



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Expeditionary Learning for Community Leaders**

**High School K572**

**2630 Benson Avenue  
Brooklyn  
NY 11214**

**Principal: David O'Hara**

**Date of review: February 10, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Jo Ann Benoit**

## The School Context

EL School for Community Leaders is a High school with 271 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 17% Black, 42% Hispanic, 23% White, 15% Asian students and 3% other. The student body includes 17% English language learners and 16% special education students. Boys account for 55% of the students enrolled and girls account for 45%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 83.4%

## School Quality Criteria

<b>Instructional Core</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</b>
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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</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>Focus</b>	<b>Proficient</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>School Culture</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</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>Celebration</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	<b>Area of:</b>	<b>Rating:</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>

## Area of Celebration

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>3.4 High Expectations</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff and students and promote a culture for learning that provides supports for all to understand and meet those expectations.

### Impact

The support provided to staff and students entails training for teachers which promotes a culture of mutual accountability, and a unified set of expectations for students to ensure that they all own their educational experience and are prepared for the next level.

### Supporting Evidence

- Being a Progressive Redesign Opportunity for Schools of Excellence (PROSE) school, teachers contributed to the application process to become such a school, thus were part of the crafting of the expectations and understood that they would participate in a comprehensive approach to teacher development through goal setting, inter-visitations, administrator evaluations and an end of the year structured review. Because the school's focus is around evidence-based writing across all grades and subject and on component 3C in the Danielson Framework for Teaching, teachers receive professional development around these topics from administrators via regular formal and informal observations as well as from coaches and peers. There is a Bridge club for new teachers who work with more seasoned teachers and the school has model teachers.
- Teachers are also trained to develop and implement standards-based tasks that promote high expectations for all students in all classrooms. They participate in professional development in and outside of the school to hone in their skills in evaluating and supporting students with their performance based assessment tasks (PBATs). They also receive training to become crew advisors. Crews are groups of 12-15 students and an adult who remain in their cohorts for four years and focus on four key areas: literacy, upholding the school's core values and community standards, college preparation and academic responsibility. Crew is a cornerstone of school culture at Leaders.
- Students participate in all facets of culture building as they engage in rigorous work, assessments, and practices that help them develop academic and leadership skills. Annually, all seniors participate in a College March during which they proudly march to a mail truck to send off the last of their college applications. The entire school is in attendance to cheer them on. Every junior and senior is offered a semester-long class in which they prepare for life after Leaders. Students play a part in the school's restorative justice practices. They are peer mediators. They take part in the student-led conferences during which they share their work, progress and next steps with family members. They present their work to staff and administrators for the PBATs.
- Because of these practices and others, the school is able to share the following data: 86% of seniors are on track to graduate this year; 96% are on track to graduate next year. There is 100% participation by seniors in the College March. 1.6 million dollars have been earned in scholarships from 2014. There is a 42% decrease in overall school incidents because of restorative justice practices and a 56% decrease in school suspensions.

# Area of Focus

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.2 Pedagogy</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Proficient</b>
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## Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best. Teaching strategies consistently provide multiple entry points to the curricula and tasks.

## Impact

Teaching practices reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the Danielson Framework for Teaching and engage all learners in demonstrating higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

## Supporting Evidence

- The administration focused on the following practices that reflect the school’s beliefs about how students learn best: asking open-ended questions with learning targets, displaying an agenda to inform students of the day’s work, facilitating discussions, work with annotations, small group work and student self and peer assessment. Across classrooms, these were evident in one way or another. For example, students were peer assessing in a chemistry class during which students were presenting their part of a project on hydro fracking to their group members. In another class, “student teachers” were supporting one another by walking from group to group and providing feedback on work they were doing around syntax and vocabulary development. The student teachers explained that their roles change regularly and that sometimes they receive support from classmates, and other times, they offer it.
- Teaching strategies provide multiple entry points into the curricula and tasks. For example, in a history class, students were reading in three voices based on their proficiency level. The most proficient students read the most and facilitated conversations during the group read aloud. In another class, students were working in small groups with each group member fulfilling a role: facilitator, vocabulary detective, searcher and reader. These roles change allowing students to take the lead in the discussions from time to time. When there were two teachers in the classroom, one teacher would meet with a small group while the other would move from group to group or facilitate the whole group/class discussions.
- Although the work was rigorous, allowing students to participate in higher order thinking skills across classrooms, and there were multiple entry points into the curricula, some students seemed to struggle with the work in some classrooms because of the pace of the activity or they did not have the opportunity to fully own their learning. For example, in four of the seven classes visited, lessons were teacher-directed. Teachers directed and facilitated the class conversations and missed opportunities to allow students to present their own explanations for example in the math class visited, or by asking rapid fire questions to the group in a history class after the teachers asked students to turn and talk.

## Additional Findings

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>1.1 Curriculum</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that the curricula and tasks are aligned to the Common Core, the instructional shifts and the content standards. Rigorous habits and higher-order thinking skills are emphasized, and academic tasks are planned using student work and data.

### Impact

The level of rigor in the curricula helps to promote college and career readiness for all students as well as to allow for all students, across grades and subjects, to have access to the curricula and to demonstrate their thinking.

### Supporting Evidence

- As school leaders and faculty analyzed data on student performance after high school, they realized that their students were passing the regents exams but not persisting after high school. The school offered 5 Regents exams to its students and many were passing them. However, English language learners and students with disabilities were negatively affected under that system. Thus, the school decided to move to performance-based assessment tasks (PBATs) in order for all students to have the opportunity to reach the same goals but with time throughout their academic career to perfect and revise their craft. Because of this move to PBATs, the school is seeing growth in student achievement. For example, the course pass rate for SWD is 80% for the 2014-2015 school year as compared to 76% from the previous year. The overall course pass rate for ELLs is 88% for the 2014-2015 school year as compared to 85% from the previous year. 86% of 12th graders are on track to graduate in June of 2015 as compared to 83% graduation rate from the previous year. 80% of students with IEPs in the 12th grade are on track to graduate and in addition to that, 100% of students with IEPs in the 11th grade are on track to graduate on time. 86% of ELLs in the 12th grade are on track to graduate and in addition to that, 83% of ELLs in the 11th grade are on track to graduate on time.
- Leaders is a member of the NY Performance Standards Consortium, a coalition of 43 small high schools in New York State that use a performance assessment system aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and promoting college and career readiness for all students. Consortium schools require a series of assessments in all academic subject areas that demand concentrated effort over time and prepare students for the rigor of college work. All teachers use a tuning protocol to analyze students' work and ensure alignment of tasks to the rubrics used. They also focus on reading complex texts and writing. The unit plans (Expedition plans) and lesson plans used with guiding questions, long-term and daily learning targets, PBATs, differentiation and other components ensure coherence throughout the grades and subject areas.
- Starting from grade 9, students develop PBATs, first in groups then individually as they move up to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They are given time to analyze documents and internalize the learning objectives. They have choice in the topics they research and the way they present their work which enables access to the curricula and tasks for all students. Students have researched and presented on topics such as hydro fracking, soda ban, and euthanasia. Last year, all 11th graders presented position papers to Senator Gillibrand in Washington D.C.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### **Findings**

The school uses common assessments to create a clear picture of student progress towards goals, and teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the varied use of on-going checks for understanding, student self and peer assessment.

### **Impact**

Teachers are able to adjust curricula appropriately and to meet students' learning needs to ensure all students demonstrate increased mastery and are aware of their next steps.

### **Supporting Evidence**

- The school uses the performance based assessment tasks (PBATs), Regents exams, baselines, exit slips, grade level and school wide rubrics, as well as, the PBAT inquiry cycle to determine student progress towards school goals and for next steps for instructional adjustments. Students understand the expectations as learning targets and the PBATs' descriptions are always shared with them in class. They also receive a mastery report that lists their work and scores throughout a period of time and their own assessment of their work. This report lists assessments taken and other assignments done and missing.
- In addition to the mastery reports, students are also able to gauge their progress and identify their next steps during the planning and presentations during the student-led conferences (SLCs). These SLCs provide students with a platform to take ownership of their learning. This structure not only supports students academically, but also supports college and career readiness as students work on their public speaking skills and organization skills.
- During the student interview, students talked about having opportunities to self- and peer- assess in class though they felt they needed more opportunities to self-assess. Nevertheless, they explained that when the expectation to self-assess is there, work will not be accepted without that piece.
- Teachers' and students' ability to identify progress and lack thereof towards goals and students' next steps have helped to increase student achievement. 81% of students successfully completed approved college preparatory courses and assessments as compared to the city and borough's averages of 46% and 45%. 72% of students passed the ELA Regents with 46% exceeding the college metric score of 75 or better. 95% of students passed the Math Regents and/or Math PBAT, and 82% exceeded the math college metric of 80.

<b>Quality Indicator:</b>	<b>4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development</b>	<b>Rating:</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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### Findings

The vast majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based professional collaborations, analyze key elements of student and teacher work and play an integral role in the embedded distributive leadership structures established at the school.

### Impact

There is coherence in the work that is done across grades and subject areas, shared improvements in student outcomes and teacher practice, and teachers have a say in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet every week in grade teams, department teams, for professional development and in other professional settings to analyze and affect student work and teacher practice. Science and English teachers talked about refining their work using a peer revision protocol. Science teachers spoke about how their collaborations and talks helped them plan units on local topics such as hydro fracking and Jamaica Bay, which have increased student engagement in science classes. A 9<sup>th</sup> grade teacher spoke about being better prepared to support her students after sitting in on passages (seniors' final presentations for graduation) and learning more about the process from peers.
- Teachers have opportunities to lead teacher meetings, be a part of the leadership team and make key decisions in student learning. To become a PROSE school as well as a member of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, teachers' input and buy-in were taken into account. Teachers also refine and revise curricula as they see fit based on their analysis on student work. The entire 9<sup>th</sup> grade global curriculum was revamped enabling students to write a position paper as their argument project, including adding a focus on annotating while reading, taking notes and debating.
- As part of the option PROSE, teachers conduct intervisitations with colleagues and participate in goal setting during which they are asked to engage in a self-assessment on their strengths and areas in need of improvement aligned with the four domains of the Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* contributing to improvements in teacher practice at the school.