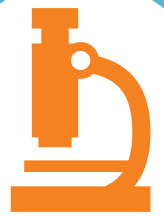


PLAYBOOK

A Practitioner's Guide
to the EPIC School
Model



NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

FOR MORE INFO ABOUT EPIC HIGH SCHOOLS, PLEASE VISIT:

epicschoolsnyc.org

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Contributing Writers: Harvey Chism, John Clemente, Natalie Ferrell, Stephanie Krauss, Joe Pinto

Designer: James Minton (<http://jamesminton.com>)



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Why EPIC?

In the fall of 2011, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) began grappling with a seemingly intractable challenge: how can schools significantly increase the number of Black and Latino students - especially young men - who graduate prepared for the rigors of college and careers?

Earlier that summer, Mayor Bloomberg had announced the launch of the Young Men's Initiative (YMI), the nation's largest public-private partnership aimed at reducing disparities for Black and Latino young men across a range of sectors: health, criminal justice, employment, and education. With support from Open Society Foundations, my colleagues and I at DOE began thinking about what it would take to solve this problem at scale in a city where the college- and career-ready rate for Black and Latino young men was about 1 in 10. Hence, the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI), the major education component of YMI.

The first phase of ESI consisted of direct investment in schools that had shown some promise in graduating young men of color. The theory of action was a simple one: find the most promising ideas developed by those closest to students everyday and give them support in launching new innovations inside of their schools. A central team built to support this work reviewed competitive applications as part of a Design Challenge, matched schools with relevant community-based organizations, and finally selected 40 schools that would receive up to \$250,000 over three years to implement their strategies. This work continues as of this writing, and we continue to learn from our success and failures in organizing this large-scale R&D lab.

The second phase of ESI presented an entirely different opportunity. What would it take to get to 10 in 10? Surely, we felt, it would take a different group of schools, perhaps designed around a different set of core principles, beliefs, and practices. Could we launch a new network of schools from scratch that shared a fundamental set of building blocks - competencies,

assessments, and rites of passage experiences, to name a few—thereby allowing greater resource sharing and distributed leadership? Many hypothetical questions and few answers.

So in the spring of 2013, we launched the ESI School Design Fellowship, an intentionally cross-functional team consisting of expertise in school leadership, youth development, workforce preparation, and education technology. We received upwards of 500 applications and selected 9 individuals to come to New York and spend a year designing schools rooted in competency-based education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and user-centered design methodologies. The ESI Design Fellows were charged with nothing short of reimagining the high school experience to get to the elusive 10 in 10 and improve prospects for young men and women of color alike. In the fall of 2014, the DOE opened three schools based on this work: EPIC High School North, EPIC High School South, and The Nelson Mandela School for Social Justice.

Innovation is hard. It requires optimism, courage, and humility. This Playbook represents the collective intelligence, determination, and humanity of a very, very talented team. They have braved the ups and downs of an often-changing education climate, of working with each other (!), and of trying to remain faithful to a collective enterprise even when the work day to day - as surely every practitioner knows - requires laser-like focus on the immediate issues at hand. Yet, here we are at the end of Year 1, trying to acknowledge where we have done right by the young people that come through our doors every day and, more importantly—both for ourselves and the field writ large—where we have failed. Failed with the determination to learn and be better tomorrow than we were today.



John Duval
Office of Postsecondary Readiness

A National Crisis

Being born Black or Latino limits your chance for educational and life success; especially if you were born to poor parents in a struggling rural or urban neighborhood. In the United States, young men and women of color face seemingly insurmountable opportunity and achievement gaps. The Schott Foundation for Public Education issued a recent report entitled *Black Lives Matter*; it reveals that young Black men fall to the bottom of four-year graduation rates in 35 states and Washington D.C., and that Latinos hold the same position in the remaining states.¹ This report suggests that the graduation and achievement gaps between whites and their peers of color is widening. Columbia University's Law School, in partnership with the African American Policy Forum, published a similar report, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected*, as a clarion call to understand and overhaul the "school-to-prison pipeline" that increasingly affects our young women of color. Young women of color are the fastest growing population in the juvenile justice system. As with their young brothers of color, these girls and women are targeted more than their white peers by zero-tolerance school discipline policies, sometimes called "push-out" policies.²

"It's imperative to continue to expand opportunity, access and engagement for Black and Latino young men, who represent 60% of the young men between the ages of 16 and 24 in New York City. They are not a special interest group; they are the future of New York. We need their health, well-being, full participation and leadership to continue to grow and thrive as a city."

—NYC Young Men's Initiative
2013 Annual Report

This past year we witnessed major galvanizing events, like the killing of Michael Brown—an unarmed black teen—by a white police officer, in Ferguson Missouri, and the launching of the White House *My Brother's Keepers Initiative*. We are steeped in a confluence of tragedy and opportunity. More than ever, the public expresses a readiness and willingness to name and remove the barriers holding these young people back.

If these barriers are not removed, children and youth of color will continue to be considerably more likely than White peers to:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • live below the poverty line; • drop out school; • face chronic, debilitating unemployment; | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be incarcerated, • and be the victims of violent and potentially fatal crime.³ |
|--|--|

¹"Black Lives Matter: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males", published 2015

²"Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected", published 2015

³"My Brother's Keeper Task Force Report to the President", published 2014

This is everybody's problem. Our nation's landscape is changing and the need to be quick and effective is pressing. Communities are increasingly urbanized and racially diverse. They are also getting poorer. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the majority of American babies are born into non-white families, many whom are poor and live in rural or urban areas. Right now, the majority of children and youth attending public schools qualify for free and reduced lunch (a common measure of childhood poverty)⁴ and there are more 18-24 year old Black and Latino men in prison than in higher education.⁵

At the Crossroads: New York City

This national crisis and opportunity to act is expressed in our local communities. For example, as of 2012, New York City (NYC) - our nation's most crowded, and perhaps most diverse, urban center - ranked sixth in the nation for largest Black-White gap in urban high school graduation rates⁶.

In 2008, nearly 225,000 of NYC's young people, ages 16 to 24, were known to be disconnected from school and work. Based on NYC's Department of Education graduation rates data, we can assume that most of these young people were men and women of color. The daily stress of meeting life's demands, especially in situations of poverty, makes it hard for disconnected youth to find work and finish their high school degree. They are more likely than their regularly school-going or working peers to get sick or pregnant, or to rely on the informal economy - that is, the part of the economy that is not taxed or government-monitored, and that consists largely of odd jobs, bartering,

and street trading - to meet their financial needs. Many end up in jail or homeless, bearing significant individual and public cost and consequence⁷.

These young people disconnect for different reasons, but nearly all experience some combination of "push" and "pull" factors. *The Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study* highlights a few of the reasons why NYC youth get *pushed* out of school:

- They experience harsh school discipline. For instance, in grades six through twelve, Black boys are more than twice as likely to be suspended from school and more than thirteen times more likely to be expelled;
- They are mislabeled and placed in special education. For instance, there are more than double the number of young Black boys receiving special education than any other group, and many are misclassified as learning disabled and/or speech-impaired;⁸
- They feel unsafe. For instance, roughly half of Black and Latino youth who participated in the 2011 National Crime Victimization Survey School Crime Supplement reported that gangs were present and active in their public schools⁹.

Policymakers and practitioners have many entry points to consider when supporting young people of color. Family, community, schools and other youth-serving programs will limit or promote social mobility and life opportunities. Schools, however, are a standout place for intervention and reform, because of their constancy in young people's lives and the known relationship between academic success and positive life outcomes.

⁴ "A New Majority Research Bulletin: Low Income Students Now a Majority in the Nation's Public Schools", published 2015

⁵ As cited in "Succeeding in the City: A Report from the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study", published 2014

⁶ "

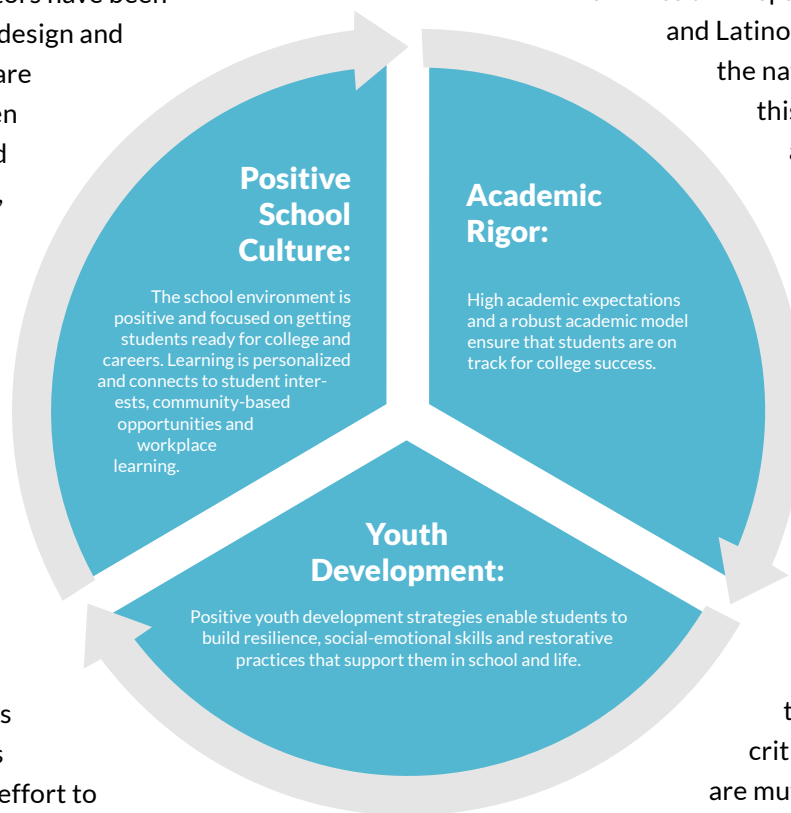
⁷ *Disconnected Young People in New York City: Crisis and Opportunity*, published 2008

⁸ t, published 2005; Chapter 9, page 212

⁹ "Succeeding in the City: A Report from the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study", published 2014

The NYC Expanded Success Initiative

New York City educators have been working hard to find, design and try new ways to prepare young men and women of color to engage and graduate from school, ready for adulthood. In 2012, ESI was launched with the support of the Open Society Foundations, as a component of the Office of the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative (YMI) and a part of the New York City public schools. YMI stands out, not only as NYC's most comprehensive effort to



address the disparities that young Black and Latino youth face, but also as the nation's largest effort of this kind. ESI was instituted as a way to directly spur innovative solutions, in schools, to address these disparities.

ESI has developed a three-pronged framework that serves as the backbone infrastructure for all of its schools by articulating an effective, student-centered school's three most critical components, which are mutually reinforcing:

- **Academic Rigor**

High academic expectations and a robust academic model ensure that students are on track for college success.

- **Positive School Culture**

The school environment is positive and focused on getting students ready for college and careers. Learning is personalized and connects to student interests, community-based opportunities and workplace learning.

- **Youth Development**

Positive youth development strategies enable students to build resilience, social-emotional skills and restorative practices that support them in school and life.

ESI started with a school redesign challenge, offering capacity-building grants to 40 city schools. Grant funds enabled recipients to realign practice with this framework. Then, in 2013, ESI launched a first-of-its-kind school design fellowship. This fellowship brought together a powerful cadre of education and youth development leaders who had frontline experience putting this framework into practice. The result of this

fellowship was the EPIC school model, which went into place at EPIC North High School (“EPIC North”), EPIC South High School (“EPIC South”), and the Nelson Mandela School for Social Justice (“Mandela”) in the 2014-2015 school year. This model will also serve as the anchoring architecture for future schools that open as members of the network.

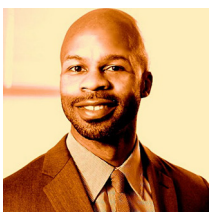
“The three-pronged ESI model encompasses shifts in academic programming, instructional delivery, development of students’ aspirations and goal commitments, and strengthening cultural competence and expectations, for student success among educators. Moreover, embedding college-going cultures in each school is an important component of the model.”

“Succeeding in the City: A Report from the NYC Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study”

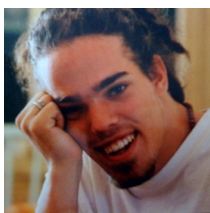
Inaugural ESI School Design Fellows



Tabari Zaid Bomani has worked as a social studies teacher, college advisor, and Dean at Bushwick Community High School, a transfer high school in Brooklyn. Additionally, he was an adjunct professor in the African Studies department at Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York. Tabari has also lectured and performed poetry for community-based organizations, colleges, and universities. He earned a BA in History and Secondary Education from Hofstra University and a MA in History from Brooklyn College. He was also a member of the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model, a leadership program jointly developed by New Visions for Public Schools and the School for Public Affairs at Baruch College. Tabari is a member of the MALIK fraternity and the Phi Alpha Theta National Historian Honor Society. He is also the father of two extraordinary young ladies, Anisa and Anaya, and is married to Lydia Colon Bomani.



Harvey Chism Jr. has focused his professional career on addressing the needs of under-served youth and communities. As Vice President of Educational Innovations at the Philadelphia Youth Network, Harvey oversaw the development of educational programs designed to assist struggling students, former out-of-school youth, and others in need of support to realize their educational and career-related goals. He supported the School District of Philadelphia in creating and expanding its multiple pathways system, a diversified portfolio of educational program options. During his tenure at the Philadelphia Youth Network, Harvey regularly convened strategic planning and governance bodies; presented to diverse levels of audiences, and served as facilitator and policy adviser to local and national groups. Most recently, Harvey has worked on building the capacity of community-based organizations to provide core academic credit bearing learning experiences to students via a digital badges pilot. He has also served as project lead for the creation of a new school model that integrates competency-based, blended-learning strategies with work-based learning and embedded college transition. Additionally, as a former 8th and 11th grade social studies teacher at Delaware Valley Friends School, Harvey also has practical experience at the school level working with students, their families, fellow faculty, school administrators and staff. Harvey holds Bachelors of Arts in Sociology and Education from Swarthmore College, a Masters in Education with a concentration in education policy from the University of Pennsylvania, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Urban Education at Temple University.



John Clemente graduated from New York University with a degree in anthropology. He subsequently joined the AmeriCorps VISTA Program working with foster teens and adjudicated youth in Paterson, New Jersey. He was an inaugural member of the New York City Teaching Fellows, teaching middle school in the south Bronx for four years. He received his Masters in Education from Lehman College and his Masters in Media Studies from New School University. Most recently, John was the Director of Educational Services at Teaching Matters, a non-profit whose mission is to develop and retain great teachers and measurably increase their ability to give students in urban public schools an excellent education. John led their team of over 35 instructional coaches for six years. Prior to that he served as an instructional coach and wrote culturally relevant curriculum for several of their large scale programs.



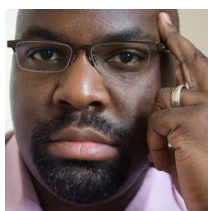
Brandon Corley is a mathematics teacher at the James Baldwin School: A School for Expeditionary Learning, a transfer high school in New York City. He is a graduate of Chicago State University with a BS in Mathematics/Secondary Education and is an established leader, teacher, and child advocate. He was born and raised in Chicago and represents the Englewood community of Chicago's Southside with great pride. Brandon has worked with the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® program since 2004 in various capacities. His role as co-founder and Project Director of the "World Famous" Bethel-Imani CDF Freedom Schools site in Chicago and the Imani-Harambee CDF Freedom Schools site in Milwaukee, his time as an Ella Baker Trainer, and his work planning regular youth mobilizations, conferences and events has earned him recognition amongst his peers. Mr. Corley's widespread community involvement and volunteer work includes: the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America where he has served as the multicultural representative for the Lutheran Youth Organization; Nation Builder with the Simba Circle Camp; basketball coach for the Southside YMCA in Chicago; National Membership Chairman of Phi Rho Eta Fraternity, Inc. Currently, he is an advisory board member for Mature Cradle, Inc. Through this work he has directly served communities in Champaign and Chicago, IL, as well as Milwaukee, WI, Mt Vernon, NY, New Orleans, La, and Philadelphia, Pa.



John Duval leads the Model Redesign team in the Office of Postsecondary Readiness at DOE where he oversees a range of education innovation initiatives including the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI), Mastery Collaborative, NYC P-TECH model, and School Time Lab. Formerly, he was the Deputy Executive Director for research and development, managing the office's annual operating budget of approximately \$60M in local, federal, and private funds. Additionally, he managed all longitudinal research to assess the return on investment for the Multiple Pathways and CTE portfolios and led policy development in the areas of finance and accountability. He came to education after working as a job coach for adults recovering from mental illness in the Bronx and central Brooklyn. John holds a BA from the University of Virginia and a MPA from Columbia University.



Natalie Ferrell has a background in bilingual education, research and youth development. She began her career teaching Science at a middle school for recently arrived immigrants in Upper Manhattan. As an educator, she became acutely aware of the effects of relationships and learning conditions on student success and returned to graduate school to study adolescent health, programming and policy, publishing research on the effects of school choice on student well-being in post-Katrina New Orleans. While in New Orleans, Natalie also coached new teachers as an Intervention Specialist for teachNOLA. Most recently, she served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic, where she worked primarily on collaborative action research, gender initiatives and capacity building with a youth development nonprofit. Natalie holds a BA in Latin American Studies and a Masters in Public Health from Tulane University, as well as a Masters in Teaching with a focus on ESL and bilingual education.



Darius Mensah comes to the ESI School Design Fellowship with an unshakable belief that all children come to us with unlimited potential, and that we, as educators, have the responsibility of creating the spaces where they can thrive academically. He came into the teaching profession via the NYC Teaching Fellows, and served as a special education teacher at Frederick Douglass Academy VII High School in Brownsville, Brooklyn. He then joined New Leaders for New Schools in Oakland, CA, earned a school leadership credential, and served as an Assistant Principal before returning to NYC to lead the work of improving college and career readiness for students at FDA VII. Darius earned a BA in Psychology from Montclair State University, a MEd from CUNY Brooklyn College, and completed graduate work for his administrative credential at California State University East Bay.



Paul Perry joined the ESI School Design Fellowship after working on the School Leadership Team at TechBoston Academy, a 6-12 pilot school with a focus on technology and college and career readiness. Prior to this, he worked for the Los Angeles Unified School District in their Talent Management Division developing professional development programs for teachers and school leaders. While in California, Paul also led a project to reform the policies and procedures of the San Francisco Department of Juvenile Justice and taught courses at San Quentin State Prison through the Prison University Project. Paul started his career in the School District of Philadelphia as a middle school English and Social Studies teacher. He is completing his final year in the Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D) Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He holds degrees from American University, University of Pennsylvania and University of California, Berkeley.



Vadewatie Ramsuchit has passionately served as an educator in NYC Public Schools for over a decade. She served as a founding teacher and later as an assistant principal at The International High School at Prospect Heights. She has mentored teachers, developed peer support systems and sought alternative solutions to help students achieve their goals and strengthen educational communities. Vadewatie holds a Bachelors degree in Information Systems Management, a Masters degree in Education and an advanced certificate in Educational Leadership.



David Weinberg has been working as an urban educator for 10 years. He got involved in this work because he believes deeply that education is the greatest tool to impact social change and to help to level the playing field for all people. David's career started as a High School History and Government teacher at Chelsea High School in Chelsea, Massachusetts, where he taught everything from Sheltered English classes to Advanced Placement courses. After graduating from Harvard's School Leadership program he oversaw the "redesign" of Chelsea High School; a 3 million dollar turnaround grant from the state to rethink what an urban high school could look like. That work focused heavily on building teacher capacity to support English Language Learners and Special Education students. David then assumed the title of Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and School Redesign; a role in which he spent time coaching principals, designing professional development and working to create leadership pathways.

The Playbook

The EPIC Playbook offers practitioners an early picture of the EPIC model, including both its core rationale as well as insights into how it works day-to-day. As of this publication, the model is being implemented by three NYC public schools that have just completed their first year. The Playbook is meant to act as a guide and resource for anyone working to put this model into practice at the school and district levels as well as contribute to broader learning communities that share similar values and principles.

This document highlights four distinguishing features of our approach: Competency-Based Education, Culturally Responsive Education, Human-Centered Design, and Integrated Learning. For each feature, we consider the research that informed our implementation, briefly restate key principles related to the approach, provide a short overview of principle-driven practices in our schools, and offer frontline artifacts as primary illustrations of these practices.

We designed this Playbook as a living document. In keeping with our value of continuous growth and improvement, we invite the comments, questions, and criticisms of readers in order to inform stronger future iterations of both the Playbook and the model as it evolves over time.

About EPIC

MISSION: HOW WE WORK TO MAKE OUR VISION A REALITY

The mission of EPIC High Schools is to challenge all students to dream big and to support them in designing their future. We recognize that each student is an individual and therefore provide a series of learning experiences that equip young people to walk their unique paths. We honor and integrate the cultures of

our communities to make learning relevant, responsive, and accessible, as we develop citizens with a positive sense of self, ready to stand for social justice.

VISION: HOW WE HOPE TO CHANGE LIVES

All graduates will be college- and career-ready as we provide a meaningful pathway to lifelong learning for every student. By fostering the boldness to dream and by developing a commitment to inner growth and outward transformation, our graduates will be ready to design their own futures.

VALUES: *THE BELIEFS THAT GUIDE OUR DECISIONS AND ACTIONS ALONG THE WAY***EMPOWERMENT**

Students make important decisions about the direction of their learning and their lives. At EPIC, we listen to our young people and, instead of prescribing paths, we present options, and teach skills pertaining to leadership and choice.

**PERSONALIZED AND APPLIED
LEARNING**

Learning is built upon a sense of self and connects wherever possible to practical experience. At EPIC, all students and staff maintain personal growth plans that engage strengths to surmount challenges and that emphasize application.

**INCLUSION AND SERVICE**

We embrace the communities already in our students' lives just as we guide them to forge new ones. At EPIC, honoring who we are is intimately bound up with deciding who we'll be through acts of service and connection.

**CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS**

Cultural biases in education are rooted out and all students' senses of place and perspective are reflected in content and pedagogy. At EPIC, instruction connects students to their heritage and expands access points to learning.

**CONTINUOUS GROWTH & DESIGN
FOR TRANSFORMATION**

Students and staff understand how future ability evolves from present ability and approach learning to improve both the self and the world. At EPIC, we encourage our students to take risks, learn from failure, and design a better future.

**COLLECTIVE
RESPONSIBILITY**

We each exist as unique and powerful learners but we also work together to transform our community and ourselves. At EPIC, our learning community operates on the moral principle of Ubuntu — "I am because we are."

The EPIC Approach

In order to prepare all students to be college- and career-ready, the EPIC model employs four approaches to teaching and learning. These approaches are evident throughout the student experience, in each learning place and every learning process. Students are surrounded and supported academically, socially and emotionally, to ensure active engagement as well as a self-paced, challenging learning environment. The result is that students receive a rigorous, highly personalized, and equitable high school experience:

COMPETENCY-BASED



EPIC High Schools utilize a multi-layer approach to teaching and learning that involves students progressing based on what they know and can do, rather than the time they have spent in class. At EPIC, the focus of teaching and learning is to help students learn, practice, develop, and demonstrate 19 competencies that indicate their academic, personal and professional readiness. This approach is centered on clear, actionable learning targets—called attainments—that students use to create, apply, manage, understand, and critique information, solutions, and the world around them.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE



Culturally responsive education, a holistic approach that undergirds all others, is the simple but powerful contention that achievement is anchored not just in building from one's existing strengths but in full engagement of one's self and lived experience. Advocates of personalized learning talk of meeting students where they are, and success in EPIC High Schools springs just as much from meeting them *who* they are. Unlike loose interpretations that minimize the complexity and implications of culture and identity, EPIC's approach centers the learner as an invaluable and intricately constituted subject. Within an EPIC school, the context, content, and means for learning may vary according to individual needs while the goal for self-awareness and connection is shared and consistent. EPIC High Schools understand and anticipate that an individual's definition of self may expand, contract, and shift over time as social, personal, and academic identities emerge and develop.

HUMAN-CENTERED



Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation. It involves a commitment to understanding individuals' needs, recognizing that lived experience is legitimate and instructive, and building and revising solutions as needed to achieve increasingly better outcomes. Classroom learning revolves around the processes by which we seek to understand ambiguous problems and ideate solutions through empathy with the anticipated user, and this reflects the very design fellowship year EPIC's school leaders spent building their schools together, with intent and iteration.

INTEGRATED



EPIC High Schools recognize that, in order to support students to become agents of their life paths, we must broaden the concept of college and career readiness beyond building content knowledge and academic skills to a more integrated approach that supports students to become successful and balanced adults. Concretely, this shift involves articulating a holistic set of academic, social and emotional skills, creating applied learning experiences that integrate these skills and mirror the world of work, assessing social and emotional skills alongside academic skills, and hiring staff with youth development experience to work alongside teachers to support social and emotional skill acquisition.



EPIC VALUES AND APPROACH



Competency-Based Education

Competency-based education (CBE) is a multi-layer approach to teaching and learning that involves students progressing based on what they know and can do, rather than the time they have spent in class. It focuses on providing students with the supports and opportunities needed to build skills, not just absorb content. In a CBE environment, one might expect to find a combination of the following elements:

- transparent learning targets that are clear and comprehensible to students/teachers/families;
- sustained learning experiences that have an arc and duration (not just small discrete lesson plans and disparate activities);
- student ownership of learning and an understanding of what's needed to advance/achieve/improve;
- evidence of students working at different paces;
- instances of individual and small group feedback being offered by the teacher;
- meaningful student demonstrations and applications of learning; and,
- opportunities and expectations for revision and reflection.

THE NEED FOR CBE

The challenges that CBE addresses are many. They include students being graduated with significant gaps in learning because of ineffective assessments, inadequate supports and opportunities to learn, and narrow focuses that neglect complex skills and mindsets students need for short- and long-term success.

For many, competency-based education is seen as a more straightforward way to organize and deliver education and support students. Primarily, the approach is centered on clear, actionable learning targets—often called competencies—that students use to create, apply, manage, understand, and critique information,

solutions, and the world around them. Competencies may extend beyond academics to include social and emotional knowledge, particular mindsets, and other forms of awareness.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CBE

Commonly, competency-based education programs in K-12 schools share five characteristics:

1. **Schooling is Personalized:** Learning environments support individual student needs and interests (situated, at EPIC, within school cultures that emphasize community and social-emotional aspects of personal growth).
2. **Instruction is Flexible:** Time, place, and technology are flexible resources that accommodate when, where, and how learning happens. Students have multiple opportunities to learn, practice, and demonstrate the competencies and learning targets on which they are working.
3. **Learning is Customized:** Instructional design and sequencing are based on whatever competencies students need to learn and where they are in the learning process.
4. **Advancement is Performance-Based:** Students advance by demonstrating specific competencies, or stages of learning within competencies.
5. **Credits are Qualified:** Credits and credentials link to specific, known competencies, and transcripts and scores provide a clear picture of where students are in the learning process.

SUPPORTING RESEARCH

In the past few years, much has been written about competency-based education. Among the contributing organizations are:

CompetencyWorks
Achieve
KnowledgeWorks

Jobs For the Future – Students at the Center Initiative
 Marzano Labs/Re-Inventing Schools Coalition (RISC)
 CCSSO Innovation Lab Network
 Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation
 QED Foundation

Collectively, they have begun to examine frameworks, policy conditions, and practices. Still, much information is needed regarding how to scale competency-based education, align in-school and out-of-school time learning, and accomplish successful implementation for diverse communities and populations.

Several principal reports include:

- *Making Mastery Work: A Close-Up View of Competency Education* (The Nellie Mae Education Foundation’s foundational report on K-12 competency-based education)
- CompetencyWorks’ Briefing Papers (Topics include introductory resources, international perspectives, competency-based grading, policy framework, students supports, and use of technology)
- Students at the Center Competency Research Series (Includes a series on equity and competency-based education)
- *Clearing the Path: Creating Innovation Space for Serving Over-Age, Under-Credited Students in Competency-Based Pathways*
- Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation’s Education Papers & Case Studies on Competency-based Education (Specifically, Julia Freeland’s deep dive into competency-based education in New Hampshire)
- *Formative Classroom Assessment and Benjamin S. Bloom: Theory Research and Implications*, by Thomas Guskey (On mastery learning)

CURRICULUM & LEARNING

In competency-based education, competencies are the central organizing unit for curriculum design,

learning facilitation, and assessment. A competency by description is a skill, ability, or facet of knowledge that a student should reach with proficiency and success. Here, the emphasis is on high levels of achievement and not mere passing. In an innovative competency-based learning environment, calendars, class times, and schedules support rather than drive the bounds and intensity of learning. Assessment is used to measure and communicate how proficient students are and are becoming relative to target competencies. In many instances, assessment of, as, and for learning are the priority in terms of student performance and measurement.

Commonly, competency-based classes tend to look different from traditional classes. Whereas traditional classes tend to synchronize learning—that is, the driving imperative is to shift all students to the same learning pace—competency-based classes unleash learning by allowing for the reality that learning styles and paces are different. Standards and content are unpacked from common formats (i.e., semester-long biology courses, or an algebra-to-geometry-to-calculus-to-trigonometry sequence) and reorganized to reflect actionable, natural clusters of content and skills, which can be grouped by interests and level in more experiential formats. Competencies can be a gateway to meaningful personalization. The unbundled nature of competencies expose the deeper meaning and significance of the skills and content.

Consider the power of competency-based education from the perspective of Nellie Mae Education Foundation’s landmark report, *Making Mastery Work: A Close-Up View of Competency Education*:

The idea of moving to a system built on demonstration of mastery, rather than a required amount of time in a classroom, is drawing renewed interest from educators and policymakers alike. Competency education is rooted in the notion that education is about mastering a set of skills and knowledge, not just moving through a curriculum. In competency education, students keep working on specific skills or knowledge until they can demonstrate their un-

derstanding and ability to apply them; they then move to the next material while continuing to use what they have learned. Students cannot advance simply by showing up to class on a sufficient number of days or earning a grade above failing.¹⁰

In competency-based education environments, students move as slowly or quickly as needed to practice and attain target skills. Curriculum “maps” are malleable and students’ learning pathways are evident. Monitoring tools like progress reports, grades, and report cards sketch a picture of where a student is on her path toward attaining competencies and advancing toward promotion and graduation. Feedback is frequent and learning is no longer just limited to the single classroom. Instead, students may practice and achieve proficiency on competencies in a variety of settings, including virtual settings. In this respect, CBE dovetails with and supports blended learning, another relatively recent concept which stipulates that new technologies engaged thoughtfully can expand learning environments beyond the physical classroom. This is yet another way that competency-based education broadens learning.

TEACHING IN A CBE ENVIRONMENT

Effective teaching in competency-based education environments can be difficult. According to *Making Mastery Work*, teachers in competency-based education environments must be versatile in their facilitation and support methods so that they can plan and carry out a high level of differentiation. This requires advanced critical thinking skills and a high degree of technological savvy. Technology can ease some of the more cumbersome planning and transactional com-

ponents of competency-based education. Moreover, new, sophisticated blended learning approaches can support that process. Additional professional practices and characteristics that assist in these environments include: cultivating authentic and supportive relationships with students and colleagues; acting as a coach and facilitator with students; integrating social-emotional and youth development practices into classroom instruction and learning; being culturally responsive; collaborating with colleagues; and, practicing a commitment to continuous improvement.

This type of learning environment becomes more sustainable when staffing structures are diversified and distributed. The authors of *Clearing the Path* suggest flexible staffing structures that include youth development professionals, learning coaches and strong community partners. Flexible staffing is further characterized by:

- Broadened school staffing around student needs
- Revised human resources policies to include a team approach to educating students
- Revised expectations for teaching staff to have greater expertise in instruction and assessment
- Greater flexibility in hiring teachers
- Adequate support for educators, including integrated student information and learning management systems, coaching in instruction and assessment, and opportunities to build a common understanding of proficiency.

WHERE IS THIS APPROACH WORKING?

Competency-based education is happening in states and schools across the nation. Entire regions, like New England, are pursuing this approach with wholesale

¹⁰ Taken from the Executive Summary of “Making Mastery Work: A Close-Up View of Competency Education,” published 2012

¹¹ In her report, “Blending Toward Competency,” research fellow Julia Freeland identifies four ways that blended learning enables and supports competency-based education: *Blended learning stands to support competency-based education in at least four overarching ways. First, online content can offer a continuum of learning along which students can progress at a flexible pace. Second, when students learn through online learning, testing can occur on-demand—that is, when students are ready to be assessed, not before or after. Third, online content can be deployed in a more modular manner than traditional face-to-face instruction, which in turn offers students multiple pathways to mastery, as opposed to a single lesson or textbook. Finally, blended learning can support school systems attempting to take competency-based education to scale by providing tools to personalize learning for each student.*

reform to their statewide education systems. Increasingly, education leaders recognize that learning should be constant and time the variable. To learn more about what is happening on the ground, contact some of the states and schools that are leading the nation in this work:

States:

Connecticut

Iowa

Maine

New Hampshire

Rhode Island

Systems and Schools:

Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA), Boston, Massachusetts

Bronx Arena High School, New York City, New York

Casco Bay High School, Portland, Maine

Chugach School District, Anchorage, Alaska

DiplomaPlus, National Network

High Tech High, San Diego, California

Lindsay Unified School District, Lindsay, California

learning than does teaching by rote or promotion by seat time associated with a credit whose reflection of skills may be ambiguous. The EPIC School Design Fellows, in partnership with national experts, teachers, and students, derived the EPIC Competency Framework through a design process that began with envisioning the end goal: the skills young people need to be healthy, happy, high-functioning and productive adults. This broader set of skills - or attainments as they're known in EPIC parlance - was organized into 19 critical domains, called competencies, a collection that is simultaneously ambitious and accessible for students in a way that standards are often not. Each attainment is comprehensibly related to the others in its domain and described in simple "I can" language with which students can straightforwardly understand and pursue the handful of tangible skills in question. These attainments have been mapped back to a series of frameworks including the Common Core Standards (encompassing the New York State Learning Standards), the CASEL standards, and the NYCDOE College and Career Readiness Benchmarks. Additionally they were vetted by experts at the Center for Collaborative Education.

A high school credential should signal that a graduate is competent in the ways that will enable her to meet the demands and challenges of whatever comes next, whether that is college or a career of choice. Additionally, EPIC graduates stand out among their peers as citizens with a positive sense of self who are ready to stand for social justice, all of which are qualities EPIC sees as inherent to a productive and meaningful life, and which we therefore consider central to a high school education.

Principles and Practices: How CBE Works at EPIC

PRINCIPLE: *CREDENTIALS SHOULD SIGNAL COMPETENCE AND READINESS*

PRACTICE: *OUR COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK DRIVES TEACHING AND LEARNING*

At EPIC, the focus of teaching and learning is to help students learn, practice, develop, and demonstrate 19 competencies that correspond with meaningful academic, personal, and professional achievement. EPIC educators believe that this results in deeper

Artifact: [EPIC Competencies](#), Appendix 1

PRINCIPLE: *GRADES SHOULD CLEARLY COMMUNICATE WHAT STUDENTS KNOW AND ARE ABLE TO DO*

PRACTICE: *MASTERY-BASED GRADING*

We report on student mastery and progress toward specific attainments - skills, knowledge, and abilities that reflect both academic and social-emotional capabilities. Progress Reports provide students with a rubric score on a 4-point scale for each attainment they have attempted to demonstrate over the course of the marking period. Fundamental to the design of EPIC High Schools is challenging the dominant paradigm around assessment of student learning. Students must have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of critical skills and they must be provided with frequent updates on their progress towards mastery so that they can more fully take ownership over their learning and development. In addition, traditional grading can often feel punitive and promote competition. These sometimes unintended consequences often have a significantly negative impact on young people of color. To this end, student scores are not “averaged” but rather reflect a student’s current level of achievement for each attainment.

The EPIC grading system draws on best practices of well-developed competency-based programs, such as Casco Bay High School’s in Maine, and is designed to provide post-secondary institutions with a clear picture of a student’s learning, utilizing the standard measure of a grade point average (GPA). The rigorous expectations of the EPIC Competency Framework go beyond state expectations and therefore an EPIC student’s GPA reflects learning that significantly exceeds minimum state requirements.

Artifact: Grading Principles and Practices, Appendix 2

“In competency education, the key to improving achievement for underserved student populations—racial/ethnic, language, income, and special education needs—depends on several factors and elements that keep equity at the core. These include: making learning expectations and the process of determining proficiency transparent; supporting students to build the habits of learning they need to be lifelong learners; monitoring student progress and pace to ensure the school is being responsive to student needs while also informing the professional development of teachers; and upholding strong continuous improvement efforts. In this way, accountability is embedded into the system itself.”

—Chris Sturgis,
*Implementing Competency Education
in K-12 Systems*

PRINCIPLE: *COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING PATHWAYS SHOULD BE SHARED AND TRANSPARENT TO STUDENTS*

PRACTICE: *1:1 COMPUTING AND LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM*

We provide each student with a Netbook computer throughout the school year. These Netbooks provide students with essential access to the internet for research and learning, teacher-designed and curated deeper learning experiences, communication tools to enhance collaboration, and a learning management system that tracks student progress in relation to our competency framework. Personalized learning requires ready access to learning targets, curriculum resources, and assessment tools that meet the needs of both students and teachers. EPIC's digital pathway allows staff to better personalize student learning and share resources across schools. The EPIC system integrates our competencies and attainments, students' individual learning plans, learning resources, and assessments and performance data.

Artifact: Sample Progress Report, Appendix 3

PRINCIPLE: *STUDENTS SHOULD BE CHALLENGED AND SUPPORTED TO REACH THEIR ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT*

PRACTICE: *DEEPER LEARNING*

Consistent with the Common Core Standards, the EPIC learning model shifts the cognitive load to students. Teachers design learning experiences using the Understanding by Design Framework, working backward from specific attainments to plan how essential skills will be defined, developed, and authentically demonstrated. Deeper learning occurs as these

skills are integrated and applied to a novel problem or situation. Students are introduced to the culminating performance task and encouraged to approach it on their own and in their own way. Teachers prepare and provide scaffolds and supports, but only as students need them. This design ensures students are engaged in their zone of proximal development, fosters a 'fail forward' mindset, gives students responsibility to seek support where they need it, and facilitates self-directed and self-paced learning. EPIC High Schools conduct Student Symposia multiple times throughout the year. These Symposia are learning conference-style events that provide a platform for students to demonstrate their learning to an audience of external evaluators, peers, and community members.

Artifact: Student Symposium, Appendix 4



Culturally Responsive Education

Culturally responsive education (CRE) is a framework for teaching and learning that respects, reflects, serves, examines, and co-constructs the identities, cultures, and beliefs of each member of a school community. It is an educational approach that aligns with competency-based education in that, far from being asked to check their individual strengths, needs, and backgrounds at the door, students are taught in a way that builds on current awareness, ability, and senses of self – both the individual self and, more instructively, the situated self inherent in the spirit of *Ubuntu* (the belief that “*I am because you are*”). It is an asset-based paradigm that honors student identity as fundamental to learning.

CRE FEATURES & PRACTICES

In *But That's Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, Gloria Ladson-Billings, known for establishing “culturally responsive education” as a term and approach, suggests that culturally responsive education is identified by these three features: (a) all students are experiencing academic success; (b) students are actively developing and practicing cultural competence; and, (c) students are developing and practicing a “critical consciousness” that helps them to challenge the status quo that they see in the world around them.

Ladson-Billings and her colleagues argue for certain practices to fully enable a culturally responsive environment. Those practices include:

- Ensuring a pluralistic, representative curriculum
- Creating opportunities for students to see them-

selves in the curriculum

- Helping students to develop and maintain a positive academic self-image
- Connecting learning opportunities to the real world
- Providing learning opportunities that enrich students’ present and future lives
- Providing learning opportunities that allow students to explore their personal and peers’ socio-cultural and racial identities
- Creating a welcoming, positive, and accepting school and classroom culture
- Creating a culture of success
- Supporting diverse learners’ communication and learning styles
- Inviting counselors and mentors into the school and classroom
- Nurturing strong relations between home and school
- Ensuring equitable access to learning and social resources and supports

Most practitioners agree that these are commonsense elements of practice. Each requires and engages certain distinct professional abilities, such as: attunement to different cultures, identities, and styles; positive youth development practices; skills in differentiation and accommodation; counseling and coaching skills; the ability to motivate and intervene; and, a commitment to equity and social justice. Schools can enable these practices through strategic supports, innovative staffing, and professional learning structures.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE STAFF

To carry out culturally responsive practices, school staff must be culturally aware and competent. In the 1990s, Ladson-Billings reported that those who demonstrate cultural relevance share these qualities:

- The belief that all young people—no matter who they are, what they look like, what they need, or where they are from—deserve and are able to thrive and succeed¹²
- The ability to develop fluid, equitable relationships with students
- Active investment and participation in community activities
- Commitment to building a community of learners who are collaborative and show mutual respect
- Respect for individuals and their backgrounds and an understanding that students often operate in dual worlds, school/work and home/community¹³

NCCRES issued a [practitioner brief](#) in 2006 rethinking how teacher prep programs can develop culturally relevant, responsive educators. The brief suggests that teacher training include specific content and skill building around cultural competence, multicultural education, and supporting diverse leaders.

The brief describes six criteria of culturally relevant and responsive educators¹⁴:

1. Sociocultural consciousness
2. Affirming attitude toward diverse learners
3. Commitment and skills to act as agents of change
4. Constructivist views of teaching and learning
5. Commitment to learning about students and their home lives
6. Culturally responsive teaching strategies

Schools that commit to cultural relevance should see these six criteria manifest in more than practitioners' attitudes and behaviors. They should also be identifiable in school policies and processes, discipline codes, schools customs and cultures, and in the way that the school engages and partners with the community and families.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS

High quality, culturally responsive schools share these six characteristics¹⁵:

1. **Students Feel Physically and Psychologically Safe:** The learning environment promotes safe peer interactions. The building is accessible and the activities promote healthy living.
2. **Time and Activities are Structured:** Staff sets appropriate limits and rules for continuity and predictability. Staff have appropriate control and supervision over what happens.
3. **Students Feel Supported:** The environment is warm and nurturing. Students feel close and connected to the school and each another. Staff members are caring, supportive, and communicative. Staff and students feel connected.
4. **Anyone Can Belong:** The school community is inclusive and culturally competent. All students have ways to fully participate, engage, and lead. The school provides students with explicit opportunities for socio-cultural and racial identity formation and reflection.
5. **There are Positive Social Norms:** There are taught, shared, and practiced rituals, rites and rules. The school community upholds individual expression and diversity while also upholding shared values and morals, including a commitment to service.
6. **Youth Feel Empowered:** Students feel challenged and know that they matter. The environment is student-centered. The staff works to develop students' autonomy, helping students find ways to make a difference in their communities. There is a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

These six characteristics come from the National Research Council/Institute of Medicine study, *Com-*

¹² In 2012, the University of Pennsylvania published a report called "Black male student success in higher education: A report from the National Black Male College Achievement Study" The report introduces an anti-deficit achievement framework that shows practical ways for practitioners to put this belief into action.

¹³ Taken from Gloria Ladson-Billings's article, "But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally responsive pedagogy," *Theory into Practice* 34:3, pp. 162 and 163.

¹⁴ "For more on this, see *The Quest for Mastery: Positive Youth Development Through Out of School Programs*, a publication of Harvard Education Press

¹⁵ These six features of positive developmental settings are taken from *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, a National Research Council publication, published 2003

munity Programs to Promote Youth Development. This publication links students' acquisition of the "attitudes, competencies, values, and social skills that will carry them forward to a successful adulthood¹⁶" with participation in positive youth development settings. The study suggests that the world is "increasingly complex, technical, and multicultural, placing new and challenging demands on young people in terms of education, training, and the social and emotional skills needed in a highly competitive environment." Schools that fully embrace and carry out culturally responsive practices naturally double as positive youth development settings.

"If one does not see color, then one does not really see children. Children made 'invisible' in this manner become hard-pressed to see themselves worthy of notice."

—Lisa Delpit,

Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom, published 1995

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRE FOR HISTORICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS

Undeniably, students from institutionally under-served and historically under-represented communities are especially accustomed to having few if any opportunities to ground success in a validation of self and culture at school. In this respect, CRE,

and the positive youth development practices that develop from it, specifically map with greater long-term success for students at the lagging end of what is commonly called the achievement gap. Geneva Gay, in *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*, explains it this way:

A very different pedagogical paradigm is needed to improve the performance of underachieving students from various ethnic groups—one that teaches to and through their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments. Culturally responsive teaching is this kind of paradigm. It is at once a routine and a radical proposal. It is routine because it does for Native American, Latino, Asian American, African American, and low-income students what traditional instructional ideologies and actions do for middle-class European Americans. That is, it filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through their cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master. It is radical because it makes explicit the previously implicit role of culture in teaching and learning, and it insists that educational institutions accept the legitimacy and viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving learning outcomes¹⁷.

Paulo Friere is a philosophical father to culturally responsive pedagogy and practice. In Friere's view, this type of educational experience is transformative, equipping learners to become agents for change who are able to positively affect the systems and structures around them rather than merely be subject to them – and, in the case of entrenched inequalities, deprived of opportunity by them. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he explains that transformation as follows:

When [he or she] participates in this sort of educational experience, he or she comes to a new awareness of self, has a new sense of dignity, and is stirred by a new hope . . . When this happens in the process of learning to read, men and women discover that they are creators of culture, and that all their work can be creative. "I work, and work-

¹⁶ Taken from the Executive Summary of "Community Programs that Promote Youth Development," published 2003

¹⁷ Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed., p. 26).

ing I transform the world.” And as those who have been completely marginalized are so radically transformed, they are no longer willing to be mere objects, responding to changes occurring around them; they are more likely to decide to take upon themselves the struggle to change the structures of society, which until now have served to oppress them.¹⁸

TO LEARN MORE

Several organizations work on issues of culturally responsive education and positive youth development. To learn more about this approach, check out these organizations:

- American Youth Policy Forum
- The White House My Brother’s Keeper Initiative
- Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC)
- Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools
- Campaign for Black Male Achievement
- Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education
- YouthToday
- National Education Association
- National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRES)

Here are some books and edited volumes that provide a comprehensive picture of culturally responsive learning environments and positive youth development:

- *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, published 2003
- *From Rage to Hope: Strategies for Reclaiming Black and Hispanic Students*, published 2004
- Harvard Education Press’s Books on Race and Equity in Education
- *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, published 1995

- *Ready, Willing, and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success*, published 2014
- *The Biracial and Multiracial Student Experience: A Journey to Racial Literacy*, published 2009
- *The Trouble with Black Boys...And Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education*, published 2009
- *The Quest for Mastery: Positive Youth Development Through Out-of-School Programs*, published 2014
- *Youth Development: Issues, Challenges and Directions*, published 1997
- *Youth, Education, and the Role of Society*, published 2013

Principles and Practices: How CRE Works at EPIC

By design, EPIC Schools promote culturally relevant and responsive education. Unlike loose interpretations that minimize the complexity and implications of culture and identity, EPIC’s approach centers the learner as an invaluable and intricately constituted subject. EPIC’s commitment to learning as reflection and empowerment is especially promising for Black and Latino boys who often experience alienation in schools and classrooms. Combating this alienation means treating the realities, identifications, and histories of learners as vital, legitimate, useful, and constructive to the educational process. Regarding a match to students’ lives, circumstances, goals, and biographies, it is important to note that relevance and responsiveness equally pertain to the form and substance of learning. Consequently, within an EPIC school, the context, content, and means for learning may vary according to individual needs while the goal for self-awareness and connection is shared and consistent. Additionally, EPIC schools understand and anticipate that an individual’s definition of self may ex-

¹⁸ Friere, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

pand, contract, and shift over time as social, personal, and academic identities emerge and develop.

Being culturally responsive is more than just a collection of “tricks” or teacher moves that can be used to motivate Black and Latino youth to engage with content. EPIC High Schools believe that for the benefit of all students – because a Eurocentric lens insufficiently educates even students of European descent – CRE requires a paradigm shift away from a monocultural system (understanding) of what constitutes knowledge, what determines canon, what students “need” to learn, and how it is to be taught. CRE calls upon a community to view the culture and cultural heritage of all students as social, political, and educational capital. While research has shown that this shift has been instrumental in improving academic success among Black and Latino youth, EPIC schools believe CRE disarms a vast array of negative cultural biases – including those rooted in gender, religion, and sexual orientation – and is inclusive even of students whose cultures the prevailing paradigm already reflects, because it doesn’t replace but expands it. In so doing it also pushes a diverse community on the key issue of privilege, and challenges students on all sides of privilege to recognize it and build a society free from it.

PRINCIPLE: WE HONOR STUDENT IDENTITY

PRACTICE: RITES OF PASSAGE PROGRAM

Honoring student identity is fundamental to learning, as it builds a foundation of belonging and safety without which learning can’t take place, and it liberates students to take academic risks. A primary vehicle that drives this element of our school model is our Rites of Passage program, which is intended “not simply as a program; it is more accurately a way of life. Providing youth with an opportunity to explore their ideas, identity, and future among peers, with the

support and guidance of their immediate elders, is a natural method of promoting positive development into adulthood. . . It provides these youth with the support, guidance, knowledge, and resources necessary to understand and overcome negative pressures, as well as the skills to combat them.”¹⁹ Rites of Passage - which is a cornerstone of the CORE Advisory program, a practice explained more deeply below - provides youth with a safe environment in which to speak their minds, define their own beliefs, and receive support in achieving their full potential. Chapters, or same-gender groups that meet weekly, are formed to support students throughout the course of their high school years in order to provide a consistent, stabilizing influence in their lives and assist students in building positive, mutually supportive relationships with their peers and elders.

Artifact: [EPIC/Brotherhood Sister Sol Rites of Passage Handbook \(excerpt\)](#), Appendix 5

PRINCIPLE: STRONG RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STAFF AND STUDENTS ARE AT THE CORE OF OUR LEARNING MODEL

PRACTICE: CORE (CREATIVITY, OPPORTUNITY, RISK AND EXPERIENCE) ADVISORY

A “CORE” is a tight-knit group of approximately 20 students and two adults that stays together throughout the year. CORE has the dual goal of creating a comprehensive support system and accountability structure for students while simultaneously incorporating early college and workplace learning into the school experience. CORE groups meet daily and engage in many activities traditionally associated with high school advisory programs; however, CORE differs from traditional advisories in that it is the hub of sup-

¹⁹ Taken from the EPIC / Brotherhood Sister Sol Rites of Passage Handbook

port for self-paced learning, with a particular focus on those competencies that involve social and emotional skills, academic and personal behaviors, and early college and workplace learning. CORE groups also push the bar on bonding in school, developing shared rituals, incorporating supports like Rites of Passage, and requiring service learning, thereby becoming a more distinctive and decidedly deeper community space. This safe environment also lends itself to engaging in difficult discussions around race and gender, which are an important element of EPIC's culturally responsive model. A CORE group is led by a teacher and a learning coach. This duo works together to decide how they implement their CORE. CORE's balance of academic and personal development support allows for the tracking of both academic and social-emotional competencies and ensures that all adult staff form close personal bonds with students.

Artifact: [College Inquiry Project](#), Appendix 6

PRINCIPLE: STUDENT EMPOWERMENT AND INVESTMENT ARE ESSENTIAL TO BUILDING AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

PRACTICE: RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

In Restorative Practice, the community at large determines school norms and responds to incidents in ways that prioritize learning and healing above discipline and enforcement. Students who violate school norms and the community members who are harmed by their actions are brought together in a process of ownership and repair when student safety is disrupted. We believe that this approach fosters investment in community values and empowers students to actively hold each other accountable for upholding them. In our schools, we employ the use of circles, family conferences, and victim-offender mediation as critical elements of our restorative practice model. Leveraging student ownership and investment in their community is a more effective method of accountability

than is a zero-tolerance discipline code. Circles serve as vehicles for creating safe and equitable dialogue among community members, inclusive of staff and students. Staff use them in the context of instruction to promote student voice and connections to the content and their peers. Students use them in Morning Meeting (a practice further explained below) as a platform for students to recognize peers, express concerns, etc. Circles are also used for creating equitable dialogue between students and staff about how they support all students to engage in learning successfully.

Artifact: [Circle Protocol](#), Appendix 7

PRINCIPLE: LEARNING EXPERIENCES MUST PROVIDE A WINDOW AND A MIRROR FOR STUDENTS' IDENTITIES

PRACTICE: MORNING MEETING AND LIBATIONS

EPIC High Schools engage in a Morning Meeting ritual every day that lets students come together as a community, center themselves, celebrate their identities, share hopes and fears, and lead libations. Libations offer an opportunity for staff and students to acknowledge those who came before them and made possible the opportunities they have. Elements of the Morning Meeting ritual are designed and led by students, and students guide the agenda. Morning Meetings are essential as opportunities for students to engage in positive social interaction, recognize their own and each other's achievements, and engage in a unifying positive affirmation of collective goals. Finally, Morning Meetings foster students' positive associations with school, their peers, and staff, while also keeping them focused on long-term goals of college preparedness, career success, and community engagement.

Artifact: [Morning Meeting Rubric](#), Appendix 8



Human-Centered Design

Human-centeredness considers the emotional, cognitive, perceptual, and physical needs of people as foundational to the design of experiences and objects that meet their needs. All design processes are guided by a prevailing sensibility about the end goal that determines what choices are and aren't made. Human-centered design contends that, in the most effective and authentic design processes, this sensibility is entirely focused on the people who will be using the design product, the context in which they will be using it, and the purposes it needs to serve for them. It is through this lens that human-centered designers make choices.

THE LIMITS OF STATIC DESIGN

Because people's needs aren't static, the products and processes of human-centered design aren't static. They must be as flexible and evolving as their users, and as the circumstances surrounding their use. Static design often occurs when something other than people - for example, an ideology or an established tradition or ethos of use (i.e. "We do it this way because we have always done it this way, or because others did it this way before us") - furnishes the prevailing sensibility of design. Invariably in this case, people who encounter the object or experience that is the product of design immediately come up against problems of insufficiency, inflexibility, or ill-fit between the design and its user(s), and/or the design and a context of its use. By definition, human-centered endeavors are informed by the insights, ingenuity, and impulse of individuals who are living an experience or set of experiences that are dynamic and fluid... and, often, social. A human-centered approach treats the individual and his relationships to self and others as more instructive for design than is any meaning or utility

presumed inherent in a tool or activity.

EDUCATION AS A DESIGN PROBLEM

In this light, we might consider underperforming schools as failures of human-centered design. How might education be more human-centered?

Schools at the vanguard of reform across the country already aspire to a kind of radical - that is, more genuine and encompassing than ever before - "student-centeredness." This has a variety of common interpretations, none of which is necessarily more true than others, and which include the following.

- Student interests and needs are focal to the learning process.
- Power is shifted such that students as well as teachers are decision-makers in how learning happens.
- Teachers are driven to persist at finding interventions and strategies that benefit individual students.

According to the Jobs for the Future Students at the Center Project, a research-based initiative examining theories and practices associated with students achieving deeper learning outcomes, there are four core tenets to student-centeredness. Learning is:

- personalized;
- competency-based;
- ubiquitous (taking place anytime and anywhere); and,
- owned by the learner as an expression of critical agency.

A school or learning environment that possesses these characteristics is necessarily one where relationships are valued. For example, in a competency-based learning environment, communication and feedback

are vital. Relationships must withstand periods of frustration and struggle. In addition, they must be predicated on trust, confidence, and a sincere belief in one's capacity to excel. Educators like Richard Felder describe student-centered learning as instances that involve learning as an active, cooperative, and challenge-based undertaking. These criteria alongside JFF's tenets depict student-centered learning as that which is engaging, responsive, and organized to support high levels of achievement.

SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS

The value of an education at a school that does not see itself as a learning organization - i.e. an organization that is always looking at what it does and making changes - will be constantly diminishing, for several reasons:

- A school's "product" is learning itself, and an organization must know its product.
- Schools prepare students to succeed in the world. Because the world is always changing, so must students' preparation be.
- Human-centered design tells us that meeting the needs of users, in this case students, requires being attentive to how those needs shift and expand, and being ready to shift solutions accordingly.

Truly excellent schools will be the first to tell you that they are learning organizations. Many of them opened recently, and like all new start-up organizations believe that learning is constant; that all aspects of a school are evolutionary and subject to improvement, and that change for the sake of advancement is desirable. Consider networks like Summit Public Schools that are recognized for their agility and innovation. These schools promote a student-centered learning environment that is small, personalized, empowering, and rigorous. In re-telling their story, staff at Summit Schools remark that innovation is a process rather than a model. In their words, "Rather than viewing [a]

"Design Thinking is the confidence that everyone can be part of creating a more desirable future, and a process to take action when faced with a difficult challenge. That kind of optimism is well needed in education. Classrooms and schools across the world are facing design challenges every single day, from teacher feedback systems to daily schedules. Wherever they fall on the spectrum of scale—the challenges educators are confronted with are real, complex, and varied. And as such, they require new perspectives, new tools, and new approaches."

—Design Thinking for Educators,
IDEO

school model as static, [Summit Schools'] aspiration is to create a culture and process that consistently changes for the better. The idea that we need to iterate and constantly evolve is one of our most important themes. A lot of people want to know our model and how to implement the model. We think having one model is actually a huge mistake...it's a process, and

you have to invest the time [to improve].”²⁰ Here one sees the importance of maintaining a positive disposition towards learning and discovery.

It is critical in learning organizations for there to be collective ownership of and commitment to this ethos. Committing an entire team at different levels of a complex system to the idea of change-as-constant is not easy, and calls for a common lens. Ideally that lens is human-centeredness. In order to attempt innovation and feel comfortable in a state of flux, one must vividly see possibility and believe deeply in the rationale for seeking and initiating change. This mindset and practice is predicated on one’s relationship with self as well as others. And at its core is a shared desire to correctly interpret what will most benefit students and do right by them as a team.

STAFF MEMBERS AS USERS

Within an authentic learning organization, we know that innovation and initiative are generally welcome. However, other factors like social emotional intelligence and cultural competence also matter. And, where schools are concerned, this applies as much in adult culture as in student culture. If an employee is expected to contribute meaningfully to her organization’s development, the organization must validate her, appreciate and make room for the talent it has asked her to bring, and respect the legitimacy of her perspective. In addition, in consideration of motivation and exchange theory, one is more likely to nurture when nurturing is provided in return.

Consequently, being human-centered at EPIC schools means paying attention to all of the stakeholders who make up the school community. Though student achievement is focal, it does not diminish the attention paid to staff. Instead, both students and adults alike are recognized as deserving of emotional, cognitive, and physical backing and opportunities for

growth, creation, and leadership. Among EPIC High Schools the quality of adult learning is measured alongside that of students and, in this context, every member has the right to signal and resolve issues as they emerge, consistent with his or her particular needs. In fact, respect for the individual is essential to the EPIC school model.

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN & THE ORIGIN OF EPIC SCHOOLS

EPIC High Schools have relied on human-centered design - and, more broadly, design-thinking (in which not only is the end user deeply considered but the problem of design is more comprehensively defined in terms of opportunities and constraints) - since before their inception. Over the course of a year-long design fellowship, school design leaders (who would later become principals) established a culture of continuous innovation that would allow the schools to evolve and improve once they opened. During the design year, members of the design team engaged students, families, and community members in an iterative process to simultaneously gather community input and hone various aspects of the model. Each community engagement experience included opportunities for key constituents to participate in discovery, visioning, and design related to key model elements. In addition, the team launched a student fellowship to ensure student input on every aspect of the school design. On a weekly basis, members of the ESI design team met with students to understand the perspectives of young people around issues of learning, school culture, etc., and to gain input on models of school systems and practices. As a result, the school model incorporates student and community feedback regarding offerings like advisory and Rites of Passage programs in addition to the identification of prospective community partners.

The school design team also partnered with a design anthropology firm, Danish Kurani Studio, to conduct a

²⁰ “Blended Learning in Practice: Case Studies from Leading Schools,” published 2012.

series of community engagement workshops to fully integrate community input systemically into the ultimate school model. As described by the design studio:

Successful projects leverage the process of outreach into sustained interest in project outcomes. Public process participants, in the most ideal scenario, become the champions of the project through the long road of implementation and the ever more daunting challenge of ongoing governance. In this way, engagement becomes a critical path toward both project realization and design excellence.

The input gathered through these experiences informed the elements of the school model where community input was most vital. Finally, these experiences also signaled to students and families a dynamic of collaboration that remains essential to the fabric of EPIC's schools.

Principles and Practices: Human-Centered Design at EPIC

PRINCIPLE: USER-CENTERED CO-CREATION

PRACTICE: COLLABORATION AND CURRICULUM TUNING

At EPIC, collaboration time is built into the daily schedule so that staff may co-construct performance tasks utilizing student input. During these sessions, staff use a tuning protocol to refine curriculum. Tuning is a process by which staff share and comment on each other's performance tasks so that the wisdom and experience of the group can be directed toward the refinement of each instructor's own materials and pedagogy. The tuning process also seeks to incorporate student input given that many of the categories (i.e. cultural relevance) benefit from the student per-

spective and students will have insight into the experience of completing a performance task. Tuning also models the importance of peer critique that students engage in as part of the learning process.

Artifact: [Tuning Protocol](#), Appendix 9

PRINCIPLE: FAILING FORWARD

PRACTICE: IMPROVEMENT CYCLES

Staff engage in improvement cycles to develop and test interventions that are changes, in some cases small tweaks, contributing to the improvement of an instructional practice or school-wide system or procedure. Staff define the problem, determine the intervention and data to be collected, perform the practice, review outcomes, and decide the next basis for modification. Even when attempted changes prove unsuccessful, the learning is documented and shared to reinforce a culture of continuous improvement and growth. The process itself is celebrated as an outcome in a way that mirrors the learning support and expectations for students. One example of data used to inform an improvement cycle is the monthly student survey.

Artifact: [Monthly Student Survey](#), Appendix 10



Integrating Social and Emotional Learning

There are numerous names and frameworks seeking to articulate a set of skills that have been recognized as critical to student postsecondary success but mostly absent in the classroom. These skills have been referred to as:

- “Noncognitive skills” or “soft skills”
- “21st century skills”
- “Social and emotional learning”
- “Metacognitive learning skills”
- “Academic and personal behaviors”

Despite disagreement around the terminology and metrics for knowing and apprehending them, there is relative consensus that a person engages complex intellectual, emotional, and social faculties in confronting the world and constructing a life. More so, educators are starting to agree that students trained in academic knowledge and problem-solving, but not supported in developing these broader faculties with which to act on what they know and can do, will struggle with relationships, goal-setting, decision-making, navigation through ambiguity, and persistence in multi-step undertakings.

THE NEED

A significant recent trend in education has been a focus on preparing students for college. The primary strategies most commonly used across the country have included increasing students’ content and skills through the adoption of the rigorous Common Core Standards, increasing high stakes testing and account-

ability and more widespread offering of Advanced Placement courses. While high school graduation and college matriculation rates have risen over the past decade, there is a stark deficit in college completion rates, with only 56 percent of students who begin college completing in six years²¹ and an alarming 13 percent of low-income students who enroll in community college earning a degree within six years²².

This gap suggests that an approach to college and career readiness that is purely academic—i.e. focusing solely on traditional academic subjects, content and skills—does not adequately prepare students to persist in the unscaffolded experiences of college, career, and life. Scholars including Jim Collins in the private sector and Angela Duckworth in education have come to differing articulations of the same idea, which is that persistence through challenges, including those presented by higher education, by work, and by personal relationships, requires a blend of personal and professional mindsets and behaviors that have been mostly absent in classrooms. By focusing primarily on academic knowledge, we have largely ignored the varied characteristics that drive young people to engage in learning and hard work, first in school and later in life.²³

Broadening our idea of college and career readiness to include integrated academic, social, and emotional skills that enable students to achieve personal meaning and success as productive, proactive, well-rounded, and fulfilled free agents involves asking a larger question: what do students need to experience, feel, think, and be able to do in order to both achieve a meaningful life and solve the increasingly complex challenges in an interconnected world?

²¹ National Student Clearinghouse, 2013

²² National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2013

²³ “A Framework For Developing Young Adult Success in the 21st Century: Defining Young Adult Success,” University of Chicago Consortium, 2014.

EXISTING FRAMEWORKS

PARTNERSHIP FOR 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

This partnership framework acknowledges that core academic subject knowledge must work in conjunction with a wider set of essential skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration. In addition to core subjects and 21st century interdisciplinary themes, the framework also highlights learning and innovation skills (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and communication and collaboration) as well as information, media, and technology skills (information literacy, media literacy, and ICT literacy) and life and career skills (flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility).

CASEL

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning has identified five interrelated sets of competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

MHA Labs

MHA has classified 21st century skills into six skill building blocks: personal mindset, planning for success, social awareness, verbal communication, collaboration, and problem solving. These six skill domains are further broken down into 35 specific skills that can be concretely understood, practiced, assessed, and cultivated more deeply.

David Conley

Conley's model for college and career readiness includes four domains: key cognitive strategies (problem formation, research, interpretation, communication, and precision and accuracy), key content knowledge

(structure of knowledge, attitudes towards learning content, and technical knowledge and skills), key learning strategies and techniques (ownership of learning and learning techniques), and key transition knowledge and skills (contextual, procedural, financial, and cultural).

University of Chicago Consortium

The University of Chicago Consortium aims to build upon the above established frameworks by broadening the definition of success in young adulthood to reflect the ability to shape one's future and live a meaningful life. In "A Framework for Developing Young Adult Success in the 21st Century", the consortium identifies the building blocks for success - termed "integrated identity" - as the mindsets (self-efficacy, openness, relevance, optimism, growth mindset, and belonging), awareness (self, social/interpersonal, cultural and temporal) and knowledge (content, technical, cultural, institutional and professional) that allow students to make meaning of and harness knowledge and skills in order to achieve their goals. A set of "intermediary processes" - goal setting, strategy use, and self-regulation - develop the behaviors that poise young people for success within institutional, societal, and economic contexts.

EQUITY FOCUS

Given what we now know about long-term success and its dependence on student agency - on how one understands herself and can engage with others and the world - we must reexamine the way that we organize learning for low-income students of color. There is a deeply embedded issue of equity with respect to the experiences that foster student agency and the ability to pursue one's passions. In several districts, especially those with considerable populations of both highly resourced and under-resourced students, we see two narratives, one that prescribes narrowly defined academic asset-building and job-readiness train-

ing for low-income youth of color and another that preserves enrichment time, and school-sanctioned opportunities to develop talents, explore interests, and cultivate the self, for economically advantaged children.²⁴ This is compounded in high schools where many low-income students of color arrive below grade level and teachers with good intentions, but unexamined biases about success after high school, aggressively structure recuperative learning around what they believe to be the “essentials,” or strictly academic skills, that are the determinants of grade level but alone don’t begin to complete a picture of post-secondary readiness.

WHY INTEGRATION?

The integration of social and emotional learning into the classroom is critical for numerous reasons, three of which stand out for the purposes of an ambitious, student-centered model like EPIC’s.

1. It elevates the aims of social and emotional learning to the same importance and preeminence enjoyed by strictly academic learning. Schools have long resisted placing them on equal footing in part because social and emotional skills are even more nebulous and difficult to measure than are academic ones, and so keeping them apart allows schools to avoid the hard work of wrangling the particulars of social and emotional development on the pretense of “focusing on what matters.”
2. It creates a common picture of the sum total of education’s purpose for high- and low-income populations alike, and does not reserve certain activities and modes of learning as “enrichment” to which some and not other students are entitled, or for which some and not other schools or districts have time.
3. It greatly reduces the practice of leading students, deliberately or not, to believe that skills them-

selves are compartmental or somehow deployable in isolation, and eliminates the stigma that “soft skills” are somehow less rigorous or more easily attained, an idea that gets perpetuated when such skills are relegated to study hall, homeroom, or an advisory or elective that meets less frequently than do academic classes and whose assessments are weighted less.

At EPIC, our primary goal is to graduate students who are capable of making choices that enable them to have the life and career they want. In order to do this, we have broadened our definition of student success and overhauled the traditional learning environment in favor of a competency-based, project-based approach grounded in a profile of integrated skills that we believe better equips students for the experiences they will face beyond high school.

Principles and Practices: Integrated Learning at EPIC

PRINCIPLE: *WE CAN ASSESS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)*

PRACTICE: *SEL SKILL ASSESSMENT*

At EPIC, our competency framework includes not only academic but social and emotional learning (SEL) skills that have been mapped to the CASEL and Partnerships for 21st Century Success frameworks. SEL assessment takes various forms. As a diagnostic, students self-assess their SEL skill attainment and conference with their advisors to norm on their assessment. Throughout the year, SEL skills are explic-

²⁴ Andrew Simmons, “The Danger of Telling Poor Kids That College is the Key to Social Mobility”, The Atlantic, Jan 2014.

itly built into projects across disciplines and assessed through the use of tailored rubrics. Finally, students have the opportunity to assess their development on SEL attainments through a validated measurement system for life and work preparedness.

Artifact: Student Self Assessment Tool - Develop Myself, Appendix 11

PRINCIPLE: SEL SKILLS ARE CONTEXTUAL AND BEST DEMONSTRATED WHEN EMBEDDED INTO LEARNING AND INTEGRATED ACROSS DOMAINS

PRACTICE: INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECTS EMBED SEL ATTAINMENTS

At EPIC, most learning is performance-based. Units of study are planned as challenges, which are complex performance assessments that emphasize applied demonstrations of learning. These challenges are broken up into smaller performance tasks that engage discrete skills. Each performance task identifies a target set of attainments that students are expected to master. Teachers and learning coaches decide on the attainments they will cover across the year and ensure that there are opportunities for reinforcement across content areas. Staff aim to embed at least one SEL learning attainment in each challenge. Many projects are interdisciplinary and facilitated across multiple classroom settings. There is an end-of-year capstone project that is largely metacognitive in nature, with a heavy emphasis on reflection.

Artifact: Sample Challenge - The Sankofa Project, Appendix 12

PRINCIPLE: SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES MUST REFLECT A NEW INTEGRATED SKILLS FOCUS

PRACTICE: BALANCED STAFFING

A shift to a competency-based academic program that incorporates SEL skills and behaviors into teaching and learning requires a more flexible staffing structure, one that leverages diverse expertise and creatively utilizes human capital to personalize support and guidance for students. Through the more openly defined position of learning coach, EPIC has been able to draw different kinds of youth development talent to its schools, and supports these unique professionals as it does teachers with opportunities for growth, collaboration, and leadership. Learning coaches take the lead on social and emotional and college and career supports for students, creating CORE advisory and Rites of Passage curriculum and providing cross-training opportunities for their teacher co-facilitators. Learning coaches also support teachers and students in the classroom, providing one-on-one and group support as students work their way through complex projects.

Artifact: Learning Coach Job Description, Appendix 13

Appendix 1: The 19 EPIC Competencies & 66 Attainments

EPIC COMPETENCY DESCRIPTIONS

EPIC Competency-Based Academic Program: Teaching and learning is wholly organized around helping students to master specific competencies both Academic and Social/Emotional Skills—that collectively define what a student must know and be able to do in order to be considered college and career ready. The EPIC competency framework is aligned to both the New York State Learning Standards, inclusive of the Common Core State Standards, and the NYCDOE College and Career Readiness Benchmarks in order to help students master the skills and knowledge necessary to pass PARCC-aligned Regents exams, graduate from high school, and complete two years of college and/or a career internship of their choice.

Teaching and learning is organized into cycles, with four types of courses offered: Subject Area Classes (interdisciplinary, problem-based learning focused on a network-wide theme); Selectives (units of study focused on competency strands and/or clusters); Targeted Support (dedicated time for mastering discrete skills); and CORE (social-emotional and leadership development).



READ ANALYTICALLY

I can read, decode and interpret text and other media. I can use various strategies to access information from charts, graphs, and diagrams. I can read for meaning and demonstrate understanding through personal response. I can respond to text and media by showing understanding, making connections, and making judgments. I can understand and make meaning from news sources, academic writing, literature and other forms of media to advance my own knowledge, understanding, and enjoyment.



COMMUNICATE & BE CREATIVE

I can interact with others through verbal, visual and artistic expression. I can use clear, concise, organized language to express thoughts and ideas in front of a group. I can listen effectively and engage others in conversations, in working together and in presenting information and ideas. I can actively respond to participants in a conversation. I can express my thoughts, ideas and emotions through visual arts, music, performance, multimedia or other means of artistic representation. I can use multiple forms of media to convey learning.



WRITE EFFECTIVELY

I can express myself in my own unique voice. I can write to communicate, organize, and record information. I can develop and present a logical sequence of ideas using appropriate structure and conventions. I can demonstrate proper grammar use and mechanics. I can synthesize and properly integrate outside resources into my writing. I can edit language and style both independently and with assistance from peers and adults. I can take different positions for different tasks. I can write to express my feelings and views or to persuade an audience. I can appropriately credit sources of information.



THINK CRITICALLY AND DESIGN SOLUTIONS

I can distinguish between facts and opinions. I can analyze, synthesize and evaluate information to guide my actions and beliefs. I can formulate and raise questions. I can assess and draw inferences from sources. I can develop responses beyond what is rote. I can navigate complex situations. I can design and build solutions to complex challenges.



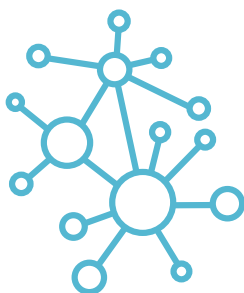
CONNECT TO ENVIRONMENT

I can understand my physical, social and cultural environment. I can interact with and adapt to my surroundings. I can operate in different cultural settings. I can explain the impact of personal and collective actions on communities, environment, and society. I can correctly apply concepts of cause and effect and correlation.



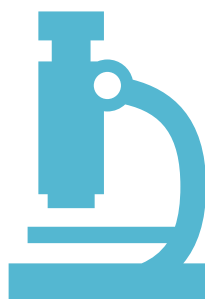
CONCEPTUALIZE GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

I can conceptualize how living things develop and how we design objects in relationship to their environment. I understand how complex systems, both living and built, function and the interdependencies within them. I can apply my understanding of living things and systems in a variety of situations.



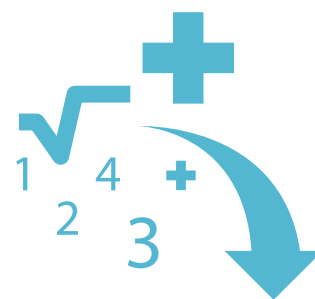
SYNTHESIZE SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

I can analyze how parts of a system interrelate and work together over time. I can break systems into their component parts. I can understand the organization and structure of a system at different levels. I can identify and assemble factors to explain and produce general processes.



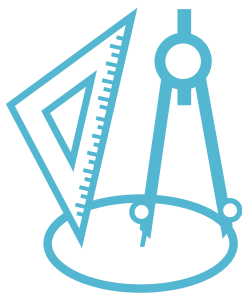
INVESTIGATE SCIENTIFICALLY

I can ask questions, do research, and make hypotheses. I can test my hypotheses, analyze results, and draw conclusions, and I can use this information to deepen my understanding of the world around me. I can apply the scientific method beyond the science classroom to investigate real world problems.



APPLY NUMERACY

I can think and express ideas in quantitative terms. I know how numbers connect and relate. I can estimate and figure out the correct solution when I see a problem. I can create and evaluate mathematical expressions and equations for a given situation. I am numerically literate and can use my skills in a variety of contexts to make wise decisions.



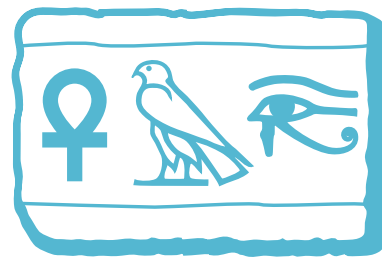
EVALUATE SPACES, SHAPES & CONDITIONS

I can effectively use measurement and evaluation in a wide variety of situations and contexts. I use measurements in order to design, build and modify. I understand the relationship between angles and measurements. I can identify shapes and provide proof of their classification. I can track changes in conditions and the long and short term effects of these changes.



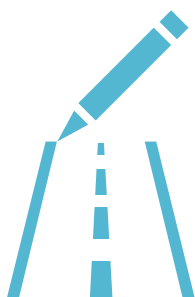
PRACTICE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

I can contribute to my community both locally and globally. I can learn from and take the perspective of those who are different than me. I can identify social and ethical norms in a variety of situations. I am aware of the events, people and systems that shape politics and world affairs and I can take action and access power based on that knowledge. I know my own history and culture and value learning the culture and language of others.



APPLY HISTORY IN VARIETY OF WAYS

I make sense of my life and take action as a result of understanding the world around me, including the people, places and events that have made the world the way it is. I can use the past in understanding current events, literature, art, people and places. I can identify trends and patterns over time. I can evaluate primary sources.



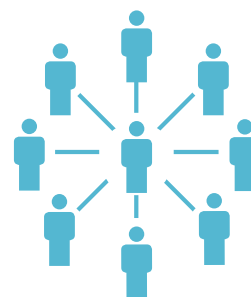
DESIGN MY FUTURE

I can author my own story around college, career and life. I have a design mindset and I can plan and implement things myself with little instruction, support or guidance. I can look for opportunities to empower myself and pivot as necessary in dynamic contexts. I can execute successfully when presented with external barriers to my success.



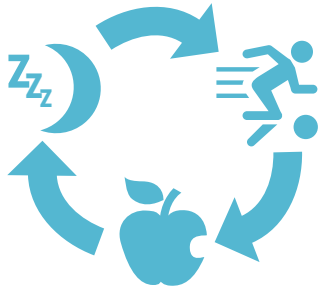
DEVELOP MYSELF

I can assess my feelings, interests, values and strengths. I have a well-grounded sense of self confidence and can advocate for myself to get my needs met, but can also admit when I'm wrong. I can handle stress, control my impulses and persevere in overcoming obstacles. I can adapt to new contexts and accept critical feedback as an opportunity for growth.



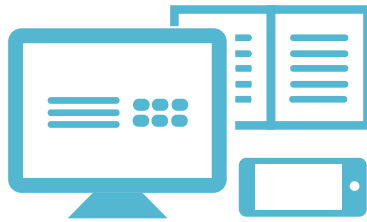
MANAGE MY RELATIONSHIPS

I have the agency and skills necessary to successfully create and maintain positive relationships with a broad range of diverse people. I can prevent, manage and resolve interpersonal conflict and make decisions that build social capital and contribute positively to my community.



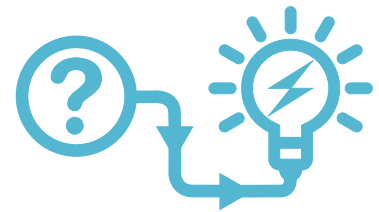
STAY HEALTHY

I can take care of myself physically, emotionally, and mentally. I can identify harmful situations and know how to respond to negative experiences. I am able to see how my actions affect the wellbeing of others and my environment. I am my body's keeper. I understand how my body works and use that knowledge to make positive choices.



USE TECHNOLOGY & MEDIA PURPOSEFULLY

I can engage with media and technology for a variety of reasons. I use computers, tablets, phones and related technology to find, select, organize, and share ideas and information. I can use technology to be more efficient in my work. I can use various forms of media to express thoughts and ideas. I am able to determine bias in media and its effects on consumers. I know that my actions on social media can affect other aspects of my life and will navigate in appropriate and safe ways.



DIRECT MY LEARNING

I can set goals and manage my trajectory towards those goals despite challenges I may face. I can be self-directed but know how to ask for help when needed. I believe that my abilities will grow with my effort and I value learning as a life-long journey.



ANALYZE DATA AND INFORMATION

I can conduct observations, interpret information, identify patterns, differences, relationships and reach conclusions. I can sort, analyze, and represent information in a variety of forms to others. I can make predictions based on what information tells me. I use data and information to substantiate claims. I can survey and interview.

THE ATTAINMENTS

- I can read and interpret technical text and literature.
- I can maneuver technology.
- I can articulate complex thoughts and ideas in writing.
- I can understand domain and context specific words and use them appropriately.
- I can verbally articulate a point of view.
- I can make connections to current events.
- I can access knowledge around a wide variety of careers.
- I can use appropriate tools strategically.
- I can use math to handle finances effectively.
- I can problem solve.
- I can facilitate a meeting or workshop.
- I can use a variety of presentation skills.
- I can interact with new forms of media.
- I can safely and appropriately manage social media.
- I can reason logically.
- I can reason mathematically.
- I can think symbolically.
- I can break an idea into its parts.
- I can apply statistics.
- I can formulate a sound argument based on evidence.
- I can think creatively.
- I can represent mathematical expressions.
- I can take real world problem and express it in mathematical form.
- I can use reasoning to justify a solution or argument.
- I can create models for a situation.
- I can summarize, represent and interpret data.
- I can reason abstractly.
- I can show precision in my work.
- I can estimate and/or hypothesize.
- I can look for and make use of structure or patterns from source materials.
- I can look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.
- I can plan and carry out investigations.
- I can determine a central idea from a source.
- I can construct explanations and design solutions for a situation.
- I can apply the scientific method.
- I can analyze how things change as they grow
- I can analyze how events, ideas, and individuals interact and develop.
- I can interpret meaning based on context.
- I can ask questions and define problems.
- I can obtain, evaluate, and communicate information.
- I can recognize how point of view influences the presentation of ideas and information.
- I can evaluate the influence of Engineering, Technology, and Science on Society and the Natural World
- I can cite evidence and information to build, express, and/or substantiate an argument or interpretation.
- I can write effectively for a particular audience, purpose or task.
- I can conduct research.
- I can analyze how a subject or scene is represented across different mediums.
- I can develop or strengthen my writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach
- I can express thoughts, opinions, or feelings in writing.
- I can demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- I can believe in myself and engage with my life with confidence, vision and purpose
- I can control my responses and behaviors in a range of situations, so that I can pursue goals and live up to the realistic standards that have been set for me.
- I can successfully resolve disagreements and arguments, remaining respectful and considerate of others
- I can assume responsibility for my thoughts and actions and understand the power of my decisions
- I can seek and connect to the resources and people that I need to meet my needs and goals
- I can work collaboratively with others.
- I can be aware and appreciate the motives, opinions, and feelings of others.
- I can value diversity, remain open-minded and consider other people's perspectives
- I can make decisions based on what I think is right and follow through on commitments to others.
- I can take care of myself in healthy ways.
- I can relate, socialize and form relationships with people in productive, healthy and meaningful ways
- I can set, monitor, adjust and achieve realistic goals that support my growth and development
- I can make it through tough situations and recover from challenges and setbacks
- I can develop my leadership abilities by using my talents and resources to help others.
- I can plan & organize myself and my time in ways that support and improve my work.
- I can show strength and take action even in the face of fear
- I can reflect on my thoughts, actions & experiences & make decisions and meaning that are based on my observations & insights

Appendix 2: Grading Principles and Practices

OUR GRADING PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES:

Our competency-based grading system uses the following principles to guide how we assess student achievement and communicate progress.

PRINCIPLE: Grades should clearly communicate what students know and are able to do in each class.

PRACTICE: We report on student mastery and progress toward specific skills, knowledge and abilities called “attainments” Attainments are academic and social emotional capabilities. Attainments, especially those that are academic, involve the achievement of relevant standards.

PRINCIPLE: Students should have multiple opportunities to show what they know and can do.

PRACTICE: We ask students to build a body of work to demonstrate their mastery of attainments. Students encounter attainments multiple times throughout their high school career and are evaluated through projects that align to attainments.

PRINCIPLE: Schools should support students in acquiring all of the essential knowledge and skills in a course, versus just a portion of it.

PRACTICE: To earn a full academic course credit, 80% of all course attainments must be mastered. To be graduated, a student must satisfactorily meet 100% of attainments.

PRINCIPLE: Students deserve more time and support to learn the material they have not mastered.

PRACTICE: Students can receive additional time to meet attainments and corresponding standards via targeted support, projects developed with advisors (pending teach-

er approval), and other assignments or demonstrations, e.g. symposia participation.

PRINCIPLE: All students should have the opportunity to excel and advance at their own pace.

PRACTICE: Accelerated learning, deepened learning, and mastery of new or advanced content are options for all students in all courses.

PRINCIPLE: Regular communication with families about student progress supports deeper learning.

PRACTICE: We formally report progress 8 times a year through report cards, progress reports, and conferences.

PRINCIPLE: Students need time to practice and learn from mistakes without penalty.

PRACTICE: We determine a student’s GPA based on the achievement of mastery. Semester scores/grades reflect a student’s current level of achievement. Non-passing performance is not averaged and instead gets recognized as work in progress. A student’s status toward completion of 80% of course attainments is tracked and reported.

Scale

Our grading scale is comparable to the 4.0 scale which is used in many schools and colleges:

- 1 = Does Not Meet the Standards
- 2 = Approaches the Standards
- 3 = Meets the Standards
- 4 = Exceeds the Standards

For each major assessment, teachers will use common rubrics that make clear the criteria that a student will have to meet in order to receive a 1, 2, 3 or 4. The chart on the next page describes the grading scale in more detail.

		STANDARDS*	ATTAINMENTS
1	Does Not Meet the Standard	A student's body of work has not met any of the standards assessed. <i>This is not a passing grade and does not earn course credit.</i>	A student's work does not demonstrate substantive progress towards meeting the attainment or criteria of a given assessment by an established deadline. This may mean that a student has not met the majority of performance indicators or criteria for that assessment, or student has not made an attempt to meet criteria. <i>This is not a passing grade.</i>
2	Approaching the Standard	A student's body of work has met some of the standards assessed. <i>This grade does not earn course credit.</i>	A student's work demonstrates a substantive attempt to meet the attainments of a given assessment (task/challenge), but needs more time to achieve proficiency and meet all the criteria for the assessment. <i>This is not a passing grade.</i>
2+	Very Close to Meeting the Standard		A student's work is very close to meeting the standard. <i>This is not a passing grade</i> , but it lets the student know s/he does not have far to go before meeting the attainments being assessed.
3	Meets the Standard	The student has met a majority of standards. This does <i>not</i> mean that a student has to pass each and every standard assessment, but his/her body of work demonstrates proficiency with each of the assessed standards. <i>At the end of a semester, this grade earns course credit.</i>	A student's work fundamentally and competently meets the attainments being assessed. <i>All</i> of the criteria for "Meets the Standard" are demonstrated in the work. <i>This is a passing grade.</i>
3.25 to 3.75	Partially Exceeding the Standard		
4	Exceeds the Standard	A student's work has consistently met all standards.	The student's work goes substantially above and beyond the course attainments in quality and rigor. Sometimes, a student will opt to complete a particular task(s) or challenge, not required of all, in order to be eligible for an Exceeds. <i>All</i> of the criteria for Exceeds the Standard (e.g., in the rubric) are demonstrated in the work. <i>This is the highest grade possible.</i>

*Rubrics may be elaborated by incorporating select standards as part of a Challenge's performance criteria.

Appendix 3: Sample Progress Report

Progress Report

Student: [REDACTED]
Report Date: 5/7/2015 12:54:49 PM

CLASS/TEACHER	ASSIGNMENT_NAME	DUE ON	SCORE	COMPETENCY
CORE 3 Edelyne Lafontant	Road to Success: Exploration	01/29/15	4.0	I can plan and organize my self, time and work in ways that support and improve whatever I am focused on.
			4.0	I can access knowledge around a wide variety of careers
			3.50	I can control my responses and behaviors in a range of situations, so that I can pursue goals and live up to the realistic standards that have been set for me
			3.50	I can use math to handle finances effectively.
CORE 3 Edelyne Lafontant	Road to Success: Presentation	03/01/15	4.0	I can plan and organize my self, time and work in ways that support and improve whatever I am focused on.
			3.75	I can plan and carry out investigations.
			3.75	I can use a variety of presentation skills.
			3.75	I can access knowledge around a wide variety of careers
CORE 3 Edelyne Lafontant	T.S. Achieve & Think Through Math	05/06/15	4.0	I can control my responses and behaviors in a range of situations, so that I can pursue goals and live up to the realistic standards that have been set for me
			4.0	I can plan and organize my self, time and work in ways that support and improve whatever I am focused on.
			4.0	I can control my responses and behaviors in a range of situations, so that I can pursue goals and live up to the realistic standards that have been set for me
			4.0	I can plan and organize my self, time and work in ways that support and improve whatever I am focused on.
CORE 3 Edelyne Lafontant	Targeted Support 101 (Friday)	04/27/15	4.0	I can control my responses and behaviors in a range of situations, so that I can pursue goals and live up to the realistic standards that have been set for me
			4.0	I can plan and organize my self, time and work in ways that support and improve whatever I am focused on.
			4.0	I can set, monitor, adjust and achieve realistic goals that support my growth and development

Parent Signature _____

Date _____

Student Signature _____

Date _____

4.0 = Demonstrates knowledge beyond the targeted proficiency level.

2.0 = Demonstrates knowledge at the foundational level.

3.0 = Demonstrates knowledge at the targeted proficiency level.

1.0 = Demonstrates knowledge at the foundational level with help.

Appendix 4: Student Symposium

Challenge: You are a 9th grade student at a brand new high school that is changing the way the world thinks about school. Your goal is to design a demonstration of the best learning you have done so far this year. You will present to an audience of your peers among our 3 schools, stakeholders from the community, the Department of Education and experts in the field. You will deliver this presentation at our first ever Student Symposium on December 12th. The Student Symposium is a learning conference where you will participate in sessions with students across all 3 schools, network with other students and make your voice heard to decision makers. It will be held on a college campus and lunch will be provided.

Sessions will each be 45 minutes. Here is a description of the session styles. **Choose one:**

- **Feedback Session** (individual or group of up to 5 students) - In this type of session, you can receive feedback from experts and peers on your work in specific categories - for instance - publishable writing (experts could include journalists...) poetry (spoken word artists), short films (experts could include filmmakers). You should prepare to have copies of your work for all participants to view/read and specific questions about the kind of feedback you would like to improve your work. Be prepared to spend 3 to 5 minutes discussing your work and how you created it. Your work should already have been reviewed by teachers/peers.
- **Teach In** (individual or group of up to 5 students) - You present a final project in a similar way to how it happens at a conference - you should prepare an activity to do with the group in your room that will advance their learning on the subject. Presentations should be 5 to 7 minutes, with an activity for participants and an opportunity for feedback, questions and answers at the end.

- **Panel Discussion** (group of up to 5 students) - You sit on a panel to share and discuss your learning about different aspects of the same theme or content. Prepare a 3 to 5 minute presentation about your topic. The attendees are invited to ask questions and participate in a discussion related to the theme. Design a set of questions for discussion and prepare to be able to speak to each question.
- **Gallery Walk** (individual or group of up to 5 students) - You display a project in an open room. Attendees can participate in a gallery walk to learn about the range of projects and learning represented. You should be prepared to talk about your project for 2 to 3 minutes and answer questions that attendees walking around may have. You should also prepare to ask for feedback on a particular aspect of your project.

Each presenter or group of presenters must submit a proposal for review no later than December 1st. The proposal should be no more than 100 words in length, have a catchy title, include the names of the presenters, and the names of the teacher(s) that will support and review the proposal. Only a select number of presentations from each school will be accepted. Submit your proposal here: (<http://goo.gl/forms/4PQlufn6wl>).

In addition, there are opportunities for additional roles and responsibilities leading up to the Symposium. You may volunteer for other responsibilities here: (<http://goo.gl/forms/mZcEpQpO0U>).

Criteria for Success (Presenters): In addition to the quality of the learning experience you present (research, data analysis, scientific investigation, etc.), all presenters are expected to deliver a presentation that focuses on the following attainments (*see next page*):

ATTAINMENT	Emerging (E)	Developing (D)	Arriving (A)	Advancing (Ad)
I can facilitate a meeting or workshop.	I can create an agenda for a meeting and call the meeting to order.	I can transition from one topic to the next in a meeting, moving the conversation forward when necessary.	I can prioritize within the meeting to make more time for topics that require more attention while addressing all necessary topics that need attention.	I can keep the conversation focused by redirecting participants as needed. I can modify the agenda during the meeting to meet the needs of the group while still adhering to the goals and purposes of the meeting.
I can use a variety of presentation skills.	I can incorporate eye-contact, straight posture, and small gestures when speaking to an audience.	I can maintain eye-contact with multiple audience members, speak clearly and audibly so all in the room can hear me, and use movement intentionally when speaking to an audience.	I can use varied eye-contact, vocal techniques, and gestures to underscore the message I am communicating.	I can interweave vocal techniques such as volume, pace, and inflection with eye-contact, and gestures that harmoniously enhance the message I am communicating.
I can interact with new forms of media.	I can understand a new form of media that I read, listen to, or view.	I can identify the benefits of using different types of media.	I can make meaning from using a variety of new forms of media and apply it to my work.	I can create multi-media presentations that show my understanding of a topic in a variety of ways.

Criteria for Success (Participants): Each participant in attendance is expected to take notes, be an active participant in session discussions, provide feedback to the presenter(s) and reflect on their own learning from the sessions. Each participant can submit their reflections as part of their portfolio for CORE. Here are the attainments in focus:

ATTAINMENT	Indicators
Collaboration: I can work collaboratively with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I can listen closely and carefully to what others are saying ● I can receive support and help from others ● I can provide support and help to others ● I can be a team player ● I can give constructive feedback
Open Mindedness: I can value diversity, remain open-minded and consider other people's perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I can show an interest in and respect the beliefs and backgrounds of people who are different than I am. ● I can participate effectively in a group discussion

Appendix 5: Rites of Passage Handbook Excerpt

CORE ROP - 4 Year Rites of Passage Stages

Year	In School Activities	Extra-Curricular Activities	School-Wide Activities
Year 1 (9th grade) <i>Bonding & Community Building</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation • 32 sessions • Choose a Name • Mission Statement • Create Definitions • Gift: 1st T-Shirt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Wilderness Retreat • 1-on-1 meetings • NYC College Tour • Service Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter Solstice Celebration • Achievement Club • Unity Day • Year End Celebration
Year 2 (10th Grade) <i>Critical Thinking, Global Awareness, Knowledge of Self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 sessions • Review Mission • Review Definitions • College Prep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southern College Tour • Service Project • Warrior Weekend • 2 Wilderness Retreats • 1-on-1 meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter Solstice Celebration • Achievement Club • Unity Day • Year End Celebration • SAT Prep
Year 3 (11th Grade) <i>Oath of Dedication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 sessions • Member facilitated workshops • College Prep • Oath of Dedication • Gift: 2nd T-shirt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern College Tour • Service Project • Warrior Weekend • 2 Wilderness Retreats • 1-on-1 meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter Solstice Celebration • Achievement Club • Unity Day • Year End Celebration • SAT Prep • Scholarship Search • College Search
Year 4 (12th Grade) <i>Lifetime Commitment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 sessions • Member facilitated workshops • College Prep • Oath of Dedication Review • Gift: Hooded Sweatshirt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warrior Weekend • "Major" Service Project • Senior Trip • 2 Wilderness Retreats • 1-on-1 meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter Solstice Celebration • Achievement Club • Unity Day • Year End Celebration • Scholarship Search • College Applications

Appendix 6: CORE College Inquiry Project

MAPPING THE COLLEGE LANDSCAPE

Suggested timeframe: 11/10 to 12/19

STAGE I:

Attainments:

#54 I can seek and connect to the resources and people that I need to meet my needs and goals.

#39: I can ask questions and define problems.

#45: I can conduct research (change to investigate)

#12: I can use a variety of presentation skills.

Essential Question:

What is college like?

Real World Understandings:

(Suggested/CARA):

1. I have the potential to go to college and be successful
2. There are multiple pathways to and through higher education
3. I am an active participant in creating my own path to higher education

STAGE II:

Challenge description:

Students identify one question around “college life” that they would like to learn more about and design a research project to answer their own question. *Students do research using interviews, online documents, etc and create a multimedia presentation to share learnings with other students. Students will also visit a college campus as part of the information gathering project.*

GRASPS:

Goal:	Identify and build upon student's prior knowledge around college
Role:	Inquirer/Researcher
Audience:	Other young people, supportive high stakes adults
Situation:	Real life
Performance/Purpose:	Multimedia Presentation
Criteria for Success:	Young people engaged in thinking for themselves (and society) around higher education

Baseline Assessment: CARA College Knowledge Pre-survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CollegeInquiry>

Formative Assessment:

Exit Slip from Staff Interview (54)

Interview Questions script for outside interviews (39)

Draft of Presentation (45)

Summative Assessment:

Final presentation of research question (12)

Rubrics for assessing this project

STAGE III:

Sample Task:

Task 1:

Attainment: #39: I can ask questions and define problems.

Objective: Students assess their own level of college knowledge. Students identify questions that they have about college life.

Activities: Students take CARA survey, CARA Sort, graphic organizer (Students define what they know, what they don't know, what they'd like to know?)

Performance: survey, completion of graphic organizer

Supporting activities:

1. Graffiti Wall:

- a. Put the word "College" on board and have students write what comes to mind

2. Group Brainstorm:

- a. What images come to mind when we think of college? (Elements of college life)
- b. What are some of our fears around college? What are the elements of college life that excite us?
- c. How many people here plan to go to college?
- d. What are some of the questions that we have about college?

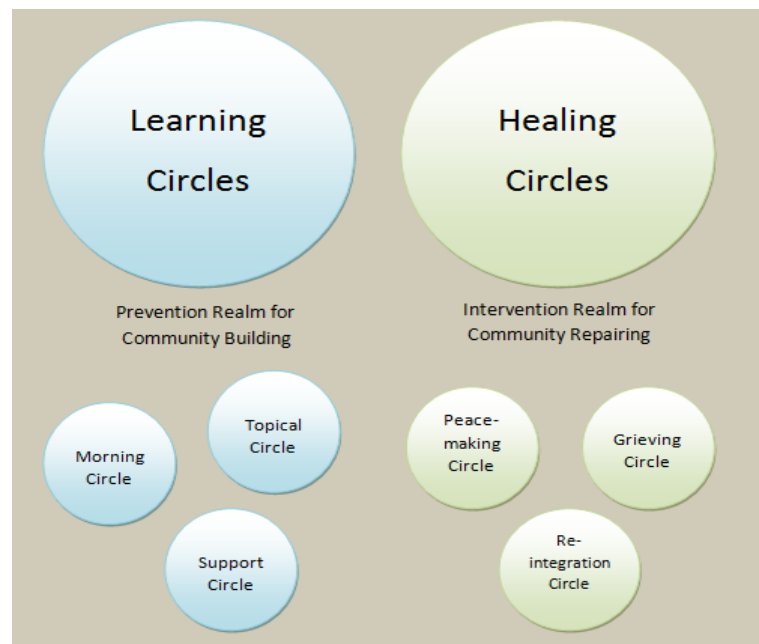
3. CORE advisor testimonial regarding their college experience

4. Videos/images:

- a. White College movies vs. Black College movies, Key and Peele: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L54F7iUFx9g>
- b. Asher Roth "I Love College": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYx7YG0RsFY>
- c. Dear White People Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMgWMzbM2Pk>

Appendix 7: Circle Protocol

1. **A Facilitator.** Welcome everyone to the space. Facilitator is a part of the community too. The facilitator can alternate weekly.
2. **Guidelines.** Guidelines are created during the initial circle (this is true for healing circles and learning circles). The guidelines of the Circle are the agreements that participants make to one another about how to behave in the Circle. They establish clear expectations and common ground to provide a space where people feel safe to speak in their authentic voice, connect to others in a good way and ensure a space that is respectful for all. Pass the talking piece and ask participants to name one agreement important to their participation in the Circle. (You can have them write a guideline on a post-it or small paper plate and place it in the center, or you can write them down on a large sheet of flip chart paper for all to see).
3. **An Opening.** This serves as mark that circle time has begun. Opening activities are designed to help participants center themselves, be reminded of core values, clear negative energies, encourage optimism, and honor the presence of everyone there. You may want to use an opening that is physically active – a game or activity, a reading related to the topic, a song, lighting candles for anyone they've lost to violence, etc.
4. **Talking Piece.** This is a critical element to the circle. Its purpose is to ensure that all members have voice and that voice is heard. Make it clear that the talking piece goes only in one direction and is not passed back and forth or across to participants. Also, let them know that it is okay to pass. Show that respecting to the talking piece is fundamental to the Circle, AND that they need to respect the time so that everyone has an opportunity to talk and share experiences. Talking piece can switch daily or weekly.
5. **Check-in/Check-out Rounds.** Checking in can be as simple as passing the talking piece around and asking everyone how they are doing. You may also add another element to this by adding to the initial question (i.e. tell me how you are doing today and something we don't know about you.) Checking-in should happen after the opening activity. Checking-out is done toward the end of the circle after the topic/learning portion is completed. Checking-out is similar to the checking-in except you are asking participants to sum up their experience of the circle.
6. **Reflection Rounds.** This is done through the topic/learning aspect of the circle. It is the bulk/middle of your circle activities. Pass the talking piece around and ask questions that will help participants to share their feelings, experiences, and needs.
7. **Closing Round.** This round is done after the check-out. Closings help participants to transition out of the Circle. An example closing activity might be the "Commitment Web Activity." In this activity, one person begins by holding a ball of yarn. They hold onto the string at the end and make a commitment to the circle regarding what they will do to promote healing. Then they toss the ball of yarn to someone else in the Circle. Each person makes their commitment and tosses the ball of yarn to someone else in the Circle that has not yet had a turn. Continue tossing the ball of yarn until everyone in the Circle has made their commitment. This exercise creates a web of connectedness and shared values. This activity is one of many possible Closings. Like Openings, you should choose activities that work for you and the participants in the Circle.



Appendix 8: Morning Meeting Rubric

CORE TEAM		DATE			
		1	2	3	4
LEADERSHIP SCORE for C.O.R.E. groups leading	Planning	Group planning is not evident. Critical elements of the meeting don't have students assigned and are not carried out. Plan is not sent to C.O.R.E. advisors, Principal, and AP at least 24 hours.	Group planning is somewhat evident. Critical elements of the meeting don't have students assigned or are not carried out. Plan is not sent to C.O.R.E. advisors, Principal, and AP at least 24 hours.	Group planning is mostly evident. Critical elements of the meeting have students assigned, and are carried out. Plan is not sent to C.O.R.E. advisors, Principal, and AP at least 24 hours.	Group planning is evident. Critical elements of the meeting have students assigned, and are carried out. Plan is sent to C.O.R.E. advisors, Principal, and AP at least 24 hours.
	Timeliness	Meeting starts after 9:35 AM and ends before 9:45 AM.	Meeting starts after 9:35 AM, and ends between 9:45 and 9:48 AM.	Meeting starts between 9:30 and 9:34 AM, and ends between 9:40 and 9:44 AM.	Meeting starts at 9:30 AM, and ends between 9:45 and 9:48 AM.
	Execution	One or two students lead the entire meeting. Group executes meeting with many noticeable hiccups. Transitions are not seamless, leaving lag time. Spoken portions are not audible to the entire community. The team is distracting to each other during the meeting. The meeting is very plain and boring.	Some students lead more than one role. Group executes meeting with many noticeable hiccups. Transitions are not seamless, leaving lag time. Spoken portions are somewhat audible to the entire community. The team is distracting to each other during the meeting. The meeting does not feel different/special.	Some students lead more than one role. Group executes meeting with a few noticeable hiccups. Transitions are seamless, leaving no lag time. Spoken portions are somewhat audible to the entire community. Most team members are silent when not leading. The leaders take ownership to make the meeting feel different.	Each role is lead by a different student. Group executes meeting with minimal hiccups. Transitions are seamless, leaving no lag time. Spoken portions are clearly audible to the entire community. All team members are silent when not leading. The leaders add a "trademark" element to the morning meeting.

ROLE	STUDENT(S)
Time Keeper	
Greeter	
Libations Leader(s)	
Kuumba (Creativity) Share	
Announcements	
Attendance	
WE ARE EPIC	

Appendix 9: Tuning Protocol

TUNING CRITERIA

	<u>MEETS STANDARD</u>	<u>EXCEEDS STANDARD*</u>
Opportunities to Problem Solve	Students solve and navigate open-ended problems and apply newly acquired knowledge and skills.	Students generate <u>and</u> solve relevant and rigorous problems throughout the unit.
Opportunities to Revise & Reflect on Work	Students have opportunities to tune their work, receive peer feedback and perform self-assessments.	Reviews involve a broad audience of reviewers beyond the classroom who provide actionable feedback and build connections.
Opportunities for Rigorous, Individualized Learning	Students' learning pathways are differentiated according to individual needs. .	Students co-construct their learning pathways with instructors.
Inclusion of Scaffolds	Scaffolds are purposely embedded providing students with minimal but adequate support.	Interventions are widely diverse and varied according to students' needs.
Integration of Technology	Students use technology (-ies) to produce works and demonstrate learning.	Students interact with technology (-ies) to facilitate access, synthesis, organization and production of information.
Mastery-Based Assessments of Learning	Formative assessments are used in alignment with target competencies and attainments.	Learning is evaluated through a combination of assessments (summative, performance-based and formative) that align to competencies and attainments.
Real World Transfer of Learning	Student learning occurs in a real world context and work is shared with others.	Student projects address unmet authentic needs of actual communities and audiences.
Project Based Teaching & Learning	Students collaborate, research, and think critically to implement a set of interdependent, interactive tasks.	Students produce works that involve art, engineering, or some form of conceptual design in their execution.
Literacy Skill Development	Students actively think, read, write and talk about content.	Students use multiple media to develop reading, writing, and communication skills.
Integrated Domains and Depth of Competencies	Students have opportunities to delve deep in few areas or skim topically across many.	Students develop deep skills and personal behaviors with deep dives into multiple domains.
Cultural Relevance	Students are able to make connections between the learning, their lives, interests, and communities through conversation and reflection.	Students are able to explicitly apply their connections between the learning and their lives, interests and communities.

Appendix 10: Student Survey

Student Feedback Survey

Please answer the following questions based on your experiences over the last month at your school (EPIC North, EPIC South or Nelson Mandela) The survey is anonymous (you don't have to identify yourself) so you can be completely truthful. This is a chance for your school staff to see where they are doing well and where they need to improve based on feedback from all students.

1. Choose your school

2. I am

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

3. All staff cares about me and my success.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. What I learn in school takes into account my life experiences and helps me think more deeply about who I am.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. I have opportunities to apply what I learn in a real world setting.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. I am able to choose what I want to learn and how I show that I have learned it.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. My schoolwork is challenging in ways that make me feel like I am learning.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. I have opportunities to practice my skills and improve with support over time.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. I have the opportunity to learn at my own pace.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. I can make mistakes without being viewed or treated as a failure.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. I have opportunities to develop my leadership skills.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Staff help me to deal with situations and resolve conflicts on my own.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix 11: Develop Myself Self-Assessment

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE THAT HELPS ME TO DEVELOP MYSELF

What does it mean to DEVELOP MYSELF?

TO DEVELOP MYSELF means that I can figure out my feelings, interests, values and strengths. I feel confident and can get my needs met. I can also admit when I am wrong. I am able to handle stress, control my behavior, and make it through obstacles. I can adjust to new settings and people. I am able to accept feedback from others, and see it as a chance to grow.

What is the purpose of this assessment?

We believe that the quality of your character and your social and emotional strengths have a big impact on your ability to develop yourself. Because of this, we take seriously the need for you to develop, practice, and strengthen your social and emotional skills and abilities. This assessment is a chance for you to reflect on and better understand how you practice and demonstrate those skills, abilities, and qualities of character (attainments) that will help you to develop yourself.

Directions:

Student:

- Carefully read each social or emotional attainment. Rate yourself according to the scale that is provided. You may select 1, 2, 3, or 4 only.
- If an attainment or one of its indicators does not make sense, talk to someone – your teacher, a parent, or someone else who knows you well.
- Tell the truth. Learning these attainments will help you. We need to know where you really are in order to know how to help you.
- This might sound like you at home or at work, but not at school, or maybe it sounds like you at school, but not at home. That's ok, rate yourself and then talk about it with you someone on staff.

Staff:

- Offer support to students during the self-assessment process. Answer questions and provide examples of how attainments might look in different settings.
- Once a student completes the self-assessment add your scores and comments. Be prepared to discuss with the student.
- For each attainment select and circle the rating that most accurately describes what you see at school. You may select 1, 2, 3, or 4 only. You may not assign a fraction (e.g. 3.2, 1.5 etc.) for the specific attainments.
- Cite specific evidence to support your rating. Please note that you do not need to include examples or comments for each rating. Comments are required at the end of the assessment, and after the student conference, and should focus on areas of greatest strength and growth.
- Document student strength and growth opportunities at the bottom of the assessment and use this reflection to help students choose their three focus attainments for the marking period.

How well do I develop myself?

Circle the number that best describes your behavior or practice.

Develop Myself				
Attainment	I'm really good at this and/or do this most of the time	I'm pretty good at this and/or do this some of the time	I'm just ok at this and/or do this every once in a while	I'm not good at this and/or I've never tried
	4	3	2	1
Confidence - I can believe in myself and engage with my life with confidence, vision and purpose				
● I believe in myself and my abilities	4	3	2	1
● I can define my own success	4	3	2	1
● I can speak my thoughts and opinions in public spaces	4	3	2	1
● I can have a growth mindset	4	3	2	1
● I can advocate for myself and others	4	3	2	1
● I can see myself as a leader in any situation	4	3	2	1
● I can tell my story	4	3	2	1
Final rating: (In consultation with your advisor)				
I can be confident	4	3	2	1
Courage - I can show strength and take action even in the face fear				
● I can be vulnerable	4	3	2	1
● I take risks that are appropriate	4	3	2	1
● I believe in myself and my abilities	4	3	2	1
● I can make a decision that I know if for the best, even if it might hurt or frustrate other people	4	3	2	1
● I can assert myself (stick up for myself) in appropriate and effective ways	4	3	2	1
Final rating: (In consultation with your advisor)				
I can be courageous	4	3	2	1
Self-Regulation - I can control my responses and behaviors in a range of situations, so that I can pursue goals and live up to the realistic standards that have been set for me.				
● I can follow rules that are well known and those that are not discussed, but still expected to be followed	4	3	2	1
● I can express emotions in a healthy and productive way	4	3	2	1
● I can do something without expecting to immediately get something out of it	4	3	2	1

Perseverance - I can make it through tough situations and recover from challenges and setbacks				
● I can keep going, even when things are tough	4	3	2	1
● I keep trying even if I feel like I am at risk of failing	4	3	2	1
● I do hard things, if those things have to get done	4	3	2	1
● I can make difficult decisions when I know that they are the right decisions	4	3	2	1
● I can make a decision that I know is best, even if it will hurt or disappoint others	4	3	2	1
Final rating: (In consultation with your advisor)				
I can persevere	4	3	2	1
Open-Mindedness - I can value diversity, remain open-minded and consider other people's perspectives				
● I can show an interest in and respect the beliefs and backgrounds of people who are different than I am	4	3	2	1
● I can participate effectively in a group discussion	4	3	2	1
Final rating: (In consultation with your advisor)				
I can be open-minded	4	3	2	1
Reflectiveness - I can reflect on my thoughts, actions & experiences & make decisions and meaning that are based on my observations & insights				
● I can reflect on and assess my work	4	3	2	1
● I can distinguish between my thoughts, opinions and feelings	4	3	2	1
● I can identify my personal strengths and weaknesses	4	3	2	1
● I can listen to and consider critical feedback	4	3	2	1
● I can talk about my personal history and story	4	3	2	1
● I can find meaning in rituals	4	3	2	1
● I can recognize my unhealthy behaviors and consider ways to change them	4	3	2	1
Final rating: (In consultation with your advisor)				
I can be reflective	4	3	2	1
Service Leadership - I can develop my leadership abilities by using my talents and resources to help others				
● I can develop my leadership abilities through my service to others	4	3	2	1
● I can take action when others are in need	4	3	2	1
● I can sacrifice my needs or desires for something or someone that I believe in	4	3	2	1
● I can demonstrate humility	4	3	2	1

● I can express gratitude	4	3	2	1
Final rating: (In consultation with your advisor)				
I can be a service leader	4	3	2	1
Self-care & Personal health - I can take care of myself in healthy ways				
● I can cope, in a healthy manner, with tough situations	4	3	2	1
● I can decompress and manage stress in healthy ways	4	3	2	1
● I can recognize unhealthy behaviors and work to change them.	4	3	2	1
● I can do things to stay physically fit	4	3	2	1
● I can do things to stay mentally fit and emotionally healthy	4	3	2	1
Final rating: (In consultation with your advisor)				
I can take care of myself	4	3	2	1

Develop Myself – Reflection

What are my strengths in this area? What are ways I can build on these strengths?

Where do I need to improve? What support do I need to do this?

Appendix 12: The Sankofa Project

Spring 2015 - 9th Grade End of Year Promotional Project

Due: June 12th 2015

The Sankofa Project



“Always remember the past for therein lies the future: if forgotten, we are destined to repeat it.”



Spring 2015 - 9th Grade End of Year Promotional Project

***Due:* June 12th 2015**

Project Introduction

What is Sankofa?

The word Sankofa is an African word originating from the Akan Tribe in Ghana. The word represents the tribe's quest of knowledge, wisdom, self-awareness, and growth. Sankofa places importance on intellectual curiosity, critical examination, and self-reflection. One must be fully knowledgeable of self, others, and the connection among the community members by continually seeking out experiences that force oneself to re-examine one's identity.

How is this relevant to you?

The Sankofa project will allow you to capture your journey at EPIC High School North as a ninth grader thus far. The goal of this project is for you to showcase your ability to be reflective, introspective, and metacognitive. You will be responsible for a written journal, a portfolio, and a presentation that will include a summation of the skills (academic and social-emotional) that you have mastered, yet to master, and your plans to mastering those skills. In the following pages, you will find a detailed description of the overall project and outlines for each challenge.

Bridge into Sophomore year.

The Sankofa project is your bridge into your sophomore year similar to your summer bridge experience into your freshman year. Your freshmen year was your introduction to what it means to be an EPIC student, and the challenge of this project is to help you realize your EPIC student identity: self-reflective,

GRASPS Description

Essential Questions:

Who am I? What have I learned? Where am I headed?

Graded Attainments:

- # 12 I can use a variety of presentation skills.
- # 36 I can analyze how things change as they grow.
- # 45 I can conduct research (sub-attainments #20 & #43).
- # 66 I can reflect on my thoughts, actions & experiences & make decisions and meaning that are based on my observations & insights (sub-attainment #55) (sub-attainment #64 scaffold for students).

Challenge Description:

Goal	For students to use what they have learned this year to plan for where they want to be going. To reflect on their transformation throughout the year of how they have developed into a person who can live into that goal. How have the challenges, adversities, and experiences from this year affected my ability to succeed in this role in the future?
Role	Self Reflective - Epic High School Student,
Audience	Student creates invitation list of panel members, Epic Staff Members, Epic Students, Outside Evaluators (Parents).
Situation	Classroom and/or performance. Your “one” shot. In life you never know when an opportunity will pop up, this is your only chance to share your vision and make your dreams come true.
Product	A reflection, a portfolio, a life-mapping, an investigation and a synthesized vision
Criteria for Success	Incorporating the three challenges into a final presentation. Defending your work. Evaluating and giving feedback of another student’s work.

Appendix 13: Learning Coach Job Description

LEARNING COACH

Lead Responsibilities

Leadership

- Lead students in synthesizing workplace/service learning experiences
- Coordinate family outreach e.g.. Home visits, calls, etc.
- Coordinate field experiences e.g.. college exposure, internships etc.

Facilitation

- Lead CORE and Rites of Passage (advisory and social and emotional skill building block)
- Design and facilitate College and Career learning experiences
- Design and lead Selectives (electives designed with student input)
- Push-in to Targeted Support (small group skill development) and content courses

Student Support

- Advise 1:1 and group of students
- Implement hands-on social, emotional and workplace learning support
- Monitor attendance and motivate
- Implement Restorative Justice plan
- Serve as 1st responder for student crisis

Professional Learning and Planning

- Develop College and Career learning blocks in collaboration with all Learning Coaches, led by Youth Development Director
- Participate in professional development opportunities and planning sessions with colleagues

Preferred Skills and Experiences

- Develops relationships with youth and families
- Possesses an adaptive mindset
- Collaborates with colleagues
- Collaborates with community based organizations
- Uses various forms of technology
- Applies restorative justice practices/protocols
- Ability/willingness to establish a school culture and community that is culturally relevant and responsive

Qualifications

Applicants should have one of the following.

- Bachelor's Degree in related field preferred.
- Associate's Degree and at least two years of experience working with youth, families and communities.
- At least three years experience working with youth, families and communities.

