

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Expeditionary Learning School for Community Leaders

K572

**2630 Benson Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11214**

Principal: David O'Hara

Dates of review: April 10 - 11, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Aimee Horowitz

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Expeditionary Learning School for Community Leaders (LEADERS) is a high school with 251 students from ninth through grade 12. The school population comprises 20% Black, 41% Hispanic, 19% White, 17% Asian, and 3% other students. The student body includes 18% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 86.8%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school's calm, respectful environment and inclusive culture supports and celebrates students' academic and social emotional growth aligned to school goals for college and career readiness. (1.4)
 - In addition to systems that support students' academic and social-emotional growth, such as Crew (advisory), Crew Council, mediation, counseling; along with parent communication and involvement, the administrative team constantly analyzes data and addresses areas to improve upon. The Peer Mentor program was developed to strengthen the successful Crew program. Peer Mentors partner with ninth grade Crew Leaders to strengthen academic and social emotional support for freshman as well as help freshman understand and embody the school's core values and the goal setting process. Students report that they have access to school leaders, they are challenged in academic subjects and the Arts, and the school expects them to graduate college ready. There is a commitment to college readiness and students are supported through that process. For example, the school has a full time college counselor, an after-school Math Lab, an SAT preparation program that includes a parent workshop, new Advanced Placement and College Now course offerings, and intensives engaging students in in-depth explorations of particular topics. Student and parent voices are heard through School Leadership Team, Crew Council, and the Parents' Association. Participation in these venues and communication with student leaders lead to the implementation of initiatives and programs aimed at increasing student achievement and developing a supportive and respectful school culture. Specifically, the implementation of "Crew of the Year" and Crew Clean-up increased motivation, student engagement and self regulation in a safe and respectful environment that supports college and career preparation.
 - Teachers and school leadership evidence an exceptional level of knowledge of their students, undergirded by a strong Crew program. Each student belongs to a Crew with a Crew Leader who loops with them throughout their high school studies. This deliberate system ensures that every student is well known by at least one adult. Crew leaders liaise between families, students, and teachers; they are the point person through which all academic and social emotional communication is routed. Leaders develop learning targets and instructional plans to address relational skills and through use of a distributive counseling approach, are integral to each student's social emotional growth. Crew's engage in a myriad of activities ranging from team building to academic support and goal setting. A week long camping trip engages ninth grade students in outdoor, teambuilding activities, developing trust in one another and their Crew Leader. As a result, attendance has improved and in 2011-12 the graduation rate increased 16%. This year's projected graduation rate indicates a 25% increase.

- The principal's strategic organizational decisions, key partnerships, and scheduling are well aligned to the school's goals as evidenced by meaningful student work products. (1.3)
 - The use of resources is well aligned to the school's mission and goals. The school has an extensive array of partnerships that complement and enhance its focus on graduating students who are academically and emotionally college ready. Partnerships include New York City Outward Bound, Re-Serve, CAMBA, Bottom Line, and the Partnership for Student Advancement. Coupled with the school's Crew program and full time college counselor, these partnerships support the school's vision and mission of graduating students "equipped to pursue their passions" by guiding them "to achieve the highest academic and character standards to enable them to contribute to their communities as productive, compassionate, responsible and personally satisfied citizens." As a result, a 12th grade student in his senior speech, touted the support from Crew, his teachers, fellow students, and the principal as well as the school's high expectations in academic classes as excellent preparation for college, for giving him the courage to take risks and to continually set and achieve new goals, and to realize he is the master of his destiny.
 - The school's schedule meets the needs of all students while providing extended blocks of time for teacher teams to meet. Teams engage in designing curriculum, using Lesson Study to analyze teacher and student work, in order to improve instruction, assessment practices and reflecting on school goals. The schedule provides longer blocks of class time allowing students to engage in challenging tasks and collaboratively produce relevant, authentic work products. For example, in a science course students designed and conducted their own experiments around the effects of hydro-fracking. Their results, coupled with research and fieldwork, enabled them to take a position on whether hydro-fracking can be used responsibly, which they shared with parents and community members during the *Presentation of Learning* program. As a result of their learning students wrote a policy memo to Governor Cuomo regarding the effects of hydro-fracking on New York City's eco-system. To prepare for designing their dream Leed, home students visited a Leed Certified home and interviewed experts. Field work regularly engages students in consulting experts through Skype, as well as through visits to their classes. In mathematics, students keep Math Journals where they explain their work, reflect on how they solve problems, and analyze their own reasoning. As a result, students' use of evidence in writing, their ability to logically and effectively make an argument and refute counter-claims, their stamina to produce extended written pieces, and their comprehension of complex, non-fiction text has improved.
- Use of assessments, tasks, school wide rubrics and on going checks for student understanding, provides consistent progress monitoring and facilitates adjustments to curriculum and instruction to improve outcomes for all students. (2.2)
 - Teacher teams regularly use interim assessment data, item analysis, teacher and student work, in class assessments such as exit tickets and students' annotations, rubric review and revision, student conferences, anecdotal data, and departmental goal setting to monitor and measure

students' academic growth and progress. These formative methods of assessment are used together with summative data analysis such as Socratic Seminars, Presentations of Learning and performance tasks that monitor student progress and provide students feedback on their writing and problem solving skills. In the English, Social Studies, and Science departments, there is a focus on increasing student proficiency in comprehending complex text and in using evidence to support claims and refute counterclaims. An annotation rubric used across subject areas supports students in engaging with complex text. Similarly, to foster accountable talk and students' use of evidence in discourse, students regularly engage in Socratic Seminars. Teachers consistently assess student understanding through skillful questioning, turn and talks, presentations, and exit tickets. Additionally, students' peer and self assessments provide clear feedback enabling them to take their work to the next level.

- Strong professional collaborations across grades and disciplines enable teachers to reflect on student work, improve instruction, and develop leadership skills to improve student achievement. (4.2)
 - All teachers participate in a departmental Lesson Study Team. Lesson Study supports teachers in the delivery of curricula and lessons. The departmental team devises a research question derived from a gap that they have observed during an analysis of student work. For example, the Social Studies team is looking at how they can increase students' use of relevant and meaningful text based evidence in their writing. In their department teams, teachers create a Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) aligned lesson plan to address their question. The department team then observes a teacher teach the lesson, paying particular attention to the research question. Using a protocol the department debriefs the lesson and looks at student work. As a result of this process, freshmen now incorporate textual evidence into their writing. In United States History classes, most students have mastered using quality textual evidence to support their arguments and are now focused on improving their analysis of the evidence. Consequently, across the school, the quantity and quality of student argumentative writing across disciplines has increased.
 - The Leadership Team, comprised of teachers that lead department and grade level teams, are key partners in school goal development, progress monitoring and decision making. Leadership Team members voice teacher concerns and problem solve concerns that arise on the team. In addition to biweekly meetings with the administration, members convene three times per year to set goals and reflect on progress towards meeting goals. In collaboration with Outward Bound, the team assembles during the summer to set work plan goals and to fine tune these goals. Outward Bound also leads the team in a mid-year huddle to assess progress and revise the work plan as per the team's feedback. Then in mid May the team, administration, and Expeditionary Learning school designers reflect on the year's work and provide feedback for the upcoming year. As a result of the school's intentional and embedded structures to develop leaders, teachers actively partner with administration to set goals, make decisions and are empowered to support one another in effectively moving students forward.

What the school needs to improve

- Further enhance instructional delivery to strategically provide multiple entry points and opportunities to extend learning so that all students are challenged to achieve high levels for post secondary work. (1.2)
 - Instructional practices, informed by the Danielson framework have included creating expeditionary learning experiences that engage students in authentic CCLS aligned tasks, which support the school's philosophy on how students learn best. Students are engaged through working with experts in the field, researching and critical thinking through questioning, problem solving, discussion, and presentation. However, teacher questioning in some classrooms leads to general levels of student thinking; thus limiting opportunities to challenge some students to higher levels of thinking to push increased academic achievement for all students.
 - All teachers use strategies including turn and talks, leveled texts, reading protocols, talking back to the text, visuals, note catchers, and partnered reading to provide multiple entry points for students including English Language Learners (ELLs), Students with Disabilities (SWDs) and struggling learners. However, other than leveled texts, across classrooms teachers do not strategically differentiate teaching strategies or remove scaffolds to support and maximize academic growth for all students. For example, teachers do not maximize student learning by challenging higher achieving students with extensions to deepen their learning and push them to higher proficiency. Thus, not all students are provided with learning scaffolds that challenge them to reach higher academic potential.
- Further develop curricula and academic tasks and align curricula across grades so that all students, including those who are high and low performing, are cognitively engaged and challenged. (1.1)
 - The school aligns its curricula with State standards and has extended its work of raising the level of higher order thinking for most students. Thus, increasing students' abilities to read and comprehend complex texts and engaging students in producing high quality CCLS aligned written products across all grades and subjects. Accordingly, students state that they are being prepared for college. However, spiraling content and skills across grade levels and content areas is not yet completely embedded in curriculum, limiting the school in maximizing its ability to close the achievement gap.
 - Teacher teams plan and refine learning expeditions and performance tasks based on analysis of interim, formative, and summative assessment data as well as through looking at student work and using anecdotal data from Jump Rope. While this has resulted in higher order student work products, not all academic tasks include targeted scaffolds and enrichments to support and extend the learning of SWDs and ELLs as well as high achieving students. Consequently, some students are limited from consistently engaging in tasks that are cognitively challenging.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

| School name: Expeditionary Learning School for Community Leaders | UD | D | P | WD | | | |
|---|-----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Overall QR Score | | | X | | | | |
| Instructional Core | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i> | UD | D | P | WD | | | |
| 1.1 Design engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula, including the arts, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products? | | | X | | | | |
| 2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels? | | | | X | | | |
| School Culture | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school ...</i> | UD | D | P | WD | | | |
| 1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults? | | | | X | | | |
| 3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them? | | | X | | | | |
| Systems for Improvement | | | | | | | |
| <i>To what extent does the school ...</i> | UD | D | P | WD | | | |
| 1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products? | | | | X | | | |
| 3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community? | | | | X | | | |
| 4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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 | | | |
| 5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS? | | | X | | | | |
| Quality Review Scoring Key | | | | | | | |
| UD | Underdeveloped | D | Developing | P | Proficient | WD | Well Developed |