



Science, Technology, Engineering Preparatory Academy

MN Charter School District 4200

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2021

In Operation since Fall 2011

Ramsey County, Minnesota

Contents

STEP Academy Introduction.....	3
STEP Academy's Mission and Vision	3
STEP Academy's Distance Learning Plan	4
STEP Academy Enrollment and Student Attrition	5
Governance and Management.....	5
Staffing.....	6
STEP Academy Teaching Staff 2020-21	6
STEP Academy 2020-21 School Management and Faculty Information	8
Director's Professional Development Plan	9
Professional Development for Teaching Staff	10
Finances.....	10
Academic Performance.....	11
School / Student Performance Indicators: School ScoreCard for STEP Academy	11
3a. New Student Enrollment	11
3b. MCA Proficiency, K-8	11
3c. MCA Proficiency, comparison groups (internal)	12
3d. MCA Growth (or comparable and appropriate nationally normed assessment)	13
3e. Graduation Rate (cohort defined)	13
3f. MAP or Alternative Assessment for K-9	13
3g. Student Attendance	14
3h. Student Satisfaction	14
3i. Parent Satisfaction.....	15
3j. Teacher Satisfaction	15
3k. World's Best Workforce	16
3l. Locally established measures consistent with school affidavit	16
STEP Academy Strategic Plan.....	18
Innovative Practices and Implementation	18
Future Plans	21

STEP Academy Introduction

STEP Academy, Minnesota Charter School District 4200, is a grades K-12 charter school with a Science, Technology, and Engineering focus. STEP Academy has now completed ten years of operation and is pleased to present this annual report on the 2020-21 school year. The school opened in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota, in fall 2011, and moved to its current location in St. Paul in 2016. STEP Academy opened as a grades 6-12 school; in 2016 it was granted a grade-level expansion to serve the elementary grades beginning in 2017-18 and has now completed four years as a K-12 school including the 2020-21 school year which was carried out entirely in Distance Learning mode.

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. 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 its mission, vision, and six core values (see below).

STEP Academy graduated 49 students in 2021; 71% of those students had earned college credits prior to graduating from high school.

STEP Academy is located at 835 5th Street East, St Paul, MN 55106. Main contact person is Mustafa Ibrahim, Executive Director (phone: 651 289-6120; email Mustafa@stepacademy.com).

STEP Academy's Mission and Vision

Mission: *STEP Academy will empower students to use their personal attributes and acquired knowledge to lead productive lives and become contributing members of the global community.*

Vision: *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.*

Core Values:

- **Kindness** – *Ensure a safe and nurturing learning environment where all members are valued and respected.*
- **Personalization** – *Provide high quality individualized programs to ensure success of all students.*

- **Excellence** – *Motivate students to academic excellence and prepare them with the skills and knowledge to take college classes prior to high school graduation and/or be successful in a variety of post-graduate options.*
- **STEM-Focused** – *Provide enriching experiences in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM).*
- **Community Minded** – *Collaborate with families and other partners to develop shared ownership of the learning community.*
- **Global Vision** – *Promote the development of global citizens who demonstrate integrity and personal responsibility.*

STEP Academy's authorizer is Innovative Quality Schools (contact: Laurie Schroeder – lschroeder@iqsmn.org; phone 651-234-0900). The 2020-21 school year was the second year of a second consecutive five-year charter contract between STEP Academy and IQS!

STEP Academy's Distance Learning Plan

Since March of 2020 STEP Academy, like other schools, has been striving to respond in the most effective way possible to the COVID-19 pandemic. STEP Academy established a distance learning plan which went into effect Monday, March 30, 2020, and continued through the balance of the school year that spring. Classroom teachers continued to utilize Google Classroom and Google Meet as the primary online tools to teach and communicate with students. They presented instruction via class meetings, videos, tutorials, assignments, and other online resources. Methods and requirements varied by teacher and by grade. In the secondary (grades 6-12) program, teachers set up individual Google Classrooms for each class including a distance learning syllabus, and every student was required to check their Synergy account on Mondays and Fridays.

During 2020-21, while many schools transitioned back to in-person learning for parts of the school year, STEP remained in distance learning mode throughout the year. This seemed the safest and best option for the school community, rather than taking the risk of moving to in-person schooling and then having to return to distance learning mode if the pandemic worsened. However, providing schooling without direct, in-person contact presented many challenges, and many students fell behind academically during the 2020-21 school year.

In June 2021, STEP Academy did hold a graduation ceremony in-person, for graduating seniors and their families. There were two graduation events, at the school, following COVID protocols. In the fall of 2021, STEP Academy transitioned back to in-person learning for the 2021-22 school year.

STEP Academy Enrollment and Student Attrition

STEP ACADEMY'S ENROLLMENT BY GRADE, 2016-2021															
School Year	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL	Attrition ¹
2016-17							24	50	37	50	44	39	34	278	+20%
2017-18	19	17	20	21	24	24	26	43	55	40	41	35	35	400	+44%
2018-19	33	22	19	24	26	25	40	46	45	64	44	47	38	473	+18%
2019-20	39	38	37	41	42	42	49	54	50	71	61	45	45	614	+30%
2020-21	40	43	43	44	39	50	45	51	52	52	71	63	50	643	+5%

Student enrollment figures from the past five years are shown. This data is based on October 1 student enrollment figures. As this table shows, STEP Academy has experienced substantial growth since adding the elementary grades starting in 2017-18, with a further jump in enrollment in 2019-20. The school is now at capacity in its present building, and operated during 2020-21 with waiting lists for many grades and limited if any room to expand.

Governance and Management

The table below shows all the members of STEP Academy's governing board during 2020-21. The Board was stable for the school year, following an election for Board members in the spring of 2020. Board information including meeting Agendas and Minutes, is posted on the school website, at <https://stepacademymn.org/about-us/school-board/>. In general, the Board meets the third Monday of the month, except in July. The STEP Academy Board transitioned to meeting remotely, via Zoom in April 2020 and continued to meet remotely throughout 2020-21.

Name: Last, First	Affiliation	Date Appointed	Term Expiration	Contact
Rahima Ahmed	Teacher / Director	7/1/2020	6/30/2023	952 288-0012 rahmed@stepacademymn.com
Amina Mohamud	Parent / Vice Chair	7/1/2019	6/30/2022	612-876-7145; amohamud@stepacademymn.com

¹ Based on percentage change from the previous fall.

Name: Last, First	Affiliation	Date Appointed	Term Expiration	Contact
Abdulrazzaq Mursal	Community / Chair	7/1/2019	6/30/2022	953-688-6705; abdulrazzaqmursal@stepacademymn.org
Abdiladif Sanbul	Community / Secretary	7/1/2020	6/30/2023	612-483-7686; asanbul@stepacademymn.org
Mohamed Shuriye	Community	8/26/2019	6/30/2022	651-808-3578; mshuriye@stepacademymn.org

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. Board members attended training on Finance, Governance, and HR matters, provided by the school's financial services provider, The Anton Group (TAG). TAG training was done remotely, via Zoom on September 19, 2020 and was attended by all members.

Staffing

STEP Academy Teaching Staff 2020-21

Teacher	File folder #	Assignment	Left during 2020/21?	Not returning 2021/22
Balagot, Ali	498408	MS Math		
Borghol, Marwa	446832	Secondary Arabic		
Campbell, Amelia	1004884	Grade 2		
Chapman, Jessica	473968	MS English Language Arts		
Chowdhury, Zinat	432535	MS Science		
Crawford, Megan	501211	Grade 5		
Currie, Malcolm	373280	Grade 6 ELA / Social St.		
Dahir, Nasra	511807	MS Social Studies		
Davis, Edward	440573	ELL Grades 3-5		
Elmi, Mahdi	508897	MS/HS Math Intervention		
Fiqi, Omar	369215	MS/HS Math Intervention		

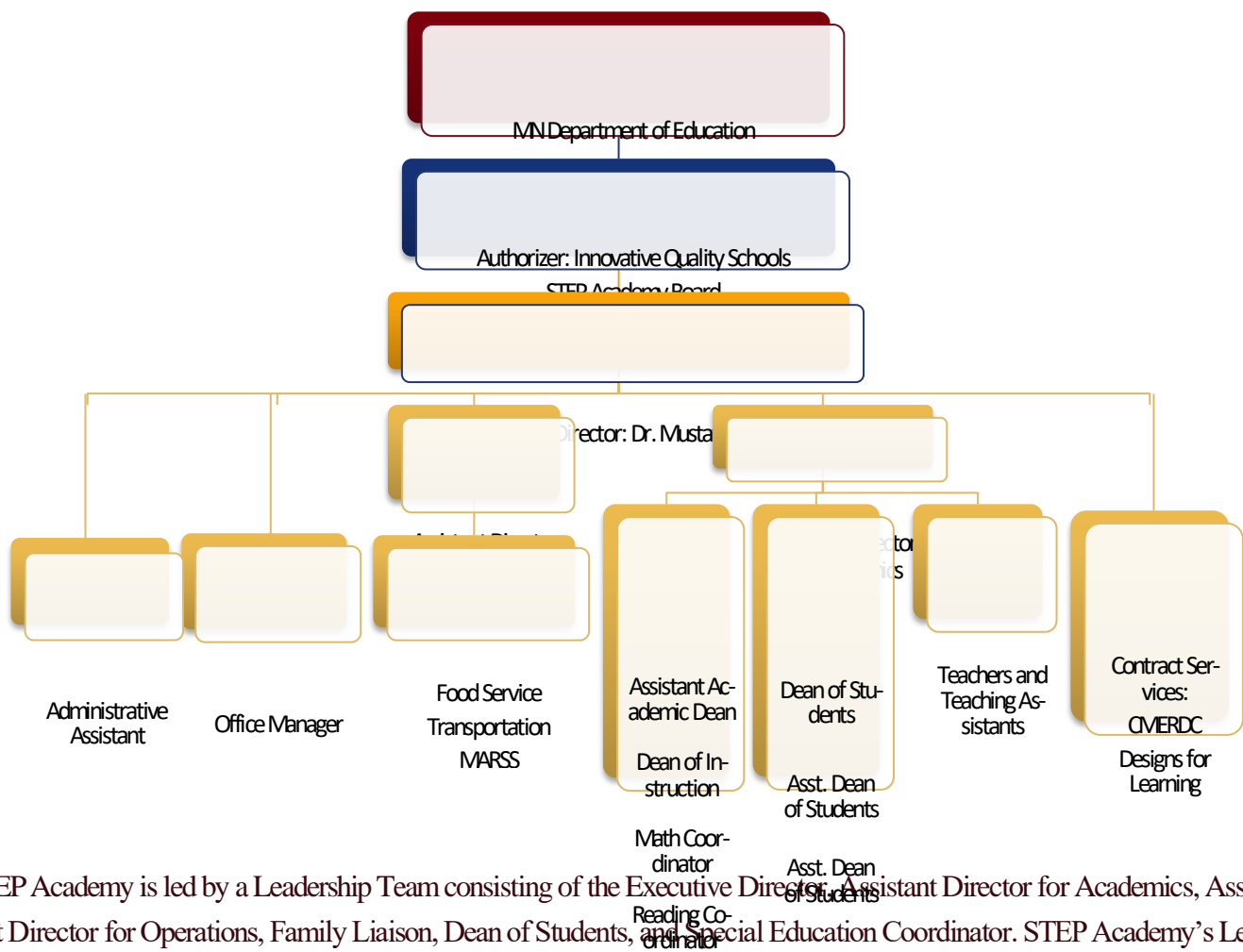
Teacher	File folder #	Assignment	Left during 2020/21?	Not returning 2021/22
Fisher, Cara	503186	Grade 3		
Gavin, Mariah	440827	Special Education		
Hanson, Kara	503475	Grade 4		
Harbeck, Mitsy	302447	ES Special Education		X
Heinzen, Noelle	494491	Kindergarten		
Holsten, Kristen	471423	ES Reading Intervention		X
Hunt, Freedom	1006460	Special Education		
Hussein, Yasmin	1003596	Special Education		X
Jones, Sydney	508855	MS Eng. Language Arts		
Krug, Darlah	436867	ES Math Intervention		
McDonald, Mari	514715	HS Biology / Life Science		X
Mortenson, Brandon	367781	Phys. Ed.		
Nelsen, Wayne	343848	HS ELL		
Norwick, Jacob	469575	Math Intervention		
Olson, Luke	485672	HS Mathematics		
Omar, Awil	511664	Special Education		
Rames, Jessica	1000795	Grade 1		
Ritchart, John	415920	HS Science		
Samuelson, Hannah	496105	HS Social Studies		
Sheikh-Ahmed, Rahima	453262	MS ELL		
Sheikhomar, Nawal	1006320	Grade 1		
Smith, Christina	513539	Grade 5		
Stensby, Billie	403839	ES Reading Intervention		X
Strand, Katie	502856	Grade 2		
Straub, Frank	472359	ES Reading Intervention		
Substad, Trent	513249	Grade 4		
Thompson, Ellyn	496863	MS/HS Reading Intervention		X

Teacher	File folder #	Assignment	Left during 2020/21?	Not returning 2021/22
Treptow, Hannah	504812	Grade 3		
Unseth, Andy	397738	ELL Grades K-2		X
Weiss, Aleshia	506000	Kindergarten		
Welter, Chris	499931	MS/HS PE/Health		

Thirty-five of 42 licensed teachers from 2020-21 returned for the 2021-22 school year, yielding a retention rate of 83%.

STEP Academy 2020-21 School Management and Faculty Information

Name	File Folder number	Assignment	Years employed	Left during 2020-21?	Not returning 2021-22?
Mustafa Ibrahim	513361	Executive Director	9		
Traci Moore	362417	Asst. Director for Academics	5		
Ahmed Mursal		Asst. Director for Operations	4		
Mohamed Mohamoud	513236	Community & Parent Coord.	5		
Olson, Emma	1009507	Special Ed. Coordinator	1		
Keeley Tholen	463199	Asst. Academic Dean, Acad. Leadership Team	6		
Rani Hayden	361628	Dean of Instruction/EL Coordinator	3		
Kathryn Martin	495707	Dean of Students, Acad. Leadership Team	2		X
Andy Tholen	462933	Asst. Dean of Students	3		
Jude Vales	466738	Asst. Dean of Students	2		X



STEP Academy is led by a Leadership Team consisting of the Executive Director, Assistant Director for Academics, Assistant Director for Operations, Family Liaison, Dean of Students, and Special Education Coordinator. STEP Academy's Leadership Team meets weekly and each member takes responsibility for continuous improvement in their respective areas of management. Through the creation and monitoring of goals and action steps in each management area, the school continues to identify areas in need of attention and pathways to success.

STEP Academy's organization chart, effective during 2020-21, was as shown below.

Director's Professional Development Plan

STEP Academy's director, Mustafa Ibrahim, is a licensed school administrator, having completed his administrative license as a K-12 principal through the University of Minnesota's administrative licensure program in 2019. Mr. Ibrahim is now working toward a Superintendent's licensure, at the University of Minnesota, working toward completion of the degree in

spring 2022. Graduate school work toward the Superintendent licensure during 2020-21 included internships with two Superintendents, in the South Washington County and South St. Paul school districts. Dr. Ibrahim also attended trainings offered by IQS during 2020-21.

Professional Development for Teaching Staff

STEP Academy's Assistant Director for Academics provided this summary of professional development that was provided for teachers during 2020-21:

Professional development in 2020-2021 focused on maximizing the effectiveness of distance learning. The entire staff was trained in Google Suite and either Google Classroom or Seesaw. PLC work focused on supporting each content area with online tools and practices. Staff also worked tirelessly learning and implementing skills and strategies for active student engagement culminating in a staggering data point of fewer secondary students with an F in a class in the spring of 2021 than previous on-site years. These skills will be carried forward to onsite programming in 2021-2022. Finally, all staff participated in cultural competence training by a certified MDE trainer.

Finances

STEP Academy has maintained good financial health over the past several years, its ending Fund Balance increasing each of the past several years, as the overall size of the school budget has increased with the school's expansion of student enrollment. STEP Academy's Audited Financial Statement for FY2021 shows a surplus of Revenues over Expenditures of \$435,398 for the year, resulting in an ending Fund Balance as of 6/30/21, of \$2,617,372. The total amount of the school's Fund Balance continued to increase in FY2021; see the table below.

STEP Academy Financial Summary, 2017-2021				
	Total Rev.	Total Exp.	Ending F.B.	F.B. - % of Exp.
FY 2017	\$ 3,397,640	\$3,441,918	\$ 822,944	23.9%
FY 2018	\$5,655,076	\$5,425,501	\$1,052,519	19.4%
FY 2019	\$6,264,752	\$6,157,882	\$1,159,388	18.8%
FY 2020	\$8,509,629	\$7,487,043	\$2,181,974	29.1%
FY 2021	\$8,242,666	\$7,807,268	\$2,617,372	33.5%

Academic Performance

This report on STEP Academy's Academic Performance data is organized around the IQS School ScoreCard, Addendum No. 1 to STEP Academy's contract with its authorizer. Specifically, we address Area 3 of the ScoreCard, Evaluation of School / Student Performance Indicators. While data is not available for several areas, due to the transition to distance-learning in March 2020 and cancellation of spring testing, the indicators are all listed below, and information is included to the extent it is available.

School / Student Performance Indicators: School ScoreCard for STEP Academy

3a. New Student Enrollment

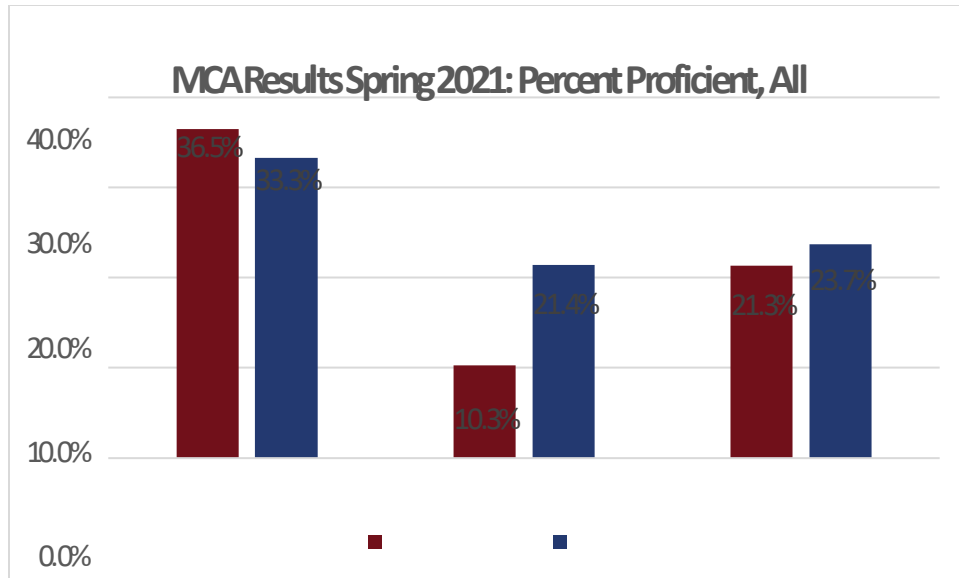
Benchmark to exceed target: *The school uses its evaluation process to develop an individual learning plan designed to assist teacher, parents, and student with academic growth and success.*

STEP Academy has a thorough new student enrollment process that includes administration of universal screeners in ELL, reading, and math. Assessments are given promptly when a new student enrolls, and the results used to inform initial class placement and to indicate if further assessment is needed to determine intervention or EL services. In addition, assessment information is available to content area teachers to provide initial instructional baselines.

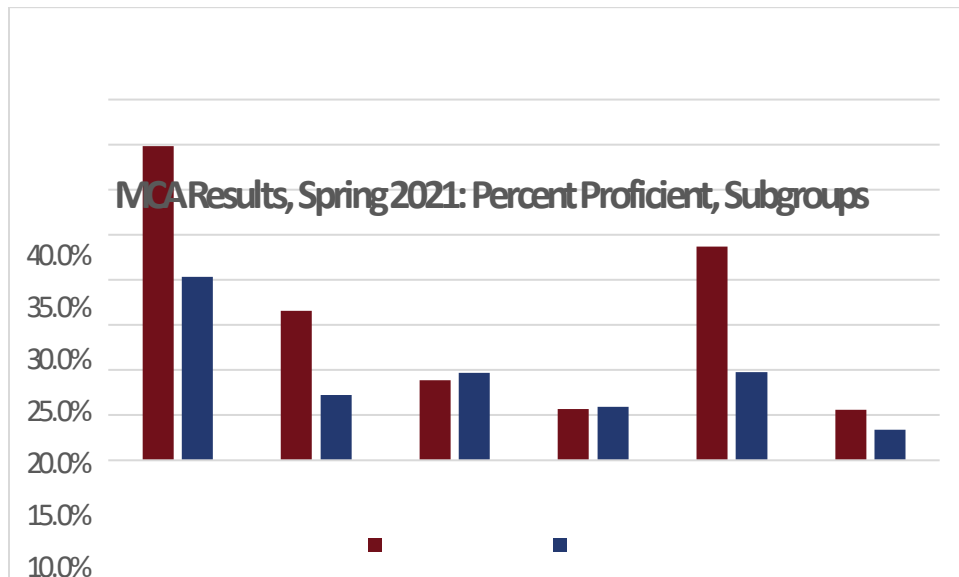
3b. MCA Proficiency, K-8

Benchmark to exceed target: *The school has exceeded their performance goals: Performing better than low income and EL student demographic groups in resident district.*

Although the Minnesota Department of Education determined that 2020-21 state test results should not be used for accountability purposes, we are reporting STEP Academy's MCA results, and comparing with those of the resident district, the St. Paul Public Schools. Overall, STEP Academy students performed comparably to the district in Reading and Science, and not as well in Math.



However, when the comparison is limited to the Free/Reduced meals-eligible and English Learners, STEP Academy students performed better than the district in Reading and Science, and comparably in Math.



3c. MCA Proficiency, comparison groups (internal)

Benchmark to exceed target: *The school has reduced overall student performance gaps when comparing its sub-groups and student groups exceeded performance goals.*

Not applicable. STEP Academy has a homogenous student population, with the great majority of the students free and reduced-meals eligible, and categorized as Black or African American.

3d. MCA Growth (or comparable and appropriate nationally normed assessment)

Benchmark to exceed target: *Students are making annual growth that exceeds 1 year as measured by the assessment*

Not applicable for 2020-21, due to cancelation of spring 2020 MCA testing.

3e. Graduation Rate (cohort defined)

Benchmark to exceed target: *The school exceeds the graduation rates as established by the state and ESSA not including students who have a form on file indicating that they are moving out of the country.*

The statewide goal for 2021 is that 90% of students graduate within four years with no student group below 85%. Minnesota Report Card data for 2020-21 shows STEP Academy continued to easily out-perform the state:

- STEP Academy overall four-year grad rate: 94.1% (based on 48 of 51 students graduating; statewide average was 83.3%)
- Black or African-American four-year grad rate: 94.0% (statewide average for this group was 70.4%)
- Free or Reduced price meals-eligible: 94.0% (statewide average was 70.3%)
- English Learners four-year grad rate: 94.7% (statewide average was 64.7%)

3f. MAP or Alternative Assessment for K-9

STEP Academy's Performance Indicator for 3f is split into three Benchmarks.

3f(1): Fastbridge Assessment – Reading (grades 6-12). Benchmark to exceed target: *90% or more of STEP Academy students are making annual growth that meets or exceeds 1 year as measured by the assessment.*

In spite of disruptions caused by COVID and the shift to distance learning, STEP Academy administered the Fastbridge assessment twice during 2020-21, in the fall and spring, bringing students on-site for purposes of testing. Fastbridge assessment results do not provide a direct measure of expected annual growth, but percentile ranks are reported. For purposes of addressing this measure, we are defining meeting or exceeding one year's growth as, Percentile at Nation score remaining the same or increasing from fall to spring. Results for grades 6-12 show that of 236 students tested, 78 or 33% increased or retained the same percentile rank from fall to spring. School leadership noted that distance learning was not ideal for our students. Interventions were more challenging to plan and carry out, and many students fell behind academically. Better results were expected for 2021-22, with the return to in-person learning.

3f(2): Benchmark Reading Assessment – Reading (grades K-5). Benchmark to exceed target: *90% or more of STEP Academy students are making annual growth that meets or exceeds 1 year as measured by the assessment.*

STEP Academy utilized the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment in reading for grades K-5 during 2020-21. Data from this source showed that for the six grades overall, 61% of students made growth of a year or more. This falls short of the challenging 90% target.

3f(3): Fastbridge Assessment – Math. Benchmark to exceed target: *90% or more of STEP Academy students are making annual growth that meets or exceeds 1 year as measured by the assessment.*

As noted, STEP Academy administered the Fastbridge assessments in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021. Comparison of fall to spring results for all grades K-12 shows that of 423 students tested both seasons, 122 or 29% increased their Percentile at Nation rank (or kept same rank) from fall to spring. As with the Reading results, this disappointing figure shows the results of the shift to distance learning; STEP Academy hopes and expects to return to solid academic progress in 2021-22 with students again on-site every day.

3g. Student Attendance

Benchmark to exceed target: *The school's consistent attendance rate is greater than or equal to 90%.*

Student Attendance results for 2020-21 show STEP Academy exceeding the Target Benchmark of 90%: attendance data shows average percent-of-attendance for all students for the 2020-21 school year at 97.5%.

3h. Student Satisfaction

Benchmark to exceed target: *Students' level of satisfaction with their school in the areas of distance learning success, acceptance, and quality of education is greater than or equal to 90%.*

Students in grades 3 and up were surveyed in the spring of 2021, and results reported at the April 2021 board meeting. Survey results showed the following percentages with positive responses to questions in three areas covered on the survey:

	Grades 3-5	Grades 6-12
Distance Learning Success	90%	87%
Acceptance	96%	91%
Quality of Education	83%	91%

Overall, total average was calculated at 90%.

3i. Parent Satisfaction

Benchmark to exceed target: *Parents' level of satisfaction with their school in the areas of distance learning success, acceptance, and quality of education is greater than or equal to 90%.*

STEP Academy parents were surveyed in the spring of 2021, regarding their level of satisfaction with the school; 77 parents responded. Results from three of the survey questions are shown below

	Elementary (n=70)	Secondary (n=103)
My child has had a successful experience during distance learning: <i>Almost Always</i> or <i>Usually</i>	95%	96%
My child is accepted at STEP Academy: <i>Almost Always</i> or <i>Usually</i>	-	99%
My child receives an excellent education at STEP Academy: <i>Almost Always</i> or <i>Usually</i>	98%	100%

Overall, total average was calculated at 97%.

3j. Teacher Satisfaction

Benchmark to exceed target: *Teachers' level of satisfaction with the school and with the distance learning program, their professional roles, responsibilities and professional development is greater than or equal to 90%.*

STEP Academy teachers were surveyed in the spring of 2021, and results reported at the April 2021 board meeting. Survey results showed the following percentages with positive responses to questions in four areas covered on the survey:

School satisfaction	100%
Distance learning program	96%
Professional roles / responsibilities	89%
Professional development	85%

Overall, total average was calculated at 93%.

3k.World's Best Workforce

Benchmark to exceed target: *The school has demonstrated that it exceeds expectations outlined in the World's Best Workforce requirements of the MDE.*

STEP Academy met three of its five World's Best Workforce SMART goals for 2020-21. The two goals that were not met were in *All Students in Third Grade Achieving Grade-Level Literacy*, and *Close the Achievement Gap(s) Between Student Groups*.

- The third-grade literacy goal was tied to MN Comprehensive Achievement (MCA) test results in Reading for third-graders: goal was for 40% of STEP Academy third graders meeting or exceeding state standards on the MCA's in reading. Only 22.5% cleared this bar on the spring 2021 MCA. The WBWF report noted, *We do believe the pandemic affected our data. We had 40 out of 50 students test, so scores from 20% of our third graders are missing in this data.*
- The Close the Achievement Gap goal was for the proportion of K-12 ELL students at WIDA Level 4 or higher (nearing proficiency) to increase by 1% from 2020 results to 2021 results; however, the fraction of students at WIDA Level 4 or higher actually declined (compared to 2019 results – 2020 results were not reported). The WBWF report noted that in this area as well, the pandemic affected these results. In particular – *STEP Academy was in a distance learning model for the entire 2020-2021 school year. Our teachers documented that their students received less ELL services because they would not always show up to the virtual group meetings where as when they are onsite, students rarely miss group meeting times.*

3l. Locally established measures consistent with school affidavit

11. Special Education, MTSS, & Child Find

Benchmark to exceed target: *SpEd referrals are being received with 100% timeline adherence and fully documented pre-referral interventions.*

STEP Academy's Student Success (Child Find) team met weekly throughout the year to assess students who were being considered for special education referrals. The Student Success team documented pre-referral interventions and assured adherence to proper timelines.

12. English Language Learning

Benchmark to exceed target: *K-12 EL students at WIDA Level 4 or higher will increase by 2% or more from 2020 results to 2021 results.*

Not applicable; 2020 ACCESS results not reported.

STEP Academy ACCESS test results from 2021 show that of a total of 126 students tested, 25 or 19.8% scored at Level 4 or higher (24 at Level 4, and one at Level 5).

13. PSEO Participation

Benchmark to exceed target: *The percent of juniors and seniors participating in the PSEO program meets or exceeds 40%*

STEP Academy easily met this target with 68 students or 62% of juniors and seniors, participating in PSEO and earning credits.

14. Locally established measures consistent with school affidavit

Benchmark to exceed target: *The school has achieved more than 80% of measures.*

There were a total of 12 Benchmarks in STEP Academy's Scorecard that were applicable for 2020-21; STEP Academy met or exceeded targets on eight of the 12 or 67%, while partially meeting one of the other targets. The table below shows all of the benchmarks and their status for 2021-22.

STEP Academy Student Performance Indicators / Benchmarks, 2020-21	
Indicator	Benchmark Status
A – New Student Enrollment	Met benchmark
B – MCA Proficiency, K-8	Not applicable for 2020-21; references MCA
C – MCA Proficiency, comparison groups	Not applicable for 2020-21; references MCA – and, n/a in any case due to homogeneous pop.
D – MCA Growth	Not applicable for 2020-21; references MCA
E – Graduation Rate	Met Benchmark
F.1 – Alternative Assessment (FAST) – Reading 6-12	Did not meet benchmark – FAST
F.2 – Alternative Assessment – Benchmark Reading, K-5	Did not meet benchmark – Fountas & Pinnell BAS
F.3 – Alternative Assessment (FAST) – Math K-12	Did not meet benchmark – FAST
G – Student Attendance	Met benchmark
H – Student Satisfaction	Met benchmark
I – Parent Satisfaction	Met benchmark
J – Teacher Satisfaction	Met benchmark
K – World's Best Workforce	Partially met benchmark – 3 of 5 WBWF targets met
L.1 – Sped., MTSS, & Child Find	Met benchmark
L.2 – English Language Learning	Not applicable for 2020-21; ACCESS results not reported
L.3 – PSEO Participation	Met benchmark

STEP Academy Strategic Plan

STEP Academy has a strategic plan which identifies three focus areas in support of the school mission, vision and core values. The focus areas are Student Achievement, Student Support, and Parent and Community Engagement; each has one or more Goals and multiple Objectives. The Goals and Objectives are shown below. The 2019-20 plan, reported in last year's annual report, remained in place for 2020-21.

Innovative Practices and Implementation

Innovative practices being implemented at STEP Academy include:

- STEP Academy begins preparing students for post secondary success from the moment they enter the school. Beginning in Kindergarten, students see and hear the message that they are preparing for early college entrance. This message creates a motivating sense of belonging to an educational journey special to STEP Academy. Beginning in third grade, teachers instill study habits and processes that students practice in middle school and ultimately fully apply in the College and Career Readiness program that begins in ninth grade.
- STEP Academy offers students an accelerated and integrated remediation approach that aims to move students toward proficient and advanced levels within core academic subjects. The academic program begins with a universal assessment administered prior to school beginning for elementary students and the second day of classes for middle and high school. With that early information, interventions begin the second week of school. Response to Intervention (RTI) has been in place for several years, and continues to be refined. Implementation of STEP Academy's RTI program utilizes a pull-out / push-in model rather than providing separate classes. Use of diagnostic assessments has been solidified with the use of the FAST suite of assessments, to ensure effective monitoring of student progress and adjustment of instruction, especially in grades K-6. Students identified for RTI support in reading receive thirty-minute intervention sessions four times per week, with a focus on improving reading skills as diagnosed through FAST and other assessments. Students identified in math receive thirty-minute intervention sessions two to four times per week, under the guidance of a math intervention teacher, focusing on skills in identified areas of need. In addition, a range of social supports that reflects the social development needs of urban students are integrated into the educational experience.
- STEP Academy remains a school with a dual focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and college readiness. However, many of our students need a boost in their literacy skills, in order to be able to take advantage of these aspects. Therefore, the school focuses intensively on literacy. Staffing includes half-time Reading and Math Coordinator positions to track data, provide instructional coaching, monitor student improvement, and provide visionary strategic planning. Strategies for strengthened literacy include:

- An innovative blend of reading curriculum at grades K-3 that includes both Core Knowledge based curriculum for foundational knowledge and skill development, as well as Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading curriculum (since the 2018-19 school year) for diagnostic assessment and instruction
- Action 100 from American Reading Company has been utilized for grades 4-10 the past two school years as a supplemental reading/ELA curriculum supporting independent reading, and diagnostics. In response to STEP Academy's large population of English Learners, the reading program needs to retain the diagnostic element through middle school.
- Engage New York for novel-based deep reading strategies in middle school
- A writing-coaching program in grades 9-12
- An additional daily reading class period for grades six, seven, and eight students to help them prepare for college-ready reading.
- 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, encourage innovative teaching and learning, and create robust educational support systems.
- Preparing students for college, including giving them opportunities to earn college credits before completing high school, is a key innovation at STEP Academy. As a college-prep program, STEP Academy supports students to this end through a Career and College Readiness course which all 9th and 10th graders are enrolled in. In past years STEP Academy implemented the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program, but found that this program was overly prescriptive, with elements not well-suited to the school's specific population. Establishing a course unique to the school allows for customized solutions, and is supported by meetings between the middle school teachers and the Career and College Readiness staff, to plan for appropriately customizing the course for the incoming freshmen in the fall. Through the Career and College Readiness course, STEP Academy continues to teach students how to apply study skills and planning strategies to their course work in order to find heightened academic success.
- STEP continues to build relationships with postsecondary institutions and maintains programming to support students enrolling in PSEO. All 10th grade students get an introduction to the PSEO program in the early fall and then are assisted in applying for PSEO after winter break. The College and Career Readiness course is important in supporting students' readiness for PSEO. Numbers of students participating and earning credits via PSEO has increased over the past three years:
 - During 2017-18, a total of 32 juniors and seniors participated
 - During 2018-19, a total of 51 participated
 - During 2019-20 there were a total of 63, 34 juniors and 29 seniors, who participated in PSEO and earned credits.

- During 2020-21 there were a total of 68 students who participated in PSEO and earned credits.
- STEP Academy provides Arabic language instruction in the elementary, middle school, and high school, a world language that is in increasing demand nationally. A second world language, Chinese, was offered during 2017-18 and 2018-2019 but was discontinued when the grant program that supported it ended.
- Instruction at STEP Academy continues to be driven by data. Focused instruction is informed by nationally-normed assessments, the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST) which includes progress monitoring. The FAST provides a primary-grades assessment and incorporates curriculum based measures (CBM) type assessments. The use of the universal screening mode of EasyCBM helps 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. Assessment of reading fluency and comprehension for the elementary grades also utilizes the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessments of reading levels.
- 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 and an open house at the beginning of the school year, and multiple Family Fun Nights during the year. An annual fall gathering includes information on PSEO for tenth grade students and parents so they have the entire year to plan and prepare to apply to a college for their eleventh grade school year. In January 2020 STEP Academy adopted a schoolwide theme of “Blast into Outer Space... Out of This World Reading” and the reading team did a skit for the students to promote interest in reading. STEP Academy’s Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meets once a month, welcoming all families to gather to share ideas and hear first-hand what has been going on at school. The PTO stopped meeting in the spring of 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, but resumed in the fall of 2020 (at the school, with social distancing procedures in place). STEP Academy also maintains a Parent Portal through which parents can monitor their students’ attendance, grades, academic progress, and missing assignments.

Finally, STEP Academy is organized and operated to achieve Minnesota charter schools’ primary purpose of improving pupil learning and student achievement. STEP Academy is committed to educating all students, and seeks improved learning and achievement by operating a college preparatory program with effective supports such that English Learners and students from low income backgrounds are able to not only access but to thrive in college. For students who are behind academically, STEP Academy offers students an accelerated and integrated remediation approach beginning in Kindergarten, that is intended to move them to proficient and advanced levels within core academic subjects by the high school years. A range of social supports that reflects the social development needs of urban students is integrated into the educational experience. In addition, STEP Academy is addressing four additional purposes of charter schools specified in the Minnesota Charter Law:

- *Increase learning opportunities for pupils:* STEP Academy does this by providing a college preparatory program in a small learning community, creating a unique setting that is available for students who may not thrive in traditional public schools or otherwise be able to access this type of program. In addition, STEP Academy’s

purposeful encouragement of students to take advantage of the state's PSEO program in eleventh and twelfth grade increases students' abilities to save money on their college education, have support through the often confusing college entrance and first year processes, and enter the working world two years prior to their peers. This practice is having an impact on bringing STEP Academy families out of poverty.

- *Use different and innovative teaching methods:* Innovative teaching methods in place at STEP Academy include a supportive and encouraging PSEO program; Digital Design course work offering engineering, technology, design and coding; a College and Career Readiness program which serves all students beginning in 9th grade; a hybrid diagnostic and core literacy curriculum at the elementary level; and multiple community/business partnerships.
- *Measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes:* STEP Academy administers elementary universal assessments in August, prior to the first day of classes in order to maintain instructional time during the first month of school. Other grade levels' universal assessments take place the second and third day of school. 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 STEP Academy's success as a college-prep program is through graduating seniors' acceptance into post-secondary institutions, which STEP Academy tracks. All 37 2018 STEP Academy graduates had been accepted to a college or technical program prior to graduation this was likewise the case with the 43 2019 graduates, the 44 who graduated in 2020, and the 49 who graduated in the spring of 2021.
- *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

STEP Academy leadership planned during the summer of 2021 for a return to in-person learning in the fall of 2021, which was accomplished. An expansion application was generated in the spring of 2021, to request approval to establish a second school site, which STEP Academy hopes to accomplish in the future (this was approved by our authorizer, and a new site planned for fall 2022). Also in the spring of 2021, school leadership discussed re-branding the school, with a shift from STEM to college-prep focus. A process has been identified to be followed during the 2021-22 school year, to be completed by spring 2022 such that the re-branded school can launch in the fall of 2022. The re-branding proposal was approved at the May 2021 Board meeting.