



Expeditionary Learning Implementation Review Summary Report Codman Academy Charter School

June 17, 2004

Introduction

This report is from the Expeditionary Learning Review Team that visited Codman Academy on April 5-6, 2004. It is written for the faculty, directors and board of Codman Academy, as well as others interested in the progress of the school. The purpose of the report is to provide an outside perspective on the work the school is doing to implement the Core Practice Benchmarks of Expeditionary Learning. It also provides feedback and recommendations that are intended to lead to further inquiry and reflection by the faculty as they consider their specific school improvement goals.

The report is not based exclusively on our two-day review visit. It is also informed by our ongoing work with the school and the professional development that we have delivered to the faculty. We believe we know the school and its faculty well. The review team was comprised of three EL staff members, all of whom work nationally with Expeditionary Learning schools. Two of the site review members are not involved on a regular basis with the ongoing work of Codman Academy so served as the outside perspective to the review. One works closely with the school and has spent numerous hours in classrooms, attended many schoolwide community/ staff meetings and attended school events and performances that served to both appraise and honor the work of Codman students and faculty.

We were given many school documents: the annual report, board documents, student faculty handbooks and teacher/ student notebooks and portfolios. Review and discussion of this information was very helpful and used as supporting evidence for this report. The school's website also provides a detailed view of the school, its mission and on going work.

The school has undergone many professional reviews this year from outside evaluators. The Massachusetts Department of Education completed a formal site review in March 2004 and has submitted its final report to the school. The school is currently undergoing another rigorous review through its nomination/consideration as a CES (Coalition of Essential Schools) /Gates Foundation mentor school program. This distinction means that Codman would support and advise other small, urban high schools throughout the country. Expeditionary Learning has also requested the school's assistance to support another Gates small high school recipient, the Bronx School of Expeditionary Learning, opening in the fall of 2004. After review, Codman was nominated and then selected by the US Department of Education to present its work at the National Charter School Conference (Miami FL) in June 2004.

When we visited, we were pleased to see that many of the highlights we noted in last year's report were still flourishing. Students continue to meet visitors with a firm and friendly handshake and a look you in the eye, "Welcome to Codman Charter School!" greeting. Upon entering, there is always an inspirational quote of the day, selected and posted by a student that sets the tone for all who enter. Although school culture will be addressed more specifically in the next part of this report, it seems important to recognize in this introduction the ever vigilant attention this school places on welcoming outsiders into its community.

A challenge this year has been space. Adding another grade level and issues with the adjacent wooden building used for classroom space/ teacher workrooms, have forced the school to be creative with scheduling and using the community as classroom. This year, juniors and their teachers held physics and foreign language classes at Simmons College, using the labs and other college resources. Students still walk daily to a local private school or tennis club for PE classes and the school's innovative drama/literacy program takes place at the Huntington Theater every Friday. The Codman Square Health Center supports the school in lending additional space that is used for classrooms and cafeteria. Although the school's director has been resourceful in finding adequate solutions to space issues, the need for a plan and funding to address long term facility needs is evident. The head of school informed us that the school board has set this as a priority.

The next section will provide detailed information on the school's implementation of Expeditionary Learning. It has two parts: a one page, graphic summary report that indicates overall scores and a distribution pattern for each rating along with a more detailed section that provides information on each Core Practice.

This section also offers commentary and feedback from the review team. Although the school draws on and uses the practices associated with Expeditionary Learning, there is not an explicit, connected link of Expeditionary Learning to the work and culture of the school. Each Core Practice section will end with some recommendations and a few guiding questions to frame the work towards deeper implementation of the Expeditionary Learning design.

Respectfully submitted by:

Angela Jolliffe, East Coast Field Director, Expeditionary Learning

Doug Kilmister, Director of Research and Evaluation, Expeditionary Learning, Cambridge MA

Scott Hartl, Northeast Regional Field Director, Expeditionary Learning

**Expeditionary Learning Implementation Review
2003-2004 Pilot**

School Name: **Codman Academy Charter School**

May 28, 2004

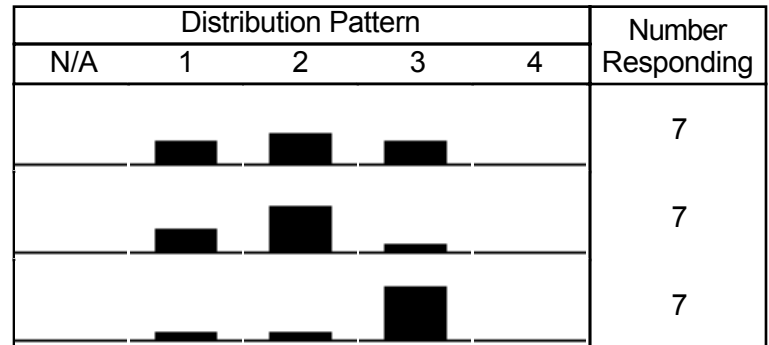
Principal/Director: Meg Campbell

Year with EL: 2nd

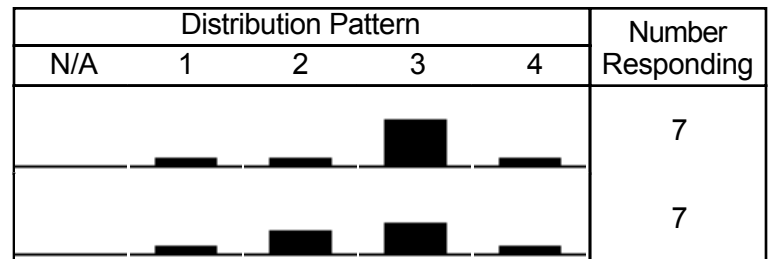
Field Director: Angela Jolliffe

School Designer: Angela Jolliffe

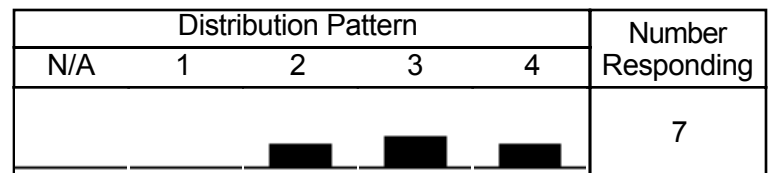
Learning Expeditions	School Score
1. Quality of Learning Expeditions	2
2. Frequency and Scope of Learning Expeditions	2
3. Quality & scope of investigations & projects outside of expeditions	3



Active Pedagogy	School Score
4. Effective instructional practices across the school	3
5. Literacy across the school	3



School Culture and Character	School Score
6. Culture & character at the classroom level	3
7. Professional learning community	3
8. Culture & character schoolwide	3



Benchmark Implementation Goals for 2003-2004

- See Implementation Review Summary Report

Leadership and School Improvement	School Score
9. Leading for school improvement	3

Structures	School Score
10. Creating and making best use of structures	4

CORE PRACTICE ONE: Learning Expeditions

Learning expeditions were rated in two areas: **Quality** (compelling topics, guiding questions, products and linked projects, fieldworks/experts/service, and high quality student work) and **Frequency**. A frequency score of 2 indicates that 25-50% of the school day/ year is spent on well-defined learning expeditions. Learning expeditions seem to be an area where there is still variation in terms of implementation and definition. In general, some units referred to as “expeditions” at the school lack the depth and scope as defined in our benchmarks (see pages 8-17 in benchmarks booklet).

It is clear that many teachers use various components of expeditions as they design in depth, content specific units/lessons and plan activities to engage students. (See Frequency/Scope of investigations and projects outside of expeditions). 96% of students reported in the classroom survey that “almost always” (51%) or “sometimes” (44%): “topics we study are challenging”. These investigations are thoughtful, well planned and appear to challenge students but do not, in and of themselves, fall into the category of a learning expedition.

Fieldwork and using community resources is apparent. A student intern documented Codman field experiences this year and interviewed students on their impact. She shared her findings with our review team and it was compelling. Most teachers authentically integrate this fieldwork into their curriculum.

Projects and reports are regularly assigned in all classrooms. Teachers provide students with written expectations, time lines, supporting materials and rubrics. Passage portfolio requirements were updated this year and showed attention to increased rigor. Teacher self-assessments and our observations /conversations with students noted challenges around the level of support /direction students receive as they complete required assignments.

Guiding Questions: What strategies will help teachers plan learning expeditions that work? How does critique promote intellectual development and best work?

Recommendations: Develop and document learning expeditions

- Consider learning expeditions as the primary way of organizing curriculum. Some collaborative discussion amongst faculty on the current mini-expeditions, subject specific investigations and related projects would develop many of the positive ideas we saw into true expeditions. Use the terminology associated with learning expeditions.
- Curriculum mapping: Develop a four year scope and sequence of curriculum for each subject area; Use this mapping to address adherence to required standards, college requirements and development of specific learning expedition plans.

Recommendation: Supporting students to ensure consistent, high levels of quality completion of required work.

- Continue to foster rigorous schoolwide focus on ongoing assessment, drafts, revision; Teacher input/help throughout the process. Monitor use of student friendly rubrics/rating sheets as students self assess along the way. Save student samples to provide models and exemplars for next year's students.
- Scaffolding: Structure the process so students gradually develop the coping skills, persistence, disciplined work habits, ethic to do quality work independently. Regular, ongoing feedback on how they are doing with this.
- Assess students on content, process and final product so they see that all three are important and related. Students should be expected to show progress in all these areas.
- Collective examination of student work in all subject areas to analyze content, skills development, literacy and higher order thinking. Any assessments-- performances, demonstrations, written work, final products, portfolio pieces, etc. -- could collectively be analyzed using protocols to determine what specific student learning goals were mastered

Recommendation: Motivating all students

- Harness the power of relevancy. The Huntington work is powerful because students have an opportunity to present their work to a real audience. Create authentic projects so students have a high stake in completing them. This will help them to get through the more tedious or uninteresting parts of an assignment (example: editing/revising text) because they know it has to be good since it is going beyond the school. It may also help to address student engagement. (See Culture and Character.)

CORE PRACTICE 2: Active Pedagogy: Instructional Practices and Literacy

Our active pedagogy benchmarks support teaching and learning that helps to make content come alive and ensure that all students think and participate. Lessons are structured so that teachers talk less and students talk more; the students do the thinking and the work. The most common modality of instruction we observed was whole class discussion/mini lesson and individual work. Teachers are skilled at asking probing questions and leading classroom discussions that encourage controversial views, defending positions and consideration of multiple perspectives. As engaging as these sessions are, not all students stay “with it” for the whole period and there appears to be minimal student empowerment in leading these discussions.

Students read and write daily in every class. Teachers go beyond the textbook— trade books, primary sources, discipline related articles, etc are used along with or instead of textbooks. One hundred percent of last year's 10th graders passed the English Language Arts portion of MCAS scores on the first try. A few teachers explicitly teach and use specific comprehension strategies

with students to discuss their reading. In these classes, we noted students were very metacognitive and enjoyed sharing their ideas through structured literature circles or other formats. Schoolwide use of these strategies would give a common vocabulary for reading that could be used in every classroom.

Writing is assigned to promote and assess understanding and reflection in all content areas. Humanities classes take on the major responsibility for teaching the writing process. Students often write for audiences within the school community and this year an electronic school newspaper was started as part of a Saturday class.

Math is inquiry based and goes beyond computation and practice. One math teacher is developing a scope and sequence of math learning expeditions. In this class students are expected to show the thinking behind their answers and are encouraged to find multiple ways to solve a problem.

Guiding Questions: What does Active Pedagogy look like in EL schools? How are our classrooms practices supporting students to become independent learners?

Recommendation: Highly focused, consistent schoolwide literacy practices

- Schoolwide use of the comprehension strategies (as noted in the 10th grade English class) would be beneficial to everyone. These strategies are user friendly across all content areas.
- Encourage writing for authentic audiences beyond the school community.

Recommendation: Responsibility for Learning

- Shift the onus from teacher to student through a gradual release of responsibility. Use collaborative groupings, student led discussions, critique protocols, etc to provide opportunities for all students to do the hard work of thinking.

CORE PRACTICE THREE: School Culture and Character

Codman has a strong school culture that has been built and nurtured through vigorous and consistent attention to character, academic achievement, post secondary goal setting and “working as crews, not passengers.” Visitors are encouraged and welcomed via a genuine open door policy. These visitors regularly comment on the school’s overall tone, everyone’s ability to work in a civilized fashion despite the constant comings and goings, and the “can do” attitude of faculty and students. As noted in the introductory section, all students are well trained as greeters and school ambassadors. During our two- day review visit, students engaged in many conversations with us while reviewing the tasks and projects they were completing. They also completed schoolwide and classroom based surveys (aligned with applicable EL Core Practice benchmarks) that were used for this report.

The school encourages high expectations through its overall mission and day-to-day work leading to the goal of college for everyone. Revisions to the passage portfolio system were made this year to address increased attention to quality work and evidence of student learning that reflected more in depth applications of content and skills. There are supports to help students who need additional attention but teachers report that this is an ongoing challenge. Another issue is student retention/promotion. The staff struggles with the negative impact of retention on older students but as a school that promotes readiness for college, it rejects the notion of social promotion as well. A step was taken this year to address this. The Learning Institute was established to support a small group of students who are two years over age for grade. Visits to this classroom were inspiring. It is clear that the level of academic and social support these students receive is bolstering student confidence and having an impact beyond the classroom and school.

The school’s handbook clearly articulates a code of conduct this is consonant with the EL design principles. Rituals and traditions associated with EL (community meetings, inspirational readings, team building, etc) are used. Students have opportunities for service through crew expectations and classroom projects. The students manage the school’s lunch program and take responsibility for clean up each day.

Most classrooms are managed well. This year some common classroom practices were instituted to address issues that were identified last year around student engagement, homework and accountability. These include: a “Do Now” activity that gets students engaged at the very beginning of each class, homework posted and collected in a specific location in each classroom and new binders with a consistent schoolwide setup and accountability system. The 9th grade

students were a challenging group for everyone. We observed behaviors in those classrooms not evidenced at other grade levels. They are isolated most of the time from the older students which limits their interaction with peer role models. (Crews are multi grade level.) There are teachers with excellent classroom management who model the standard for the school. We'd suggest some considerations around having the strongest teachers work with this group.

On the EL survey, students were asked to give feedback on the following: (In this class) "Students behave respectfully and stay engaged in productive work."

Schoolwide scores/distribution indicated the following:

14% Almost Always

62% Sometimes

20% Rarely

4% Never

One would expect some obvious variation in how a particular student might answer this type of a question on any given day. However, our observations as noted above and the student responses verify the range in how individual teachers enforce misbehavior and monitor student engagement. It should be noted that the school's leadership is aware of this and is committed to providing staff development next year that will support any teachers who need support with classroom management issues. She has offered a consulting contract to a staff member (leaving her classroom for doctoral studies) to specifically work with teachers around classroom management issues.

The school's advisory program, called crew, ensures that students and their parents are known well by an adult; crew leaders provide ongoing communication between home and school. Almost 100% of students indicated they were well known by the adults in the school (survey). Crew sessions run the gamut from structured/ planned to somewhat informal. The school enlists and receives on and off site support from many community partnerships, board members, etc and provides internships for local college interns. These relationships foster additional role models for all students; the Learning Institute program at the school provides mentorships and monitored internships for a small group of students who need additional support in this area.

Fitness and an emphasis on a healthy lifestyle are promoted. Students walk approximately two miles daily to get to offsite gym classes. The school lunch is specially catered to offer a nutritious lunch that includes salad and fresh fruit. Six students will go on Outward Bound Courses this summer.

Since many of the benchmarks overlap, school culture goals are imbedded in other sections of this report.

Guiding Questions: How can the Codman staff and students work together to promote and sustain an identifiable EL culture? What practices at our school support or hinder this?

Recommendation: Provide Professional Support (See Leadership and School Improvement)

Recommendation: Revisit crew (See School Structures)

Recommendation: Scaffolding Instruction (See Active Pedagogy)

Recommendation: Grade 9 Immersion Plan

- Consider Ground School concept for the first month of school for incoming students.
- Opportunities for freshman to work in classroom situations with older students.

Recommendation: Student Leadership

- Train school ambassadors and guides to use the language of EL when they speak with visitors; (See other related goals in section titled: Codman as an EL school.)

CORE PRACTICE FOUR: Leadership and School Improvement

This core practice defines how school leadership uses Expeditionary Learning as the central means for school improvement and professional development goals. The principal works regularly with the EL school designer and assumes responsibility for coordinating professional development. She met with our review team and completed a written assessment. Each staff member also completed a similar self-assessment as part of this review.

The faculty and school leadership participate enthusiastically in all Expeditionary Learning on and off site opportunities. However, Expeditionary Learning is not viewed at Codman as the engine that's driving the train. A recommendation made in last year's report was: *thinking about Codman as an Expeditionary Learning School*. As this report indicates, the school uses many EL practices consistently but there is not a real connection to these practices as "EL."

There is no formal Leadership team but the staff meets on a regular basis to participate in decision making, discussion of school issues, etc. Teachers report a need for more job imbedded

professional development support and supervision. A mentoring program was started this year but teachers gave mixed reviews in terms of its effects or changes in classroom practice. There is a continued need for the faculty to find ways to develop more formal collegial practices that support classroom teaching. The faculty has begun conversations on this and the head of school is working on an action plan to support professional collaboration and instructional support.

The Codman staff is highly committed to developing their content and pedagogical knowledge. There is an impressive list of professional development experiences that Codman staff will attend this summer. Four teachers were awarded scholarships through very competitive national programs. New and current staff have registered for national Expeditionary Learning offerings including OB courses, summits and institutes focusing on literacy. Two teachers were selected to participate in PBS documentaries.

Guiding Questions: What does it look like when a school makes progress in implementing Expeditionary Learning's design principles and core practices? What is the role of school leadership in establishing and institutionalizing these practices?

Recommendation: Provide Professional Support

- Head of school creates and communicates a plan / timeline for regular teacher observation and coaching. Determine roles and responsibilities, documentation guidelines and process for monitoring and accountability.
- Keep curriculum and instruction front and center of school improvement goals; Limit competing priorities for time and school resources.
- Revise the school's schedule to provide time for common planning, professional support and opportunities to give and receive feedback.
- Take time at every staff meeting to reflect upon your shared work in this area.

Recommendation: Codman as an Expeditionary Learning School

- EL 101 for Board members and new staff (summer 2004).
- Use crew time to develop students' understanding of the roots and practices of Expeditionary Learning and the vocabulary associated with the design.
- Create visual or other references within the school that represent EL at Codman.

CORE PRACTICE FIVE: School Structures

The school has organizational structures that work well for general day-to-day operations and a system for knowing students well. There is some common planning time for teachers but limited use of this time for actual collaboration around practice. A schedule supports fieldwork, large uninterrupted blocks of time, and flexibility for needed schedule changes, etc. Students are grouped heterogeneously and classes remain small. Some gender separate (all male) classes have shown very positive results. The 10th grade Humanities teacher has designed her doctoral research around the effects of this grouping.

Students are known and supported by faculty, staff members, and other adults through crew and looping structures. Mixed grade level Crews meet daily. There are opportunities for parents to participate in conferences, family focus groups and other school events.

Guiding Questions: How can we maximize our schedule for greatest impact on student and adult learning? What constitutes crew at Codman Academy?

Recommendation: Revisit Crew

- Examine and refine the crew concept and decide upon a few consistent components that are doable and provide purpose/meaning for everyone. Everyone adheres to these expectations.
- Crews in EL schools focus on the following:
 - Student academic and emotional support
 - Post secondary options/Goal setting
 - Service learning opportunities
 - Adventure
 - Literacy (Ex: book clubs to foster reading in an enjoyable, non threatening way)
 - Ongoing monitoring of academic work (Ex: Supporting portfolio work/presentations)

Recommendation: Redesign Schedule Professional Support

- As noted in another section, make time for job imbedded, shared professional learning experiences for teachers that occur during the school day