



Instructional Visit Summary El Centro de Estudiantes

Provider: Big Picture Philadelphia
Contract Term: FY 2018 - 2022

Site Visit Date: Wednesday, April 11, 2018- 9:00 a.m.
Program Capacity: 200

Site Visit Review Team:

Christina Grant, Assistant Superintendent,
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Program Staff:

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JuDonn DeShields, Principal, El Centro de Estudiantes
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Overview of Instructional Site Visits:

Instructional site visits consist 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** includes standardized questions that focus on: data and academic outcomes; academic outcomes versus goals; and preparation for classroom observations. **Academic Success Questions with Teachers** includes standardized questions that focus on: the use of academic assessments; academic outcomes versus goals; and the school's overall academic performance. **Academic Success Questions with Students** includes standardized questions that focus 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. **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

Academic Outcomes. El Centro de Estudiantes (El Centro) presented and discussed the program's key academic data, including literacy and numeracy growth, retention rate, graduation rate, percentage of students attending at least 85% of school days, and Special Education data. El Centro aggregated and analyzed its own data as a demonstration of the program's ability to make data-informed decisions for positive student outcomes. The program's leadership explained some of the key drivers of their academic outcomes. El Centro used the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) last year and in previous years to gauge students' growth in reading and mathematics. The program's leadership noted that they would like to see more students making skill gains. Leadership also noted that TABE does not give them the data they need to set learning goals with students. As a result, the program switched to the Measures of Academic Progress Assessment (MAP) this school year. So far, the program is more satisfied with the data they receive from the MAP. The MAP provides a number of different reports, including trends by class and discrete skill deficiencies and strengths by individual student. The leadership team at El Centro has worked strategically over the last several years to improve instruction and its Learning Through Internships (LTI) program. Program staff created a shared language and process for project-based learning, including final product standards and rubrics. El Centro developed the structures necessary to build a culture of high quality instruction, including teaching teams, a Gateway advisory for new students, and an instructional coaching and feedback loop to better support advisors (i.e., teachers). Program leadership prioritized content strands and skills that set standards for what students need to know and do in order to be successful. El Centro's Learning Through Internships (LTI) program provides students with real-world learning, career exposure, a professional mentor, and work experience. El Centro's advisors guide students through the process and act as a direct contact for workplace mentors/supervisors. Students can gain experience in a number of different fields, or they can focus their efforts on a particular industry. LTI provides a bridge to postsecondary education and careers by providing personalized guidance for life after high school.

Academic Outcomes versus Goals. El Centro now uses MAP assessment data to set learning goals with students and to scaffold learning in class. This year, student learning goals are basic plans for improvement. Leadership is working to develop more specific student learning goals next year that will align with program-wide goals for academic achievement. Moving forward, MAP data will be used to drive project planning so that topics, final products, and presentations all support individual student goals and program-wide goals. El Centro plans to utilize a computer-based intervention program next school year to increase growth for students with lower reading and mathematics skills. El Centro's advisors were trained this year to have pre- and post- MAP assessment conversations with students in an effort to get students more comfortable with testing, and to ensure that every student understands their skill levels and is able to take ownership of improvements.

Classroom Observation Preparation. When asked what we should see in classrooms, program leadership articulated that we should see project blocks (i.e., classes) that address real world challenges and engage students. Concepts and skills should be taught with less of a focus on the advisor and more of an emphasis on students as agents of exploration. Advisors should adjust instruction accordingly based on their checks for understanding. Finally, students' projects should be on display in classrooms.

Classroom Observations

Review team members observed a mathematics class for 10 minutes that was at the start of the class period. Seventeen students were present in class during the observation. Classroom walls displayed recent student work and classroom procedures. No instructional resources were displayed in the classroom. The advisor was teaching students about Cartesian coordinates and used basketball as a real world example of parabolic curves.

The class transitioned to independent practice that required students to practice plotting points. Most students were off-task during the observation and not engaged with the activity. One student voiced her concern about not understanding the lesson. Review team members did not see the advisor address the student who did not understand. The depth of engagement challenged students to demonstrate their understanding of how to plot points.

Review team members observed a social studies class for approximately 10 minutes that was already in progress. Fourteen students were present in class during the observation. Classroom walls displayed recent student work and classroom procedures, however, no instructional resources were on display. All students were engaged during the observation. The class was learning about the differences between protests and riots. The warm-up discussion required students to explain whether they think a riot could happen today, and why. The class then transitioned into learning about the Los Angeles and Watts riots. Students were required to complete a fill-in-the-blank handout about the two riots. The class began to complete the handout together and the teacher gave students answers to the handout. The depth of engagement challenged students to define or repeat information.

Review team members observed a Gateway social studies class for approximately 13 minutes that was already in progress. Ten students were present in class during the observation, and all were on-task. Classroom walls displayed recent student work and classroom procedures. The class was learning about the system of government in the United States. The advisor used an LCD projector to display notes and a website that summarized candidates for Philadelphia District Attorney. The class project required students to create a voter guide of the candidates for District Attorney. The method of instruction observed was question and answer, and modeling/demonstration. The depth of engagement challenged students to evaluate information in order to create a voter's guide.

Academic Success Questions with Teachers

Jason (social studies advisor) and Acacia (science and technology advisor) participated in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers. Jason has been with El Centro for five years, and Acacia is in her first year with the program. The advisors described El Centro's project-based learning model, which includes project blocks (i.e., classroom instruction), Learning Through Internships (LTI), and final projects. The advisors noted the individual attention that they give each of their students through one-on-one conversations about goal setting and academic progress. They considered themselves to be advocates for their students, which requires them to get to know students well. Jason and Acacia talked about the impact that students' personal needs and struggles have on learning. As a result, they work to support students with any challenges they may have, even if the challenges are non-academic. The advisors noted that their goal is to serve the whole student. The advisors discussed the way that internships are now scaffolded for students. Students begin their first year at El Centro with a Gateway advisory that introduces the concept of internships and prepares students for professional settings. Graduating seniors participate in the highest level of internships, which includes several internship days throughout the week and individual career exposure. Advisors design their project blocks (i.e. classes) to address a current real world problem. They use common core standards to determine the skills and knowledge that they need to infuse into the project completion process. Jason and Acacia discussed recent projects that their students completed. In social studies, students researched major religions in Philadelphia and received first-hand information from religious followers through trips to churches, mosques, and other religious centers. In biology, students learned about the human genome project and designed their own babies using what they learned about genetics. The advisors noted that they receive a great deal of support from El Centro's administrators. Advisors gain one-on-one support and feedback from the program's Assistant Principal as they develop class projects. Advisors noted a recent professional development session on high standards for

project-based learning, and found the accompanying book to be of great help to them. Jason and Acacia agreed that the program's Principal does not micro-manage them, but rather sets expectations and vision for the program. The advisors discussed El Centro's plans to continuously improve projects and instruction. They look forward to creating project rubrics for next school year that are aligned to content standards and refining their internship curriculum to ensure that each tier or level builds upon the previous one.

Academic Success Questions with Students

El Centro's leadership selected three students to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. All three students were referred to El Centro by word of mouth. One student found the program on a friend's Instagram Live, and she was attracted to the program because she could see "nice" staff and student relationships. All three students agreed that program staff really treat them like family. Students noted that even when they are having a bad day the staff still treats them respectfully and asks how they can be supportive. Students also noted the strong bonds they form with their classmates. When asked about the academics at El Centro, one student noted that the work is easier than her previous school. Students also talked about their MAP scores and how the program helps them to improve their skills through learning goals. Additionally, students spoke enthusiastically about their internships and described the focus. One student interned at an organization that hosts fundraisers in the community and helps students to develop business plans. Another student interned at an organization that helps to feed families in need. One student interned at a furniture business. In general, they were very satisfied with their internships and saw them as being an important part of accomplishing their future goals. When asked what they would change about El Centro, students talked about the need for more money for important services. They thought that the School District should provide more money to the program for childcare needs. They also thought that more money would allow them to make full use of the facility, which included the installation of showers so that less fortunate students could have a place to take care of personal hygiene. Moreover, students stated that they would also use the additional funds to get a bigger yard to host events for the community and program-wide celebrations. Overall, students were very satisfied with their experiences at the program and they are proud to be students at El Centro de Estudiantes.

Recommendations

The review team recommends that El Centro de Estudiantes follow its current improvement plan that focuses on enhancing instruction, academic rigor, and aligning projects with common core standards. The program should develop a framework for the delivery of instruction to ensure that project blocks have a standard for teaching and learning. The review team also recommends that instructional resources be on display in all classrooms to create an inviting academic environment for students. Finally, El Centro should leverage the positive rapport between students and advisors to engage all students in class and to guide them toward more opportunities for higher order and strategic thinking.