

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

Opportunity Network

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El Centro de Estudiantes Instructional Site Visit Summary May 31, 2017

Provider: Big Picture Philadelphia
Contract Term: FY 2013-FY 2017
Program capacity: 200

Site Visit Date: Monday, April 24, 2017- 9:00 a.m.
IEP Compliance: 89%
Average Daily Attendance: 67.5%

Review Team:

Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways
Tiana Wilson, REC Program Manager
Darryl Johnson, Transition Liaison
Ebony McCormick, Assistant Program Coord.

Program Staff:

David Bromley, Executive Director, Big Picture Philadelphia
JuDonn DeShields, Principal
Melina Kuchinov- Assistant Principal of Instruction
Frankie Bonilla- Assistant Principal of Culture
Matthew Prochnow, Director of Internships
Angela Smith, Director of Postsecondary Supports
Stephanie Contreras- Director of Counseling
Sheri Newmark- Director of Student Supports

Overview of Instructional Site Visits:

Instructional site visits consisted of four main parts: **Academic Success Questions with Leadership**; **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**; **Academic Success Questions with Students**; and **Classroom Observations**. **Academic Success Questions with Leadership** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: data and academic outcomes; academic outcomes versus goals; and preparation for classroom observations. **Academic Success Questions with Teachers** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: the use of academic assessments; academic outcomes versus goals; and the school's overall academic performance. **Academic Success Questions with Students** was driven by standardized questions that focused on: student backgrounds and previous educational experiences; academic expectations set by Teachers; tests, grading procedures, and supports from Teachers; overall level of satisfaction with the program and recommendations for improvement; the program's mission; the program's Special Education services; and food and health services. **Classroom Observations** was guided by a standardized Classroom Observation Form that assessed elements of: the classroom environment; instruction; and assessments.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Academic Success Questions with Leadership

El Centro de Estudiantes leadership presented and discussed data on reading and mathematics skill growth from the previous school year. The program administers the TABE twice per year. Post-TABE reading scores showed an average of .32 years of growth in students' skill levels. Post-TABE applied mathematics scores showed an average of .47 years of growth in students' skill levels. El Centro leadership discussed the ways in which they are working to improve instruction throughout the program. Writing and reading are now regularly incorporated across the curriculum. As a project-based learning school, El Centro is working to align projects to Pennsylvania Common Core Standards for all high school core content areas. Staff have carved out more time in the schedule to record notes into students' individual learning plans. The program has placed a greater emphasis on scaffolding concepts to ensure that skills deficiencies are resolved and students are learning core content toward their final projects. The program is working to create a manual for Advisors that aligns projects with core content so that projects become more rigorous and include the key concepts that students need to know.

El Centro leadership talked about the ways that they use TABE results and individual learning plans to inform professional development for Advisors. Program administration convenes weekly meetings with Advisors to determine the areas that students are struggling in. That information is then used to develop professional development to address the common needs among students. The program is working to ensure that instruction becomes more of a focus during professional development. The program plans to spend this summer mapping out the entire 2017-2018 curriculum for each content area so that each is aligned to core standards.

Program leadership discussed the strategies that they have used to improve attendance. The program has developed various incentives to reward students for high attendance, including fun trips and special breakfast meals. The program uses its Gateway cohort to set high expectations for attendance (90% attendance goal). By placing this expectation on Gateway students, the program aims to have new students develop good attendance habits that will follow them throughout their time at El Centro.

When students leave Gateway, their Advisors move with them as group for the rest of the time that they are enrolled in the program. This structure helps to establish camaraderie and strong relationships among students and staff. Program leadership discussed the positive effects that these relationships have on student learning. Students feel safe and valued, and they want to learn and do well because the rapport that establish with their peers and staff. Students participate in LTI (Learning Through Internships) after they complete Gateway. Students take career interest inventories to determine their passions and strengths. LTI affords students the opportunity to develop relationship with their adult mentors, and El Centro staff work closely with LTI mentors to support the process and ensure that students are successful.

Academic Success Questions with Students

El Centro leadership selected two students to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students: Crystal and Ahmad. The students talked about their LTI experiences. Ahmad is currently interning at film studio and is learning to create short films. He has a passion for the arts and plans to pursue film making after high school. Crystal plan to travel to Argentina during the summer to participate in El Centro's travel abroad program. She plans to teach English to native speakers and also plans to learn the native language. Crystal plans to matriculate at Temple University upon return from Argentina with a concentration in environment engineering.

Both students thought that their Advisors at El Centro have high academic expectations for them. They remarked that the learning they do at El Centro is different from what they have experienced in other schools, and the learning relates more to real life, which keeps them interested. Students talked about producing projects in all of their classes and that they have about 10 projects to complete every trimester. Project guidelines are explained by the Teacher and students receive a calendar to ensure they are on schedule for completing the projects. Students described what they have to produce for their project exhibitions. They create PowerPoint decks and presentation talking points to showcase their projects to staff, peers, and family members.

Students talked about the tests that they take at El Centro. The TABE is administered three times per year and they also take Keystone Exams. Students reported taking subject tests in English and mathematics classes only. Students receive report cards at the end of every trimester, and Advisors are always talking with them about their academic progress.

Overall, the students reported satisfaction at El Centro. They see their Advisors as adults who genuinely care about them and their success. They felt that the school is set up like a community in which their peers and Advisors all care about each other. At the beginning of each trimester, students meet one-on-one with their Advisor to review attendance and course marks from the previous trimester. This meeting allows the student to set goals for the new trimester and any improvement strategies that might be needed to perform at a higher level.

Students recommended to the review team that the School District create more schools like El Centro where students are valued and receive consistent guidance from staff.

Academic Success Questions with Teachers

Advisors Iris (Math and Engineering) and Betsy (Literacy) participated in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers. Advisors talked about the assessments that they use to monitor students learning. Project exhibitions are a major assessment used throughout the program and they take place at the end of every trimester. Project exhibitions are a culmination of everything that the student has learned within a given core subject. Advisors reported using a binder to record daily learning, which becomes an artifact that they can refer back to when planning lessons or re-teaching certain concepts. Advisors use Engrade Pro to record course marks, which are entered on a 4-point scale (4- excellent, 3- good, 2- fair, 1- needs improvement/very little effort). As a result, students become very familiar with the program's grading system. At the end of every class period, students complete a daily self evaluation that accounts for their participation and recaps what they have learned.

On a daily basis, Advisors reported using various assessments to determine if students have mastered the material that was covered. Iris requires her students to write a paragraph describing what they learned for the day. Betsy requires students to complete various deliverables that include exit tickets, class assignments, and checks for understanding.

Advisors talked about the El Centro's weekly professional development meetings that are held on Wednesdays, and team meetings that are held on Mondays. Advisors record notes on student progress in Google Docs and they use the system to learn from each other about best practices to engage individual students. During PD Advisors discuss program policies student trends. Advisors reported that they are always looking to refresh and improve the systems that they have in place. For example, the program implemented team leaders on each floor, which helps to centralize operations. The team leader also provides supports to Advisors, including observations, coaching and feedback. The program has also placed a Resiliency Specialist on each floor, who serves as a Counselor for students.

Overall, Advisors felt that the school is doing well academically. They noted that they are always trying to improve academic rigor and they felt that the program is moving in the right direction in order to realize that goal. Advisors reported receiving clear messages from program leadership that academics need to be improved throughout the program.

Classroom Observations

Review team members observed an English class for approximately ten minutes, and 13 students were present in class during the observation. Classroom walls displayed recent student work and classroom procedures. All students were on task during the observation. The class agenda was posted and included a warm-up activity, introduction, mini lesson, guided practice, independent practice, and a closing/wrap up. The warm up consisted of reading a case study, and the introduction focused on defining community. The class was engaged in a discussion about sugar and its effects on behavior and decision making for the introduction part of the lesson. According to the class agenda, students would then transition to developing their own geographic studies using geographic details that they learned in class. Review team members were unclear about which level English was being taught and how the lesson aligned with Pennsylvania Common Core Standards. The depth of engagement observed required students to demonstrate understanding and apply information.

Review team members observed a Social Studies class for approximately five minutes and 13 students were present in class during the observation. Classroom walls displayed recent student work and classroom procedures. All students were on task during the observation. The class agenda was posted and included a lesson objective that focused on students using their "knowledge of life decisions and the game of life in order to design

a game". Students worked in teams to develop a game. Students also completed a worksheet in teams in which they recorded pros and cons for the trading system that they developed for the game. The Teachers circulated the classroom to check for progress and to provide help as needed. Review team members were unclear about which level of Social Studies was being taught and how the lesson aligned with Pennsylvania Common Core Standards. The depth of engagement observed required students to demonstrate understanding, create ideas, and analyze outcomes.

Review team members observed a Science class for approximately eight minutes. Classroom walls displayed recent student work and classroom procedures. The class agenda was posted and included a lesson objective that required students to research and select a science fair project. Students were to gather internet research on several experiments and then pick two that they would complete. Students worked independently to conduct research and record their findings. All students were on task during the observation. Review team members were unclear about which level of Science was being taught and how the lesson aligned with Pennsylvania Common Core Standards. The depth of engagement observed required students to define and repeat topics for science fair projects.

Review team members observed a Mathematics and Engineering class for approximately six minutes and 14 students were present in class during the observation. Classroom walls displayed recent student work and classroom procedures. The class agenda was evident and included a lesson objective that required students to build a boat and determine what engineering qualities would affect the speed and stability of the boat. Students worked in pairs to complete the assignment and record their answers on a worksheet. The Teacher circulated the room to check on students' progress and to provide help as needed. Review team members were unclear about which level of Mathematics was being taught and how the lesson aligned with Pennsylvania Common Core Standards. The depth of engagement observed challenged students to analyze and apply design concepts, as well as to evaluate the affects of certain designs on boat stability and speed.

Recommendations

The review team strongly recommends that El Centro de Estudiantes meet the objectives that it has already set to improve instructional rigor and align project based learning with core academic standards. The review team also recommends that the program use TABE results, grades from classroom deliverables/assignments, and other data to inform instructional strategies and lesson content. The program should work to make a direct connection between data and instruction. The review team recommends that El Centro consider establishing program-wide norms that are consistent across all classrooms. Program-wide norms will help Advisors who are not very strong with classroom management to remain focused on instruction. In addition, students will be more likely to conform to behavioral expectations if norms are consistent throughout the program.