



**Department of  
Education**  
*Carmen Fariña, Chancellor*

**Quality Review  
Office of School Quality  
Division of Academics, Performance, and Support  
2013-2014**

# **Quality Review Report 2013-2014**

**New Explorers High School**

**X547**

**730 Concourse Village West**

**Bronx**

**NY 10451**

**Principal: Jacob Hobson**

**Dates of review: December 9-10, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Elena Rovalino**

## **Part 1: The school context**

### **Information about the school**

New Explorers is a high school with 440 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 30% Black, 68% Hispanic, 0% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 20% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2012 - 2013 was 83.0%.

### **Overall Evaluation**

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school has effective structures in place where students are known well by adults who help coordinate the development of a safe and nurturing environment in order to improve academic and personal achievement. (1.4)
  - Parents and students feel that the school is a safe and caring place for students. The theory of action (TOA) is based on the school's beliefs of how students learn best, the TOA includes: "students learn best when they are able to activate the shifts in instruction independently; when expectations are clearly communicated to them; when they are held accountable as well as recognized for their efforts". This theory was apparent throughout the school. Student voice is heard through different venues and leads improvement processes. For example, the student council meets once a week and is instrumental in planning activities including school performances; the school magazine is published by the student body and is titled "The Student Voice"; and students take an online survey which helps inform how students feel about the school and its programs. Students are members of the School Leadership Team and help to guide the decision making process. Consequently, students feel safe and are valued in the educational process.
  - Currently the school has a Positive Behavioral Interventions System (PBIS) team that meets regularly to address the needs of a small group of at-risk students where behavior intervention plans are created based on each students' behavioral needs. In addition, teachers select students for Kid-Talk sessions once a month and focus on students who are attending classes but failing. A plan for academic success is created at these sessions and followed up by teachers and counselors. A "Guardian Angels" structure is in place where support staff has been assigned a small group of students to monitor, support and maintain daily check-ins. Additional counselors have been hired to support students, a college advisor is in place this year and a partnership with East Side Settlement with a team of social workers help to support the social and emotional development of students. A girls' empowerment class was implemented to address the needs of female students and plans are in place for the creation of a boys' empowerment class. As a result, a culture of mutual trust and respect strongly impacts the development of student academic behaviors and helps to support student personal growth.
- Teachers develop units of study that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and integrate the instructional shifts in order to improve student outcomes.( 1.1)
  - Teachers develop units of study using Understanding by Design (UbD) templates that are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). All curricula are online and accessible to administrators and staff. Units and lesson plans are measured against the Tri-State rubric and scored on alignment to CCLS, key shifts in the Common Core, instructional supports, and assessments. Teachers take feedback and write their next actionable revisions/steps. For example, in a Global History unit a teacher wrote, "vary the texts I'm using according to student

data”, and “use more graphic organizers for all students”. This practice ensures that units are aligned and meet the Common Core Standards and promotes college and career readiness.

- Teacher teams meet regularly to look at student work and focus on the lowest third school-wide to refine curriculum and meet the needs of all students. A review of student work helped teachers identify skills that are lacking in different areas, such as in English where students are still struggling with claim and counter-claim. At one of the meetings observed, teachers engaged in reading a short text to identify areas where students might run into difficulty reading. Teachers identified areas that they can adjust in their lesson plans such as, “characterization, vocabulary, literary elements”. Another teacher talked about “chunking the work” as a way to support learning for English language learners and special needs students. As a result of this work, lessons are more targeted in order to improve student outcomes.
- The principal uses resources effectively to support instructional programs; hiring practices and teacher assignments are implemented, with special focus on the arts program to support learning that leads to college readiness. (1.3)
  - The purchase of Achieve 3000 supports struggling students and the ILearn program has made possible the offering of French, Biology and Advanced math. Many of the classrooms have Smart Boards installed and the math teacher is able to demonstrate on the screen calculations using the graphing calculator. The impact on student work was evident in the level of work a student in the ILearn class was engaged in. For example a student stated, “I already passed trigonometry, so this helps me to move at a faster pace than everyone else, and I want to take calculus next year when I am a senior”. These resources help teachers to meet the needs of students at all levels.
  - The principal has effectively allocated funds to hire an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher to provide additional support to English language learners who comprise 14% of the schools’ population. Major strides have been made in developing the Arts theme of this school. The hiring of a full time art teacher, a full time music teacher and a part-time drama teacher have allowed the offering of a full arts program. Students spoke highly of the opportunities this program opens for them in selecting college majors that are aligned to the arts. These organizational decisions clearly support the school’s academic goals and help to motivate students to prepare for college and pursue careers in the arts.
- School leaders support the development of teachers with actionable feedback and next steps using the Danielson Framework in order to improve pedagogical skills across the school. (4.1)
  - The principal and assistant principal conduct frequent observations and provide teachers with focused feedback on specific components of the Danielson’s Instructional Framework. Feedback to teachers include ‘inter-visitations; with feedback emphasizing the need for teachers to provide students with sentence stems to start discussion, provide suitable scaffolds and challenge students to explain their thinking”. In addition to professional development sessions, the principal hired consultants and

coaches to support the development of struggling teachers based on their needs. As a result, teachers are supported in curriculum planning and developing their pedagogical skills.

- The administrators use an on-line platform that is aligned with the Advance system for documenting teacher observations. School leaders are able to effectively analyze the teachers' scores on each of the Danielson's Framework components and determine the areas of greater need school-wide in order to provide professional development. For example, data shows that most teachers in the school were struggling with questioning techniques that lead to student engagement. Professional development has been provided in this area. This approach has also provided leaders with the ability to identify teachers with strong instructional skills. In addition, as part of his succession plan, the principal has selected some of these teachers to be part of his "leadership circle" who meet regularly and are being trained to take leadership roles. As a result, these teachers are assigned as instructional coaches in order to support the development of all teachers.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Strengthen teachers' pedagogical skills and practices in order to provide students with more challenging tasks and varied entry points into curricula. (1.2)
  - Teachers are developing units that are aligned to the Common Core Standards, and some classrooms are lead by a regular teacher and a special education teacher. However, some of the students interviewed indicate that they are not challenged in classrooms and that the work is too easy. In addition teaching strategies designed to meet the needs of English language learners and students with disabilities were inconsistent. For example: in a class observed, students who are English language learners were not provided with effective scaffolds to support their learning and were left confused about the work at hand. Furthermore, across classrooms there was inconsistency in providing different entry points for students at all levels. In classrooms visited, students were on task; however, they were not engaged in discussion nor were their responses used to further conversation among them. Consequently, students were left unable to engage in challenging academic discussion.
- Increase assessment of learning practices across classrooms and expand the use of common assessments in content areas so that results are used to adjust curriculum and instruction to improve graduation rates and Regents results. (2.2)
  - Teacher teams review in-class assessments and common assessments such as the two baselines that were administered this year. However, a thorough analysis of History Regents exams has not taken place. For example, the social studies team indicated that they have not seen the essays and an item analysis from the June Regents, although, 30% of the students failed the US History Regents and 29% failed the Global History Regents and still need to pass in order to graduate. This limits the schools' ability to customize supports based each student's individual

needs in order to improve graduation rates and passing rates in all Regents exams.

- Many of the lesson plans include exit slips to assess learning. However, in some classrooms, opportunities to use ongoing checks for understanding are not maximized. For example: In a geometry class where students were sitting in groups, most of the students did not understand how to find the slope. Students were frustrated and a student exclaimed “I do not understand this stuff”. The teacher continued the lesson and did not stop to assess what were the blocks that were getting in the way of learning. Consequently, without adjustments to lessons teachers are not able to meet the needs of all their students.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2013-2014

School name: <b>New Explores High School</b>	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>				
<b>Instructional Core</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards?			<b>X</b>				
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		<b>X</b>					
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?		<b>X</b>					
<b>School Culture</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>			
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<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 student learning needs, as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection?			<b>X</b>				
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			<b>X</b>				
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?			<b>X</b>				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>