develop, and retain effective teachers and staff whose skills and beliefs represent the diverse needs of all students. **Effective**
2.2 The school has created and implemented systems to evaluate teachers and staff against individual and school-wide goals, provide interventions to those who are not meeting expectations, and remove those who do not make reasonable improvement. **Effective**

#### Domain 3: Vision and Engagement

3.1 The school provides a safe and supportive learning environment for students, families, teachers, and staff. **Effective**
3.2 The school cultivates and sustains open communication and decision-making opportunities with families about school events, policies, and the academic and social development of their children. **Effective**
3.3 The culture of the school reflects and embraces student, staff, and community diversity. **Effective**

#### Domain 4: Strategic Leadership

4.1 The school establishes growth goals that guide strategic planning, teaching, and adjusting of practice to meet student needs. **Developing**
4.2 The school allocates and deploys the resources of time, staff talent, and funding to address the priorities of growth goals for student achievement. **Effective**
4.3 The school’s board of trustees (or operator) provides component stewardship and oversight of the school (For schools that are overseen by an autonomous board of trustees or operator). **Effective**
Part III: Findings on Domains of Effective Schools

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Domain 1: Highly Effective Instruction

Key action 1.1: Teachers plan highly effective instruction.

- Teachers implement standards-based daily lessons, units, and long-term plans using appropriate curriculum planning documents. School leadership and teachers reported that teachers follow the district curriculum for all core academic subject areas, including Eureka for math and the district’s scope and sequence for English Language Arts (ELA). Further, teachers and school leadership noted that teachers use a lesson plan template. A review of lesson plans confirmed that standards were included, such as CCSS.ELA-LITERACY SL.8.1 (comprehension and collaboration), with the associated objective “Students will be able to explain how hysteria spread during the Salem witch trials.”

- Teachers design daily lessons that meet some learners’ unique needs. According to school leadership and teachers, modifications are included in plans for students with disabilities. Additionally, school leadership stated that special education teachers are assigned to general educators to help support students with push-in and pull-out services. Further, teachers stated that small groups are formed based on student needs. A review of lesson plans revealed that plans included explicit modifications and accommodations for students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs). For example in one plan, the following IEP accommodations were noted: “students will be assisted with questioning and formulating their ideas for the activity. Additionally with visual models for the atomic parts. Students will take the same quiz but with word bank and extra assistance. IEP students will also be allowed to retake the quiz until they pass.” However, most plans did not note differentiation or modifications for students that didn’t have an IEP. In addition, most plans reviewed did not identify or generally identified small groups. For example, in one lesson plan it was simply noted that students will work in groups or pairs under student action but no strategic grouping was noted.

- Teachers set and track goals based on students’ performance levels. According to school leadership and teachers, all teachers have goal setting conferences with students three times throughout the year based on Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data; which a review of MAP goal setting sheets confirmed. Further, teachers stated that teachers track data through MAP data trackers in hallways and data boards in individual classrooms, which include summative unit assessments, as well as in their data binders. A review of the data room expectations revealed that instructional leads should design and display grade level data boards with current MAP scores, data trackers in classrooms, growth charts for each grade, and data binders that include student’s individual goal setting sheets. Finally, school leadership stated that teachers’ Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are aligned to the MAP goals. A review of a 7th grade data meeting agenda dated September 29 confirmed communication about SLO
being based on MAP data. For example, a review of one teacher’s SLO was “increase their MAP goal performance score for operations and algebraic thinking by 3 points.”

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<th>Key action 1.2: Teachers deliver highly effective instruction.¹</th>
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- Some teachers use and communicate standards-based lesson objectives and align learning activities to the stated lesson objectives. In 61% of classrooms (n=18), teachers communicated lesson objectives to students by explaining and/or referencing them during the lesson. Additionally, in 56% of classes, learning activities and resources had a clear and intentional purpose and were aligned with lesson objectives. For example, in one class, a student read the following objective aloud “Students will be able to finish painting an image of a face in order to practice adding value in light, medium, and dark hues.” and during the lesson, students painted a portrait using only three colors (one light hue, one medium hue, and one dark hue) to show dimension and represent highlights and shadows.

- Some teachers present content in various ways and emphasize key points to make content clear. In 83% of classrooms (n=18), teachers presented students with accurate, grade-level content aligned to appropriate content standards. In most classes the objective and activities aligned to a Common Core State Standard. Additionally, in 72% of classes, teachers emphasized important points to focus learning of content. Finally, in only 39% of classes, did teachers present content in various ways to make content clear. For example, one teacher presented content through guided notes, drawings, and hands-on demonstrations. However, in 44% of classes observed, the teachers presented content in only one way such as through a whole group lecture/discussion.

- Some teachers use multiple strategies and tasks to engage all students in rigorous work. In only 33% of classrooms (n=18), did teachers scaffold and/or differentiate tasks by providing access to rigorous grade-level instruction for all students. For example, in one class the teacher modeled the activity step by step for the whole class before releasing them to work independently. However, in most classes either the teacher did not scaffold and/or differentiate or attempts did not support all students. Additionally, in only 39% of classes, did students have opportunities and time to grapple with complex texts and/or rigorous tasks. For example, in one class in which students were supposed to be using textual evidence during the class discussion, no text was provided and all evidence stated was based on recall.

- Some teachers use evidence-dependent questioning. In only 33% of classrooms (n=18), did teachers ask questions that required students to cite evidence and explain their thought processes. Additionally, in 44% of classes, teachers asked questions that were clear and scaffolded. For example, in one class, the teacher asked the following questions: “What caused this volcano to erupt? Why is a

1 Key action 1.2 evidence comes directly from classroom observations that were conducted as part of the SER. All classroom observations are twenty minute in which the observers are looking for teachers to demonstrate components of the Instructional Framework. The completed classroom visit tool can be found in appendix A.
volcano erupting dangerous to humans? What is dangerous about the lava?” However, in most classes teachers did not require students to cite evidence or only asked recall questions, and questions were either unclear or lacked scaffolding.

- Most teachers check for student understanding and provide specific academic feedback. In 56% of classrooms (n=18), teachers conducted one or more checks for understanding that yielded useful information at key points throughout the lesson. For example, teachers were observed circulating the room, asking questions, checking on individual students. Additionally, in 67% of classes, teachers gave specific academic feedback to communicate current progress and next steps to move forward. For example, in one class a teacher was observed saying “you are solving for Y, it won’t be a single digit” when a student got an incorrect answer.

- Some teachers facilitate student-to-student interaction and academic talk. In only 22% of classrooms (n=18), did teachers provide multiple or extended opportunities for student-to-student interaction. Additionally, in only 17% of classes did students engage in discussions with their peers to make meaning of content or deepen their understanding in student-to-student interactions. For example, in one class students were observed sharing and explaining their reflection responses to a question about their own academic progress. In most classes, teachers did not provide an opportunity for student-to-student interaction. Lastly, in 44% of classes, students used academic talk, and, when necessary, teachers consistently and appropriately supported students in speaking academically.

### Key action 1.3: Teachers use multiple data sources to adjust practice. Developing

- Teachers do not consistently analyze students’ progress toward goals. According to school leadership, teachers reflect and adjust three times a year by looking at specific skills from MAP data and creating an action plan. A review of reflect and adjust action plans showed that teachers reflect on the MAP data through the following questions: “What was the biggest takeaway from looking at the MAP Data yesterday? Looking at your current unit plan, do you need to make changes to the End of Unit Learning Targets? Looking at your current unit plan, do you need to make changes to the Summative Assessment Task? Looking at your current unit plan, do you need to make changes to the Unit Texts and Materials? Based on what you’ve seen from the MAP data, what are some ideas that you have for an area of focus for your Student Learning Objective (SLO)?” Some teachers reported that they use a data wise process, tiering students to address skills. Yet other teachers stated that there is a school wide expectation to use data, however no school-wide process; rather it’s based on individual teachers’ comfort level. However, completed action plans reviewed by the site visit team were only from October.

- Teachers do not consistently modify instruction in response to data. School leadership and some teachers reported that teachers adjust instruction through small groups, scaffolding, differentiation, and collaboration with the special educators. Some teachers reported re-teaching as a way in which they reinforce deficits skills. For example, teachers on one grade level stated that they have structured
time built-in, such as Monday make-up and Tuesday Tune-up. A review of an 8th grade data meeting revealed that some teachers focused on forming small groups based on data. However, teacher focus groups all noted different strategies and only some teachers were able to confirm strategies that school leadership reported.

- Teachers appropriately recommend students for some tiered interventions including opportunities for acceleration. School leadership stated that interventions used include running records, just words, and Moby max. Continuing, teachers added coach class and daily reading time (stop, drop, and read); which school leadership confirmed. School leadership and teachers added that the reading specialist works with some students individually or in targeted small groups in the middle school. Regarding acceleration opportunities, school leadership and teachers noted that the school offers some honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes, including AP English and AP Calculus, which the school schedule confirmed. Continuing, some teachers and staff stated that the school has partnerships with Coppin State University in which student can earn college credits, which a review of a dual enrollment flyer with Coppin confirmed.

**Key action 1.4: School leadership supports highly effective instruction.**

- School leadership holds and promotes a clear instructional vision of high student achievement. According to school leadership and teachers the instructional vision includes a targeted focus on the district’s instructional framework, specifically Teach 3 (rigor), Teach 5 (checks for understanding), Teach 6 (student to student interaction), and Teach 8 (positive culture). School leadership and teachers stated that the vision has been communicated through professional development and informal observations. A review of a targeted learning walk confirmed that Teach 3, 5, 6 and 8 were specifically called out as either evident or not evident with notes around each pertaining to the environment, teacher actions and student actions.

- School leadership ensures that teachers engage in the planning of the curricula through oversight of standards-based units, lessons, and pacing. School leadership and teachers stated that teachers submit lesson plans to leadership; daily for middle school and twice a week for high school. School leadership and teachers added that teachers also submit unit plans, which helps school leadership monitor pacing. School leadership and teachers further noted that teachers receive individual feedback (through email or conversations) as well as professional development based on trends observed by school leadership in their review of lesson plans. A review of lesson plan feedback confirmed that school leadership is reviewing lessons plans and posing clarifying questions to the teacher, in which the teacher is responding. For example, in one plan school leadership asked, “will students share as well”, in which the teacher responded “yes, each Friday students share aloud their response to their creative journal prompt.” Finally, school leadership and teachers reported that teachers discuss pacing in collaborative meetings, which the team lead (who is part of ILT) facilitates.
• School leadership provides formative feedback and guidance to teachers about the quality of planning, teaching, and adjustment of practice. School leadership stated that teachers are informally observed by school leadership and various members of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), as well as their peers. Teachers confirmed that leadership conducts informal observations, however the frequency varies by teacher. Further, school leadership and teachers stated that they receive both written and verbal feedback. The site visit team reviewed a variety of feedback forms such as targeted learning walks, ILT ghost walks, and teacher reflect and adjust observation forms. Specifically, in teacher reflect and adjust feedback forms the observer noted observation evidence around behavior management, classroom routines and procedures, and instructional strategies, as well as provided recommendations.

• School leadership demonstrates an understanding of data analysis and somewhat ensures the use of a complete student learning data-cycle. School leadership reported that training was provided to teachers on data analysis this year. Some teachers confirmed they received training on Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments. Further, school leadership stated that data analysis is happening during teachers’ collaborative planning meetings, where the instructional coach checks-in with teachers around their SLOs, student work, and progress monitoring data. Some teachers confirmed that they reviewed student work or were asked to bring data to collaborative meetings to discuss. However, some teachers stated that they have not had to submit data, and as stated earlier, there is no school-wide process for data analysis. The site team reviewed a “Using MAP data to inform instruction” PowerPoint presentation and a meeting agenda from October that stated: “We will design a professional development (PD) that gives as example in each content area of how MAP data can be helpful in reaching students with the following: authentic behavior challenges and academic struggles.”

Key action 1.5: Teachers establish a classroom environment in which teaching and learning can occur.  

Highly Effective

• Most teachers implement routines to maximize instructional time. In 89% of classrooms (n=18), students were only idle for very brief periods of time while waiting for the teacher. Additionally, in 72% of classes, routines and procedures ran smoothly with minimal or no promoting from teachers. For example, in one class, all materials and resources were prepared and accessible, such as a warm-up activity when students arrived, and the teacher used a timer to help with the transition from the warm-up to the next activity.

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2 Key action 1.5 evidence comes directly from classroom observations that were conducted as part of the SER. All classroom observations are twenty minute in which the observers are looking for teachers to demonstrate components of the Instructional Framework. The completed classroom visit tool can be found in appendix A.
• Teachers build a positive, learning-focused classroom culture. In 100% of classrooms (n=18), teacher interactions with students were positive and respectful. For example, all teachers were observed smiling and praised students for their participation. Additionally, in 94% of classes, student interactions with teachers were positive and respectful. Further, in 94% of classes, student-to-student interactions were positive and respectful. For example, in one class students from one group were observed helping students from another group and giving each other high fives when getting the correct answer.

• Most teachers reinforce positive behavior and redirect off-task or challenging behavior, when necessary. In 78% of classrooms observed (n=18), teachers promoted or reinforced positive behavior. For example, in one class, the teacher acknowledged that the entire class had perfect attendance for the day. Further, in 83% of classes, students were on-task and active participants in classwork and discussion. Lastly, in 94% of classes, teachers addressed behavior issues with minimal interruption to instructional time. When students were off-task, teachers were observed quickly addressing students’ behavior and getting them back on-task.
Domain 2: Talented People

Key action 2.1: The school creates and implements systems to select, develop, and retain effective teachers and staff whose skills and beliefs represent the diverse needs of all students.

- School leadership has created and implemented an organizational and staffing structure that meets the diverse needs of all students. According to school leadership the school added an assistant principal this year, and has a reading specialist, and six climate and culture staff members (who support behavior management using restorative practices). School leadership and teachers added that resource classes include visual art, African drum, dance, drama, vocals, and martial arts. Further, school leadership, teachers, and staff noted that the school has a social worker, school psychologist, and guidance counselor. Finally, review of the staff roster confirmed that resource and climate staff.

- School leadership leverages a pipeline for staff recruitment and uses multiple measures and includes stakeholders in the assessment of candidates. School leadership and teachers stated that candidates are recruited through hiring fairs and word of mouth. School leadership added that prospective candidates participate in an in-person interview with a panel of administrators and teachers as well as a separate interview with the operator (Baltimore Teachers Network), which teachers confirmed. Review of interview questions revealed that they included the following: “ConneXions Mission is to cultivate academic and artistic excellence, cultural identity and community awareness in all students. If you were observed teaching, what might you be doing to demonstrate your belief in this Mission Statement? How does your personal background align with this commitment of our school? How would you work to deepen the integration between the arts and academics?”

- School leadership includes staff members and other stakeholders in the development and retention of effective teachers and staff. School leadership and teachers reported that teachers lead professional development sessions, including modeling a lesson and watching a video of best teaching practices. Further, school leadership reported that teachers conduct peer observations, which teachers confirmed. In addition, school leadership and teachers stated that some teachers went to California and Boston to observe other schools. Finally, regarding retention, school leadership stated they express their appreciation through recognitions and celebrations of teachers. Teachers confirmed being celebrated through the hospitality committee events and social outings, which a review of a hospitality committee meeting agenda confirmed. In addition teachers stated that they feel leadership is very approachable, teachers’ voices are heard and recognized, and there are opportunities for leadership.
School leadership has created mentoring and other induction programs, when applicable, to support the development of all new teachers and staff and monitors the program’s effectiveness. School leadership stated that a specific individual has been designated as the new teacher mentor and meets with early career teacher (less than three years teaching experience) weekly. A review of the learning zone (an online mentoring log) confirmed that the mentor is meeting with three mentees on a regular basis. In addition, a review of informal observations conducted by the mentor revealed that teachers are receiving support around content, instructional strategies, and alignment with the curriculum. Finally, teachers stated that all teachers were invited to a retreat over the summer in which there was a separate session for teachers new to the school. A review of the retreat agenda confirmed a breakout session for new teachers.

Key action 2.2: The school has created and implemented systems to evaluate teachers and staff against individual and school-wide goals, provide interventions to those who are not meeting expectations, and remove those who do not make reasonable improvement.

- School leadership makes full use of the evaluation system to develop faculty and staff capacity. According to school leadership and teachers, the school follows the district’s teacher evaluation process, which includes a pre-observation conference, the formal observation, and a post-observation conference. Teachers confirmed the above process and stated they received suggestions for improvement in the post-observation conference. A review of formal observations confirmed that feedback included areas of improvement and next steps. For example, one formal observation feedback stated, “small group instruction would stop a lot of chatter, use chart paper when modeling for students, be sure to circulate the room often throughout the lesson.”

- School leadership provides timely support and interventions to struggling teachers and staff as indicated by data and/or informal or formal observations and holds them accountable for performance. School leadership and teachers reported that struggling teachers are identified through informal and formal observations. School leadership added that supports provided to teachers include weekly PD, videos of teaching best practices, peer observations, and collaboration and oversight on lesson planning. Teachers confirmed the above support provided by the instructional lead or ILT members. Although school leadership stated that no teachers were currently on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), a few teachers are on action plans (a precursor to a PIP). However, no action plans were provided for review. A review of a meeting agenda minutes from an October 10th meeting, confirmed the following support: “[school leadership designee] will work one-on-one with the other teachers in need of support using the exemplar teachers [teacher names], as models.”
School leadership engages faculty in a school-wide professional development plan based on identified needs and in alignment with the school’s instructional vision. School leadership and teachers reported that every Wednesday is dedicated as a half-day PD day. Further, school leadership stated that they have been focusing on areas of growth identified through the last SER, which took place during school year 2014-15. A review of the middle school PD plan confirmed that starting in January the focus of some PD days was “SER reflect and adjust based on previous report and the five-year plan”. In addition, school leadership and some teachers stated that other topics included routines and procedures, specific areas from the instructional framework (Teach 3, 5, 6, and 8), and data analysis of MAP assessment. Teachers added that other one-off topics include trauma-informed care (which a review of an agenda confirmed), restorative practice, and arts integration. A review of the high school professional development plan confirmed topics such as restorative practice, arts integration, and the instructional toolkit (Teach 3, 5, 6, and 8).
Domain 3: Vision and Engagement

Key action 3.1: The school provides a safe and supportive learning environment for students, families, teachers, and staff.

- The school community shares an understanding of, and commitment to, the school mission, vision, and values, including a clear understanding of strategic goals and initiatives. According to school leadership, students, and teachers the mission of the school is to cultivate cultural, academic, and artistic awareness. School leadership and teachers further indicated that the vision has a community focus – as evidenced by student performances within the community. Parents and students confirmed the outreach to the community as well as student performances. A review of the school’s mission on the school’s website states: “ConneXions mission is to cultivate academic and artistic excellence, cultural identity, and community awareness in ALL students.”

- Students, staff, and families feel physically and emotionally safe at the school. Regarding physical safety, school leadership, teachers, parents, and students all reported feeling safe, due to adult presence in the hallways, a visitor system in the office, teachers having keys for entrance of doors and hallways, and safety drills (fire, lock down, active shooter, etc.). Staff and some students added that the school has a school police officer. Regarding emotional safety, school leadership stated that because the school is a focused on the arts it is a safe space for self-expression. Additionally, school leadership indicated that restorative practice is part of how the school de-escalates and resolves issues between students. Continuing, teachers, parents, and students noted that the adults have good relationships with students, and students are able to speak with someone about issues or concerns. Finally, teachers stated that teacher voice and the ability to provide feedback is promoted and encouraged.

- School leadership establishes structures for the acknowledgement and celebration of student, faculty, and staff success. School leadership, teachers, parents, and students stated that students participate in school-wide celebrations, such as MAPs award growth parties, honor roll, and Fresh Friday. A review of a Fresh Friday flyer revealed that each teacher selects one high school student to receive this award and students selected should have demonstrated leadership, focus, and dedication. Further, teachers noted that students perform at community events and competitions. A review of an email to staff confirmed that a group of 6th through 12th grade vocal students attended the Festival Disney competition from April 25 to May 2. Teachers, students, and parents also stated that students participate in field trips. Regarding staff celebration, school leadership and teachers stated that they receive shout outs during morning huddles, and for teacher appreciation week, staff received food. Additionally, school leadership and teachers reported that they receive “caught doing something good” notes from leadership and their peers. Further, school leadership stated that a teacher is in charge of coordinating monthly events dedicated to boosting staff morale.
The school develops systems that proactively attend to individual students’ social and emotional needs. According to school leadership, teachers, students, staff, and community partners the school has a partnership with Keep Encouraging Youth to Succeed (KEYS) that provides mentoring and youth development. School leadership, teachers, and students further indicated that the school psychologist and social worker conduct groups such as grief counseling and provide additional support to students who are homeless. Parents also confirmed the social worker and stated that students have strong relationships with adults in the building, some acting as a father figure. Finally, school leadership, teachers, staff, and students all stated that restorative practice is used to de-escalate and resolve conflicts.

Key action 3.2: The school cultivates and sustains open communication and decision-making opportunities with families about school events, policies, and the academic and social development of their children.

The school uses multiple strategies and vehicles to communicate information about school progress, policies, events, and the academic and social development of students to families and the community. School leadership and teachers stated that the school uses a variety of communication methods, including Parent Link (an automated call system), flyers, phone calls, and remind app to communicate with parents. Parents and students confirmed the use of phone calls, emails, texts, as well as in-person conversations. The site visit team reviewed the Parent Link call log, flyers, and letters to confirm these forms of communication.

The school establishes regular structures for two-way communication, which facilitate opportunities for families and the community to participate in or provide feedback on school-wide decisions. According to school leadership, teachers, staff, and parents the school has a parent teacher organization (PTO), which meets every two weeks. School leadership added that their goal is to leverage parent participation through every grade level. Further, parents stated that topics discussed include how to stay connected, keeping abreast of student concerns and issues, and increasing parental involvement. A review of a PTO meeting agenda from December 4, 2017 revealed meeting objectives as: discuss governance board, outline parent volunteers program, discuss parent room, and update student/parent contacts. School leadership further indicated that a parent is on the charter’s board and the board meetings are open to the public; which parents confirmed. Students were unaware of any two-way communication structures.
• School leadership establishes multiple structures for frequent communication with teachers and staff members regarding policies, progress, and school culture. According to school leadership and teachers, every morning before the school day begins, school leadership conducts middle and high school morning staff huddles to share important information for the day, such as last-minute changes to the schedule or staff, and shout outs. Teachers added that they receive emails, phone calls, texts, and can speak with school leadership in person. Continuing, school leadership, also noted that team leads serve on the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and are expected to disseminate information out to teachers.

Key action 3.3: The culture of the school reflects and embraces student, staff, and community diversity. Effective

• School leadership, teachers, and staff build strong relationships with families and community stakeholders from diverse backgrounds. According to school leadership, part of the school’s vision is around building relationships by engaging partners and families. School leadership added that relationships with families and the community are developed by attending the Mondawmin community association meetings, providing teachers and administrations cell phone numbers to families, and students performances. Teachers, parents, and students confirmed that student performances (musicals, theatre, and art galleries) help bring families and community members to the school, which a review of a playbill confirmed that Spell #7 was performed on December 9th. Teachers, staff, students, and parents also stated that they held an earth day celebration which included a community clean-up and fair, which a review of a letter to community partners confirmed.

• The school’s curricula, resources and programs consider cultural, socioeconomic, and some linguistic diversity. According to school leadership and teachers the curriculum exposes students to other cultures. For example, school leadership stated that students have read text such as The Other Wes Moore and The Diary of a Part-Time Indian. Continuing, school leadership, teachers, and students confirmed that students are also exposed to diversity through the arts, such as dance, theatre, martial art, and West African drumming classes. In addition, school leadership, teacher, parents, and students stated that they have attended field trips to Orchard Street Church (a stop on the Underground Railroad), a Buddhist temple, Philadelphia art museum, and colleges. A review of an email confirmed the field trip to Kadampa Meditation Center. Continuing, regarding socioeconomic diversity, school leadership, teachers, students, and parents noted that the school has a food pantry, uniform bank, and washer and dryer. The previous stakeholders also reported that the school social worker and phycologist help identify resources for students who are homeless, a review of a resource guide confirmed such resources as Loving Arms and Weinberg Housing and Resources Center. School leadership, teachers, and some students also stated that KEYS helped remodel a home for a family in need. Finally regarding linguistic diversity, school leadership, parents, and teachers noted that Spanish I and II are offered for the high school grades, however, not middle school.
The school maintains a positive school culture and climate. According to school leadership and teachers, the school has a positive culture because of its focus on the arts which excites and empowers students to learn. Additionally, school leadership, teachers, parents, and students stated that relationships are emphasized at the school. Continuing, students stated that they feel supported by staff; parents stated that the school “feels like a family”. Members of the site visit team observed student work displayed in the hallways and murals throughout the 2nd floor. However, the site visit team also observed some loud transitions and horseplay in the halls.
## Domain 4: Strategic Leadership

### Key action 4.1: The school establishes growth goals that guide strategic planning, teaching, and adjusting of practice to meet student needs.  

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- School leadership and teachers establish goals for the improvement of student learning that are measurable and aligned to student need and school improvement. According to school leadership and the School Performance Plan (SPP) SY 16-17 reflection, the school has the following goals:  
  1. By June 2018, ConneXions will increase the reading proficiency of students in grades 6-12 from 21.5% to 45% on MAP assessments.  
  2. By June 2018, ConneXions will increase the math proficiency of students in grades 6-12 from 10.5% to 30% on MAP assessments.  
  3. By June 2017, our extended learning program participation will increase from an average 22 students per day to 75 or more per day. (Continued goal from SY16-17)  
  4. By June 2017, our average combined SAT scores in reading, math, and writing will increase from 1048 to 1100. (Continued goal from SY16-17).  

School leadership noted that goals were based on data from the last school year and were created by school leadership and the operator, then shared with the team leads. When asked about the school-wide goals, most teachers could reference the MAP goal, but none could confirm all goals or related measures.

- School leadership ensures the alignment of some school goals, action plans, and key priorities. School leadership stated that regarding academic goals, strategies included the staffing of a reading specialist, the instructional coaches pushing out the vision, and professional development. Further, school leadership stated that regarding the extended learning goal, strategies included automatic calls home and conversations with students who need the extra support. Additionally, school leadership stated that regarding the SAT goal, strategies included the staffing of the college and career readiness coordinator, SAT test prep in the reading block, providing multiple opportunities for students to take the test and becoming a SAT test site. Some teachers reported the following strategies: professional development, student conferences about goals, and the staffing of the reading specialist. However, teachers’ responses were not consistent around any of the strategies and no teachers were able to speak to the strategies related to the extended learning or SAT goals. A review of the strategies in the SPP revealed that not all strategies aligned to responses from leadership or teachers. For example, the strategies listed in the SPP for the academic goals stated using data to support student growth, creating informal checks for understanding, spiral reviews, and progress monitoring. For the extended learning goal, SPP strategies focused on building relationships and creating flexible schedule to support student need. Finally, the SAT goals strategies in the SPP focused on SAT test prep and becoming an SAT test site.
• School leadership and staff participate in analysis of some school-wide data and revisit and adjust action plans as needed. According to school leadership and most teachers, the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meets weekly to analyzing school-wide data, such as MAPs, PARCC, Lexile reading levels, attendance, and suspension. However, some teachers stated that data is reviewed on an individual level but not school-wide. School leadership added that the intervention strategy was adjusted mid-year, providing more support and guidance to teachers based on data. A review of ILT meeting agendas only showed observation data being discussed, but no academic or climate data. For example, a February 28, 2018 ILT meeting agenda noted an activity to review learning walk data/findings.

• Budget distributions and resource allocations support teaching and learning. Regarding staffing, although school leadership, students, and teachers reported sufficient staffing and no current vacancies, some parents reported needing additional support staff such as another social worker and reading specialist. Additionally, when probed regarding materials and supplies, school leadership, teachers, parents, and students stated that the school has sufficient materials, such as texts and paper. Regarding technology, school leadership stated that the school purchased 200 chrome books last year and they are working towards a 1:1 ratio for students and technology. Parents and students confirmed that they have sufficient technology. In addition, most teachers reported having enough technology stating that they have Elmo, document cameras, and projectors as well as laptop carts and a computer lab. However, a few teachers stated that they do not always have access to computers because they are often in use for testing. Everyone stated that the connectivity to the wireless network is unreliable, and school leadership reported that they are aware and are looking into buying hot spots for next year.

• School leadership leverages teacher and staff talent, expertise, and effectiveness by delegating essential responsibilities and decisions to appropriate individuals. School leadership and teachers reported that teachers serve in various capacities such as team leads, ILT members, facilitate professional development and participate on committees. A review of a committee list confirmed that teachers serve on the following committees: ILT, school improvement team, HS data tea, MS data team, PBIS team, testing team, climate/culture team, stop, drop, and read committee, and the student support team. Continuing, teachers and parents noted that teachers plan events and lead after school clubs, such as robotics, bike, martial arts, dance, basketball, volleyball, drill, comic book, and drone.
School leadership consistently provides and focuses common staff time on instructional practices and development in support of student achievement. School leadership stated that teachers have planning time each day with their grade level (the only exception is 10th-12th grades are paired by grade or content). In addition, school leadership and teachers reported that every Wednesday is a half day, and after students are dismissed, teachers have content/department level meetings. Teachers added that meetings are led by team leads, who create agendas, and topics may include data and student concerns. A review of 7th grade collaborative planning meeting agendas confirmed that teachers discuss individual student needs and review student data.

The school collaborates with families and community partners to garner resources to meet the needs of students and the school. According to school leadership, teachers, parents, and students the school has a few faithful parent volunteers who monitor the hallways, distribute late passes, assist with the food pantry, and help in the office. The site visit team observed the parent volunteers who monitored the hallway and reviewed the volunteer logs. Additionally, school leadership, teachers, parents, and students reported that Keep Encouraging Youth to Succeed (KEYS) provides mentoring and youth development; which a flyer confirmed. In addition, school leadership stated other partnerships and program include Play on Purpose (P.O.P)- youth development through athletics Young Scholars in Service (YSIS)- afterschool program, Coppin State University (dual enrollment), Sage Wellness, and Baltimore Urban Debate League (debate club); all confirmed by flyers.

Key action 4.3: The school’s board of trustees (or operator) provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school. (For schools that are overseen by an autonomous board of trustees or operator).

The governing board and operator maintain essential knowledge of the school and provide oversight of the academic program. According to school leadership, the board, and operator the principal attends the monthly board meetings and provides a principal report which includes updates around instruction, professional development, budget, staffing, and events. In addition, school leadership, the board, and operator stated that board members are provided a dashboard that includes MAP, PARCC, attendance, and art performances. A review of board meetings agendas confirm that principals of both Baltimore Teacher Network (BTN) schools provide an update (school reports) which includes the dashboard. However the site visit team did not review any actual dashboards, and board meeting agendas only confirmed general school-wide data or dashboard but did not specify what data was included. In addition, the operator and board stated that the operator meets with the principal individually weekly and both principals bi-weekly. Further, the operator stated that the operator attends weekly professional development sessions and staff meetings, and there is an open-door policy for teachers and staff to come to the operator with any concerns.
- The governing board and operator provide financial oversight by monitoring the school’s financial records and ensuring that the school remains fiscally viable. According to the board and operator the board has a finance committee (which includes the board Treasurer and the BTN accountant) who develops the budget and presents to the full board for approval. Further, the operator and school leadership stated they seek input from the PTO president and staff before presenting the proposed budget to the finance committee. The operator and board stated that the accountant prepares monthly expenditures reports for the board so that the board can monitor spending; which a review of a budget vs actual statement confirmed. Finally, school leadership added that purchases over $10,000 must have board approval. Review of an independent auditor’s report confirmed that the financial statements presented fairly in all material aspects.

- The governing board and operator maintain effective governance practices to ensure organizational viability, including the systematic selection and oversight of the school leader. According to school leadership, the board and operator, the board (which oversees two schools) consists of eleven board members, in addition both principals are advisory (non-voting) members. Continuing, school leadership, the board and operator stated that the officers consist of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The board and operator added that the board includes sub-committees, such as Executive, Finance, Personnel, and School Governance. A review of the by-laws confirmed the aforementioned officer positions and sub-committees. According to the board and operator, the selection process for the school leader included a selection committee composed of board and staff members who reviewed resumes, identified candidates, and held interviews and narrowed it down to three final candidates. Continuing, the board and operator stated that stakeholders (parents, students, and teachers) were invited to ask candidates questions directly. After this process, the board added, a recommendation from the board and executive director results in the hiring of a candidate. Further, the board indicated that they follow the district’s process to evaluate the school leader in conjunction with the executive director, which school leadership confirmed. The board and operator noted that the executive director created a three-year work plan with benchmarks, when he was hired, in which he is evaluated against. However, the site visit team did not review any documentation around the hiring or evaluation of the school leaders or Executive Director.
### Performance Level Rubric

The SER team will use the following guidance to select a performance level for each key action. Note that the quality standard for each performance level is based upon: the extent to which the SER team finds multiple types\(^3\) and multiple sources\(^4\) of evidence AND the extent to which the SER team finds evidence of high levels of adoption and/or implementation of a practice or system. The SER team will also reflect on the Instructional Framework and School Leadership Framework in their analysis prior to assigning a rating for each key action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Performance Level</th>
<th>Quality Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not Effective</td>
<td>Evidence indicates that the key action is not a practice or system that has been adopted and/or implemented at the school, or the level of adoption/implementation does not improve the school’s effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Evidence indicates that the key action (including some indicators) is a practice or system that is emerging at the school, but that it has not yet been implemented at a level that has begun to improve the school’s effectiveness, OR that the impact of the key action on the effectiveness of the school cannot yet be fully determined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>Evidence indicates that the key action (including most indicators) is a practice or system that has been adopted at the school, and is implemented at a level that is improving the school’s effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Highly Effective</td>
<td>Evidence indicates that the key action (including all indicators) is a practice or system that has been fully adopted at the school, and is implemented at a level that has had a strong, significant or sustainable impact on the school’s effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^3\) “Multiple types of evidence” is defined as evidence collected from two or more of the following: document review, stakeholder focus groups; and classroom observations.

\(^4\) “Multiple sources of evidence” is defined as evidence collected from three or more stakeholder focus groups; two or more documents; and/or evidence that a descriptor was documented in 75% or more of lessons observed at the time of the visit.
Appendix A: Classroom Observation Data

The classroom visit tool is aligned to Baltimore City Schools Instructional Framework. During each classroom visit, the observer collects evidence based on his/her observations and then determines whether the indicator was “evident”, “partially evident” or “not evident” for each of the 22 indicators. Below is the summary of the 18 classroom observations that were conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACH 1: Communicate Standards-Based Lesson Objectives</th>
<th>Evident</th>
<th>Partially Evident</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication of objective</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning activities and resources align with lesson objective</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACH 2: Present Content Clearly</th>
<th>Evident</th>
<th>Partially Evident</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accurate, grade-level content</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate presentation of content</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis of Key Points</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACH 3: Use Strategies and Tasks To Engage All Students In Rigorous Work</th>
<th>Evident</th>
<th>Partially Evident</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolded and/or Differentiated Tasks</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities To Engage With Complex Texts and Tasks</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACH 4: Use Evidence-Dependent Questioning</th>
<th>Evident</th>
<th>Partially Evident</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions Requiring Justification</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear And Scaffolded Questions</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACH 5: Check For Understanding and Provide Specific, Academic Feedback</th>
<th>Evident</th>
<th>Partially Evident</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informative Checks for Understanding</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific, Academic Feedback</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACH 6: Facilitate Student-To-Student Interactions and Academic Talk</th>
<th>Evident</th>
<th>Partially Evident</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for student-to-student interaction</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-based discussions</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student academic talk</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACH 7: Implement Routines To Maximize Instructional Time</td>
<td>Evident</td>
<td>Partially Evident</td>
<td>Not Evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximized instructional time</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smooth routines and procedures</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACH 8: Build A Positive, Learning-Focused Classroom Culture</th>
<th>Evident</th>
<th>Partially Evident</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-to-student interactions</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-to-teacher interactions</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-to-Student interactions</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACH 9: Reinforce Positive Behavior, Redirect Off-Task Behavior, and De-escalate Challenging Behavior</th>
<th>Evident</th>
<th>Partially Evident</th>
<th>Not Evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinforce positive behavior</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-task behavior</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time impact of redirection/discipline or off-task behavior</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B: School Report Comments

### Domain 1: Highly Effective Instruction
None

### Domain 2: Talented People
None

### Domain 3: Vision and Engagement
None

### Domain 4: Strategic Leadership
None
Appendix C: SER Team Members

The SER visit to the ConneXions: A Community Based Arts School was conducted on May 8-10, 2018 by a team of representatives from Baltimore City Public Schools.

**Brianna Kaufman** is the Manager for the School Effectiveness Reviews in the Office of Achievement and Accountability in Baltimore City Public Schools. Brianna began her career as an elementary art teacher in Bryan, TX. After obtaining her Master’s degree, she interned and worked at a number of art museums in the education department including the: Dallas Museum of Art, The National Gallery of Art in DC, and the Walters Art Museum. In 2008, Brianna made the shift from art education to general education reform as a Program Manager at the Fund for Educational Excellence. There she managed a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that focused on College and Career Readiness. Prior to joining OAA, Brianna worked as the College and Career Readiness Education Specialist for Baltimore City Public Schools. Brianna holds a Bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Texas Lutheran University, a Master’s degree in Art Education from University of North Texas, and a Master’s of Business Administration from Loyola University in Maryland.

**Mona Khajawi** is a Program Evaluator II in the Office of Achievement and Accountability in Baltimore City Public Schools. She has had a variety of experience in the field of education, including teaching, program management and evaluation. Most recently, she worked in the capacity of Evaluation Specialist with City Year in Washington, D.C., assessing the quality of educational programming implemented by 140 AmeriCorps members in eleven schools throughout the district. She initially gained exposure to evaluation while interning with the Academy for Educational Development, where she assisted in conducting reviews of a subset of the Gates-funded small schools in New York City. Previously, she also taught English in a rural high school in Ukraine, and served as an Assistant Program Coordinator of the AmeriCorps program at the Latin American Youth Center in Washington, D.C. Mona holds a Bachelor’s degree in English Literature from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a Master’s degree in Education Policy from Teachers College, Columbia University.

**Deonne Medley** is a Director of Teacher Support and Development in the Office of Organizational Development within Human Capital.

**Paul Larcom** is an administrator at The Commodore John Rodgers School. Prior to working at Commodore, Mr. Larcom taught elementary and middle school Language Arts, and then served as an Instructional Coach at Lakeland Elementary / Middle. Mr. Larcom has also worked for Teach For America in a variety of capacities, helping train new teachers from around the country. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration and a Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of South Florida. He also holds a School Principal certification with Administration I & II endorsements.