



Expeditionary Learning Schools Outward Bound

June 9, 2009

Thabiti Brown, Principal
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637 Washington Street
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Dear Thabiti and Codman Academy Community,

This letter presents the findings of our annual Implementation Review (IR), lists the priorities in the past year's Work Plan, and identifies possible foci for next year's plan of work together.

The report is based on information collected through the IR surveys of teachers and administrators, PD surveys, conversations with staff and school leaders/administrators, and your School Designers' observations.

The IR is not an overall measure of the quality of your school; rather, this process is aimed at assessing the *level of implementation of ELS's Core Practices*. The two purposes of the Review are:

- to provide an informed basis for developing next year's work plan, and
- to give our organization information essential for continuous improvement of our services to you.

Codman's ELS Work Plan Goals for 2008-2009

Below is the list of goals we set for our EL work this year.

- 1. Assessment for Learning** -- Clarity of purpose in lessons, tighter connections between learning goals and assessments, and more student ownership and responsibility for their own learning.
 - a. Creating and using Long-term and Supporting Learning Targets linked to assessment and portfolios.
 - b. Creating scope and sequence of Learning Targets that makes sense across grade levels and vertically by department
 - c. Using best practices in formative and summative assessment focused on student understanding
 - How do we know what students understand?
 - What do we use as evidence?
 - What do we do when students don't understand?
 - d. Using data to guide instruction. Involving students in the process, e.g. data walls, self-assessment, error-analysis, and goal setting.
- 3. Learning Expeditions** -- Support grade-level teams and individual teachers on expedition planning and delivery. Focus on Learning Target and Assessment work (above).
- 2. Pedagogical Support for New Teachers**
 - a. Provide support especially to new teachers through planning lessons, coaching, observation and feedback, model lessons or co-taught lessons.
 - b. Help formalize teacher induction and mentor program.

4. Revise Portfolio System

- a. Support re-vision of purpose and scope of portfolios
- b. Connect Learning Target and Assessment work (above) to portfolio contents and student ownership of work and learning.
- c. Coach teachers and direct work with students on portfolio presentation prep

5. Targeted support for math department -- Tighten and deepen lesson design and provide individualized instructional support to math teachers from ELS national math coach.

How Did We Do? The IR Data

The IR scores show a real strength in **Culture and Character** both in classrooms and whole school. High scores in **Leadership** and **School Structures** reflect a positive climate for students and adults, including the larger school community, such as families. Surveys indicate that Codman is structured to support good communication, shared leadership, and continued learning for students and staff.

Scores also reflect high standards for **quality student work**, for **well-designed lessons** across the board and **effective instructional practices**, and **expedition topics that are compelling** to students. I was surprised by the “2” in **fieldwork**, but it was a high “2” and, perhaps, new teachers this year have less experience of using that practice well, and veteran teachers may not be satisfied with the quality of fieldwork. The “2’s” in **embedded literacy practices** along with a “low 3” in **inquiry-based math** may reflect a need identified later for more attention to instruction.

Assessment scores varied quite a bit by teacher. Consistently high scores, however, reflected the good work done this year to refine and tighten portfolio expectations and processes and to identify cross-grade and -discipline learning targets.

The “3” in **effective assessment practices** is a low “3” and you’ll see that **grading and reporting** is a “2”. The assessment practices that were marked lower by most staff included:

- Students tracking their own progress toward learning targets
- Assessment used to refine curriculum
- Assessment perceived by students as informative and validating of their learning
- School-wide consistency in grading practices
- Report cards including grades *and* learning targets
- Grades reflecting students’ current level of achievement

| Learning Expeditions | Score | Active Pedagogy | Score | Culture and Character | Score |
|---|-------|--------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Compelling Topic | 3 | 5. Lesson design | 3 | 11. C&C in classrooms | 3 |
| 2. Linked projects & products | 2 | 6. Effective instructional practices | 3 | 12. C&C school-wide | 3 |
| 3. Fieldwork, service & experts | 2 | 7. Teach reading across disciplines | 2 | 13. Professional Learning Ct. | 3 |
| 4. High quality student work | 3 | 8. Teach writing across disciplines | 2 | 14. Leadership and SI | 3 |
| <i>Scores are 1-4 with 4 = high level of implementation</i> | | 9. Inquiry-based math | 3 | 15. School structures | 3 |
| | | 10. Effective assessment practices | 3 | 16. Grading & Reporting | 2 |

Accomplishments on Work Plan Goals

In addition to the positive growth mentioned above, these accomplishments stand out:

- All teachers using learning targets consistently
- Assessment tied to targets for each course
- Revamping of the Portfolio process and development of the new Portfolio Guide
- Consistent expedition and pedagogical support for new Humanities teacher
- Several coaching sessions to support the math department

Focus areas that may not have moved as far as we wanted include:

1. Expedition and instructional support for all new and some veteran teachers
2. Involving students in the assessment process, e.g. data walls, self-assessment, error-analysis, and goal setting.
3. Supporting best practices in formative assessment for all teachers

Ideas for Next Year's Work

I think again targeting the three focus areas named above would be wise. All are identified as needs by many staff members. In addition, we may want to take a closer look at grading and reporting practices that were scored low by staff. Also, you'll see a "2" for "project and products" in the IR. Some concerted work on student final products may be a nice link to the assessment focus and continued growth in portfolio work. Finally, I believe teachers are asking for more support for active pedagogy, including the math department's continued work with the math coach.

Feedback on EL Professional Development

What EL PD did staff find most useful?

- Six teachers mentioned working with the School Designers as helpful with lesson and expedition planning and providing resources (this included all members of the math department).
- One teacher named demonstration lesson and co-teaching as most beneficial.
- Eight teachers gave high praise for the off-site PD, including the National Conference, summer Secondary Institute, Differentiated Instruction Institute, and visiting another EL school.

Suggestions for improvement?

- While some staff named useful elements of the *on-site PD sessions*, most were quite critical, saying the sessions need clearer learning targets (created from staff feedback), tighter planning and better use of time, better application to teachers' needs and work, and differentiated for new and veteran teachers.

Additional PD offerings staff would like?

- Half the staff named more PD focused on instructional practice as a need.
- Several also named wanting observation and feedback in their classrooms (from school designer and perhaps peers), expedition models, and a better introduction to EL.
- A few staff said one-on-one instructional support helps them most with their specific needs.

What EL Core Practices are supported well in the school and which need more attention?

- Culture and Community, Leadership and Structures were named as strengths, citing rituals such as community meeting, staff meetings, the buddy system, and kudos and deltas. Yet, several teachers also encouraged continued attention in these areas, especially around consistency.
- Expeditions and Active Pedagogy were also named by most staff as well-supported through principal meetings, and collegial conversations in teams and departments. Again, equally strong was a voice to lift the level of expeditions and continue to grow instructional practice, including making it “more EL-like”.

Effectiveness of School Designer support?

- Several staff found the SD consistently accessible and supportive, yet did not have much opportunity to work with her. Several also appreciated the SD’s help in accessing the off-site PD.

Some voices from the surveys:

“Planning my class (for the EL National Conference) was helpful. It forced me to think about EL benchmarks and practices and apply them to the work I already do. The master class helped me feel like a professional who is ‘plugged in’ to the EL network.”

“The summer (secondary) institute was in-depth, experiential, and a model for my work with students.”

There seems a clear message from the PD survey that teachers want more support for both their expedition planning and instructional practice and a tighter, more purposeful feel to the whole-staff PD sessions. There was very little request for support on assessment and, yet, that need shows up in the IR data; something to ask the staff about. I think teachers would welcome the chance to help development the EL work plan for next year

We will create a work plan together defining specific goals and outlining structures to support teachers in achieving them. Congratulations on your good work this year. You are a pleasure to work with and I am so excited the have the opportunity to work with Codman again this coming year.

Sincerely yours,

Jill Mirman

Jill A. Mirman
School Designer