

# SchoolWorks School Quality Review Report

**Walton Elementary School  
April 28-30, 2015**



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## **About the SchoolWorks School Quality Review Process**

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The Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) envisions 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools of Choice in which students will be challenged with a rigorous curriculum that considers the individual learning styles, program preferences, and academic capabilities of each student, while engaging the highest quality professional educators, administrators, and support staff available. As part of Cleveland's Plan for Transforming Schools, CMSD has adopted a portfolio district strategy that includes: growing the number of high quality district and charter schools, and closing or replacing failing schools; focusing the district's central office on its role in school support and governance, while transferring authority and resources to schools; investing and phasing in high leverage school reforms across all levels; and increased accountability for all schools in the district through the creation of the Cleveland Transformation Alliance (CTA). CMSD has partnered with stakeholders to create a school performance framework that will be used to provide a comprehensive assessment of the quality of each school in the district. The comprehensive assessment will be an evidence-based process that includes data and information gathered on academic programs and performance, school climate, finance, operations, and governance, and stakeholder satisfaction, among other sources.

CMSD has engaged SchoolWorks as a partner in implementing a school quality review process aligned to CMSD initiatives and the school performance framework. The school quality reviews (SQR) are used as one component of a comprehensive assessment of the quality of each school in the district. The SQRs are used to provide formative feedback to schools. Reviews include an action planning process in which the team and the school work together to identify prioritized areas for improvement.

The SQR protocol and review process provides a third-party perspective on current school quality for all students. The report documents the team's ratings for key questions within each of the four domains identified within the SQR protocol: Instruction, Students' Opportunities to Learn, Educators' Opportunities to Learn, and Leadership. While on site, evidence collection takes place through document reviews, classroom visits and interviews with key school stakeholders. After collecting evidence, the team meets to confirm, refute and modify its hypotheses about school performance. The site visit team uses evidence collected through these events to determine ratings in relation to the protocol's criteria and indicators. The outcome of the action planning process is a prioritized plan of next steps, including strategies, resources and timelines to accomplish goals. This report presents the ratings, evidence, and action plan developed on site for the school.

## Domains and Key Questions

Based on trends found in the collected evidence, the site visit team assigns a rating to each key question.

Domains	Rating			
	Level 4: Exemplary	Level 3: Established	Level 2: Targeted support Required	Level 1: Intensive support Required
<b>Domain 1: Instruction</b>				
1. <i>Classroom interactions and organization ensure a supportive, highly structured learning climate.</i>				Level 1: Intensive support Required
2. <i>Classroom instruction is intentional, engaging, and challenging for all students.</i>				Level 1: Intensive support Required
3. <i>The school has created a performance-driven culture, where teachers and staff effectively use data to make decisions about instruction and the organization of students.</i>				Level 1: Intensive support Required
<b>Domain 2: Students' Opportunities to Learn</b>				
4. <i>The school identifies and supports special education students, English language learners, and students who are struggling or at risk.</i>			Level 2: Targeted support Required	
5. <i>The school's culture reflects high levels of both academic expectation and support.</i>				Level 1: Intensive support Required
<b>Domain 3: Educators' Opportunities to Learn</b>				
6. <i>The school designs professional development and collaborative supports to sustain a focus on instructional improvement.</i>			Level 2: Targeted support Required	
7. <i>The school's culture indicates high levels of collective responsibility, trust, and efficacy.</i>				Level 1: Intensive support Required
<b>Domain 4: Leadership</b>				
8. <i>School leaders guide instructional staff in the central processes of improving teaching and learning.</i>			Level 2: Targeted support Required	
9. <i>The principal effectively orchestrates the school's operations.</i>				Level 2: Targeted support Required

### Domain 1: Instruction

1. Classroom interactions and organization ensure a supportive, highly structured learning climate.

**Level 1:  
Intensive support  
Required**

- While behavioral expectations are understood by students, they are not clearly or consistently enforced.** In 33% of observed classes (n=15), students adhered to the school's behavioral norms. In these classes, students demonstrated knowledge of classroom norms that contributed to an orderly learning environment. For example, in one class students were seated quietly responding to questions from a reading assignment; though some behavior reminders were issued, students were generally on-task, respectful, and complied with rules. In some classrooms, students were predominantly well-behaved but there were individuals or small groups that were behaving inappropriately. In addition, many classrooms posted behavioral expectations and hallways included posters depicting the school's behavioral norms but students repeatedly disregarded teachers' expectations without consequences. In many classes, classroom management was characterized by verbal cues like "Shhh" or "I'll count to three" but these reminders did not impact student behavior and the teacher would typically move on without further addressing or administering consequences for disruptive behaviors. For example, in one class a teacher redirected a student more than five times but the student continued to ignore her requests. At one point the teacher said, "You cannot threaten another student" to which the student replied, "Yes I can" and the teacher proceeded without administering any consequences to the student. In many classes, the majority of students were engaged in off-task behavior, including social discussions, profanity, running around the room, and horseplay with other students. In a focus group students indicated that behavior problems are impeding instruction and that while rules are similar across classrooms, the consequences and enforcements vary greatly.
- The learning environment is not highly structured, and learning time is not maximized.** In 13% of observed classes, instruction was characterized by purposeful learning tasks, effective use of materials, and well-paced transitions. However, in most classes, directions were unclear, and teachers and students were unprepared to execute instructional tasks. For example, in one lesson the majority of instructional time was spent addressing negative behaviors from a small group of students while the rest of the class waited to move forward; it took over 15 minutes for the majority of the class to engage in learning. In another class, the teacher reminded students they had two minutes to finish a lesson, but then did not adhere to that time frame; the lesson lacked structure and learning time was not maximized. Teachers reported that they do not have easy access to curricular materials or time to properly plan and execute teaching strategies.

2. Classroom instruction is intentional, engaging, and challenging for all students.

**Level 1:  
Intensive support  
Required**

- While some learning goals are posted, teachers do not provide direct instruction aligned to those goals.** Learning objectives were frequently posted and stated as "I can" statements but were not tied into the observed lesson or referenced during instruction. In 1% of classes, posted learning targets aligned to instruction. Many classes included an analytical objective on the board but low-level work was observed during instruction. For example, in one class an objective included high-level computing and number sense but students were only expected to complete a worksheet that contained basic problems presented in a format requiring no application or synthesis. In another

class the instruction did not align to the posted objective; when asked about their learning goal, students said it was to get through a certain number of problems in their workbook.

- **Instruction does not require students to use or develop higher-order thinking skills.** In focus groups, school leaders confirmed that critical thinking is a growth area for the school. They indicated that groundwork is being laid to develop teaching strategies that foster higher-order thinking in the future. The site visit team did not observe any classes in which activities developed students' critical thinking. Rather, many classes were centered on book work or the completion of work sheets. For example, in one class students worked on singular and plural apostrophes; their only task was to add an apostrophe to a word in a set of seven sentences. Feedback centered on accurate placement of apostrophes but students were not asked to connect the apostrophe to the idea of possession, use apostrophes to write their own sentences, or explain why the apostrophe was important in terms of language usage. In a middle school class, students were drafting an essay; the expectation for the writing piece was to compose six sentences around a given topic though it was unclear how the sentences fit together to develop a grade-appropriate essay structure. In focus groups, the majority of students indicated that they did not feel challenged in their classes and described the expectations for class work and assessments as "very easy."

3. The school has created a performance-driven culture where teachers and staff effectively use data to make decisions about instruction and the organization of students.	<b>Level 1: Intensive support Required</b>
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- **In-class assessment strategies are rarely used to reveal students' thinking about learning goals.** Teachers stated that they are required to administer and reflect on weekly in-class assessments as part of their teacher-based teams (TBT). School leaders stated that teachers administer weekly assessments, but they are still working with teachers to design assessments that target learning goals. In 20% of observed classes, teachers used in-class inquiry and monitoring to assess students' understanding. For example, when this was present in a classroom, teachers used verbal inquiry to help students clarify their understandings and/or circulated the classroom to give one-on-one feedback to students as they worked. However, in most classes, assessment strategies were not observed. For example, in one class students were struggling with reading passages and revealed they did not understand the content but the students could not articulate where their understanding broke down and the teacher did not use inquiry to target their skill deficiencies. In another class the teacher asked students to raise their hands to indicate whether they understood the assignment; none of the students raised their hands and the teacher moved on without further clarification. Many classes included a line of questioning based on recall of information but student responses did not allow teachers to monitor their conceptual understanding.
- **Feedback is not provided to students to inform improvement efforts.** Students reported that they receive feedback on their learning through progress reports and grades. Only 7% of observed classes included provision of feedback that aided students' progression toward learning goals. In the majority of classes, feedback was based on procedure, completion, or behavior; in some classes, students did not receive any feedback. Some teachers were observed giving quantitative feedback such as "You can write more" or "Did you complete number fourteen?" or general feedback such as "Good job" or "Keep going." However, criteria-based feedback, models, and rubrics were not used in the learning process, and students had few tools to help them gauge their own understanding. When asked what they do with completed work, students said they check with other students. Classroom observations did not yield evidence of teachers grading or giving feedback on work. An examination of student work samples contained few pieces of feedback from teachers; some students' answers were marked wrong but did not invite students to correct

misunderstandings. Rubrics or models were not attached to any of the samples of corrected student work.

## Domain 2: Students' Opportunities to Learn

4. The school identifies and supports special education students, English language learners, and students who are struggling or at risk.	<b>Level 2: Targeted support Required</b>
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- The school has interventions in place for lower elementary students and is working to expand its supports across the school.** Teachers and leaders described the existence of systems of intervention supports for grades K-3 delivered through targeted small group instruction. According to teachers, these intervention groups are created based on a universal screening and student placement by the student support team (SST). School leaders also described interventions in place for grades 4-8 through a whole class intervention period for reading and math. According to staff, students can move along a spectrum of services based on progress monitoring and teacher recommendations. Observed intervention classes included small groups of students - in alignment with teachers' descriptions of Rtl groups of less than ten students. In those classes, students were engaged in learning activities focused on targeted skill development. Both teachers and school leaders acknowledged the work of staff members who have collaborated to create a more robust system of supports through Rtl and reported that student progress has increased dramatically due to these efforts. Nearly all stakeholders recognized Rtl as an area of strength for the school and reported on ways it has improved teaching and learning within the school. The principal further reported the addition of an Rtl coach for next year, as well as plans to expand the Rtl model to include fourth and fifth grades.
- The school provides limited opportunities for students to form positive relationships with peers and adults in the school.** While upper elementary students identified adults in the building that they seek out for support, middle school students claimed they have few adults that they trust to help them with personal matters. When asked what they would do to improve the school, many students reported they would like a more supportive teaching staff. In a focus group, parents also claimed that many parents felt uncomfortable going to teachers or leaders for support, and reported that they had brought issues to the leadership team and were not satisfied by the way their concerns were addressed. Teachers and leaders reported that the Positive Alternative Thinking System (PATHS) is used to facilitate social-emotional learning in the lower grades. However, when the site visit team observed this program in action, some students were disengaged and inappropriate actions by students (such as name-calling) were not addressed.

5. The school's culture reflects high levels of both academic expectation and support.	<b>Level 1: Intensive support Required</b>
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- The school does not provide a safe environment to support students' learning.** In a focus group, students reported feeling unsafe within the school building. They indicated that given violence within the neighborhood, they were concerned about easy access to the school from multiple outside doors and the tendency for students to let unsolicited visitors into the building. Both teachers and parents indicated that they feel there is insufficient security for the building and that monitoring videos are not viewed regularly to ensure the safety of the facility. Upper elementary students described some classrooms as chaotic and some students' behaviors as harmful to the

learning environment. Site visit team members observed classes where students were throwing things, standing on desks, name-calling, hitting, or teasing other students. The school's Conditions of Learning Survey questions students as to their feeling of safety within their school; only 51% of second through fourth graders and 55% of fifth through eighth grade students reported feeling safe. Teachers also reported feeling unsafe in the building and in the neighborhood. According to teachers, some school-wide initiatives are in place to enforce safety, such as the establishment of a bullying coordinator and a mediation advisor. Students described using peer mediation and a court system to resolve conflicts among students. However, nearly all stakeholders indicated that these measures have not proven sufficient to create a sense of safety within the school.

- **The school provides limited opportunities for family engagement.** In a focus group, parents reported minimal communication or outreach from the school to families. Although some students reported that their parents attended school events, the majority indicated that their parents' work schedules prevented them from participating. Parents reported that they participate in a Student-Parent Organization (SPO) and, in conjunction with a teacher-led family engagement committee, they plan family-centered events. Both parents and teachers cited two events that were held this year including a Dr. Seuss movie event and a Pasta for Pages dinner to encourage literacy at home. A review of fliers showed evidence of five other parent outreach events though all events took place between 10:00 and 11:30 a.m. School leaders reported that this year's staff does not include the site coordinator position they had in past years, and subsequently, the school has seen a measurable negative impact on community engagement.

### Domain 3: Educators' Opportunities to Learn

6. The school designs professional development and collaborative supports to sustain a focus on instructional improvement.

**Level 2:  
Targeted support  
Required**

- **While professional development is provided, there is little impact on instructional practice.** Based on feedback from stakeholders, there is a lack of congruence between staff and leadership's perception of what constitutes professional development. When asked what professional development activities they engaged in as a school, teachers discussed TBTs and the way they spend the requirements for their 200 weekly minutes. The leadership team discussed (and a review of professional development documents confirmed) that the school offered frequent and explicit training on how to unpack standards, use the Data Wise system, and incorporate data-driven instruction. However, few teachers mentioned this training. Both teachers and school leaders reflected that although professional development systems were in place, they did not see that there was any significant impact on instruction. Teachers also noted there are limited opportunities to give input into the design of professional development or to reflect on its efficacy. Some teachers discussed ways in which leaders support their efforts to seek professional development from the district, through other educational agencies, and through educational materials. These teachers also cited a recent opportunity for a group of educators to attend the ASCD conference and referred to workshop opportunities in Houston and Denver.
- **Structures are in place for educators to collaborate regularly; however, the quality and impact of the collaboration varies.** While site visit team members observed teachers meeting in grade-level TBTs, they noted variability in the quality and focus of each meeting. For example, some groups effectively discussed and used data to reflect on their instruction and plan new strategies for improvement. However, another group never referred to their data binders, and another group made virtually no mention of data. Two TBTs used a common protocol, agenda, and established

roles within their groups, though one group was focused on complying with the protocol sheet whereas the other was more focused on student outcomes. When asked about the purpose for the day's meeting, groups noted that their self-selected goal was to help students devise more complete responses to questions; some team members said they had been working on the goal all year whereas others stated they had established the goal only recently. A review of professional development documents and minutes revealed clear expectations and resources for using the Data Wise program to aid collaborative work, guide interventions, and participate in data digs. Furthermore, professional development agendas included guidance on lesson planning, best practices, and norms for professional behavior. Teachers reported that although there is regular time to meet in TBTs, they do not feel they have sufficient instructional time to implement new ideas before the next data cycle. Teachers also noted that in addition to their 200 minutes of weekly professional development, they have 200 minutes of planning time. When asked if they use this time to plan collaboratively with other team members, most said they preferred to plan on their own or that scheduling constraints made it difficult to plan with members of their team.

7. The school's culture indicates high levels of collective responsibility, trust, and efficacy.

**Level 1:  
Intensive support  
Required**

- **Not all educators convey shared commitments and mutual responsibility.** Teachers and leaders reflected that the school does not currently have a working vision and that although a team was convened to draft one, it has not yet generated a working philosophy within the school. Additionally, school leaders and teachers reported they have a great deal of autonomy in regards to classroom management and instructional practices. Teachers also referred to time constraints, micro-management, and plans to leave the school as reasons they are not fully effective or committed. Some teachers reported that they feel their jobs require too much behavior management and student behaviors prevent them from providing effective instruction. A number of staff members cited families, economic situations, and home structures as reasons for students' struggles to succeed.
- **The school does not reflect a safe and trustworthy professional climate.** Teachers reported that they do not receive feedback from instructional leaders unless they ask for it directly. When asked if they reach out to request feedback, some teachers said they did and were given support. School leaders reported multiple instances when they have attempted to give teachers constructive feedback and were met with resistance or teachers indicated that they only wanted feedback as part of the district-mandated evaluation system. Teachers and students reported that school leaders do not follow through on consequences for negative student behaviors, and one teacher reported that a student once responded to feedback with "Go ahead and give me a referral, nothing's going to happen." Leaders reported that many teachers send students to the office rather than exercise classroom management or apply positive behavior intervention supports. Teachers further stated they do not feel they can provide feedback to school leaders as part of an open and honest culture. School leaders cited ways in which they have attempted to build culture through newsletters recognizing teachers' positive efforts or giving kudos to staff members. They were criticized by other staff members that did not receive recognition. Multiple stakeholders reported that staffing was unstable throughout the school year with some teachers leaving mid-year and multiple positions being filled by long-term substitutes. Leaders further stated (and staff confirmed) that they will be experiencing significant staff turnover again this year and are seeking teachers who are committed, honest about their own areas for improvement, and open to building a strong professional culture.

#### Domain 4: Leadership

8. School leaders guide instructional staff in the central processes of improving teaching and learning.

**Level 2:  
Targeted support  
Required**

**School leaders are working to ensure that teachers deliver high quality instruction.** According to school leaders, early professional development sessions focused on writing learning objectives and unpacking standards, and providing resources for teachers to observe good teaching in action. One such resource was Observation 360, an evaluative tool intended to give teachers structured observations and feedback. According to school leaders, the program also includes videos that model good practices and connect teachers with resources. However, the principal reported that teachers filed a grievance related to the use of Observation 360; thus, she curtailed its use and now only observes as part of the Teacher Development and Evaluation System (TDES) or by teacher invitation. The principal reported there are other leadership team members who focus on quality instruction. For example, the instructional coach reported she works with teachers, on an informal basis, to improve planning and data-driven instruction (DDI) or give feedback on instruction. Some teachers stated that they had received feedback from school leaders and that all leaders were available if teachers asked for their help. School leaders discussed (and a review of professional development materials confirmed) that they have led regular professional development sessions focused on instruction such as unpacking Common Core State Standards (CCSS), DDI, norm-checking, building assessments, and creating exemplars.

**School leaders are in the early stages of creating a school-wide data culture.** Teachers reported that results for pre-, mid-, and post-assessments are submitted to school leaders on a weekly basis. The principal indicated that she offers feedback as needed. The school leader explained that she instituted this system in order to create an assessment and feedback cycle, and ensure that learning goals, instruction and assessments are aligned. Leaders stated that teachers were provided with training through the Data Wise program and are given time to analyze data within their TBTs that meet 50-100 minutes per week. However, teachers indicated that assessments are too frequent to demonstrate impacts on student learning. As stated earlier, site visit team members observed TBTs in session and the work of groups varied in terms of their ability to use data in decision making. Many teachers reported that the instructional coach is available to run reports and help teachers access and analyze relevant data from classroom assessments, AIMSweb and the Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) assessments.

9. The principal effectively orchestrates the school's operations.

**Level 2:  
Targeted support  
Required**

- **The principal is working to recruit and retain talent that can drive dramatic student gains, and dismiss those who do not meet professional standards and expectations.** The principal reported that only five teachers will be returning for the 2015-2016 school year and the majority of staff will be retiring, transferring, or leaving at the end of this year. Additionally, the principal reported that she is preparing for some non-renewals and termination for staff members that have been unable to meet expectations and have not made sufficient gains toward improvement. She also described her plans for hiring through a selection committee. A review of meeting minutes showed that the committee has met multiple times to examine resources for best practices in hiring, the CMSD protocol for hiring, and the TDES question bank to prepare for interviews. Some teachers described their role within the process and stated that they are members of the selection committee. School leaders reported they have twelve interviews scheduled in the coming weeks in hopes of having all

new staff hired by the end of the school year. Leaders further reported that the school is seeking candidates that are reflective, enthusiastic, and willing to receive feedback. Teachers and leaders claimed that staff turnover and placement of long-term substitutes have been frequent throughout the year and as a result, some staff members have been moved into roles in which they were not effective. School leaders and teachers reported they are committed to hiring the best possible candidates for 2015-2016 and have begun to identify the attributes and core values of strong candidates.

- **The principal engages community members in support of the school.** The school leadership described their vision for the school as a hub of learning within the community. As a CMSD Investment School, the school is eligible for additional supports from the school district and the community. Among these is a partnership with the Boys and Girls Club that provides after-school programming for students, including tutoring, music, and sports. In focus groups, students indicated that they were all aware of the after-school programs, and half of the students stated that they received academic support and extra-curricular programming. The principal also described a partnership with the Asia Society that has culminated in their status as an International Studies School Network (ISSN) school. Teachers and leaders reported that the school established a partnership with the Cleveland Browns that has resulted in a variety of resources for the school and students. All stakeholders described the positive impact of this relationship and discussed the contributions the team has made, including a Kindle Fire for each middle school student, backpacks and bikes for eligible students, gifts for teachers, and free tickets to home games. A review of documents contained evidence of each of these partnerships (including a partnership with the Cleveland Metro Zoo), and a bulletin board in the main hallway featured icons from local businesses, nonprofits, and city services that stated “We’re invested in you.”

## Prioritization Process

The site visit team met with the Walton Elementary School's leadership team to review its findings, discuss the school's areas of strengths and areas for improvement, prioritize areas for improvement, and discuss ways to address the identified areas for improvement.

School leaders and the site visit team were in agreement that there are significant strengths present in the school. Areas of strength the team discussed included professional development, supports for diverse learners, and the principal's hiring and teambuilding abilities. The site visit team also noted the following areas for growth: learning goals, aligned instruction, and student behaviors.

The group identified instruction as the area to prioritize for growth. The group identified the following priority within this Key Question as having the most potential impact on the success of the school as a whole: instruction aligned to learning goals.

The team then developed the following goal, success measure, and action plan:

**Goal: All learning goals are posted and teachers provide aligned, direct instruction.**

**Success Measure: By the end of the first quarter, observed lessons will align with learning objectives in 90% of classrooms.**

Actions	Target Dates	Champions
Create professional development plan	8/1/15	Dean of student engagement
Share and schedule professional development plan with academic planning team	9/1/15	Assistant principal
Train staff on learning walkthrough protocols	10/1/15	Principal/ lead teacher
Utilize sit-in on TBTs to ensure aligned instruction	Ongoing	Dean of student engagement Instructional coach/ lead teacher
Instructional coach to model learning objective and aligned instruction	Ongoing as needed	Assistant principal Instructional coach
Observation 360 walkthrough	Weekly	Principal

## **Appendix A: Site Visit Team Members**

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The SQR to Walton Elementary School was conducted on April 28-30, 2015 by a team of educators from the Cleveland Metropolitan School District and SchoolWorks, LLC.

<b>Sarah Rapa</b>	Team Leader	SchoolWorks, LLC
<b>Amber Leage</b>	Team Writer	SchoolWorks, LLC
<b>Nicholas D'Amico</b>	Team Member	Cleveland Metropolitan School District