

Quality Review Report 2012-2013

Explorations Academy

High School X251

1619 Boston Road

Bronx

NY 10460

Principal: Susana Hernandez

Dates of review: May 6 – 7, 2013

Lead Reviewer: Elaine Lindsey

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Exploration Academy is a high school with 363 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 31% Black, 66% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 20% English language learners and 21% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 80.0%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- Students benefit from standards aligned curricula that integrate rigorous Common Core aligned units and performance tasks in order to challenge and engage a diversity of learners and promote college and career readiness. (1.1)
 - Curriculum has been organized into units of instruction with pacing guides that culminate in formative end-of-unit assessments. In addition, all core disciplines have completed and implemented two Common Core aligned units as outlined by the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). Writing assignments begin with a thesis topic and culminate in a five paragraph essay. A Living Environment unit focuses on genetically modified food culminating in a research paper requiring students to take a position and cite evidence from outside resources to support their position. As a result, all learners are exposed to academic tasks that promote college and career readiness skills.
 - Learning outcomes are related to formative and summative assessment results and lessons are adjusted accordingly to include scaffolds in order to provide students with multiple entry points and opportunities to engage in rigorous instruction. A weekly assessment showed that students struggled with summarizing which resulted in a daily plan by all disciplines to engage students in the writing of summaries during lessons for each task. Additionally, Integrated Co-Teachers (ICT) adapt curriculum to provide students with modified tasks to further cognitive engagement. Furthermore algebra lessons provide advanced students with work appropriate to their learning level to be completed independently, while small group instruction is planned at the computer on pre-algebra problems supported by the teacher. As a result students experience curriculum that leads to increased engagement.
- The principal makes strategic organizational decisions that utilize resources and staff assignments that support the school's instructional goals to expose students to college level experiences and career choices. (1.3)
 - Columbia University Teachers College and Teacher Effectiveness Program (TEP) provide professional development opportunities and workshops for Common Core unit development and the Danielson Framework. In addition, the newly hired attendance teacher has had a major impact on student attendance showing improvement in this area from 80% in 2012 to 86% in 2013. Furthermore, each classroom is equipped with a SMART board as well as laptop and i-Pad cart to increase student engagement. As part of grants from New York City (NYC) I-Learn, Connected Foundations, and the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI), teachers are provided with professional development opportunities to increase proficiency in technology. The school's three Mac computer labs support blended learning in Pre-Advanced Placement (AP) Biology, graphic arts, AP English and AP Spanish. Additionally, Integrated Co-teaching (ICT) teachers in every grade support students with disabilities (SWDs) in Regents classes and related services, and

Achieve 3000 offers beginner and intermediate English Language Learners (ELLs) accelerated reading comprehension skills two to three days per week. As a result, the school has seen an 8% increase in the number of students earning sufficient credits in the 2012-2013 school year as indicated in the Standard Testing and Reporting System (STARS).

- To deepen teacher team work, teachers are strategically scheduled to meet daily as grades and departments to analyze student work and deepen Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). During a 9th grade inquiry meeting teachers focused on the lowest third students in English classes, revealing struggles with writing upon review of the data. Strategies employed to support this need included the use of graphic organizers and sentence starters with a short term objective to write a paragraph once per week with 90% accuracy until completing a five paragraph essay. As a result, all students are experiencing performance tasks that engage all learners.
- Staff and students appreciate the principal's focused efforts to create a safe, respectful and orderly environment that supports their needs and promotes academic success. (1.4)
 - The school's collaborative approach to a safe learning community is one where there is respect among staff and students promoting an inclusive culture that meaningfully involves student voice in decision making in order to initiate, guide and lead school improvement efforts. Students stated that their voice is heard through their involvement in student government, the school leadership team (SLT) and participation in town hall meetings to discuss concerns. The principal listens to students and takes their recommendations into consideration. As a result, in addition to the current teams that exist for boys, a school flag football team, music club, girls' basketball, girls' softball and girls' volley ball teams were created that support the personal growth of students.
 - Students are supported by the staff upon entering the school through the school's advisory group structure that ensures that every student is known by at least one adult in the building. Additionally, the school's discipline team consisting of the assistant principal, dean, community associate, community assistant, school aide, and physical education teacher work together through regular meetings to identify at-risk students and develop interventions to ensure an environment conducive to learning. Unannounced walkthroughs and spot checks by school leaders, as well as ongoing collaboration with guidance and the school's attendance team, has created an environment where students are safe, resulting in a low percentage of incidents rates as reported in the online occurrence reporting system (OORS) reports.
- School leaders use frequent observations to provide teachers with actionable feedback and supports using a research-based framework in order to promote professional growth. (4.1)
 - Teacher development is supported through the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Pedagogues receive six to eight classroom observations per year, with the exception of new teachers, who receive additional

observations from coaches and peer mentors. In addition, school leaders conduct one cycle of observations then exchange teachers and begin the cycle again, resulting in all administrators' clear understanding of each teachers' practice and the ability to support their development and professional growth.

- As participants in the Teacher Effectiveness Pilot (TEP) teacher development is tracked through Achievement Reporting and Innovation System (ARIS). All teachers are required to complete a lesson self-reflection on a form after formal observations and informal observations followed by a feedback session with one-on-one conferences with school leaders, highlighting areas for growth. In addition, it has become the school's culture for all teachers to submit an end-of-year reflection video of the teacher's best lesson, which has become a part of a library to be used for professional development. As a result the school is able to compile and analyze data from the teacher videos and observation cycles to effectively design targeted professional development in order to impact teacher pedagogy. A round of observations revealed that 91% of teachers were between developing and ineffective in using questioning and discussion techniques resulting in school-wide and individual professional development workshops from December 2012 to February 2013 covering this topic in order to improve pedagogy as indicated on the school-wide professional development plan.

What the school needs to improve

- Continue to strengthen pedagogical strategies that consistently provide multiple entry points into curricula so that all learners are engaged in higher order tasks. (1.2)
 - Across classrooms students respond to teacher questions, however, questioning is typically lower level and does not push students' critical thinking. In an English 4 class students were participating in a discussion about the book "*The Absolute True Diary of a Part-time Indian*". Some of the questions presented by the teacher included, "Do you think it's racism or not? Do you think it's more important to put your family before yourself?" In biology class students were analyzing the overfishing problem and reviewed an article. The teacher asks the class, "How do you know there's overfishing in Canada? What is the definition of trophic level?" Students do not form their own higher order questions and lessons do not typically generate student query. Furthermore, in most classes, student tasks are identical, thus hindering the school's ability to provide multiple entry points to engage all learners in higher-order thinking skills.
 - The lessons across classrooms were often teacher centered resulting in limited opportunities for student interaction. Furthermore interactions were primarily between student and teacher hampering opportunities for student exploration, accountability talk and student to student discussions. In a global history class the teacher wrote a quote on the board and gave his interpretation of the quote, then asking the class if students thought he interpreted the quote correctly. The students' response to the teacher was, "yes", however there was no further inquiry from the teacher. In a math class the teacher asks the class "What is this type of problem? Do you have a formula for average?" Students' responses were directed to the teacher with no follow-up or inquiry from

fellow classmates, thus hindering discussions that reflect higher order thinking.

- Expand current assessment practices so that clear next learning steps are identified in order to make instructional adjustments to meet student learning needs. (2.2)
 - Assessments aligned to curricula are used across grades and disciplines in order to measure student progress toward goals. Additionally teachers use rubrics that are aligned with the school's key standards to analyze student work. Students are provided with rubrics before starting an assignment; however feedback provided through the rubrics is not sufficiently specific to offer a clear portrait of mastery of the school's chosen key standards hindering student's next learning steps, as well as teachers' ability to determine appropriate instructional approaches according to student levels of understanding. Teacher feedback often includes general observations regarding attendance or completion of assignments resulting in the school's inability to provide meaningful feedback to students regarding their achievement.
 - Across classrooms teachers' assessment practices reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding as evidenced in a math class where students are asked to put thumbs up to acknowledge understanding of the concepts of the lesson, and thumbs down if not sure. In a global history class students' comprehension is assessed through questioning, however strategies to check for understanding are not sufficiently varied so that appropriate adjustments can be made to consistently meet the needs of all learners.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Explorations Academy High School	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