

Park East High School

Purpose, Preparation, Pride

Case Study

East Harlem Pride

Park East is not just a college preparatory high school. They are a family that learns and thrives together, offering the personalized instruction of a small school with the athletics and enrichment programs of a big school.

Then and Now

Prior to 2001, Park East was struggling to engage their students. Many had fallen behind in credit accumulation and graduation rates were far below national average. Recognizing the school was not providing an environment that fostered achievement, the principal and staff made the decision to partner with ISA and restructure the school's program.

Utilizing ISA's proven approach for school restructuring, Park East and ISA embarked on a collaborative journey to build a strong community and college prep instructional program that provides students with the safety nets they needed for their continued academic, emotional and social development.

Now a top-rated NYC high school, Park East provides its students with a rigorous academic curriculum in a supportive and inclusive environment. With a mission centered on educating all students to be critical thinkers, Park East faculty and ISA content coaches continuously develop inquiry- based initiatives and programs that emphasize higher order thinking, analytical writing skills and content area

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knowledge. Teamwork and collaborative learning among students, parents, faculty, the surrounding community, community-based organizations and local junior high schools, are key to continuously achieving its mission.

Collaboration and Community

At Park East change began with the faculty. "From the start, school faculty was encouraged to make collaborative decisions. Something as simple as deciding where funds would be allocated motivated the teachers to develop new ideas and put them into action. This collaboration really served as the springboard for transformation and the foundation for the new culture," said Suzy Ort, former ISA coach and current Assistant Principal at Park East.

Teachers and school leaders developed ideas to build community at the school, including the addition of unique after-school activities, like a science club focused on dissection. While faculty initially doubted student interest in



PARK EAST HIGH SCHOOL

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— Kevin McCarthy, Principal

By The Numbers

76%

4-Year Cohort
Graduation Rate

86%

4-Year Cohort
Attendance Rate

the programs, they were hugely successful, engaging the student community and motivating the faculty to continue the transformation. In addition to a variety of after school activities, Park East began to participate in the Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL) program as one of the four local schools that make up East Harlem Pride. Through PSAL, students are able to participate in 15 sports teams. The athletic program and the after school activities provide multiple opportunities for engagement within the school community, a factor that has been tied to academic success.

Supporting Students and Teachers

Park East goes beyond providing mandated services to students. The embedded culture of the school is one of advising and supporting, as evidenced by their robust student support services which include but are not limited to additional teacher office hours for extra support, services for students with IEPs, academic intervention services, participation with College Now – a college readiness program that helps students meet high school graduation requirements and prepare for success in college and post-secondary education preparation and

includes close faculty counseling, financial aid guidance, visits to college campuses, relationships with college admissions officers, parent information, courses at local colleges and regular assessment of student performance, as well as internships and community service.

ISA provides teachers, counselors and principals with continuous professional development opportunities

To ensure success and sustainability, ISA provides teachers, counselors and principals with continuous professional development opportunities, including embedded coaching and professional development institutes. During and after the transformation, school faculty found incredible value in attending the institutes offered to all ISA partner schools. "The Summer and Winter Institutes gave us opportunities to collaborate with each other and learn from the experiences of other ISA partner schools. Our best ideas came from these retreats," said Ort. Staff from Park East continues to attend the Summer Institute each year.

ISA content coaches work directly with teachers to develop a challenging inquiry-based college-preparatory curriculum that encourages the development of critical thinking skills and the habits of work necessary for rigorous intellectual productivity.

Sharing Success

Park East has received four A's in four consecutive years on the NYC Department of Education school report card and currently reports an attendance rate of 86% and a graduation rate of 76%. Academic expectations continue to advance; the school recently added its first AP classes to the curriculum and was featured in a video by the Department of Education and College Board about expanding Advanced Placement opportunities in small high schools.

Park East Alumni have attended universities such as Dartmouth, Drexel, Howard, and Drew and are encouraged to return to the school to speak with high school seniors about their college experience. "The partnership with ISA has really helped us transform this school from struggling to thriving. We can now proudly say, at Park East, no student is overlooked."

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— Suzy Ort, Assistant Principal

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