

# New York City Outward Bound

## *Small Schools Initiative*

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New York City Outward Bound is in the process of building a network of small public schools in New York City which we start and operate in partnership with the NYC Department of Education. By design, our schools serve students from underserved neighborhoods who until now have had limited access to quality schools and who historically have been left behind. Our network currently includes nine schools—The Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School, Validus Preparatory Academy, The James Baldwin School, Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies, Marsh Avenue Expeditionary Learning School, Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School, Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School, The Expeditionary Learning School for Community Leaders and The Kurt Hahn Expeditionary Learning School. Our tenth network school—Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School—will open in Queens in September.

New York City Outward Bound is committed to ensuring that at each of these schools the academic program is rigorous, that character development is as important as academics, and the school community supports both. The schools will be dedicated to bringing out the best in students and teachers, making teaching and learning as engaging, active and project-based as possible, creating a supportive, inclusive, challenging school culture, and preparing all students to go on successfully to college or other post-secondary education and employment.

### Opportunities

The political climate in New York City is particularly ripe for the kinds of new small schools that NYC Outward Bound is seeking to establish and nurture. Chancellor Klein has made the creation of new small schools an integral part of the Department of Education's *Children First* reform agenda. To-date, over 250 new high quality small schools have opened in New York City as part of the City's overall effort.

### What New York City Outward Bound Brings to the Small Schools Initiative...

Each of the small schools NYC Outward Bound establishes is built upon Outward Bound's Expeditionary Learning school design—a proven national design that leads to high levels of student achievement and engagement by providing the school faculty and leadership with a rigorous sequence of professional development activities that are rooted in Outward Bound's educational approach. At the national level, independent evaluations by respected organizations and researchers—conducted since Expeditionary Learning was launched in 1993—have shown that the model delivers highly effective professional development to its partner schools.

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*“Outward Bound’s involvement with the creation of new schools has had a direct impact on the success of our students. I appreciate your support as we build on our vision for public education: that all students will be given the tools they need to succeed in and out of the classroom.”*

—Joel Klein, Chancellor, NYC Department of Education

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Working with middle and high schools has been NYC Outward Bound's historic strength. The problems faced by many schools in New York City and throughout the country include: low achievement among students; low motivation among both students and staff; poor communication and lack of collaboration among school staff; and rigid schedules and short classroom periods that are not conducive to in-depth learning. There is a growing body of research and evidence that to address these problems schools need precisely the kinds of personalized education, hands-on, real world learning and attention to the creation of strong learning communities that Outward Bound offers.

### The Model

Expeditionary Learning is a comprehensive school design consisting of five core practices that work in concert and support one another: *learning expeditions*, which break the curriculum down into a series of in-depth investigations of compelling real world topics that align with State and City standards; *active pedagogy*, a set of instructional practices through which teachers are able to engage, support and challenge students; a *strong school culture* that promotes positive character traits; and *effective school leadership teams* and *school-wide structures* that support each school as a community of learners. These practices when implemented at high levels provide students, regardless of their background, with the skills necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—the ability to think critically and creatively; to work effectively in teams and with people from different

backgrounds; to research and synthesize information from multiple sources; to use technology effectively as an information-gathering and communications tool; and to be self-confident, adaptive, perseverant and compassionate.

In addition to using the Expeditionary Learning design as its pedagogical framework, NYC Outward Bound offers its network schools the following Outward Bound programs and services:

- All incoming students have an immersion Outward Bound experience to orient them to their new school and crew.
- Selected students in the subsequent grades have the opportunity to participate in an Outward Bound adventure experience such as backpacking or rock climbing.

## Evaluating Success

NYC Outward Bound aims to help all students meet high standards on the traditional measures of school success—including high levels of student attendance, retention, high school graduation, college admission, and passing scores on New York State Regents examinations. In addition, NYC Outward Bound is committed to promoting a caring school community, where students produce quality work and positive character development is fostered. To assess each school's success, NYC Outward Bound uses two sets of benchmarks:

1. *Implementation*: each school receives an annual review based on explicit school-level benchmarks, used by Expeditionary Learning Schools Outward Bound since 1998, to assess each school's annual progress in implementing the Outward Bound core practices.
2. *Outcomes*: as assessment of school's progress in meeting academic, community and character goals. The data sources we use to assess how our schools are doing in meeting these outcomes include the following: *Annual Quality Reviews* conducted by the NYC Department of Education that include ratings in key areas of school performance; *School Progress Reports* that the Department of Education will be issuing for the first time in 07-08 as part of its new Accountability initiative. In these Progress Reports, each school will eventually be issued a letter grade—A, B, C, D, F—based primarily upon the academic progress made by students from one year to the next; and *Learning Environment Surveys* issued by the Department of Education to the parents, educators and students of each school to gauge the effectiveness of the school at meeting their needs.

## Results

While our schools are in different stages of implementing their Expeditionary Learning practices, overall progress is clear as our network continues to grow stronger. College acceptance rates, graduation rates, State test score results and the Department of Education's Progress Reports and Quality Reviews confirm that we are moving steadily toward providing the kind of outstanding network we envisioned when we launched our Small Schools Initiative. Some specific highlights include:

### ***Academic Progress & College***

- All seven of our network schools which have been open more than a year received grades or projected grades of A or B on the Department of Education's 2007-8 Progress Reports.<sup>1</sup> Three of our seven network schools that had been in operation for more than a year received grades (or projected grades) of A, and four received B's. Because they were brand new in 08-09, the two other schools in our network—McCown and Marsh—did not receive Progress Reports.
- Three out of four of our network schools with graduating classes had graduation rates that significantly outpaced the City averages<sup>2</sup>. Validus Prep, which had its first graduation in June 2009, had a four-year June graduation rate of 68% compared to a city-wide rate of 56% and a Bronx rate of 52%. This was particularly significant as 80% of this graduating class was behind grade level in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math when they entered the school in 2005. Baldwin and Humanities Prep, both transfer schools, had 6-year graduation rates of 76% and 69% respectively compared to the citywide 6-year graduation transfer school

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<sup>1</sup> Progress Reports assess the academic achievement and progress of students and rate each school by letter grade of A, B, C, D or F. High schools like Hahn, Validus, Baldwin and Leaders that did not yet have their first graduating class in 2007-8 did not receive grades (25% of the grade is based upon the schools' graduation rates). Based on the partial scores our schools received, we made conservative estimates of what grade they would have received. For example, Validus received a partial score of 54.5 and would have only needed to get 9.7 out of the possible 25 missing points to receive an A.

<sup>2</sup> These graduation rates are based on the new State and City methodology and reflect June graduations only. Rates will go up after summer school.

rate of 49%<sup>3</sup>. BELHS, our fourth school with a graduating class, had a graduation rate of 53% which is on par with the 52% Bronx rate but still far behind where we want it to be.

- *College acceptances were also high among our graduates, with rates of 99% at Validus, 88% at James Baldwin, 74% at BELHS, and 63% at Humanities Prep.*
- *Both our middle schools did extraordinarily well on the State ELA and Math tests. WHEELS' results were particularly impressive. While the percent of students' proficiency levels in ELA and Math increased citywide, WHEELS significantly outpaced citywide growth in both subject areas. On average 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades WHEELS students gained 23 percentage points in ELA and 16 in Math, while citywide gains were 15 and 10 respectively.*

### ***School Culture***

- *Our schools showed strong results in the Department of Education Quality Reviews, which assesses each school's progress in developing a culture that promotes student achievement. Five of our schools received the highest possible rating they could on their most recent Quality Reviews—Validus, WHEELS, Humanities Prep and Baldwin were rated "well developed" and Marsh "exceeded expected progress", the highest possible rating for a new school. Hahn received a "proficient" rating, the second highest rating; and BELHS received an "underdeveloped with proficient features" rating. Leaders' final rating is still being determined.*
- *Our schools are succeeding in establishing strong cultures that promote high levels of achievement, effectively engage students, teacher and parents, and provide a safe and respectful environment. Five of our nine schools—Validus, Hahn, Leaders, WHEELS and Marsh—scored well above the City average in all four categories of the annual Learning Environment Survey. And one of our schools—Baldwin—scored above average in two of the categories and average in the other two. The surveys are distributed by the Department of Education to the parents, educators and students of each school to gauge the school's effectiveness in meeting their needs. The survey assesses academic expectations, communication, engagement, and safety and respect. Of our remaining three schools, BELHS was at the citywide average in each of these categories, while Humanities Prep and McCown were below in all but one.*
- *Our teachers report that our schools encourage a culture of collaboration and shared leadership. On the most recent Learning Environment Surveys, 96% of the responding teachers in our network schools reported that school leaders encourage collaboration among teachers and 92% reported that school leaders invite teachers to play a meaningful role in setting goals and making important decisions for their school.*
- *Parents at our schools feel welcome and included. As reported in the Learning Environment Survey results, 93% of responding parents in our network schools reported feeling welcome at those schools and 94% felt their school kept them informed about their child's progress.*

### ***National Results***

In 2007-2008, schools implementing the Expeditionary Learning model outperformed their districts in reading proficiency by 9.3% and in math by 3.6%. Free/Reduced Lunch Students outperformed their district peers in math by 9.3%, Black and Hispanic Students outperformed their district peers in reading by 15.1%, and students receiving special education services outperformed their peers in math by 8%.

Independent evaluations by respected organizations and researchers—conducted since Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound was launched in 1993—have shown that the model delivers highly effective professional development, improvements in student achievement as measured by standardized tests and portfolios, instructional practices, school culture, student attendance and parent participation, and the need for disciplinary action is reduced.

- The American Institutes for Research listed Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound as **one of only eight reform models showing positive effects on student achievement.**
- A series of National Staff Development Council (NSDC) reports entitled "What Works: Results-Based Staff Development" have featured Expeditionary Learning as a **leading professional development organization.**

For more details on these studies and others, visit <http://www.elob.org/results/evaluation.html>

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<sup>3</sup> The City uses a 6-year graduation rate in assessing transfer schools.

## **Direct Feedback**

Testimonials provide rich evidence that Outward Bound programming has been transformational on a variety of levels. Here are a few examples:

*"Validus Preparatory Academy hasn't just helped me succeed as a student but as a person as well by instilling within me compassion, commitment, collaboration, and responsibility."* —Anthony Jimenez, graduate of Validus Preparatory Academy

*"The Expeditionary Learning model compels us to do work in school that has real, authentic consequences."*  
—Elijah Hawkes, Principal, The James Baldwin School

*"NYC Outward Bound is...defying the lie, defying the myth, defying the stereotypes about what children can and cannot do."* —Arne Duncan, US Secretary of Education

*"There is a sense of moral purpose to the [Expeditionary Learning] design that is beyond academic success. There is a sense of citizenship, something closer to a world view, a shared sense of our place in the world and the responsibilities that come with that. That is really powerful, and it's something that is largely absent today."*  
—Tom Vander Ark, Former Executive Director, Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation