



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

Office of School Quality  
Division of Teaching and Learning

# Quality Review Report

## 2014-2015

**Eximius College Preparatory Academy**

**High School X250**

**1363 Fulton Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10456**

**Principal: Jonathan Daly**

**Date of review: January 15, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Richard Cintron**

## The School Context

Eximius College Preparatory Academy is a high school with 423 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 43% Black, 56% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 10% English language learners and 22% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 89.0%.

## 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>Celebration</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>Additional Findings</b>	<b>Well Developed</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>Focus</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>Additional Findings</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

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.1 Curriculum**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure curricula are aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Higher order skills are emphasized in curricula and tasks in a coherent way.

### Impact

All students, including English language learners (ELLs), students with disabilities and highest achieving learners, are consistently exposed to higher level tasks across grades and content areas, are required to demonstrate their thinking, and are provided with the necessary supports to access those tasks leading to college and career readiness for all students.

### Supporting Evidence

- Lesson plans across all content areas revealed that in-class tasks consistently emphasize higher order thinking skills such as developing claims and citing evidence, developing logical arguments, analyzing information from multiple sources, and applying concepts in real world situations.
- The school has identified specific college and career readiness skills connected to reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language and coherently imbedded them across all content areas and grades. A review of unit maps in global history, math, and English language arts revealed purposeful planning by teachers for how students would show mastery of these skills. This process has resulted in steady increases in credit accumulation across grades, specifically for students in the school's lowest third, which helped the school to be identified as exceeding their targets with regards to closing the achievement gap.
- The school has created templates for curriculum maps, unit plans and lesson plans that have been adopted by the vast majority of teachers and has developed a process for teachers and administrators to peer review all teacher work products. The principal was able to show evidence of curriculum maps, unit plans and lesson plans across all content areas and grades that had been revised, based on peer feedback, to ensure alignment to the Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards.
- Unit plans across all content areas provide numerous scaffolds and entry points such as purposeful grouping, flexible use of time, one to one conferencing, sentence starters, leveled texts, graphic organizers, key vocabulary identified, and text already partially annotated.
- All departments have clearly defined criteria for what students need to know and what skills they need to master to move to the next grade, ensuring coherency across grades and subject areas. A review of the department action plans showed alignment to these identified skills as well as specific strategies teachers would use throughout the year to ensure all students reached mastery level.

## Area of Focus

**Quality Indicator:**

**2.2 Assessment**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use assessments and rubrics aligned to the school's curricula to provide actionable feedback to students and teachers. Teachers consistently use ongoing checks for understanding and students self-assess, allowing teachers to make effective adjustments to meet all learners' needs.

### Impact

The monitoring of student progress at the teacher team and classroom level results in all students having a clear understanding of their next steps for demonstrating mastery in all content areas and increased student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teachers use common end-of-unit assessments in all content areas that are aligned to the school's curricula and use the resulting data to track student performance. Action plans and units are modified based on student work. For example, a tenth grade algebra unit on statistics was modified to include additional lessons on finding central tendencies of a set of data, interpreting a scatter plot to find the line of best fit, representing a set of data using set notation, and representing outcomes using a tree diagram.
- The use of rubrics accompanied by specific targeted actionable feedback from teachers to students is an established ritual for improving student achievement across the school that the principal, teachers and students were able to speak about. Student work displayed in hallways included rubrics with identified areas of strength and areas of growth. In addition to individual feedback to students, teachers also provide next steps for the class as a whole that were also posted in the hallways. Students spoke to how they regularly use rubrics in class and with homework assignments and how teachers confer with them to provide next steps, specifically related to the school-wide focus of using evidence in their writing and speaking to support a claim.
- The school has adopted a school-wide system of checking for understanding by asking students to self-assess at various times throughout the lesson so that teachers or other students in the class can assist them with their next learning steps. This practice was observed at various times in all classrooms visited. In addition to this strategy, teachers used exit slips, one on one conferencing with students, conferencing with groups, and peer and self-assessment to check for understanding and make effective adjustments. For example, in an eleventh grade English class, students were originally paired with their "By Buddy", another student who sits next to them so they can engage in a quick turn and talk, and then self-selected which group they would be working in after conferencing with the teacher. In a tenth grade science classroom, as the students worked in groups to determine the ages of rock layers, the teacher conferenced with each group to determine their understanding of the process and its connection to the previous night's homework and recorded their answers as well as any further questions that they might have that could be shared with the whole class.
- Although students develop goals in all content areas, the practice of students reflecting on their own learning at the end of each unit and modifying their existing goals or developing new goals for the next unit is not yet a consistent practice in all subject areas.

## Additional Findings

**Quality Indicator:**

**1.2 Pedagogy**

**Rating:**

**Well Developed**

### Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points and high-quality supports for all learners. Student discussion and work products reflect high levels of student thinking, participation and ownership.

### Impact

In the vast majority of classrooms, all students, including ELLs and students with disabilities, are motivated and actively engaged in classroom activities and discussions, resulting in them producing meaningful work products that prepare them for college and career.

### Supporting Evidence

- In the vast majority of classrooms observed, students used academic vocabulary and evidenced-based accountable talk, cited evidence to support their claims, annotated text, applied what they were learning in real world applications and used rubrics to self-and peer-assess their work. During student interviews, when asked to describe how they learn in their classes, students spoke to all of these practices and how they are commonplace and consistent across all grades and subject areas.
- Purposeful grouping of students was seen in the vast majority of classrooms. In a twelfth grade math class, students were grouped according to how they had performed on the last end-of-unit exam so that specific groups could be assigned similar problems that they had struggled with on the test. In a tenth grade English class, after the Do Now was completed, students were grouped based on their own assessment of their understanding of the Do Now as well as their ability to fully understand the homework from the previous night.
- When asked, the vast majority of students could articulate what they were learning and why it was important. In a twelfth grade physics class where students were learning about the relationship between energy and power, students explained how they could apply this knowledge to solve everyday problems such as maintaining and designing roller coasters. In a tenth grade English class, students were able to explain how annotating text and writing the gist were the first steps towards helping them understand the text and to eventually cite evidence from it to defend their claim.
- Teachers used a variety of strategies to ensure all students could access the material. In an eleventh grade history class, certain students were provided with key vocabulary so that they could more easily access the text. In a tenth grade science class, certain students were able to use their notes from the previous day to complete the assignment in the allotted time. In an eleventh grade English class, the teacher worked individually with certain students to provide scaffolds in their native language.

<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 the entire staff. Leadership and staff successfully partner with families to support student progress towards high expectations connected to college and career readiness.

### Impact

The school has a culture of mutual accountability and staff takes ownership on improving their own practice and creating true partnerships with parents that result in increased student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- The school has a very detailed professional development calendar that was collaboratively created with teacher leaders and is aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching, the school's instructional focus, as well as the work of creating and modifying curriculum. The school's professional development team frequently facilitates or co-facilitates with the administration and several teachers referenced how their ability to offer large group, small group and individual professional development has helped to create coherence across the school and improve teacher practice. The principal was able to show evidence through the use of increases in teacher observation scores related to 3B from the Danielson Framework for Teaching of how teachers' ability to create and deliver higher-order questions has increased since professional development has focused on this area.
- Parents spoke about how teachers not only communicate with them on a daily basis using the school's website Pupil Path, but that they also regularly provide them with strategies and access to specific websites during parent teacher conferences and during parent workshops to support their children when they are working at home. Parents mentioned how teachers are always available by phone, email or text and frequently stay late into the evening to work with students. Parents commented that they believe the school does an excellent job of helping them navigate the college application process and work closely with students from ninth grade until they graduate to ensure they are college and career ready. A review of the school's High School Quality Snapshot revealed that the school's four year graduation rate rose three percentage points to 85%, which is above the city and borough averages, and 68% of students enrolled in a postsecondary program within six months, which is also higher than the city and borough averages.
- Parents spoke about how all staff members model the school's core values and regularly discuss them with students and parents. Several parents mentioned how they believe the school's student mentoring program, where upperclassmen mentor ninth and tenth graders, is an example of how the school has created opportunities for students to learn from their teachers as well as each other; a skill that parents felt would be especially important when they graduate and either join the workforce or go to college.
- School leaders and teachers explained that in addition to regularly scheduled teacher team meetings, the vast majority of teachers regularly meet in small groups and engage in intervisitations to share best strategies to improve their practice.

<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

All teachers are engaged in consistently examining teacher practice and student data within inquiry-based structured professional collaborations. Distributed teacher leadership is embedded across all areas of the school.

### Impact

School-wide instructional coherence is seen throughout all classrooms and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect teaching and learning across the school, resulting in increased student achievement.

### Supporting Evidence

- Teacher teams meet five days a week to share best strategies and provide feedback to improve their practice. For example, English teachers spoke to how they have developed a common strategy called “RUBO”, which stands for read a few times, underline, bullet key points, and then outline, for students to use when establishing a claim that has led to increases in students’ ability to organize their writing. Math teachers have developed a common practice for students to self-reflect at the end of each unit and use a common data file to examine student responses. Teachers also mentioned how they have established a practice of visiting each other’s classrooms after professional development to give feedback on topics learned in either large or small group sessions or during their professional learning communities.
- During two teacher team meetings observed, teachers spoke about how they have a strong voice in school-wide instructional decisions and their leadership is not only valued but actively sought after. For example, teachers collaboratively worked with the administration to create professional learning communities associated with high-need areas identified through an examination of school-wide data and teacher surveys. Teachers chosen collaboratively by the administration and teacher leaders facilitate these sessions and best practices are shared across the school. Topics under study are Universal Design for Learning, classroom procedures, classroom management, creating higher-order questions, and pre-planning lessons using student work.
- Teachers discussed how they actively seek each other’s input on all matters pertaining to curriculum and instruction and how this established practice has led to improvements in their practice and a strong culture of teacher ownership across the school. Teachers specifically mentioned how the practice of peer reviewing curriculum maps, unit plans, lesson plans and action plans has led to greater coherence and alignment to the Common Core. In addition to these regularly scheduled meetings, the vast majority of teachers work in smaller, informal learning groups during prep periods or communicate through emails to discuss best practices for specific students who may need additional support.
- During a teacher team meeting, teachers were engaged in looking at student work and analyzing a teacher’s lesson plan to determine next steps. During the meeting, teachers used accountable talk and specifically mentioned how they model these practices at all times so that if students come across them working in their teacher team meetings or even engaging in professional conversation around the school, they can see these practices in action both inside and outside of the classroom.