



Office of New Initiatives

School Effectiveness Review
2023 - 2024

Connexions: A Community-Based Arts School, School #325
2801 N Dukeland Street, Baltimore MD 21216

May 7–9, 2024

200 East North Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
www.baltimorecityschools.org

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OVERVIEW OF 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 SchoolWorks (an education consulting company), with support from City Schools staff when appropriate, gathers information from teachers, students, parents, and leaders during a two-and-a-half-day site visit. During the visit, the SER team observes classrooms, reviews selected school documents, and conducts in-person and virtual focus groups with school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. The SER team analyzes 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—assigns 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 New Initiatives in City Schools.

SCHOOL BACKGROUND

ConneXions serves approximately 484 students in grades 6–12. The school is in the northwest quadrant of Baltimore.

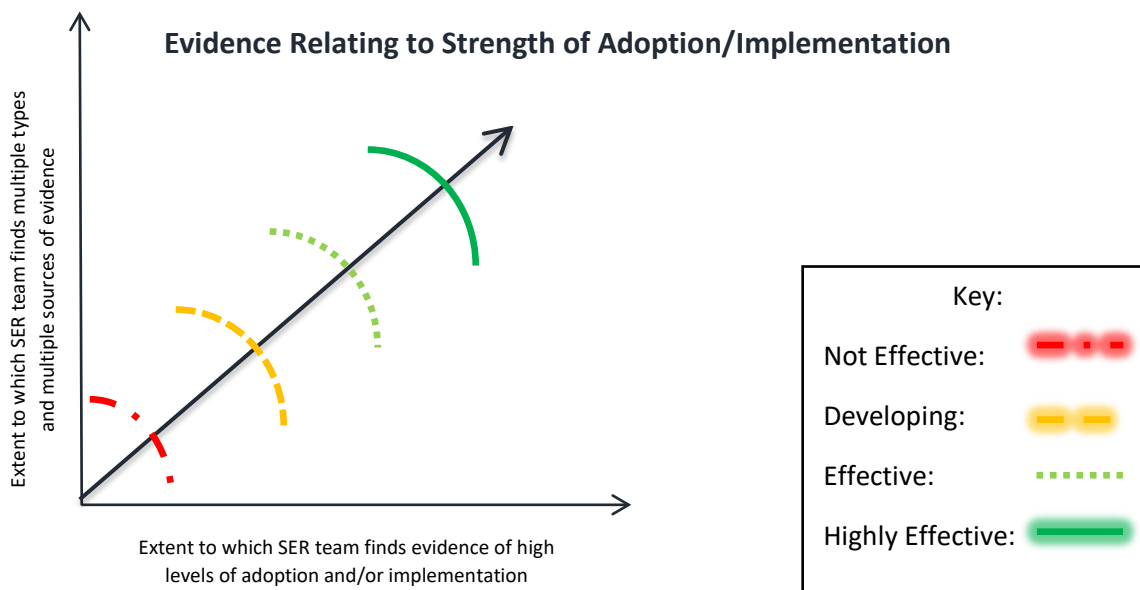
School Leadership and Staffing:

The principal, Sidney Brooks, has been at the school for 20 years (8 as principal) and with the district for 20 years in various roles. For the purpose of this SER site visit, staff designated as school leadership are listed below.

School Leadership Focus Group Members	
Name	Role
Sidney Brooks	Principal
Zikiar Alvin	Assistant Principal
Jessica McLeod	Assistant Principal
Brent Dawson	Data/Testing Coordinator/Counselor
Jodi Faye	Instructional Coach
Shannon Stokes-Graham	Instructional Coach
Elizabeth Young	Special Education Teacher
Liezel Jacutin	Transition Coordinator
Hilary Campbell	Biology Teacher
Malik Muhammad	Consultant

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 types¹ and multiple sources² 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.



Rating	Performance Level	Quality Standard
1	Not Effective	Evidence indicates that the key action is not a practice or system that has been adopted and/or implemented at the school or that the level of adoption/implementation does not improve the school's effectiveness.
2	Developing	Evidence indicates that the key action (including some indicators) is a practice or system that is emerging at the school, but it has not yet been implemented at a level that has begun to improve the school's effectiveness OR the impact of the key action on the effectiveness of the school cannot yet be fully determined.
3	Effective	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.
4	Highly Effective	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.

¹ "Multiple types of evidence" is defined as evidence collected from two or more of the following: document review, stakeholder focus groups, and classroom observations.

² "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.

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE LEVELS

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

Domains and Key Actions	Performance Levels			
	Level 4: Highly Effective	Level 3: Effective	Level 2: Developing	Level 1: Not Effective

Domain 1: Highly Effective Instruction	
1.1 School leadership supports highly effective instruction.	Effective
1.2 Teachers use multiple data sources to adjust their practice to meet learners' unique needs.	Developing
1.3 Teachers deliver highly effective instruction.	Not Effective
1.4 Teachers establish a classroom environment in which teaching and learning can occur.	Developing
Domain 2: Talented People	
2.1 The school implements systems to select effective teachers and staff whose skills and beliefs meet the needs of the school.	Effective
2.2 The school develops teacher and staff capacity through individualized support and professional development.	Effective
Domain 3: Vision and Engagement	
3.1 The school has a clear vision and mission that promotes a student-centered, culturally relevant learning that prepares students for future success.	Effective
3.2 The school cultivates and sustains open communication and decision-making opportunities with families and the community.	Effective
3.3 The climate and culture of the school creates a welcoming learning environment that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student.	Effective
Domain 4: Strategic and Professional Management	
4.1 The school establishes clear goals for student achievement and tracks progress towards goals.	Effective
4.2 The school allocates and deploys the resources of human capital and funding to address the schoolwide goals for student achievement.	Effective
4.3 The school's board of trustees (or operator) provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school.	Developing

FINDINGS ON DOMAINS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

Domains and Key Actions	Performance Levels			
	Level 4: Highly Effective	Level 3: Effective	Level 2: Developing	Level 1: Not Effective

Domain 1: Highly Effective Instruction

Key action 1.1	School leadership supports highly effective instruction.	Effective
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- 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 reported that teachers are required to upload weekly lesson plans to a shared Google folder, with high school teachers submitting by Friday at 11:59 p.m. and middle school teachers submitting by Thursday. Teachers noted that each content area uses a tailored lesson plan template aligned to specific curricula, including Wit + Wisdom and Odell Education High School Literacy Program for ELA and Eureka for Math. Leaders and teachers also reported that all teachers receive feedback on their lesson plans from various instructional leaders, including instructional coaches, New Foundation Education Consultants (NFEC) consultants, assistant principals, and the principal. Leaders and teachers indicated that teachers receive feedback via comments directly in the document as well as through one-on-one meetings (within 24–48 hours for new teachers). They also noted that the feedback addresses issues like misalignment of learning tasks and lesson objectives, the need for formative assessments (e.g., exit tickets) to assess standard proficiency, and the need to create clearer connections to the standard. In one example, leaders indicated that they gave a teacher feedback about the inclusion of an exit ticket to assess the mastery of the standard taught. A review of the school’s Informal Observation Tool found it notates whether the associated lesson plan was uploaded, the associated Instructional Framework TEACH indicator, and anecdotal observations.
- School leadership provides consistent feedback and guidance that is actionable to teachers and aligned to the Instructional Framework. Teachers and leaders reported that school leadership consistently provides feedback and guidance to teachers through various means, including Instructional Framework-aligned informal walkthroughs, lesson plan feedback, and weekly meetings with the instructional coaches. Leaders noted (and the site visit team confirmed via review) that they utilize a schoolwide template for informal observations and employ 72-hour coaching cycle post-observations that encompass a write-up as well as a post-observation debrief meeting. Leaders noted that the feedback varied by content, observation source, and feedback owner—for example, they indicated that teachers could receive feedback from instructional coaches, consultants, assistant principals, and the principal through informal and formal observations. Leaders reported feedback examples like guiding a veteran ELA teacher to

incorporate technology via QR codes to engage students. In another example, teachers reported they received feedback to consistently implement the Problem of the Day and to review it using problem-solving strategies like circling numbers and underlining questions.

- School leadership ensures the use of a complete student learning data cycle. Teachers and leaders reported that school leaders provide various data sources and regular data meetings to collect, discuss and make decisions about student learning data. Teachers and leaders specifically noted the use of data sources like the Achievement Network (ANet), Lumos Learning, the school Dashboard, and a weekly assessment tracker. Teachers and leaders reported that this data is aggregated and organized before the weekly Wednesday meetings, which are largely led by NFEC. Leaders and teachers indicated that they prioritize a biweekly meeting for those teachers that do not work as regularly with NFEC, and the site visit team reviewed an Instructional Coach report which tracked teacher lesson plan completion and instructional responses and support. Teachers and leaders noted that grade level teams analyze the data and complete protocols to assess classwork completion and to determine which students need additional support. Teachers and leaders additionally reported that the NFEC consultants will lead these meetings to review disaggregated data on the standards taught; for example, teachers reported using a Classroom Data Tracker in ELA and math with target skills listed so students can see performance on each standard. Leaders reported making instructional decisions such as adjusting scope and sequence, introducing new standards, regrouping students, or reteaching based on the data. Teachers indicated that the data analysis drives instructional changes like tailoring the problem of the day to address gaps shown in the data.

Key action 1.2	Teachers use multiple data sources to adjust their practice to meet learners’ unique needs.	Developing
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- Teachers plan instruction in response to data. Leaders and teachers reported that the common planning period shared by all middle school teachers is one of the school’s avenues through which data informs instruction. Leaders and teachers indicated that teachers meet with their instructional coaches to determine any additional curriculum adjustments and further adjust Thursday and Friday small groups based on weekly classwork completion of 60% mastery or higher. Additionally, they noted that teachers and instructional coaches thoroughly discuss standards-specific assessments for Math and English language arts (ELA)—MCCAP and MAP assessments—to revise instructional plans. This site visit team reviewed the NFEC Initiative Tracker that documents teachers’ use of the various data sources, including the classwork assignment tracker and classroom data spreadsheet. Leaders noted that, with the exception of 9th grade teachers, high school teachers were not afforded a common planning period this year due to complex high school scheduling needs but that they have time allotted with the instructional coaches to discuss data. Leaders and teachers indicated that teachers respond to various other assessments (e.g. formative tasks and exit tickets) and platforms (e.g. ANet) in their

instructional plans throughout the year. For example, teachers reported that they analyze and respond to ANet assessments three times a year.

- Teachers do not consistently recommend students for structured, schoolwide interventions. Leaders and teachers reported on various methods through which school staff may identify and recommend students for interventions; not all processes were formal, comprehensive, and/or systemized for schoolwide utilization, however. For example, leaders and teachers highlighted that each classroom is staffed with 1–2 instructional assistants to support students. Teachers and support staff noted that the instructional assistants can access online learning platforms for updated student data, however they did not report on a formal process in which the instructional assistant might recommend students for schoolwide interventions. Leaders and teachers noted that they provided the afterschool program as a schoolwide intervention for students that had a D or an F. The site visit team reviewed the Lowest Performing Standards Percentage list, which documents ELA and math standards by grade level with associated average proficiency levels to understand grade level trends first. Additionally, teachers reported that Wednesdays serve as make-up days for students but did not indicate there is a formal, comprehensive recommendation process for that time. Additionally, leaders indicated that a Student Support Team (SST) process was used more frequently and widely in the past, but the need for at least 6 months of data has prohibited school staff from high utilization of this process. While there is evidence of some intervention practices to support students who are struggling, evidence of a school-wide system was not observed, documents did not reveal, and stakeholders did not describe a school wide system of intervention.
- Teachers appropriately recommend students for structured, schoolwide opportunities for acceleration. Leaders reported that the school has eight students that have been identified as Gifted and Advanced Learners (GAL), further noting that they each have an instructional learning plan (ILP) but do not officially participate in a GAL program. However, leaders and teachers indicated that there are various ways in which they provide structured, schoolwide opportunities for advanced students. For example, teachers reported (and the site visit team observed) that the school has growing Pre-AP and AP course offerings, currently AP English and AP Art History, and expanding to more in the next academic year. The site visit team observed a classroom celebrating completion of a recent AP Exam and another class taking one. Leaders noted, in another example, that they had one student participate in a STEM program at Princeton University. Additionally, leaders and teachers indicated that musically advanced students are able to participate in performances (e.g., Festival Disney) and field trips (e.g., Hershey Park). Teachers additionally reported on the ConneXions Collegiate Program, in which middle school students, based on their academic achievement scores, are selected to participate in a monthly trip to experience college. Finally, leaders and teachers noted that opportunities for acceleration also exist through Math extensions for MCCAP All-Stars on Tuesdays and Thursdays and on Wednesdays for extension work.

Key action 1.3	Teachers deliver highly effective instruction.	Not Effective
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Data for Key Action 1.3 was collected from classroom observations in order to provide trends in instruction across the school, as it relates to Teach Action 1–6 of the Instructional Framework. During each classroom visit, the observer collects evidence based on their observations and then determines whether the indicator was Evident, Partially Evident, or Not Evident for each of the 19 indicators. Below is the summary of the 17 classroom observations that were conducted.

- Teachers do not consistently facilitate clear, standards-based content learning.

Communication of objective	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
Evident: Teachers present a purpose for learning or standards-based lesson objective that is grade level or beyond and conveys the significance for learning. Partially Evident: Teachers present a purpose for learning that is grade level or beyond. Not Evident: Teachers do not present a purpose for learning or standards-based objective, or it is not on grade level or beyond.	6%	24%	71%
Task aligned with lesson objective	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
Evident: Tasks have a clear purpose that are aligned with the lesson objective and standard. Partially Evident: Some tasks have a clear purpose or are mostly aligned with the lesson objective and standard. Not Evident: Tasks have an unclear purpose or are not aligned to the lesson objective and standards.	18%	29%	53%
Presentation of content and important concepts	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
Evident: Teachers present content accurately and emphasize important concepts. Partially Evident: Teachers present most content accurately and/or do not emphasize important concepts. Not Evident: Teachers do not present content accurately or do not present content.	12%	6%	82%
Demonstration of student thinking	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
Evident: Students demonstrate their higher-level thinking individually or in groups. Partially Evident: Students demonstrate thinking, individually or in groups. Not Evident: Students do not demonstrate thinking.	0%	47%	53%

- Teachers do not consistently use strategies and tasks to engage students in rigorous work.

Opportunities to engage with complex texts and tasks	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Students have opportunities to engage and grapple with complex texts and rigorous tasks.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Students have opportunities to engage and grapple with complex texts and rigorous tasks, superficially.</p> <p>Not Evident: Students do not have opportunities to engage and grapple with complex texts and rigorous tasks.</p>	12%	18%	71%
Scaffolded and/or differentiated tasks	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers provide scaffolds or differentiate based on students' individual needs.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers provide scaffolds or differentiate; however, it is unclear if it is based upon students' needs.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers do not provide scaffolds or differentiate for students.</p>	6%	24%	71%
Modeling of strategies	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers use evidence-based strategies to equip students to use strategies independently or with support from peers.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers attempt to use evidence-based strategies to engage students with texts and/or tasks; however, students require assistance from the teacher to use the strategies.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers do not use evidence-based strategies.</p>	12%	6%	82%

- Teachers do not consistently use intentional questioning to deepen learning.

Questions requiring justification	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers ensure students justify their thinking by explaining their thought processes and/or using evidence.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers inconsistently require students to justify their thinking by explaining their thought processes and/or using evidence.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers do not require students to justify their thinking or use evidence.</p>	12%	6%	82%
Clear and lesson-appropriate questions	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers ask questions that are clear and lesson-appropriate at key points throughout the lesson.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers ask questions that are somewhat clear and lesson-appropriate at key points throughout the lesson.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers ask questions that are unclear or not lesson appropriate.</p>	18%	24%	59%
Equitable student input	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers encourage input from students and ensure students have opportunities to contribute equitably.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers encourage input from students but use few strategies to ensure equitable contribution by students.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers minimally encourage student input and/or repeatedly call on the same students for contribution.</p>	18%	6%	76%

- Teachers do not consistently monitor progress and provide feedback.

Formative checks for understanding	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers conduct formative assessments that yield useful information for individual student learning progress.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers conduct formative assessments that yield a general sense of the whole class’s learning progress.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers do not conduct formative assessments.</p>	18%	18%	65%
Specific, academic feedback	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers or other students provide specific academic feedback that is actionable and clarifies next steps for students.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers provide general academic feedback that communicates current progress, but they do not provide next steps or the concept is still unclear.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers do not provide academic feedback.</p>	18%	12%	71%

- Teachers do not consistently facilitate student-to-student interaction and academic talk.

Academic talk	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers and students consistently and accurately use academic vocabulary and language.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers consistently and accurately model academic vocabulary and language; however, students do not consistently and accurately use academic vocabulary and language.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers inaccurately model academic vocabulary and language.</p>	6%	29%	65%
Opportunities for student-to-student interaction	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: Teachers provide multiple or extended opportunities for students to work collaboratively towards learning goals.</p> <p>Partially Evident: Teachers provide limited opportunity for students to work collaboratively towards learning goals.</p> <p>Not Evident: Teachers do not provide opportunities for students to work collaboratively towards learning goals.</p>	12%	6%	82%
Evidence-based discussions	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
<p>Evident: In most student interactions, students engage with their peers to make meaning of content and deepen their understanding of the content.</p> <p>Partially Evident: In some student interactions, students engage with their peers to make meaning of content or deepen their understanding of the content.</p> <p>Not Evident: Students do not engage with their peers to make meaning of content or deepen their understanding of the content.</p>	0%	18%	82%

Key action 1.4	Teachers establish a classroom environment in which teaching and learning can occur.	Developing
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Data for Key Action 1.4 was collected from classroom observations in order to provide trends in classroom climate and culture across the school, as it relates to Teach Action 7–9 of the Instructional Framework. During each classroom visit, the observer collects evidence based on their observations and then determines whether the indicator was Evident, Partially Evident, or Not Evident for each of the 19 indicators. Below is the summary of the 17 classroom observations that were conducted.

- Some teachers organize and implement routines to support a learning-focused classroom.

Structured student learning time	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
Evident: Sufficient teacher planning/implementation creates structure for students during the lesson. Partially Evident: Insufficient teacher planning/implementation creates short periods of unstructured time for students. Not Evident: Lack of teacher planning/implementation creates large periods of unstructured time for students.	31%	13%	56%
Routines and procedures	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
Evident: Routines and procedures run smoothly with minimal or no prompting from the teachers. Partially Evident: Routines and procedures run smoothly with some prompting from the teachers. Not Evident: Routines and procedures do not run smoothly or require significant prompting from the teachers.	65%	6%	29%

- Some teachers cultivate a supportive learning community.

Positive classroom community	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
Evident: Teachers cultivate a positive supportive classroom community. Partially Evident: Teachers somewhat cultivate a positive, supportive community. Not Evident: Teachers do not cultivate a positive, supportive classroom community.	53%	18%	29%
Effective behavior management	Evident	Partially Evident	Not Evident
Evident: When needed, teachers appropriately address, redirect, or de-escalate student misbehavior or disruption in a manner that solves the issue with minimal disruption to student learning. Partially Evident: When needed, teachers appropriately address, redirect, or de-escalate student misbehavior or disruption in a manner that solves the issue with some disruption to student learning. Not Evident: When needed, teachers do not appropriately address student misbehavior.	59%	12%	29%

Domain 2: Talented People

Key action 2.1	The school implements systems to select effective teachers and staff whose skills and beliefs meet the needs of the school.	Effective
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- School leadership has implemented organizational structures for selection and/or placement across staffing positions that address student well-being and academic performance. Various stakeholders—school leaders, board members, student support staff, and teachers—consistently reported on the increase of student support specialists for the strategic choice of assigning one for every grade level to holistically address student well-being inside and outside of the school. Additionally, they noted that the school has recently placed various staff members on the Wellness Team, including additional wellness specialists, a social worker, and a director of climate and control. As it relates to academic performance, leaders and teachers reported that the school has two instructional coaches that work closely with NFEC consultants and support all grade levels by content area. Additionally, leaders, student support staff and teachers noted the strategic selection and placement of instructional support specialists. For example, leaders and student support staff noted that the school has hired ConneXions alumni for these positions, understanding their commitment to the school and their abilities to drive academic performance alongside teaching staff. Additionally, leaders, student support staff, and teachers reported (and document review of the Supplemental Instructional Support Staff Schedule confirmed) that instructional support specialists are assigned to a grade level for consistent, daily support and often serve as substitutes in teachers' absence.
- School leadership recruits candidates using multiple stakeholders and measures to assess each candidate's qualifications in alignment with school needs. School leaders reported that they have a standard process for candidate recruitment: they first assess their needs to create hiring projections for the following school year (i.e., determine student needs and identify aligned positions needed and/or needed to eliminate) and then leverage various avenues to recruit candidates, including operator referrals, Indeed, Handshake, and career fairs hosted by the district. The site visit team reviewed hiring-related documents, including emails about talent fairs and a job description for a science teacher. Leaders noted that they have a hiring rubric for all hiring processes, indicating that they leverage a combination of resumes, interviews, and model lessons and/or sample lesson plan submissions as assessment measures for candidates' qualifications. Leaders and teachers indicated that a teacher from the relevant grade level and/or department (e.g., special education) will always serve on the hiring committee, and that the principal and the executive director have the final decision in all hiring.

Key action 2.2	The school develops teacher and staff capacity through individualized support and professional development.	Effective
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- School leadership ensures the implementation of a mentoring program, when applicable, to support the development of all new teachers and staff. Leaders and teachers reported on mentorship and support programs for both international and new teachers. Leaders and teachers noted that international teachers are assigned a mentor, often from their same country, to help them adjust to the cultural norms, support classroom management expectations, and provide emotional support overall. Additionally, teachers noted that the school enrolled international teachers in a cultural responsiveness workshop. Leaders and teachers highlighted that new teachers receive additional professional development through the district-led New Teachers Institute and an additional one-hour session during the school’s all-staff retreat dedicated to new staff that covers topics about school policies, procedures, culture, and instructional expectations. Leaders, student support staff, and teachers reported that new teachers informally receive more support through additional coaching, as instructional coaches mentor first-year and second-year teachers by conducting more frequent classroom observations. Leaders and teachers indicated that they employ a full team effort of experienced teachers supporting instruction, with NFEC providing additional feedback and IEP chairs assisting with paperwork for new teachers as well. School leaders and teachers did not report (and document review confirmed) any evidence of school leadership monitoring the effectiveness of the new teacher mentoring program.
- School leadership uses methods to provide support to struggling teachers and staff, as indicated by informal or formal observations. School leaders and teachers reported that teachers receive both informal and formal observations throughout the school year, conducted by a combination of the instructional leaders. In addition to the anecdotal records from informal observations, leaders indicated that they utilize qualitative observations and lesson plans to identify struggling teachers. They noted that the instructional coaches meet in a weekly instructional coach meeting to review their instructional checklist and determine needed supports for teachers across all grades in middle and high school. Teachers reported that they receive support from their instructional coaches, NFEC, and each other. They indicated that school leaders are accessible for support if needed, noting their open-door policies. Additionally, teachers reported that their instructional coaches employ a hands-on approach. School leaders and teachers further noted that instructional coaches give additional assistance to first-year teachers. The site visit team reviewed informal observations submissions that documented, among anecdotal notes, the associated teach indicator focus observed and relevant feedback in the form of glows and grows.
- School leadership engages all staff in differentiated professional development based on identified needs. Leaders and teachers reported that school leadership begins with a professional

development calendar which they submit as a part of their Comprehensive Support & Improvement (CSI) plan. They noted that they revise the scope and sequence regularly based on the data they review, standards being taught, and informal observations of instruction. Leaders noted they review professional development (PD) topics during ILT meetings on Tuesdays, and leaders and teachers noted that teachers receive PD agendas the day before Wednesday PD. For example, leaders described shifts to PD to address lesson plan expectations and in another example discussed the collaboration with the special education team to provide PD on differentiation. Additionally, leaders and teachers reported that NFEC provides differentiated professional development every Wednesday using class data to most of the teachers in the school building, noting that teachers who are unable to attend still receive their class data and updates.

Domain 3: Vision and Engagement

Key action 3.1	The school has a clear vision and mission that promotes student-centered, culturally relevant learning that prepares students for future success.	Effective
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- The school community shares a clear understanding of the school’s mission and vision, including a clear understanding of initiatives and values that support high student achievement. All stakeholders—school leaders, board members, teachers, families, and students—promptly and consistently shared a common understanding of the school’s mission and vision around arts integration, cultural identity, and community awareness. Leaders, teachers, and students discussed the arts focus and offerings (e.g., African Dance, African Drum, Ballet, Vocal Music Honors, Instrumental Band, Visual Arts, AP Visual Arts, Media Arts, Theatre), and the site visit team observed a dance class and a drum class. They additionally indicated that the arts are embedded in the everyday experience of a ConneXions student, providing them avenues for self-expression and cultural exploration. Leaders, teachers, and students also reported on the house system, which is utilized to further the mission of cultural identity and community. The site visit team observed artifacts of the school mission, vision, and values reflected in the school hallways and classrooms. Finally, leaders and the board noted that there are informal ties to the surrounding West Baltimore community and connections with the Baltimore City Community College. Leaders, board members, and teachers noted that the school vision also embodies academic excellence, sharing more about the recent collaboration with New Foundations Educational Consultants (NFEC). Leaders, teachers, and the Board reported that the initiatives supporting the school’s instructional approach entail NFEC-led weekly data meetings, standard-aligned class assignments, and small-group instruction on Thursdays and Fridays.
- School leadership ensures that the school’s programs are culturally relevant and incorporate skills for 21st-century success. Leaders, teachers, and students reported that the school has culturally relevant practices, noting the ways in which the school community embraces LGBTQ students. For example, school leaders, student support staff, and teachers highlighted gender-neutral bathrooms and an overall culture of inclusivity and embracement of full expression, regardless of one’s orientation and/or background. For example, leaders and student support staff shared that the school named a field day, the Gerry Mac Day, after one of their students in the Life Skills Program to honor their joy and greater contributions to the school community. Regarding skills for 21st-century success, leaders, teachers, and students reported the integrated usage of technology in all classes, including art courses. For example, leaders and teachers noted that students regularly access and leverage online platforms like Lumos Learning and ANet for their learning. Additionally, all stakeholders noted that students utilize Google Classrooms and maintain email addresses to communicate with their teachers and school staff and further

incorporate skills for the 21st century. Finally, the site visit team observed the availability of laptops and iPads in classrooms.

Key action 3.2	The school cultivates and sustains open communication and decision-making opportunities with families and the community.	Effective
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- The school implements systems to build strong relationships with families and garners feedback in order to make schoolwide decisions. Leaders, teachers, students and families reported that the school community has strong ties to school leadership, noting that the principal has an open-door policy and has distributed his phone number to all families. Leaders, teachers, student support staff and families highlighted that that student support team members are also very hands-on, communicating with families regularly and informally about specific student behavioral issues and/or attendance and conducting home visits, if necessary. Additionally, leaders, teachers, student support staff, students, and families reported that the school communicates regularly with families to build relationships, noting schoolwide communications are shared through various methods (e.g., Remind App, Infinite Campus, District Automated Calls, Google Classroom, school fliers, etc.) and from many stakeholders (e.g., the school, teachers, the district). Leaders, teachers, and families spotlighted the phone-a-thons, in which teachers call parents/families to invite to school events and check in on students’ attendance and/or academic progress. Leaders, teachers, and families also noted the school holds events for families, including Back-to-School Night and Math Night. The site visit team reviewed an email sent out to families and the larger school community about a College & Career Transition Fair. Finally, leaders and families noted that the school involves families in schoolwide decisions such as the budget process, highlighting the three virtual sessions the school conducted to solicit feedback on where families might want school funds allocated.
- The school builds relationships with community stakeholders and leverages resources to meet the needs of students and the school. Leaders and teachers reported that the school’s most prominent partnership is with KEYS Empowers, a psychiatric rehabilitation program (PRP) that serves the larger Baltimore community with wraparound services through community integration and resources. They noted that staff members from KEYS Empowers directly work with students and families and provide social-emotional support services such as counseling. Additionally, teachers and student support staff noted that there is a dedicated wellness team member that serves as a liaison with the community to ensure students have meals, safe housing, and any other needs met. Leaders additionally noted that a relationship with the Nation of Islam has provided support to the school community in times of challenge and crisis. For example, leaders recounted the Nation of Islam supporting students with safety measures (e.g., discussions about violence, escorting to bus stops) during times of high community violence. In another example, teachers reported on the Towson Tutors and their support of middle school students’ academic achievement.

Key action 3.3	The climate and culture of the school creates a welcoming learning environment that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student.	Effective
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- The school implements and monitors school protocols that create an environment where students, staff, and families feel welcome and safe. All stakeholders—leaders, teachers, student support staff, families, board members, and most students—reported that students feel both emotionally and physically safe at the school. Students and student support staff shared that the students can express themselves and are accepted as their truest selves at the school. Leaders and student support staff members indicated that student support staff have implemented a strategy for creating a welcoming and safe environment for students by increasing the number of student support coaches to staff each grade level, greeting students in the cafeteria before the start of the school day, and checking in on students throughout the day. Leaders and student support staff noted that the student support coaches are community members that support on the ground level and provide both emotional and physical safety support to students inside and outside of the school. All stakeholders indicated that every student has at least one adult in the building that they can go to for support. Additionally, all stakeholders noted that students have access to the principal, highlighting his open-door policy and overall open lines of communication to discuss any issues.
- The school develops proactive systems that support individual students’ social, emotional, and socioeconomic needs. School leadership and student support staff reported that the school administers a Needs Assessment to all students two times throughout the year: at the beginning and in the middle. Leaders and student support staff reported that the assessment is often distributed at Back to School Night to ensure schoolwide distribution and that the wellness team analyzes and references the results to address any student issues. Various stakeholders (leaders, teachers, student support staff, families, and students) reported that the school leverages a long-standing community model and approach to supporting individual students’ social, emotional, and socioeconomic needs, noting that the school also empowers students to share their needs with school staff, including student support coaches, who are responsible for regularly conducting informal check-ins with students, building relationships with their assigned grade levels’ families, and monitoring students’ social, emotional and socioeconomic needs. Leaders, teachers, and families indicated the student support coaches are embedded in the community and often know about happenings and can resolve students’ issues on earlier timelines. For example, leaders, teachers, student support staff and families noted that these systems have ensured support for food access, clean uniforms, and school activity attendance (e.g., field trips, prom). Finally, various stakeholders (leaders, teachers, student support staff, families, and students) described the newly implemented House system; student support staff highlighted that the House Committee convenes on a biweekly basis to plans House meetings with the overall goal of creating a

communal bond between students and staff. However, no documentation was available to confirm the supports listed above.

- School leadership establishes consistent structures to recognize and celebrate student achievement. Leaders, teachers, student support staff, and students reported that the school has quarterly celebrations to acknowledge and celebrate student achievement, often in Honor Roll assemblies, with field trips (e.g., Orioles baseball outing, Washington Wizards game, movies), and/or by hosting pizza parties. Teachers emphasized food as a celebration and the site visit team observed a pizza party celebration within a classroom post-AP exam. Teachers reported that they give students school store coupons as well, and teachers reported that they find other creative ways to celebrate students, including events like the Sneaker Ball and movie nights. Students also noted that they receive certificates for their academic progress and achievements during Honor Roll Assemblies. The site visit team observed achievement trackers throughout the hallways, celebrating student progress on MAP and MCCAP. Finally, leaders, teachers, and students described the House celebrations as another opportunity to be recognized, indicating that there are special prizes that students might receive for their achievement and/or contributions.
- School leadership establishes structures that demonstrate value and recognition of staff. Teachers unanimously reported feeling valued and recognized at the school, noting that they are appreciated by school leadership, fellow staff members, and students. Leaders and staff indicated that school leadership shows appreciation in various ways, including shout-outs during the Morning Huddles, which occur for 20 minutes three times a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and are either comprised of the whole school's staff or split into middle and high school staff. Teachers noted that they feel valued given the principal has an open-door policy, noting open lines of communication. Additionally, teachers and student support staff indicated that they value and recognize each other, noting that they check in on each other, ask for help, and send each other uplifting notes. The site visit team observed school leadership recognizing teachers' commitment and hard work during Teacher Appreciation Week with food and celebrations. Additionally, the site visit team observed team photos from staff celebrations and announcements recognizing staff birthdays.

Domain 4: Strategic and Professional Management

Key action 4.1	The school establishes clear goals for student achievement and tracks progress toward goals.	Effective
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- School leadership mostly collaborates with teachers to establish and communicate measurable goals for the improvement of student learning and strategies aligned to the goals. All staff stakeholders—leaders, teachers, and student support staff—reported that there are three major goals for the year, including (1) ELA proficiency increases from 11% to at least 30% proficiency, (2) math proficiency increases from 0% to 20%, and (3) increases in student attendance, with benchmarks around a reduction in chronic absenteeism (10 or more days absent) from 65% to 35% and tardiness from 71% to 45%. Leaders and teachers articulated various targets but overall reported clarity on moving students to higher proficiency levels and ensuring students attended school. Leaders reported (and the site visit team observed) that some of the school goals listed on a collaborative planning agenda and a deck utilized during teachers’ Summer Retreat at the start of the school year. Leaders and teachers noted that strategies to increase math and ELA proficiency include the partnership with NFEC, weekly Wednesday data meetings, and small-group instruction on Thursdays and Fridays. They also noted strategies of increasing relationship building with students and leveraging student support staff members and their unique standing within and outside the school to provide necessary wrap-around services (e.g. food, clean clothes), social-emotional support, and overall relational incentives to attend school.
- School leadership and all staff participate in regular analysis of schoolwide data and instructional practices to monitor progress towards goals, revisiting and adjusting action plans as needed. School leaders and teachers reported that they regularly review Weekly Trackers and data from ANet + Luma during Wednesday PD and Thursday collaborative time to address acute data needs relative to weekly standard proficiency. The site visit team observed the student-maintained MCCAP and MAP trackers throughout the school spaces that demonstrated their progress towards goals. School leaders, student support staff, and teachers were able to indicate the school’s progress and adjustments toward attendance goals, citing the weekly attendance dashboard shared from the principal to the school community. For example, leaders and teachers discussed strong collaboration with student support specialists and teachers in providing attendance interventions such as calling families, developing attendance plans, and conducting home visits. Additionally, school leadership noted that the instructional leadership team conducts a data meeting on a biweekly basis to review holistic data from a dynamic dashboard for grades 6–12 that reports on attendance, classroom performance (via GPA), academic health, and passing rates.

Key action 4.2	School leadership allocates and deploys the resources of time, human capital, and funding to address the schoolwide goals for student achievement.	Effective
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- Budget distributions and resource allocations are aligned to school goals and priorities that support equitable learning environments. Various stakeholders—leaders, teachers, student support staff, and board members—reported, as reflected in the ConneXions SY24 Budget, that the executive director identified and the school hired New Foundations Education Consultants (NFEC) in support of goals for increased proficiency in ELA and math. These same stakeholders spoke to the hiring of instructional support staff that would work alongside teachers in support of student achievement goals. Additionally, leaders reported that the school purchased instructional resources for intervention blocks, include IXL (for math in grades 9–12) and Nearpod. Leaders reported on additional initiatives dedicated to more intensive supports for students close to MCCAP proficiency, including the school’s Summer Learning Program, the field trip incentives to reward students for their commitment, and the hiring of Towson Tutors to work with the grade 7 class two days a week. Leaders noted, for example, that the school dedicated approximately \$100,000 to the summer learning program to serve approximately 125 middle school students and will continue to invest in that initiative, given its impact on reducing the summer learning gap.
- School leadership leverages staff in key roles in support of schoolwide goals. As noted above, various stakeholders (leaders, teachers, student support staff, and board members) expressed that the school prioritizes human capital in support of student achievement aspirations and other schoolwide goals, providing various examples. School leaders, teachers, student support staff, and board members, for example, indicated that the school leveraged New Foundations Education Consultants to provide robust, standards-driven data cycles and conduct intense professional development in support of math and ELA proficiency goals. In another example, school leadership increased the instructional support staff team members to be able to provide additive academic support for students. School leaders, teachers, and student support staff additionally noted that they expanded the team of student support specialists to provide student coaches at every grade level in support of the attendance goals. For example, leaders noted that the student support staff and coaches specifically can leverage their one-on-one conversations and relationships with students to motivate improved school attendance and behavior.
- School leadership mostly leverages common staff time to focus on professional learning and collaboration in support of student achievement. School leaders noted that that not all teachers have dedicated common time to collaborate with each other and/or equitable access to the resources for professional learning. Leaders, for example, noted that high school teachers have more complexity in their schedules this year and thus do not have a common planning time with the rest of teachers at the school. Leaders and teachers reported, however, that common staff time is often dedicated to family engagement. For example, leaders and teachers indicated that teachers contact parents on half-day Wednesdays to discuss behavior, attendance, academics

(e.g., danger of failing). Additionally, leaders and teachers reported that most staff meet on Thursdays for collaborative data planning time, a space facilitated biweekly by NFEC. Teachers reported that during this collaborative time, NFEC supports them in learning new instructional tools (e.g., new feature on ANet) and approaches for data tracking. Finally, leaders and teachers reported that school leaders leverage Wednesday afternoons (1:50–3:50) after a half-day of instruction for professional development to address topics like culture and climate, classroom management, and lesson planning.

Key action 4.3	The school’s board of trustees (or operator) provides competent stewardship and oversight of the school.	Developing
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- The governing board maintains essential knowledge of the school and provides some oversight of the academic program. The board reported that its 11 members’ knowledge of the school is informed by both their committee involvement and monthly Board meetings. Additionally, the Board reported that they all receive invitations to all school events and visit the school at least one time per year. Additionally, the board noted that the executive director provides regular informal updates. The board reported that the program school review committee manages information about instruction and its continuous improvement. The board noted that, upon receipt and review of the school’s monthly principal report, the program school review committee provides high-level updates on the school’s academic progress at each monthly board meeting with key takeaways and other items that the board may need to monitor over time. The board reported that they try their best to support the school, often reviewing available data, including MAP trends and instructional practices, and conversing with NFEC consultants, but did not indicate further conversation and/or questioning about the goals and progress towards them. Board members did not share (and document review did not reveal), outside of receiving high-level updates, further ways in which they provide robust academic oversight.
- The governing board provides financial oversight by monitoring the school’s financial records and ensuring that the school remains fiscally viable. The board reported that it has a finance committee that meets monthly to review financial reports for two budgets, the school-based budget and the executive director’s budget. The board noted that the finance committee meets with a third-party accountant throughout the year to ensure strong financial oversight and collaboration with the school. They cited, for example, the process in which the school reports expenses to the accountant and then the accountant posts the expenses and updates the finance committee with a preliminary report for a review of actuals against expenditures. The board indicated that the Finance Committee can ask questions about the reports and make any necessary changes before submitting to the full board for final review. Finally, the board reported that it conducts an annual audit and there have been no findings in at least the past six years. Within this annual audit process, the board noted that board members have at least a month to review the audit, and then, in the succeeding meeting, they vote to accept it and submit it to the district.

- The governing board maintains minimally effective governance practices to ensure organizational viability, including the systemic selection and oversight of the school leader. The board reported that the executive team, comprised of the board president, two vice presidents, the treasurer and the secretary meet at least quarterly, but often every couple of weeks, to ensure board oversight in executive committee meetings. The board indicated that the executive director attends these meetings as well as provides a monthly report to the board to be able to flag any changes necessary and provide high-level updates. The board reported that it is planning to reignite its strategic planning process, in which the board president co-creates a multi-year strategic plan with aligned goals for the executive director. The board noted that the strategic plan serves as the foundation for the ED's performance evaluation, but the board has not instituted an evaluation since after the pandemic's start. The board additionally indicated that it is beginning to develop a succession plan. Document review did not reveal evidence of board or executive committee meeting notes and/or documentation for oversight of the school leader.

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL REPORT COMMENTS

Domain 1: Highly Effective Instruction

Domain 2: Talented People

Domain 3: Vision and Engagement

Domain 4: Strategic and Professional Management

APPENDIX B: SER TEAM MEMBERS

The SER visit to ConneXions was conducted on May 7–9, 2024, by a team of representatives from SchoolWorks and Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS).

Team Lead: Chad Ferguson, SchoolWorks

Team Writer: Lourdes Laguna, SchoolWorks

Team Member: Tawney Manning, BCPS