

# The New York City Department of Education



# Quality Review Report

**Validus Preparatory Academy**

**High School 263**

**1595 Bathgate Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10457**

**Principal: Brady Smith**

**Dates of review: April 25 - 26, 2007**

**Reviewer: Georgie Beasley**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Validus Preparatory Academy has 215 students enrolled in grades 9 and 10. The school's population comprises 75% Hispanic students, 24% Black students and 1% Native American and Alaskan students. The proportion of English language learners at 19% is above the City schools' average. In addition to English, many students speak Spanish. The proportion of special education students at 14% is about the same as similar and other City schools. The school receives Title 1 funding. At 84%, attendance is above that of similar schools and the City average for high schools.

The school is approaching its second year and is building steadily to provide for students in grades 9 through 12.

The school is an Outward Bound Expeditionary Learning school, dedicated to academics, health and fitness. There is a strong partnership with other Expeditionary Learning schools in New York City.

As an Empowerment School, Validus Preparatory Academy has more flexibility to make key decisions and control 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.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal's vision for the school is clearly articulated and is shared by staff and students.
- Expeditionary learning and crew advisories help to shape an effective curriculum, make effective contributions to students' personal social and emotional development and increase student voice.
- Regular ongoing opportunities for students to lead portfolio conferences enable them to share goals with parents and teachers and to assess their own learning and achievements.
- An extensive range of data is used effectively to build up a clear picture of each student's achievement.
- The school has high expectations for all students to graduate.
- Teachers work effectively as teams to openly and honestly evaluate their practice and to share additional strategies to effect improved instruction for students.
- Data is used effectively to devise schedules and allocate resources that enable students to gain the credits they need to graduate.
- Systems are established that provide ongoing review and evaluation of the school's work.
- Procedures are clearly communicated to all and subsequently the school runs smoothly during the day.
- By grade 10, students are courteous, treat each other and adults with respect and behave in a mature manner.

### What the school needs to improve

- Further disaggregate data by additional subgroups, including gender and higher achievers, to identify trends in performance and progress.
- Based on students' prior performance and expected progress identify more precise and specific measures of success and use that information to further differentiate instruction.
- Make explicit the strategic plan for how the school intends to maintain its effective systems for monitoring and reviewing its work and to sustain its good capacity to improve.
- Create opportunities for the principal to visit classes more regularly.
- Continue to improve the attendance and punctuality of the few students who struggle to get to school on time.
- Continue to build parent involvement in the school.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The principal's clear and purposeful leadership has built a staff team with one vision that focuses on each individual student's academic, personal, physical, emotional and intellectual development and welfare. The way that this school plans, organizes and delivers the curriculum through Expeditionary Learning is almost unique in New York City. When implemented as intended, students are fully involved in planning, revising and putting their work together. Consequently, they develop academic and personal skills side by side and the growth in their social and emotional development is particularly noteworthy by grade 10. An Outward Bound course at the beginning of grade 9 builds effective teamwork and personal skills that prepares students well for the expectations in high school. Crew community activities and special events such as the Crew Olympics make significant contributions to students' achievements throughout their time at the school.

The school uses the designated periodic assessment materials very well to generate a wide range of data about students' performance, progress, the identification of ongoing academic and personal needs and attendance. The data is used effectively to plan individual routes for each student towards graduation. In this way students are never allowed to 'slip through the cracks'.

The review agrees with the school that it has already reached proficiency in its work. The school is clearly building effective systems and programs as it grows to full capacity. However, it has not yet had the time to establish systems into fully consistent practice.

### **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 has an extensive and varied range of data that gives clear information about the performance and progress of each individual student. It uses the information well to plan an individual track for each student towards graduation. Assessments in all mandated subjects, physical education, health and fitness classes and personal development are ongoing and recorded formally at the end of each marking period to accurately level students' work. Teachers use the data to plan work that prepares students well for Regents exams, and enables the administration to compare student performance class by class in each grade. As a result, planned programs meet the specific needs of individuals and groups of students well. Using this data, the school plans relevant and successful programs for special education students and English language learners to enable most to gain the credits they need to graduate in two years time.

The school is too new for it to be able to compare really effectively how well it is doing with City and similar schools and improvements year on year because it is still waiting for its

first class to graduate. However, it evaluates its passes in Regents exams to decide which students should retake to improve upon their grade and who needs to have another go to pass. It checks the progress of special education students and English language learners closely to identify any trends in performance and compare achievement between grades and classes. While the school knows that there are some differences in achievement of boys and girls, and that some students can do even better, it does not make precise comparisons to identify any trends and patterns between subjects of gender groups and higher achieving students. The school is aware of how well students in different ethnic groupings are performing and how well they are performing as groups.

**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 school uses its data to identify and set suitable goals. Some goals are better than others in the precision in which measures and timescales are identified to enable the school to know when and how successful it has been in implementing improvements, developments and change. As the school is growing, it is now in a position to use its extensive data to ensure that all goals are smart and identify precise measures for success linked to students' prior performance and expected performance. For example, to refine the goal for all students to pass the Regents exams by delineating by subject and including a measure for higher achievers to pass at the 85% mark.

Particularly good focus is given to students who need extra assistance, including special education students, English language learners and students who are struggling to make the grade. The school uses a push in model effectively to provide support in class. When working in small groups outside the classroom, students learn the same content as their classmates but develop their skills at different levels according to their needs. These models ensure students do not miss the valuable learning they need to get their credits for graduation. Intensives, short-term courses that provide academic support and enrichment experiences for students, provide good motivation for students to achieve passing grades. An increased number of special education students and English language learners attended the enrichment intensives this year because of their improved achievements.

Students are fully involved in assessing their own work and identifying and sharing goals through the student led conferences when they present portfolios of work to teachers, parents and other students. The use and reference to rubrics that focus on subject content and skills, study skills and behavior help students identify for themselves their goals for academic and personal development. Many parents attend these events and read the 'Validus Voyager' newsletter, so most know what their children can do and what the school's expectations are for them. Only a few parents regularly support the workshops and additional events organized by the parentt eacher association and parent coordinator.

**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.**

The curriculum follows the Expeditionary Learning model which focuses on students’ health and fitness and personal skills alongside their academic development. A wide range of enrichment activities meet the needs of students particularly well. An outward bound trip at the beginning of grade 9, quickly builds students into their crew teams and starts to build strong and generally positive relationships. The curriculum is organized well to ensure students are enabled to get the credits they need to graduate. The use of technology and additional physical education, health and fitness classes enrich the curriculum further and help the school achieve its mission. The baseball team has enjoyed particular successes. There are plans to extend the curriculum as the school continues to grow to include more opportunities for music and art.

The expeditionary model of learning encourages students to work collaboratively and individually to plan, complete, present and evaluate their work. When this is followed teachers ensure instruction is differentiated fully, providing not only support for those who need extra help, but also challenge for those who are capable of doing even more. This model successfully helps students develop the skills they will need in adult life. There are still some teachers who do not differentiate instruction sufficiently well and students sit for too long listening to the teacher talk rather than working themselves on independent work.

A very close watch is kept on which students need which credits in which subject to graduate. The information is used to match staffing, scheduling and resources precisely to individual need to ensure any shortfalls are made up. This is especially so for students whose attendance is poor and who return expecting to be able to make up the lost ground.

Every Friday afternoon, students take part in community crew activities that are planned and organized specifically to meet a range of student interests and to develop their personal skills. As a result, students who have attended the school since grade 9 plan their own work, respect each other, work well collaboratively and behave in a mature manner. Students are fully engaged in these activities. For example, during the Crew Olympics, students worked very well in teams to build as tall a tower as they could using straws. Trusting relationships ensure that most students are confident to ask an identified adult for help about any academic and personal concerns.

Attendance and punctuality are checked very rigorously by a team of staff that meets every week and more regularly if necessary. Several effective strategies have successfully led to higher attendance and punctuality this year. The small number of students with chronic attendance and punctuality continue to be the school’s focus for improvement.

**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 well developed.**

The school has successfully hired staff who are making a difference to setting up its vision, increasing student performance and accelerating progress. All members of staff are focused on improving student experiences and have put several effective systems in place

to improve teachers' skills in using data to differentiate instruction and engage students fully in classes. Teachers who have good skills in using the expeditionary learning model to plan programs that meet the range of academic and personal needs of learners in their classes are sharing this expertise with others and so teachers' skill levels in planning and delivering learning in this way are improving.

Professional development has been a particular focus of the school's work and is driven by teachers' needs and by areas in need of improvement revealed in performance data. New teachers benefit from experienced mentors to help them with planning effective learning. Teachers meet regularly to collaboratively evaluate practice, revise programs and plan next steps in learning. They question each other's work and comments, assess students work closely to help align grading and talk honestly about how to make instruction more effective. For example, through the critical friends group, some teachers plan in depth the focus of inter-visitations from colleagues. In this way teachers are accountable for their practice and show an acute commitment to ensure what they do is the very best for students' achievements. The principal visits classes as and when he can and has a considered strategy for improving instruction. However, he is finding it harder to build monitoring visits into his leadership schedule.

The principal is highly respected by students, staff, parents and the wider community. Good relationships between students and with adults have built an atmosphere of calm and a commitment to achieve. Due to effective systems to monitor movement round the building, the school runs very smoothly on a daily basis. Excellent communication ensures everyone is well-informed about the school's work and expectations.

The school has good partnerships with the other schools in the building, although programs are at times limited and management of the building is challenging because of the need to share areas and rooms. Very good partnerships with local organizations enable students to enjoy internships and attend summer academies to help them extend their skills. Strong links with other expeditionary learning schools give positive support to the school's vision and goals. Still to develop are partnerships with parents and outside agencies to support special education students on a more full-time basis.

**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 proficient.**

Systems for monitoring, evaluation and review have been successfully implemented and used effectively this year as a basis for ongoing review of the school's work. Representatives from all members of the school community are involved in this work. Parents play their part through the school leadership team and the work of the parent teacher association. Teachers participate through common planning times, faculty meetings and professional development activities that all focus on evaluating what is going well and what is not going as well as expected. The information gained is used effectively to make decisions and plan programs and instruction that meet the needs of all students. The school is adept at revising programs in response to data analysis outcomes. It uses the information well to revise students' individual goals and to adjust routes towards graduation if necessary. It looks closely at whether school goals have been met on a regular basis and if so makes adjustments accordingly. Improvements to programs and instruction are evident as a result of the support and guidance emerging from this work.

However, systems for evaluation and review are relatively new and so there has not been enough time for them to be fully established in practice. The school now has the data it needs to establish these systems in practice, and so give all staff a clear and accurate understanding of performance across all subjects, classes and grades.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Validus Preparatory Academy (HS 263)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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"> <li>• each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>			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"> <li>• ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>			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"> <li>• all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		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.

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X
<b>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.</b>	∅	✓	+
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	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	