



# Science, Technology, Engineering Preparatory Academy

*MN Charter School District 4200*

*ANNUAL REPORT*

*FY 2016*

In Operation since Fall 2011

(Grades 6-12)

Dakota County, Minnesota

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## **STEP Academy Introduction**

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

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

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

### **STEP Academy Contact Information**

STEP Academy is located at 835 5th Street East, St Paul, MN 55106. This is a new address as of summer 2016; during 2015-16 STEP Academy remained at its original location in Inver Grove Heights.

Main contact person is Mustafa Ibrahim, Executive Director (phone: 651 289-6120; email Mustafa@stepacademy.com)

### STEP Academy’s Mission and Vision

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

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

STEP Academy’s authorizer is Innovative Quality Schools (contact: Milo Cutter – [mcutter@iqsmn.org](mailto:mcutter@iqsmn.org); phone 651-234-0900). The 2015-16 school year was the second year of a five-year charter contract.

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

### STEP Academy Enrollment and Student Attrition

STEP ACADEMY’S ENROLLMENT <sup>1</sup> BY GRADE, 2013-2016									
School Year	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL	Attrition <sup>2</sup>
2013-14	34	38	35	30	14	14	5	170	+12%
2014-15	33	51	52	52	40	20	16	264	+55%
2015-16	26	30	49	35	43	31	18	232	-12%
2016-17 (Projected)	30	30	35	46	40	36	30	247 <sup>3</sup>	+6%

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

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

<sup>3</sup> This figure will be exceeded; enrollment as of 9/26/16 was 275.

The school concluded the year with Average Daily Membership of 211.9, down slightly from the 2014-15 school year when final ADM was 237.

## Governance and Management

The table below shows all the members of STEP Academy’s governing board during 2015-16. Parent member Abdullahi Ahmed, who served as Board Chair, resigned from the STEP Academy Board of Directors effective at the September 2015, and the position of Chair was taken over by Sandra Olmsted. A new parent member, Mustafa Hurre, was added to the Board at the March 2016 meeting. With sadness we note that teacher member Amena Abdullah passed away during the summer of 2016. A new teacher member was added to the Board in the fall.

<b>Name: Last, First</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Date Ap- pointed</b>	<b>Term Expi- ration</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Abdullah, Amena	Teacher / Director, File Folder #447116	7/1/14	6/30/17	651-332-6369
AbouAiad, Tamany	Teacher / Secretary, File Folder #447125	7/1/14	6/30/17	651-289-6132; <a href="mailto:tamany22@yahoo.com">tamany22@yahoo.com</a>
Ahmed, Abdullahi	Parent / Chair	7/1/14	9/16/15 (re- signed)	952-393-7939
Haji Aden, Mo- hamed	Community / Vice Chair	7/1/14	6/30/16	612 804-6856; <a href="mailto:slow02@yahoo.com">slow02@yahoo.com</a>
Hassan, Abdirah- man	Community / Direc- tor	7/1/14	6/30/16	612-384-6002; <a href="mailto:guled11@gmail.com">guled11@gmail.com</a>
Hurre, Mustafa	Parent / Director	3/15/16	6/30/17	952-288-0012; <a href="mailto:mhurre@stepacademymn.com">mhurre@stepacademymn.com</a>
Olmsted, Sandra	Community / Chair	7/1/14	6/30/17	612-330-1079; <a href="mailto:olmsteds@augsborg.edu">olmsteds@augsborg.edu</a>
Yassin, Khadar	Community / Treas- urer	7/1/14	6/30/16	612-281-073; <a href="mailto:khadar@stepacademymn.com">khadar@stepacademymn.com</a>

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

## Staffing

### STEP Academy Teaching Staff 2015-2016

Teacher	File folder #	Assignment	Left during 15/16?	Not returning 16/17?
Abdullah, Amena	447116	Arabic		X
Abou-Aiad, Tamany	447125	Math		
Alford, Cory	482110	Language Arts, Electives		X
Begum, Rejia	415343	Math		
Borghol, Marwa	446832	Arabic		
Benz, Diane	369051	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade		
Chowdhury, Zinat	432535	Science		
Elharawy, Mona	416352	Building Sub		
Hickman, Blake	446461	Phy. Ed.		X
Kenutis, Matthew	483419	Dean of Students		
Nelsen, Wayne	343848	ELL		
Ritchart, John	415920	Science		
Roddy, Lisa	332484	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade		
Welsh, Nicholas	450616	Social Studies		

### STEP Academy 2015-2016 School Management and Faculty Information

Name	File Folder number	Assignment	Years employed	Left during 15/16?	Not returning 16/17?
Mustafa Ibrahim		Executive Director	4		
Mohamed Abdu-rahman		Assistant Director	5		
Dawn Madland	346539	Academic Dean	3		X

STEP Academy is led by a Leadership Team consisting of the Executive Director, Assistant Director, and Academic Dean. STEP Academy's management team as a whole, shown in the table above, was consistent throughout the 2015-16 school year, though Dawn Madland decided to leave the Twin Cities area after the 2015-16 school year and did not return for the new school year. Dawn was replaced as Academic Dean by Traci Moore during the summer of 2016.

### Director's Professional Development Plan

STEP Academy's director, Mustafa Ibrahim, is not a licensed school administrator, though he is enrolled in the University of Minnesota's administrative licensure program for K-12 principals. Mr. Ibrahim's professional development activities during 2015-16 included the following:

- National Charter Schools Conference. Nashville, TN June 26-29, 2016
- Love and Logic Parent and Administration Training. Breckenridge, Co. June 20-22, 2016
- AVID District Director's Leadership Training (ADL 1). Madison, WI October 21-23, 2015

- AVID District Director's Leadership Training (ADL 2). Kansas City, MO February 24-26, 2016
- IQS School Leadership Conference for School Directors and Board Chairs on Wednesday, November 4, 2015
- IQS Spring School Leadership Conference for School Directors and School Board Chairs. Spring School Leadership Conference. May 3, 2016
- IQS Charter School Board Training for SY 2016-2017. July 25, 2016.

## Finances

STEP Academy relocated for 2016-17 to a previous parochial school building at 835 E. 6th St., St. Paul, Minnesota. This move allowed the school to expand our school without the need for build-out. The school entered a ten year lease with the building owners to occupy the 53,382 square feet building from the landlord. The acquisition of this new space provides STEP Academy with the space for more classrooms, science labs, media center, and elementary recess space.

STEP Academy is in a strong position financially, having steadily built a positive fund balance over its first four years of operation. The table below summarizes the school's finances over the past three fiscal years. There was a small loss during Fiscal 2016, totaling \$58,873, due largely to additional lease cost with the move to the new building. STEP Academy was unable to break the lease for its former facility, and is paying two leases for the first three-quarters of Fiscal 2017. However, the Fund Balance is projected to continue increasing for the K-12 school as soon as STEP is able to again pay for only one building.

<b>STEP Academy Financial Summary, 2014-2016</b>				
	<b>Total Rev.</b>	<b>Total Exp.</b>	<b>Ending F.B.</b>	<b>F.B. - % of Exp.</b>
FY 2014	\$2,255,199	\$ 2,186,780	\$580,570	26.5%
FY 2015	\$2,855,960	\$2,510,436	\$926,094	36.9%
FY 2016	\$2,986,618	\$3,045,491	\$867,221	28.5%

## Academic Performance

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

A. General Provisions:

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

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

B. Academic Performance:

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

These requirements for graduation are being addressed. Preparing students for college, including giving them opportunities to earn college credits before completing high school, is a key innovation which is in place at STEP Academy. STEP is building relationships with postsecondary institutions and has put in place programming to support students enrolling in Post-secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) Fifteen students enrolled in PSEO during 2014-15 and were able to earn PSEO credits. This figure grew to twenty-two students in 2015-16: eleven juniors and eleven seniors, who earned college credits from five different colleges.



2) Attendance: % of all students attending 90%

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

Review of the past two years' attendance data showed:

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

3) Academic performance (Cross-cohorts)

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

Proportion of students proficient in all three areas increased from spring 2015 to spring 2016, but remained below targets in two of the three subjects.

C. Individualized Student Performance (Same Cohorts)

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

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

These results are based on MCA growth in Reading and Mathematics for students who take the test two consecutive years at the school. MCA Growth results from the past two school years show that STEP Academy has maintained a positive Growth z-score the past two years: on average students who remain enrolled over two years improve more than the statewide average on MCA's in Reading and Math tests.

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

2) Students making one or more years of progress as measured by MAP

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

Analysis of the past two years of MAP test results, dividing students based on whether they had a previous-year score and if so, whether they were proficient the previous spring (defined as scoring at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile), showed the following, which is summarized in the above table:

2014-15:

- Math total: 134/189 met / exceeded projected growth (71%). There were previous-spring scores for 110 / 189; of these 110, 59 were proficient the previous spring, 51 not.
- Of the 59 who were proficient the previous spring, 47 met or exceeded growth targets
- Of the 51 who were not proficient the previous spring, 33 met or exceeded growth targets
- Reading total: 127 / 192 met / exceeded projected growth (66%). There were previous-spring scores for 111 / 192; of these 111, 49 were proficient the previous spring, 62 not.
- Of the 49 who were proficient the previous spring, 28 met or exceeded growth targets
- Of the 62 who were not proficient the previous spring, 37 met or exceeded growth targets

2015-16:

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

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

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

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

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

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

These results show STEP Academy easily out-performing the comparison schools' average in terms of proportion of students proficient in reading and math, for both of the past two school years.

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

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

E. Multiple Measurement Rating (MMR)

The below tables show the proportion of possible points earned by STEP Academy and its comparison schools on the state’s Multiple Measurement Ratings, in Growth and in Achievement Gap Reduction (not limited to grades 6-8).

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

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

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

#### F. World Language Acquisition

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

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

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

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

Student surveys were not carried out during 2015-16, but will be addressed in 2016-17.

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

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

In the fall/winter of 2016, STEP Academy administration reviewed available data on last year's graduates and realized that this information is very limited. Some of the school's 2016 grads are out of country – for instance, school staff are aware of one student who has moved to Canada and others are in different states, whereas several are at local community colleges or have lost touch with STEP Academy.

#### I. Innovation

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

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

## Innovative Practices and Implementation

Innovative practices being implemented at STEP Academy include:

- With an extended day of 7 hours, STEP Academy offers students an accelerated and integrated remediation approach that is intended to move them to proficient and advanced levels within core academic subjects. A range of social supports that reflects the social development needs of urban students are integrated into the educational experience.
- Through partnerships with business, social, civic, and cultural organizations, STEP Academy extends urban students' educational experiences into the broader community. Dedicated to the success of all students, the school's professional learning community supports creative instructional methodologies that respond to students' specific learning styles. STEP Academy harnesses cutting edge technology to develop all students' skills proficiency, encourage innovative teaching and learning, and create robust educational support systems.
- STEP Academy continues to support student learning during the summer months by sponsoring an at-home summer reading program for all students, and by providing the Grand Rapids Academic Summer Program (GRASP) for middle school students. The summer reading program was created by STEP's reading teachers, and asks students to track what they read, and to report back on this in the fall, when there will be prizes offered for summer readers. GRASP is a nine-week correspondence program designed to help students maintain reading and math skills while on summer break.
- Preparing students for college, including giving them opportunities to earn college credits before completing high school, is a key innovation being put in place at STEP Academy. As a college-prep program, STEP Academy supports students to this end through the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program, World's Best Workforce Plan, and supports in place to help students enroll in college courses via Post-Secondary Enrollment Options. STEP is building relationships with postsecondary institutions and putting in place programming to support students enrolling in PSEO. A total of 22 students were enrolled in PSEO during 2015-16, 11 Juniors and 11 Seniors, all of whom earned college as well as high school credits from their PSEO courses. Altogether, these students earned a total of 557 college credits.
- STEP Academy provides Arabic language instruction for all grades, a world language that is in increas-

ing demand nationally.

- STEP Academy employs a number of strategies to engage parents and help them understand how to help their students succeed in the American school system. The school offers a new family orientation night at the beginning of the school year, and two Family Fun Nights during the year. At the February 2016 family night, STEP Academy invited a student advocate from the PACER center who spoke about special education services, and a speaker from the state Office of Higher Education who addressed the process of applying for college including financial aid, and how parents can assist their students. Planning for transitions from middle to high school was also addressed. The St. Paul-based Network for the Development of Children of African Descent has also provided training for parents at STEP Academy, on how to support their children to succeed in school.
- Finally, STEP Academy’s innovative practices are demonstrated through the strategies it uses to address four of the additional purposes of charter schools specified in the Minnesota Charter Law:
  - *Increase learning opportunities for pupils:* STEP Academy does this by providing a STEM-focused, college preparatory program in a small learning community, creating a unique setting that is available for students who may not thrive in traditional high schools or otherwise be able to access this type of program.
  - *Use different and innovative teaching methods:* Innovative teaching methods in place at STEP Academy include PSEO; a Digital Design course offering engineering, technology, design and coding; an AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination – STEP Academy was the first Minnesota charter school to offer this); and has included the Inver Prep developmental English course offered through collaboration with Inver Hills Community College.
  - *Measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes:* In addition to the usual range of academic assessments, progress of students at STEP Academy is measured through performance on the Accuplacer, and through ACT’s Aspire assessments. A final measure of student learning is through graduating seniors’ acceptance into post-secondary institutions, which STEP Academy tracks.
  - *Establish new forms of accountability for schools:* Accountability is guaranteed through STEP Academy’s contract with IQS, which provides for academic, non-academic and organizational goals, each with measures of success.

## Future Plans

In the spring of 2016, STEP Academy applied for a grade-level expansion from a 6-12 program to a K-12 school. This was approved by the Authorizer, and then by MDE in October, so the school will expand with the addition of grades K-5 effective fall 2017. The primary reason for undertaking this expansion is demand from families:

many families with students at STEP would like to send their younger children to the school as well. When families were surveyed, 174 children were identified who would have enrolled in elementary school at STEP if offered, for the 2016-17 school year. The leadership of STEP Academy is looking forward to extending the benefits of its successful program to younger grades; and the middle school program will benefit from having its own elementary program as its “feeder” school. STEP Academy leadership has created a description of the proposed elementary program including classroom configurations, staffing, academic program, student supports, and professional development. Facility upgrades are minimal as the new grades will be served in the school’s existing building. Staff-to-student ratio will be 13:1.

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

As noted above, STEP Academy has implemented several innovative practices including a longer school day than typical, after school and summer school enrichment programs, Arabic language instruction, middle school accelerated learning opportunities, high school honors and college articulated programs, STEM based curriculum and instruction and AVID classes and strategies, RTI programs and teacher-led professional learning communities. These innovations will be incorporated into the elementary school program, as appropriate beginning fall 2017.

Instruction at STEP Academy will continue to be driven by data. Teachers use NWEA MAP data to provide focused instruction. The use of the universal screening mode of EasyCBM will help RTI coordinators identify particular gaps in reading and math to make sure that intervention efforts are specific and modified as needed to ensure student growth. The incorporation of STEM will be emphasized in the primary grades with interdisciplinary units and teaching strategies that meet standards and engage students through STEM activities. By providing strong foundational courses to primary grades, STEP Academy staff will have a better understanding of the academic level of the middle school students. This will allow the school to increase the rigor in its middle and high school classes.