

Quality Review Report

2009-2010

ELLIS Prep Academy

High School 397

**99 Terrace View Avenue
Bronx
NY 10463**

Principal: Norma Vega

Dates of review: April 15-16, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Jill Herman

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

ELLIS Prep Academy is a high school with 168 students from 9 through grade 10. The school population comprises 15% Black, 80% Hispanic, 0% White, and 5% Asian students. The student body includes 99% English language learners and 0% special education students. Boys account for 61% of the students enrolled and girls account for 39%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 88%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is well developed.

ELLIS Prep Academy is a small, new high school in its first year of operation. It serves exclusively over-aged immigrant students, most of which, when they enroll, speak little or no English. Classes are inter-aged with students traveling from class to class as a cohort taught by the same group of teachers.

In a short time the school has developed a remarkable collegiate culture which is highly supportive of students, their families, and staff. The coherence of pedagogical practices and beliefs is evident in all classrooms and provides students with clear expectations and maximum practice of the integration of content and skills. The principal and faculty have clear, focused goals that are articulated by all members of the school community. The high degree of respect, collaboration, and reflection supports and strengthens all members of this learning community. Teachers work collaboratively in a variety of ways that deepen insight and practices. Resources are aligned to support and strengthen the goals of the school. A team of coaches provides expert support for teachers, enabling them to reflect on their work, facilitating the sharing of good practice and assisting with focused goal setting. As a result, staff are open to new ideas and strengthen their instructional practices by learning readily from each other.

All classrooms are inquiry based and project driven. Students provide reasoning and proof, make connections, and practice effective communication. Throughout all classes there are differentiated entry points based on English language development. Students collaborate in activities and projects that are challenging and well matched to their needs, while faculty continuously monitor their progress and adjust programs and instructional practices to secure the students best possible progress across content and skill areas. The school's unique assessment processes which utilize student presentations to exemplify their learning provide key data on student progress which inform curricular and instructional practices. In lessons teachers frequently check students' understanding. However, the school does not make enough use of the results of periodic assessments when tailoring work to students needs.

The school reaches out well to involve parents, many of whom speak limited English. Parents think highly of the school and understand its expectations, for example for all students to graduate, although they do not always understand how they can help. They have frequent, informal conversations with teachers, but only two formal meetings when they receive report cards. As newcomers themselves, they are not always aware of how to access information or provide input that would result in a true partnership with the school.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills, aligned to clear content standards, result in a challenging and coherent curriculum evident in all classrooms.
 - o All classrooms utilize collaborative, inquiry based projects. Students demonstrate understanding of content by through oral and written work that accelerates and strengthens English language development and critical thinking skills.
 - o All second-year students are on track to take chemistry, algebra and global Regents. Instruction and programming are based on the International Principles and provide a template for best practices for English language learners. Strong English language development through the content area results in accelerated learning and thinking for all students, regardless of English proficiency level on entry.
- Classrooms consistently provide differentiated instruction using purposeful grouping and multiple entry points in which high and low-achieving students are supported and challenged.
 - o Heterogeneous grouping in classrooms enables students to rotate during the week through various stations that provide opportunities through different modalities to master skills and content. Well attended homogeneous reading groups before and after school target and accelerate learning.
 - o Classrooms provide standards-based content for all, with various entry points and outcomes enabling all students to access tasks and experience success. For instance, students of different abilities wrote essays on *Black Boy* by Richard Wright with equal enthusiasm, but the outcomes ranged from three paragraphs to three pages. Students are given additional work when mastery has been achieved. Exit slips for planning next lessons result in the right support for all learners.
- All teachers participate in highly focused collaborations to plan content, examine student work, conference with guidance about students in need, and share strategies that improve student learning and their own practice.
 - o Interdisciplinary teams meet regularly with guidance to develop action plans for students in need and weekly to share practices, discuss and review strategies that support language development. For instance, the social studies teacher showed how a Venn diagram could be used to further assist students in organizing their written work and developing an understanding of compare and contrast. The math teacher reflected how he would use it. Another teacher brought a perspective of differentiation to add. The resolve was to report back the following week to reflect on use. Content teachers meet and plan regularly to ensure continuity of practice and content.

- o Teachers continuously examine student work together, using various protocols to identify strengths and areas of need that impact on student learning and their own practices. Following last year's presentations teachers reflected that reading and writing gains were not where they wanted them to be. They now monitor assignments more closely which has accelerated student progress.
- The school has developed highly effective systems for monitoring teacher practice which have improved instructional practices.
 - o All inter-disciplinary teams have a coach to support them and, in addition, two part-time coaches support content instruction. Coaches and the principal are in classrooms, meet weekly and identify needs of teachers, resulting in well targeted individual support where needed.
 - o Teachers do formal peer observations and, as a result, they learn from each other. For example, at the end of the year, teachers present to the entire faculty portfolios containing assignments, student work and an in-depth reflection on their own practices and next steps.
- The school community has established very effective systems for school self-evaluation, review and modification that results in a strong, coherent instructional program and capacity to build and grow as a young school.
 - o The coordinating council meets weekly. It identifies what is working and what is not, based on data, observation and teacher feedback. Full staff reflects twice a year, and teams reflect weekly. Last year's review of data initiated Language Day: one day a week second-year students are at internships, further developing and practicing real world language, while first-year students receive immersion in English language development at school.
 - o Full staff meets in the summer to plan goals for the coming year and reflect on whether interim benchmarks have been met or whether further support is needed in specific areas. When this process showed that strategies for teaching reading had not been fully effective, the school implemented professional development to provide teachers with the necessary skills in order to accelerate student learning.
- Agreed goals impact instructional decisions, leverage change and accelerate student learning in a supportive environment.
 - o All classrooms reflect school goals in content, curricular design, and instructional practice which gives coherence and consistency to students' experience. Teachers and students articulate a belief around learning to use one's mind well and be college ready. Students feel challenged but supported and are reflective about what they are learning and who they are as learners.
 - o As a result of its analysis of data to identify student need, the school is opening for eleven months of the year and providing on-line advanced placement courses.

- School leaders and staff examine a wide range of data to develop a clear picture of school's strengths and areas of need, in order to make effective curricular and instructional decisions.
 - o The school collects data from student presentations, standardized reading tests and in class assessments, giving it a broad picture of student achievement and enabling staff to assess and adjust its instructional programs to respond to the wide ranging needs of students with interrupted formal education. When assessments revealed the need to reinforce language development, the school structured reading and writing instruction differently in order to assist all students in reaching their potential.
 - o Interim assessments and classroom data are continuously used and refined. Exit slips were introduced as a means for teachers to get immediate feedback as to what students understood and as a way for students to increase written language abilities. Split dictations in which students dictate alternately in pairs in content area, have been successful in accelerating listening, speaking and writing comprehension.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop additional formal ways to communicate with families around children's needs that will promote accountability and understanding.
 - o Many parents make informal contact with teachers; however, some families only have minimal information from the school because there are only two formal reports a year.
 - o Parents are able to talk about their child's strengths and weaknesses in only generalized ways, because the language of report cards uses educational wording rather than accessible language for parents
- Provide opportunities for parents' voice in providing input into activities that impacts students' learning.
 - o Some parents attend student presentations. They attend meetings that share data and school requirements which gives a snapshot of the school, but is not specific to their own child.
 - o As a result of infrequent meetings for families, parents have limited opportunities to put their views forward, for example about programs or opportunities they would like their child to receive.
- Ensure that the outcomes of periodic assessments inform instructional practices and enable teachers to tailor work to students' needs.
 - o Although teachers regularly use data to inform curricular and instructional practices, they receive only a fragmented picture of a student because they examine classroom, periodic and standardized data separately.
 - o Reading assessments are given only at the beginning and end of the year but because they are not designed for English language learners they do not necessarily provide accurate data for planning next steps.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: ELLIS Prep Academy	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score				X
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?				X
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				X
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1				X
Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				X
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				X
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				X
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2				X

Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?				X
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?				X
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3				X

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?				X
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X	
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?				X
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5				X

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed