



The New York City Department of Education



Quality Review Report

Excelsior Preparatory High School

High School 265

**143-10 Springfield Boulevard
Queens
NY 11434**

Principal: Derek Jones

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Reviewer: Cheryl Baker

Content of the report

Part 1: The School Context

Information about the school

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

What the school needs to improve

Part 3: Main Findings

Overall evaluation

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Excelsior Preparatory High School is a growing empowerment school currently serving 290 students in grades 9 through 11. Special education students are 12% of the population and 3.4% are English language learners. Approximately 81% of students are Black, nearly 9% are Hispanic and the remaining 10% represent other backgrounds. There are 14% fewer male than female students. The school is Title I eligible with the proportion of qualifying students numbering slightly less than the City average. Attendance for 2005-2006 was just over 90%, below the City average.

Empowerment schools have more flexibility to make key decisions and control the resources for their school community. Empowerment schools are free to develop or purchase professional development services, choose which schools to affiliate with, and benefit from reduced reporting and paperwork requirements. The school was founded in 2004 by the current principal with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and has an active partnership with the Institute for Student Achievement.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal provides effective leadership to implement the school's mission and the principles promoted by its partner, the Institute for Student Achievement.
- The school communicates high expectations for student achievement to students and parents and supports these expectations through strong academic and advisory programs.
- The school effectively use support and guidance from its partner organization as it continues to evolve towards it full complement of grades.
- Shared decision-making and collaborative leadership empower teachers as equal partners in the development of the school.
- Students feel respected, known and well cared for by their teachers and the administrative staff.
- Teachers are supported in their professional development through a variety of in-house activities, programs and workshops as well as through the offerings of outside providers.
- The tone of the school is warm and welcoming.

What the school needs to improve

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the current periodic assessment in providing teachers with powerful diagnostic data regarding students' individual learning needs.
- Provide teachers with training in the use of quantitative data regarding students' learning needs in planning lessons and activities.
- Provide training in the differentiation of instruction based upon teachers' knowledge of students' specific areas of weakness or strength.
- Improve planning practices to include actions, timelines, measures of success and responsible parties relative to the goals identified by the analysis of all available data.
- Continue to develop curriculum maps to provide continuity and progression across the school and assessment opportunities in line with State standards.
- Further improve student attendance through strict adherence to expectations and consequences.

Part 3: Main findings

Overall Evaluation

This is a proficient school.

In its nearly three years of existence, Excelsior Prep, largely through the charismatic leadership of its principal, has established its individual identity among four other small schools occupying the former site of a large high school. Attention to the social and emotional needs of students and consistent reinforcement of the school's mission has created an environment for learning. The school has established structures for the analysis of data for planning and collaborative decision making. The school intends to address needs for monitoring the incremental progress of its plans as it adds an additional grade next year. The school's curriculum and instruction support students' academic success. Teachers are empowered to collaborate in the leadership of the school.

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school uses all available data, including Regents and scholarship results and attendance and incidence reports, to inform the school's understanding of the performance of individual students, classes and grade levels. Teachers' assessments further inform their understanding of the progress of individuals. Diagnostic tests in mathematics and writing, designed and analyzed by the school's partner, are administered to all freshmen to reveal overall strengths and weaknesses for each class. Outcomes are disaggregated by academic strand, gender and ethnicity and compared with the Institute for Student Achievement's other thirteen schools. This provides a wealth of information including topics that need reinforcing or groups that require extra support. Reliable trend data indicating student improvement is not yet available as the school only began to administer periodic assessments, in English at grade 11 and in mathematics at grade 10, two years ago. The school introduced entrance and periodic assessments this year. The school's periodic assessment tools do not provide teachers with ready access to data that indicates students' individual learning needs and not all students are regularly tested in English and mathematics.

The progress of special education students is effectively monitored through actions and assessments specified in each student's individual education plan. Similarly, required testing for English language learners tracks their progress towards proficiency. Evaluations of data indicated no significant differences between the school's major ethnic groups but showed that female students scored slightly higher on entrance examinations. The school identified that the performance and behavior of a group of Black males warranted intervention, and created an after-school club that is successfully improving their attendance, behavior and academic performance. The school also compares its progress and performance in academic subjects with nearby schools and those sharing the building.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The very nature of the school’s annual growth keeps all members of the school community focused on the steps necessary to accommodate annual increases in students, teachers, programs and courses. Planning is ongoing, largely informal, and focused on long term targets. For example, the Comprehensive Education Plan, while addressing specific needs identified through the analysis of statistical and survey data, sets annual, rather than short term goals for inquiry-based projects, increases in the passing rate and increasing student attendance. Similarly, the school’s goals for increasing the use of data, infusion of technology and increasing parental involvement, are annual in nature. While these, and the principles embodied in the Institute for Student Achievement’s rubrics describing best practice in all of the school’s functions inform the action of all constituencies, they give little guidance as to short term targets or incremental measures of success.

The school knows each student well. The student support team meets regularly to identify, diagnose and plan interventions for students referred by staff for academic, attendance or behavioral issues. It supports those students identified as in greatest need well. Specific interventions have been successfully created which have improved the performance of, for example, underperforming Black males. The school works with another school in the building to provide required services for its small number of English language learners, thus meeting their needs in a cost-effective fashion. The school strives to meet the needs of its special education students in collaborative team teaching and self-contained settings but struggles to meet the needs of a few students whose identified needs exceed the school’s capacity. As yet, the school has not identified a particular grade level or academic subject as a focus of concern.

The principal and teachers reinforce the school’s mission that sets high expectations for students’ academic achievement and the expectation that every student will go the college. These expectations are communicated clearly and regularly to students and parents. The school is supporting its first graduating class of students and their parents effectively to prepare for college entrance. Parents of special education students are involved in discussions about programs and progress. Parents, in general, are proud of the school and express confidence in the administration and the teachers. However, not all parents participate in programs that are offered and some do not support their children’s education.

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

In 2006 teachers of tested core subjects developed weekly curriculum maps for the next year that included essential questions, topics materials and activities. Alignment to State standards is implicit rather than explicit and regular common assessment of students’ progress through the curriculum remains a goal. The school provides challenging project-based courses and endeavors to incorporate ‘real world’ connections into instructional

activities so learning becomes more relevant. Instruction is generally engaging with cooperative learning as a frequently used approach but is mostly differentiated by activity. It is not consistently differentiated using assessment data that indicates students' individual learning needs. The principal utilizes the scholarship report, Regents scores and observations of instruction to hold teachers accountable for improving their instruction and student outcomes. Shortcomings are addressed through conferencing, support and dismissal if warranted.

Decisions regarding the allocation of funds, staffing and scheduling are informed by the needs of the ever increasing student body. For example, funds were used to hire a collaborative team teacher to support the inclusion of special education students to give them access to the general education curriculum. Incident reports drove the decision to increase the administrative staff and fund the dean's position. More professional development was provided for teachers by reconfiguring the weekly schedule to create weekly early release time for teachers to hold grade level and academic conferences. This was achieved by increasing the length of two instructional days so there was no reduction in students' instructional time.

Students report feeling very safe and supported by their teachers and, especially the principal, who some view as a surrogate parent. They like their classes and feel that the school is preparing them to reach their goals for higher education. They acknowledge that the strict requirements for attendance as well as prompt arrival at school and for each class have increased their vigilance in complying with school regulations. Attendance, which had dropped below 90%, is now increasing.

Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal is highly regarded by students, parents, staff and his fellow administrators. There are clear procedures that ensure that the school runs smoothly within the confines of a building shared by four other schools. The principal and his administrative staff lead collaboratively and empower staff and students to take ownership of the school and its future. He enlists constituents in the hiring process to support the growth of a cohesive staff, placing significant emphasis on candidates' abilities to 'connect with kids' as well as evidence of their capacity to plan, their flexibility and their openness. The capacity to use data and technology are emerging criteria.

Teachers are effectively supported through bi-weekly professional development in either grade level or academic conferences. They are enabled through regularly scheduled common planning time, programs offered through the Institute for Student Achievement and programs organized through the Empowerment Network. The overarching themes for professional development reflect the school's annual goals. The school has identified the need for further training in the analysis of assessment data and techniques for the differentiation of instruction. Teachers support one another in improving their instruction through informal conversations as 'critical friends', although inter-visitations are not a common feature. The principal and assistant principal observe teaching on an informal basis nearly every day and provide helpful commentary regarding instruction. The principal makes more formalized visits followed by 'coaching sessions' if his walk-through observations indicate the need for assistance.

The school enjoys the support of several youth development and support services such as 'Giant Thinking', United Black Men of Queens, Life Camp, York College, and the Student Press Initiative, each of which contributes well to an aspect of students' social or academic development.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.

This area of the school's work is undeveloped.

The school's focus with respect to planning as evidenced by the Comprehensive Education Plan, the annual goals, the Institute for Student Achievement's principles, and the curriculum maps, is long term. The components of these plans do inform the actions of the school as it progresses through the academic year. The lack of frequent interim goals or measures of progress, however, does not allow the school to monitor and revise its plans accordingly. The school recognizes the need to develop monitoring procedures that routinely utilize data to allow for the accurate and responsive modification of goals and actions to increase student achievement.

Within classrooms teachers make adjustments to instruction based on students' performance as part of their routine practice. Comparisons of progress among students within and across classrooms to make interim diagnostic assessments or measure the progress of plans and interventions, is not a practice regularly undertaken in the school. The process of scoring the first administration of the school's periodic assessment was a component of the Empowerment School Intensive and resulted in a lengthy analysis of the instructional program in English language arts. However, the format of the reporting of raw scores from the periodic assessment and the lack of processes for the analysis and disaggregation of these scores has prevented the use of this data to understand students' actual learning needs. The school recognizes the need to evaluate the usefulness of the present instrument in generating meaningful diagnostic information that could be used to revise plans and modify goals in the effort to support and improve student achievement.

Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

SCHOOL NAME: Excelsior Preparatory High School (HS 265)	∅	✓	+
Quality Score		X	

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each student, classroom, grade level, 		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students* 		X	
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all other categories of interest to the school* 		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1		X	

* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.	X		
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.		X	
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.			X
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2		X	

Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.		X	
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3		X	
Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.		X	
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.			X
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4		X	
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.	X		
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.	X		
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.	X		
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 5	X		