



## Expeditionary Learning Schools Outward Bound

June 8, 2007

To the Professional Staff at Codman Academy Charter Public School:

This letter and the enclosed summary report present the findings of the Implementation Review conducted at your school. It is based on the information gathered during the course of our work together over the last year.

The Implementation Review assesses your school's level of implementation of 16 key aspects of the Expeditionary Learning Core Practices; these are listed on the enclosed summary report. The Review has two specific purposes: to provide an informed basis for developing next year's work plan for our partnership, and to give our organization the management information essential for the continuous improvement of our services and tools. It is **not** in any way a general assessment of the effectiveness of your school or of individual teachers but only of the implementation of the Expeditionary Learning design.

### Overview of Progress

Codman Academy Charter Public School continues to deepen implementation of the EL Schools model in increasingly complex and rigorous ways. Codman's professional learning community is its strongest asset and continues to strengthen despite the departure of key long-time staff. A cornerstone of this progress has been the habit of collaborative culture and shared responsibility for moving all students towards mastery of Massachusetts standards, graduation and college. Particularly deep work was done this year around creating a coherent curriculum/expedition map informed by the larger EL Schools' community. Each of the disciplines made crucial progress in linking existing expeditions to learning targets in each class in a way that guides and "scaffolds" daily work of. Work on a school-wide approach to writing begun this year has great potential for next year, as does formalizing a process for regular peer observation and feedback on practice.

The transition of Meg to Executive Director and Thabiti to principal has begun smoothly. Both Thabiti and Meg have indicated a desire to more closely link to EL Schools national work and to a network of similar high schools: Springfield, Casco Bay HS, Four Rivers, and the NYC schools. One question that should drive our work together next year is: How can Codman and EL Schools' collaborate so that practitioners at the school level can regularly share progress? What might it look like for Codman to host a site seminar particularly for these schools?

### Learning Expeditions

CACPS continues to develop rich expeditions that draw students into complex long-term projects; students are motivated by using case studies to anchor investigations into "Big Ideas." A particular effect of faculty work implementing Learning Targets this year has been to create a tighter connection between learning experiences and the desired outcome, which can be challenging sometimes in large, multifaceted expeditions. Though the design of learning expeditions wasn't a particular focus of Codman's work this year, a

challenge for coming years will be to create coherence and consistency in the way compelling topics and case studies are developed. Each of the scores below is three and above except for a two for “linked projects and products.” This score indicates that at match between the learning and the product or assessment of that learning could be stronger. For instance, what content and skills are best assessed through the work at the Huntington? If mastery of literacy strategies is an important skills goal, then how can work in theatre be linked to those strategies?

1. Compelling topics	<b>3</b>
2. Linked projects and products	<b>2</b>
3. Fieldwork, service, experts	<b>3</b>
4. Producing and presenting high quality student work	<b>3</b>
5. Frequency of learning expeditions	<b>3</b>
6. Quality/frequency of learning expeditions outside the expedition	<b>3</b>

### Active Pedagogy

Codman did an enormous amount of work at this level, though work like this is both harder to do and harder to see evidence of. For instance, all Codman teachers worked on rethinking their courses in terms of “big and small” learning targets, making explicit for students both the overarching goals and the sub-skills and prerequisite learning necessary to get to the larger goals. Several teachers attended EL Schools’ Regional Assessment Institute and were able to integrate that work into existing approaches. Math teachers made significant progress by strengthening the academic support and tutoring structures for students, along with incorporating specific skills practice.

The work on the curriculum map was productive, illuminating and frustrating. Each of the disciplines made crucial progress in linking existing expeditions to learning targets in each class that guide and “scaffold” the daily work of students. In doing so it became clear that many opportunities to build in cross-discipline literacy and other skills exist are not being taken advantage, nor are obvious expeditionary content matches - physics and math, for instance.

The scores of three in the first three categories indicate increasing consistency around common practices: the workshop model, inquiry-based science, reading strategies incorporated in each discipline. The score of two in teaching writing through the disciplines and teaching literacy through expeditions are both at the core of our goals for next year: much work is already underway in developing a school wide writing assessment that gives students progressive trait-based feedback over four year; each classroom teacher, regardless of discipline, is developing at least one trait-based assignment. The work in “literacy in expeditions” is more specific and is part of our effort to design a coherent expedition map that sequences particular reading and thinking strategies and links them to expeditions that are well suited to those strategies.

<b>Active Pedagogy</b>	School Score
7. Lesson design	<b>3</b>

8. Use of effective practices	3
9. Teaching reading through the disciplines	3
10. Teaching writing through the disciplines	2
11. Teaching literacy through expeditions	2

### School Culture and Character

Codman continues to demand and receive a high level of engagement from students around issues of culture and character. Crew continues to be a strong element of Codman’s school community - individual crew leaders take a great deal of responsibility of monitoring each individual student’s academic progress and maintain connections with parents and guardians. By continuing to strengthen the student accountability system and modifying academic support mechanisms when needed, staff was able to be both rigorous and responsive in making clear the connection between work habits and academic progress. Continued honing of daily practices such as do-nows and common journal formats will help both teachers and students stay “on track” and be accountable for preparedness.

The faculty has been engaged in regular “courageous conversations about equity” for the past three years, delving into individual and collective inquiry around question of how our identity and background affects how we interact within the Codman community. Much of this has been examining texts and theories about the effect of race on teaching and learning, culminating in most of next year’s staff developing individual “theories of action” to address inequity as it plays out at the classroom level at Codman. As part of that, beginning next school year, the staff has made a commitment to bringing students into regular structured conversation to discuss issues of equity and inequity regarding race, class, gender and sexual orientation, and education.

<u>School Culture and Character</u>	School Score
12. Culture and character in the classroom	3
13. Fostering student character and creating school culture	3
14. Building a professional learning community	3

### Leadership and School Improvement and School Structure:

As Codman enters it’s sixth year, sustainability becomes the focus. Meg is moving into a role that lets her work on overall direction of Codman and the building project while Thabiti takes on the principalship and responsibility for instructional leadership and day-to-day school functions. Both deserve enormous credit for handling this transition over several years in a way that reassured staff and built on each other’s strengths. As school

designer I value the thoughtful planning and execution of the EL work plan at Codman: Thabiti's level of planning and preparedness and the staff's unfailing willingness to participate seriously and without rancor or defensiveness is exemplary.

With that strong foundation, how might we improve the leaderships and school structures? As we move to next year, with the good recent news of the reception of the Barr foundation grant and John's and EL's ability to focus more on Codman this year, we may be able to document and solidify explicit leadership and governance structures that need to become more formal as the school matures. John had been part of many recurring Critical Friends Groups that might be suited for such and ongoing leadership cohort. And while all small urban schools struggle with finding and keeping high-quality staff, Codman's strength is particularly dependent on the way staff comes to understand and implement a consistent set of practices and dispositions. With each new hire each year, that two- to three-year process begins again. We might ask ourselves whether there are variables in the hiring, professional growth, or other processes that might reduce the "reinvention" challenge each year.

## **Summary and Goals for Next Year**

**Expedition Design** – Which of the expeditions help students get at crucial content deeply? Which can be revised to get closer to that goal? Where are there opportunities for new expeditions, or for newly imagined products that can drive student learning in ever-deeper ways? How can a clearly articulated expedition map help "cover" the standards while avoiding gaps and duplication? Our work on these questions will focus in part on expedition planning through the lens of the Portfolio - backward planning for products, modifying school structures, links across disciplines, etc. The goal for 07-08 is to examine what is working at Codman and elsewhere, designing and drafting clear guidelines with a focus on launching a revised Portfolio process linked to Expeditions in 08-09.

**Assessment for Learning and Differentiation** – How can the articulation of clear learning targets be part of a coherent progression through content, skills, and character goals? What are the classroom strategies that help scaffold learning for each student so they can achieve, through multiple drafts and targeted feedback, high standards. How can Codman built cross-discipline literacy and writing skills into expeditions? Our work in this area will focus in part on working on writing across the curriculum, particularly implementing the use of a school-wide writing rubric.

**Character and Culture** – How can regular, structured "Courageous Conversations about Equity" improve student learning at Codman? How can such conversations be leveraged to link character goals to academic performance? Our work in this area will focus in part on developing a "Fairness Committee," a form of student judiciary that has been successfully implemented in other schools.

## **Leadership and School Improvement and School Structures**

As Codman moves out of its initial 3-5 years of existence, the challenges now move to the honing and refining of what's already built rather than the exhausting task of building new each year. Although the effort to move into a more stable permanent home is a crucial part of moving out of that initial phase, leadership efforts can now focus on the continually elusive (and some might say moving) target of getting all Codman kids past the MCAS, into college, and prepared intellectually, emotionally and socially for the challenges they'll face.

Sincerely,

**John D'Anieri**  
School Designer  
Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound