

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

New Explorers High School

High School 547

701 St. Ann's Avenue

Bronx

NY 10455

Principal: Jacob Hobson

Dates of review: May 3 - 4, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Yolanda Torres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

New Explorers High School is a high school with 320 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 36% Black, 63% Hispanic, and 1% White students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 11% 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 80.3%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is underdeveloped with proficient features.

The New Explorers High School community recently underwent a major loss with the untimely death of its beloved principal. The school's new principal is helping the school community deal with the loss and is handling this difficult situation with care, giving staff, students and parents time to heal while subtly rebuilding the school's climate and refocusing efforts on academics.

As students walk the hallway, there is a sense of closeness and collegiality amongst them. Students share that the new principal is "cool" and "nice" and that some teachers are easy to relate to and care about their achievements. However, many students do not have a sense of urgency about their education and a lack of student engagement in classes is very evident. While the school has a variety of different learners, there is no evidence of differentiated instruction being consistently delivered in every class. The school's curriculum is not planned in a meaningful manner to meet students' individual academic needs and learning styles. In addition, students are unable to articulate their educational goals for academic improvement. Their perception of goal attainment is based on passing the Regents examinations. Although the school's leaders have introduced the workshop model of instruction to increase student involvement, there is an inconsistent level of student engagement in meaningful tasks that motivate their thinking and participation. Consequently, there is little evidence of rigorous instruction aligned to the State standards.

Teacher teams meet on a regular basis to discuss strategies to support student learning across grades. However, while teachers state that collaborative inquiry has helped them revisit topics to support student learning, there is no evidence of a focus on students' individual needs to help them overcome the different struggles they face in their learning. Although professional development is driven by formal and informal observations of instruction, there is a lack of alignment between the recommendations made for improvements in lesson delivery and what is actually happening in class.

Parental involvement in the school is very low. Parents share that the school needs to communicate more. For example, they are often not aware of the different after-school programs available. In addition, parents do not know what their children are studying or have a clear understanding of the grading policy. This lack of ongoing communication means that parent-teacher conferences at times end up in conflict because parents are not clear about the school's academic expectations.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school provides after-school programs in partnership with community-based organizations to support students and families.
 - Students with under-credited status attend the after-school and Saturday programs to support their needs and acquire the required instructional time required to make progress in their classes. The school has partnered with organizations that seek to motivate these students to complete their credit requirements, working in tandem with other interventions to help prevent them from dropping out of school.
 - The school has developed a sports program to use as leverage to motivate students with their academics. With the high percentage of males in the school, the coach addresses these students' concerns, with one-on-one meetings providing needed social and emotional support. As a result, many of these male athletes have contributed to championship wins in a variety of sports.
- To improve instruction, the school leader provides teachers with instructional support and professional development opportunities that meet their needs.
 - The principal's planning for the professional development is a result of the trends observed by the administrators during their formal and informal classroom visits. Recommendations are used to assign coaches and send teachers to professional development sessions to enhance their learning and teaching. The principal meets with individual teachers to discuss observations and to set goals to help teachers refocus and enhance their planning and lesson delivery.
- School-wide instructional decisions are aligned to the goals set out in the Comprehensive Educational Plan.
 - School-wide goals are based on the areas in need of improvement identified by the New York State Education Department. The school uses clinics on assessment to provide teachers with a venue to review and analyze student cohort data. During content meetings, teachers analyze data and regroup students in small instructional groups to hone in on the skill sets students need for academic improvement. As they identify these subgroups, they revamp the school schedule to address students' general academic needs.
- The school leader communicates school-wide goals during faculty conferences, parent meetings, and town meetings with students in order to build a coherent understanding of the needed instructional focus.
 - The principal engages teachers in conversations which review students' achievement in relation to their age, and they use this information to set non-negotiable goals for students in the areas of behavior, academics and

attendance. Teachers convey this information to students and use these goals as guidance in better supporting students.

- The school principal conducts walkthroughs with staff and parents to ascertain the extent to which the school-wide goals displayed in the hallway align with the student work posted on bulletin boards and with classroom instruction. Their reflective conversations lead to parents forming part of the decision-making process for school improvement.
- Formal and informal observations and one-on-one conversations with teachers serve as leverage to evaluate systems and structures and long-term plans of action.
 - The school's leaders meet on a regular basis to discuss their findings from formal and informal class visits. They hold one-on-one meetings with teachers to provide immediate feedback for their improvement. Teachers use these recommendations as an entry point to fine-tune their planning and lesson delivery. Some teachers request additional challenges for the improvement of their practice by offering accelerated courses to students. Other teachers look forward to participating in additional professional development sessions to enrich their practice.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that teachers' feedback consistently informs students and their parents about areas in which they do well alongside specific details of the next steps needed to attain short-term and long-term goals for academic improvement.
 - While there is some evidence of rubrics being used to assess student work, teacher feedback lacks detailed comments with clear next steps to help support student learning. The feedback given is neither rigorous nor challenging enough to enable students to reach higher levels of learning.
 - The absence of students' differentiated goals means there is no evidence of interim checkpoints to monitor progress. Because there is no clarity amongst students about these goals, these cannot be shared effectively with parents. As a result, conflicts with parents arise during conferences at report card time.
- Develop a systemic approach towards school-wide lesson delivery that engages students and develops their sense of responsibility towards their academic growth.
 - Although lesson plans are reviewed on a frequent basis, students continue to be unengaged in some of their classes. In addition, they are unable to articulate what they learn across content areas or connect their learning to real-life situations.
 - Classroom instruction and lesson activities are not planned to take into account students' learning styles and existing proficiency so that they can accelerate their learning. A lack of purposeful student groupings means that students are not challenged in their thinking and so their needs are not always suitably accommodated.

- Enhance the rigor of instruction school-wide, by content area, grade, and classroom, by using standards-based curricula that meet the differentiated needs of student subgroups.
 - There is an evident disconnect between the instruction in the school and what the State's standards-based curricula require.
 - Although some teachers have developed lessons aligned to the standards, teachers use too few differentiated instructional strategies. In addition, the level of questioning is low and does not challenge students to think critically on a consistent basis. Classroom instruction does not provide sufficiently rigorous learning opportunities for students to continue achieving academically.
- Build on the structured teacher teams engaged in collaborative inquiry by promoting more specific instructional focuses to support the needs of targeted students.
 - Teacher teams meet on a weekly basis to discuss data analysis and strategies that will help students progress. Nonetheless, their conversations and instructional decisions lack focused discussion that leads to teachers addressing students' individual needs and thereby improving academic progress.
- Implement a systematic evaluation process to build consistency and coherence in the curriculum, instruction and assessments in order to improve teaching and learning.
 - While school-wide goals are set out in the Comprehensive Educational Plan, there is no evidence of interim measures of progress to assess the effectiveness of the instructional and organizational decisions made thus far. The school has no strategic monitoring process in place to evaluate progress made towards its long-term goals.
 - The school lacks a systematic process that measures the effectiveness of its teacher teams and how their work aligns to the expectations for the curriculum, instructional delivery, and assessment. Although teachers meet regularly to discuss student progress, there is no clear way of assessing how this work provides them with the essential tools to build capacity within their teams.

School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: New Explorers High School	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score		X		
Quality Statement 1 – Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: 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 and deliver rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, 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>	△	➤	✓	+
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of its 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>	△	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+
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

△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed
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