



**Mid-Year Evaluation  
El Centro de Estudiantes**

**Provider:**

Big Picture Philadelphia

**Site Visit Date:**

Monday, December 4, 2017- 8:30 a.m.

**Contract Term:**

FY 2018 - 2022

**Child Count Compliance:**

100%

**Program Capacity:**

200

**Percent of students attending at least 85% of school days:** 53.5%

**Site Visit Review Team:**

Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways, Opportunity Network  
Cameo Posey, Assistant Director, Adult Education, Opportunity Network  
Marlon Riddick, Transition Liaison, Opportunity Network  
Luis Rosario, Project U-Turn Fellow, Opportunity Network  
Danielle Gardner, Talent Partner, SDP Recruitment and Staffing  
Stephanie Gambone, Executive Vice President, Philadelphia Youth Network

**Program Staff:**

David Bromley, Executive Director, Big Picture Philadelphia  
JuDonn DeShields, Principal, El Centro de Estudiantes  
Angela Smith, Director of Postsecondary Supports, El Centro de Estudiantes  
Stephanie Contreras, Director of Counseling, El Centro de Estudiantes  
Nina Bilynsky-Ristics, Director of Real World Learning, El Centro de Estudiantes  
Frankie Bonilla, Assistant Principal of Climate, Culture, Conduct, El Centro de Estudiantes

**Domains and Performance Levels:**

Programs were rated according to **seven domains**: 1) **Vision for Learning**, 2) **Family & Community Relationships**, 3) **School Safety**, 4) **Positive Environment**, 5) **High Quality Instruction**, 6) **Talent Development** and 7) **Data**. The domains are aligned to the School District's evidence-based High Performing School Practices and the Essential Features of Alternative Education Programs, as well as the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Leadership Framework. Each domain includes three to seven components that are rated according to **three performance levels**; 1) **Failing**, 2) **Needs Improvement**, and 3) **Proficient**. **Failing** indicates that a program could not demonstrate or did not develop practices identified within a domain component. **Needs Improvement** indicates that a program has made some progress or effort towards practices identified within a domain component, but has not sufficiently developed the practice. **Proficient** indicates that a program has made adequate progress towards the implementation of practices identified within a domain component.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Vision for Learning

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [4 of 5 components met]

**Strategy for literacy and numeracy skill-building** (No). El Centro de Estudiantes administers the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment to determine students' reading and mathematics levels at the beginning of the school year. The MAP is also administered at the end of the school year to determine how much students have improved in their reading and mathematics skills. Baseline MAP results are reviewed with each student with his or her Advisor. Students learn their individual grade level equivalents in reading and mathematics, and they work with their Advisors to develop learning goals to improve their skills. The program's leadership noted that El Centro will begin to use a blended learning platform after winter break to provide students with targeted interventions in reading and mathematics. At the time of the site visit, the program had not fully connected MAP results with lesson plans or project blocks in a way that would support targeted interventions for students with discrete skill deficiencies. **Retention plan implementation** (Yes). El Centro's leadership presented and discussed the program's plan for student and staff retention. The program's goal is to retain 82% of its student body and 90% of its staff through the next school year. The retention plan includes a series of strategic activities aimed at keeping students, staff, and parents engaged and motivated. Advisors are required to make weekly contact with parents to provide updates on their children's progress. Students have bi-weekly one-on-one discussions with their Advisors to discuss progress and to resolve any challenges. Students receive support from Resilience Specialists in the program who connect students to outside resources as needed. Parents are invited to intervention meetings when students are falling behind or not making adequate progress. **Orientation for new students** (Yes). El Centro de Estudiantes hosts a three-day orientation for new students and their parents. Parents are required to attend the first day of orientation to ensure that they are aware of the program's expectations for attendance, behavior, and academics. During the second and third days of orientation, program staff introduce the concepts of resilience and postsecondary planning to students. Resilience is a key concept at El Centro, and students learn what it means to be resilient during orientation. Students are introduced to their Resilience Specialists, who support students with all kinds of challenges, including non-academic challenges that may be personal barriers to academic success. Postsecondary planning is also a key concept at El Centro. A major component of the program involves Learning Through Internships (LTI), which requires all students to have an internship at a company or organization that interests them. At orientation, students are guided through a role playing activity in which they greet a family member, a friend, and a professional. Students begin to learn the concept of professionalism, and are able to see that they must code-switch depending on the situation. The expectation that all students will pursue learning after high school is embedded throughout orientation for new students. The program's leadership noted the importance of students understanding that high school graduation is part of the journey towards a fulfilling career, and not the destination. **Family engagement plan** (Yes). El Centro de Estudiantes' leadership presented evidence of their plan to continuously engage families with the program. The program hosts a series of events that involve parents, including students' final exhibitions at the end of each trimester, "Chat and Chew" events, report card conferences, and open house events. Advisors reach out to parents weekly to provide them with updates on their children's progress. **Individual graduation plans** (Yes). El Centro's leadership discussed and presented

student Learning Plans as a way to support students through high school graduation and postsecondary matriculation. Learning Plans allow students to take ownership over their learning and academic achievement. Learning Plans at El Centro track real world learning through internships, specific learning goals for project blocks, and progress notes from one-on-one meetings with Advisors. In addition, each student has a Postsecondary Plan that includes career exploration using O\*NET Online, postsecondary exploration activities such as college visits, as well as financial aid and application documents for postsecondary enrollment.

### **Family and Community Relationships**

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [5 of 5 components met]

**Parent surveys** (Yes). El Centro's leadership presented evidence of administering parent surveys and using the results to inform the program's practices. For example, the survey asks parents about their preference for how they would like to receive progress updates on their children. As a result of survey responses, the program has implemented more opportunities for parents to come into the program and engage directly with the learning community. **Parent/community outreach** (Yes). The program's leadership discussed and presented evidence of consistent and frequent outreach to parents and the community. Leadership noted that parents' telephone numbers often change, and that they constantly ask parents to update that information whenever they come into the school. El Centro has become an integral part of its Norris Square neighborhood and has been honored in a number of events that focus on that part of the city. On a daily basis El Centro's residential and business neighbors interact with program staff and students in a positive way. In that same vein, El Centro staff and students participate in neighborhood beautification projects, including the creation and maintenance of a community garden. **Communication logs** (Yes). The program presented communication logs and email exchanges that show consistent outreach to parents via telephone, email, postal mail, and in-person conversations. Parents are contacted at least weekly and receive progress updates on children's learning. Parents are also contacted whenever a student is absent or the need for an intervention conference arises. **Strategy to improve family engagement** (Yes). El Centro's leadership presented and discussed their strategy to improve family engagement. The program has a comprehensive family engagement plan that includes activities and strategies that are newly implemented this year as a result of student needs, parent survey results, and program-wide goals that have emerged. For example, parents are now required to attend final project exhibitions at the end of each trimester. Part of the program's strategy to improve family engagement is the formation of an Advisory Council that will consist of parents and program staff. El Centro's leadership presented evidence of their efforts to form an Advisory Council that would begin serving the program next school year. **Partnerships with employers and postsecondary institutions** (Yes). El Centro de Estudiantes has established numerous partnerships with employers who serve as mentors to students in Learning Through Internships (LTI). These employers have agreed to allow El Centro's students to serve as interns in their businesses and nonprofit organizations. Mentors commit their time and talents to nurturing students in a professional environment. Mentors keep in constant communication with students' Advisors at El Centro to ensure workplace protocols are followed and that students are making adequate progress in their internships.

### **School Safety**

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [6 of 6 components met]

**Average daily attendance** (Yes) and **Use of Scholarship with fidelity** (Yes). El Centro's leadership was able to calculate attendance on the day of the site visit and provided a Scholarship attendance report for the review team. **Number of students present in each classroom** (Yes). Review team members' count of students present in class aligned with the program's attendance data on the day of the site visit. **Attendance policy and truancy plan implementation** (Yes). El Centro's leadership presented and discussed the program's practices, policies, and procedures for student attendance. The program requires that students are present in class a certain number of days each trimester in order to earn a credit. The program reaches out consistently to parents whenever a student is absent, and uses telephone, postal mail, email and home visits to inform parents about student absences. Advisors keep track of their students' attendance trends, and posts that information in their classrooms so that students are aware of how their attendance is affecting grades and credit accumulation. **Orderly daily routines and transitions** (Yes). Review team members observed students transitioning in between class periods. The transition was appropriate for a high school learning environment, and students settled into their next classes with no disruptions. **Program-wide positive behavior system** (Yes). El Centro's leadership discussed and presented a comprehensive system of behavioral expectations, rewards for exemplary behavior, and consequences for unacceptable or inappropriate behaviors. The program-wide positive behavior system is newly developed this school year. The system is well articulated for both staff and students, and explains: specific behaviors that staff should be aware of, resources available to help staff intervene in certain behaviors, responses that staff should take to reinforce the program's values, and actions to facilitate the restoration and repair of effects caused by inappropriate behaviors.

### Positive Environment

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [4 of 4 components met]

**Engagement of students and families in building a positive environment** (Yes). El Centro's leadership discussed and presented evidence of specific efforts to engage students and families in building a positive learning environment. As mentioned in previous sections of this report, the program implements a family engagement strategy aimed at improving parental involvement to better support student academic success. Students and staff both lead restorative circles. **Respectful interactions between staff, students, and families** (Yes) and **Staff have a good rapport with students** (Yes). Review team members observed respectful interactions between staff and students at El Centro. Review team members observed students freely talking with staff whenever they had a question in class or needed extra support with an assignment. **Team building activities for staff and students** (Yes). El Centro leadership discussed and presented evidence of specific efforts to build a team environment within the program. Examples include a weekend holiday party for staff, program-wide community service projects, and a Harvest Fest.

### High Quality Instruction

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [6 of 7 components met]

**Students actively engaged in class** (Yes). El Centro's students were actively engaged in each classroom that was observed. Students were focused on learning and were not distracted or disruptive. **Early warning system for academic interventions** (Yes). El Centro's process for identifying students who are struggling academically is grounded in the program's advisory cohort model. Each student has an Advisor and a cohort of peers that they remain with until graduation. Advisors meet one-on-one with each of their students every two weeks to discuss

their overall academic progress. Students' individual Learning Plans track the bi-weekly Advisor-student meetings, which allows the student and their Advisor to clearly see trends in academic performance over time. In addition, the entire El Centro staff meets every Wednesday to discuss specific students of concern in an effort to develop interventions for students and to determine if challenges persist for students across different subject areas. **Students enrolled in the courses they need to meet graduation requirements** (Yes). El Centro's leadership presented credit profiles and Credit Timelines for a group of students. The program's Credit Timelines document credits that students have earned and map out when students will take classes to earn the remaining credits required for graduation. **Program has identified students eligible for Keystone Exams** (Yes). El Centro leadership presented a comprehensive list of students who are eligible for Keystone exams by subject area. **Strategies used to prepare students for Keystone Exams** (No). El Centro's leadership discussed their efforts to create clear alignment between project blocks and Pennsylvania common core standards. Leadership presented a comprehensive document that aligns science and technology project blocks to specific common core standards. The alignment document also includes clear language to describe what students should be able to do based on each standard. El Centro's leadership noted that the program is in the early stages of developing clear alignment between project blocks and common core standards, and that the program has not designed project blocks across all subject areas that are aligned to the standards. Subsequently, Keystone Exam preparation needs improvement because project blocks for core courses are not yet aligned to Pennsylvania common core standards. **Postsecondary bridging plan** (Yes) and **Postsecondary exploration and preparation** (Yes). El Centro staff have worked steadily over the last several years to improve upon the program's offerings for postsecondary bridging, exploration and preparation. The program now has a fully developed, comprehensive plan for postsecondary bridging, exploration and preparation, which was presented during the site visit. The program has digitized student's Postsecondary Plans. Students at El Centro receive ongoing preparation for postsecondary opportunities through project-based learning and real world learning. In addition, El Centro's Learning Through Internships (LTI) provides students with postsecondary bridging opportunities on an ongoing basis.

## **Talent Development**

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [6 of 7 components met]

**Common planning time for teachers** (Yes). El Centro's leadership presented the program's schedule for common planning time, which occurs every Wednesday afternoon. Documentation of common planning time show that Advisors tend to focus the time on teaching, learning, and student progress. Advisors use common planning time to collaborate on project blocks so that students have the opportunity to dive deeply into certain real world topics across core subject areas. **Differentiated staff supports** (No). The program has a clear and comprehensive system for developing Advisors according to the characteristics and behaviors that are necessary to be educators at El Centro. This system is new this school year and moves the program closer to clearly connecting student outcomes with Advisor performance. As mentioned in the High Quality Instruction section of this report, the program has not fully aligned project blocks with Pennsylvania common core standards. To that end, strengths and areas of growth for individual Advisors are not based on standards and how well students have mastered the standards. **Professional development calendar** (Yes). El Centro's leadership presented a professional development calendar that shows the program-wide plan for professional growth, including specific topics and focus areas. Leadership presented numerous artifacts of weekly staff meetings to

discuss specific topics related to teaching and learning. **Staff selection process** (Yes). El Centro's leadership discussed their process for hiring new staff, which begins with a clear and comprehensive job posting on Idealist.org. Leadership noted the importance of considering candidates who understand the nontraditional nature of the program and who are a good fit for the learning community. **New staff induction** (Yes). El Centro's leadership presented an agenda for staff orientation and related documentation, including sign in sheets. Staff orientation includes a review of El Centro's expectations for staff, as well as professional development in the area of project-based learning. **Principals conduct regular observations and provide constructive feedback** (Yes). The program's leadership presented evidence of regular classroom observations and documentation of the feedback that Advisors receive after observations are conducted. The program has developed its own rubric for classroom observations that is rooted in its overall focus on project-based learning, as well as positive relationship building.

## Data

**Rating:** PROFICIENT [3 of 4 components met]

**Strategy to track student academic progress and provide interventions** (Yes). El Centro staff are required to enter grades into the program's Engrade system on a bi-weekly basis, and attendance is entered into the system on a weekly basis. Advisors meet with each student on a bi-weekly basis to discuss progress and to update Learning Plans. Progress reports are published every three weeks and are shared with parents. **System to collect and analyze data** (Yes). El Centro uses Engrade as its main system of collecting and analyzing course marks and attendance data. The program uses Google docs to track social-emotional needs and supports. **Program improvement plans and related data reports** (No). Review team members reviewed El Centro's program-wide improvement plan, which includes goals to enhance real world learning experiences and to align project-based curricula with common core standards. The program's goals are sound and the accomplishment of the goals would directly lead to higher levels of performance across the learning community. However, goals have not been quantified so that progress and achievement can be measured. **Summative and formative assessments** (Yes). El Centro administers the MAP assessment and subject area quizzes and tests. The program also institutes final exhibitions in all classes at the end of each trimester. Final exhibitions serve as students' final exam for courses. Students' final exhibitions are the culmination of deep learning and extensive research into a specific topic.