

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Kurt Hahn Expeditionary Learning School

High School 569

**5800 Tilden Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11203**

Principal: Matt Brown

**Dates of review: April 23- 24, 2009
Lead Reviewer: Ainslie Cumberbatch**

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Kurt Hahn Expeditionary Learning School is a high school with 149 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 81% Black, 16% Hispanic, 1% White and 1% American Indian students. The student body includes 14% English language learners and 7% special education students. Boys account for 61% of the students enrolled and girls account for 39%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 88.4%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

This new school, of two years since its inception, shares some facilities, such as the gymnasium, cafeteria and library, with three other schools accommodated within the building. There are plans to extend the number of grades to include grade 6 through 8.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The school has worked hard to develop an expeditionary learning model experience that prepares students to become informed, skilled and courageous civic leaders. A strong partnership with New York City Outward Bound brings the expertise and educational philosophy of *Outward Bound* to support the school. The school's focus brings adventure and discovery into the students' education that connects with strong academic content and real-world issues and concerns. Currently, higher-level courses are not included as part of the school's program. School staff recognize the academic and social challenges their students face and partner with parents to ensure that the school's five commitments of, "Courage, Compassion, Respect, Stewardship and Perseverance" are upheld. Students, staff and parents praise the leadership qualities of the principal and support him in his efforts to build a school of choice. School staff commit to molding students who will become "the new generation of leaders" and communicate regularly with parents using online programs, telephone calls and mailings.

Staff collect and analyze data from a variety of sources to positively impact student performance. They work collaboratively with parents to support the school's efforts and provide students with numerous out-of-school experiences through which students acquire the tools necessary to become life-long learners. Differentiation of instruction is a work in progress as teachers strive to deliver a rigorous and challenging instructional program. The school faces considerable challenge as it plays catch up with a significant number of students in its founding cohort who struggled with credit accumulation and passing Regents exams in their first year.

Kurt Hahn is making good progress in the areas of credit accumulation and data refinement. To support student success and build school capacity, the principal has reconfigured the school schedule, provided more opportunities to support students struggling to complete credits and re-examining the school-wide delivery of instruction. However, literacy and establishing individual goals remain areas of focus and staff continue to work to build a firm literacy base and establish clear goals for students. At present, the school's inquiry team meets weekly and is working to improve student performance by one grade level on the program performance series. Initial results show progress in this area.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has good communication systems for keeping parents fully informed of school activities and their children's progress.
- Students and parents share the high expectations of the principal and his staff for improving student achievement.
- The development of project-based learning is giving students the opportunity to undertake research, solve problems and be more active learners.
- Teachers work collaboratively to collect and share data, ideas and good practice to continually improve student learning.
- There is a strong civic leadership program supported by external partnerships in which all students participate within and outside the school.
- Parents, faculty and students share the principal's clear vision and work together to bring about improvement and change.

What the school needs to improve

- Promote greater consistency in differentiated instruction based on analysis of data to maximize student learning.
- Expand the current goal setting initiative to enable all teachers to develop their practice in setting individual academic learning goals for students that define next steps in achieving their personal long-term goals.
- Implement an action plan with measurable benchmarks to realize the school's vision of using literacy as a vehicle for greater academic achievement.
- Expand curriculum options to include a wide range of higher-level courses that are engaging and challenging.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school uses a variety of assessment tools to provide staff with information that supports teaching and learning. Staff administer "Design Your Own" assessments in English, math, science and social studies that are tied to course investigations and the school's model for learning. Assessments take place three to six times a year depending on the length of the investigation. Other assessment programs are used for ninth graders to identify student specific skill deficits in English language arts and math. All teachers give pre-tests and post-tests aligned to the learning targets for each course which they then analyze. In addition, teachers regularly collect classroom level performance data and use for lesson planning. The principal uses coaching observations to evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative which includes time and strategies for the development of skills measured on formative assessments. Currently, the school sees an improvement in formative periodic assessment results.

Teachers use *Teacher Ease*, an online grade program to: analyze grade averages per assignment, graph student performance and calculate averages for each category of class assignment and provide parents and students with clear and current information related to student progress. The school uses a standards-based grading scale, rather than a percentage based scale to assess student work and identify areas for growth. They link learning targets to assignments and that allows staff to gather data on student performance according to individual learning targets and standards. As a result, the data facilitates informed conversations with students and parents as well as supplying information for six-weekly formal report cards via mid-trimester progress reports, as well as end-of-trimester cumulative reports. Staff communicate with parents regularly and use a student behavior and character development database to articulate student character and behavior performance to parents and students. They log telephone calls home and significant behavior events which allow teachers to track student progress over time, impacting positively on school tone and student decorum. Attendance statistics remain about the same, even though the school has doubled in size.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

Teachers plan their lessons based on student data. They use inquiry-based curricula that include an investigation component. The investigation takes the form of a three to five week unit where students create "learning expeditions" that utilize pre- and post-tests. Students praise these activities indicating that the unit format makes them think deeply about their work. These tests allow teachers to see, at the start of each

investigation, what students already know and can do related to the course. Teachers and students use the information from formative assessments to chart student progress and set instructional goals, both in advisory “crew class” and academic courses but establishing personal goals is in the developmental stage. Specific goals with an action plan and timeline do not exist for individual students.

The school community collectively develops the Comprehensive Educational Plan facilitated by the school’s leadership team. Parents and staff meet to discuss feedback from all constituents and review the Learning Environment Survey, internal surveys and school data related to discipline, academic progress and school culture. This process enables the development of school action plans and goals that address key issues such as credit accumulation and Regents pass rates. After examining student achievement data from last year, the school prioritized assessment practice and policies, course passing rates and academic literacy as critical school wide goals.

Regular community meetings organized by grade and whole school, and facilitated by students, offer a forum for staff and students to discuss and address shared expectations for work and behavior. Weekly professional development meetings allow teachers time to discuss goals for individual students and ways to differentiate instruction and student support. Advisors meet with students in “crew” advisories to help them develop reflective practices around assessing their own progress, goal setting, portfolio development and student led conference preparation. Parents value the student led conferences, the partnership with Outward Bound that facilitates the community activities programs and the college focus. They like the school and express that teachers communicate with them throughout the year, allowing them to feel confident and knowledgeable about their child’s progress. Parents share that they feel welcome at the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school’s broad, project-based instructional program includes a product rich curriculum that engages students both creatively and intellectually resulting in an instructional environment that supports students toward success. A college preparatory program that encompasses a *College Now* connection and a field-based experience that includes an *Explorer Week* are hallmarks of the school. Responding to last year’s school data showing low pass rates in coursework and on the Regents exams in integrated algebra and living environment, the school schedules weekly instructional meetings and workshops, as well as on site coaching in the *Expeditionary Learning* model, to provide extensive support for teachers in curriculum development and lesson design. This assessment and professional development cycle, combined with common scoring and examination of student results on school wide reading and writing assessments, serves to create a basis for school wide conversation around literacy standards and emphasis on a common language around lesson design and best instructional practices. Consequently, the common lesson format supports staff in making daily adjustments to course plans based on formative assessment data to ensure all students are engaged and on track to reach learning goals.

Across the school there is a lack of consistency in the delivery of differentiated instruction that includes purposeful groupings, challenging activities and attention to

learning styles. The school uses collaborative team teaching and currently students with individual education plans on average earn credits at a greater rate than students without such plans. Staff support special needs students in preparing for Regents, and for some students, the alternative Regents Competency exam. As a result, approximately 50% of special education students have passed the integrated algebra and living environment Regents exams. English language learners receive support from a licensed English as a second language teacher on staff. These students are making similar progress on Regents exams but half of both subgroups struggle to meet graduation requirements. The school programs students for tutoring and enrichment based on interest and need. During twice yearly *Explore Weeks*, students pursue their interest in a topic in-depth or enroll in academic support intensives courses resulting in improved course pass rates and credit accumulation.

The school's organizational structure reflects thoughtful planning related to flexible scheduling. Each week an early student dismissal allows staff time to meet in department teams. This school year the school created a literacy program for incoming students as a result of a review of initial assessments. Ninth grade students enroll in an academic program designed by West Ed. to address literacy deficits. Initial results reveal significant gains in student reading comprehension and reading engagement. The school provides a safe and nurturing environment and students remark that they like their classes and teachers. They describe their teachers as "caring" and say, "Teachers are there to help us". Teachers and students indicate that they feel safe at the school but students express concerns about the shared campus at large. The curricula offered are mainly core courses selections and students say they would like to see more challenging courses such as chemistry, greater use of technology and more hands-on activities.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal has a good grasp of how the quality of teaching is threaded throughout the school and its relationship to student outcomes. Teachers establish goals at the beginning of the school year that inform their ongoing professional development and adjust growth plans as needed. School leaders make regular classroom visits and conduct coaching sessions, providing feedback to teachers. The school runs weekly professional development series, inquiry team meetings and instructional team meetings. New teachers receive in-house mentoring or individual mentoring by an experienced teacher in a different content area. The latter arrangement provides the new teacher with good instructional support but limits their ability to grow within a skill set. *Outward Bound* provides professional development for teachers. These sessions foster structured professional collaborations that enhance teacher skills in accelerating student learning. An outgrowth of these collaborations is an intervisitation and peer-coaching program initiated by teachers.

The school's inquiry team works with 23 students. The team focus aligns with the school wide focus of reading instruction and student literacy. As a result of analyzing last year's work, the team now focuses on students reading in the second lowest quartile, as tested by performance series, by looking at how much explicit vocabulary instruction supports student literacy gains, as well as classroom performance. Progress is noted in this area. School wide, there is an emphasis on students' personal growth that is evident in discussions held at teacher meetings and in "crew". The school's partnership with

Outward Bound weaves the organization's resources and beliefs into a rich academic and civic leadership program that results in students actively participating within the community and developing positive character traits and academic success. Other partnerships include: mentoring for young men, a girls' empowerment program and a leadership program. Brooklyn College and Medgar Evers College provide opportunities for students to earn college credits, thereby fast tracking their college experience. At this time, formal data is not available for all programs to enable the school to evaluate collectively the impact of all external partnerships and enact appropriate revisions.

Students describe their principal as someone who, "Takes time to listen". Parents like the uniform policy, the peer mediation program and their access to staff. They also like the opportunity to monitor their child's progress using the *Teacher Ease* program and the college connections the school has made. They describe the principal as, "Responsive, pushes for students to do more". They share that, "He's a people person".

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's long-term goal is to create college bound, leadership-ready graduates. Each department works to improve student outcomes to enable this goal. However, setting targets that include measurable interim goals and benchmarks to improve student and teacher outcomes have not yet been realized school wide. Therefore, it is difficult to determine what the real extent of progress is across the school, grades or teachers and that subsequent adjustments to actions are the most effective they can be. After reviewing initial scholarship data, the school modified its instructional design and method of instruction to align them more closely to student needs. A review of student progress happens several times during a trimester in department and school wide teams. However, in the absence of school wide implementation of measurable interim goals and benchmarks, the principal and instructional coaches meet regularly to review student academic performance data, teacher observation data and make adjustments in school schedule, action plans, and teacher professional development as needed.

The school makes successful outreach to parents via the school website and the principal's blog to spread the school vision. As a result, parents embrace the *Teacher Ease* program and are becoming engaged in their child's learning and more familiar with the school's vision at a steady pace. One vision the school has for students is that of literacy. To that end, this school year all incoming students were enrolled in an academic literacy program. The program is showing good results. However, this vision is to be recessed in ninth grade limiting the possibilities for further school-wide progress in this and related literacy aspects.

The school's self-evaluation paints a good picture of the school. The principal has a clear vision for the direction of the school and engages in collaborative conversations with all school constituencies to determine and incorporate their perspectives. The wish for staff members in each discipline to support the creation of common assessments and work closely with the inquiry team to examine practice and process are not yet grounded in action plans that will inform the work of these teams in a more deliberate way.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Kurt Hahn Expeditionary Learning School	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent do school leaders...	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X	
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X	
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

To what extent do ...	Δ	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X	
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed