

Project BOOST

Project Update

Center for Educational Innovation – Public Education Association

July 2007

BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

In fall 2003, the Center for Educational Innovation – Public Education Association (CEI-PEA) launched Project BOOST (Building Options and Opportunities for Students) at member schools of CEI-PEA's New York City School Network. Project BOOST is a program targeted at late elementary and middle school students who have demonstrated academic talent but come from disadvantaged neighborhoods where they do not have the opportunity to develop their talent. It provides students with academic, social and cultural programs that help “boost” their abilities and outcomes.

The main goal of Project BOOST is to help participating students gain admission to quality high schools upon completion of the project (eighth grade). “Quality high school” is defined as competitive and specialized high schools, including local educational option schools and private schools, as well as independent schools (both commuter and residential) and parochial schools. To accomplish this goal, Project BOOST schools provide students with academic and cultural enrichment experiences, test prep services, academic guidance, and community service opportunities.

During this fourth year of the project, CEI-PEA ran Project BOOST at 30 schools located across the five boroughs. Project BOOST includes 14 middle and 16 elementary schools that are matched based on “feeder” patterns (i.e. elementary schools are matched with the middle schools into which a majority of their students matriculate). This feeder pattern-based organization will ensure continuity of participation and service for Project BOOST students.

All of the participating schools serve low-income students from diverse communities. In total, Project BOOST is currently serving approximately 700 students in grades four through eight. Of these, all 119 of the “graduating” 8th graders gained acceptance into quality high schools.

There are several aspects of Project BOOST that distinguish it from other enrichment programs:

- **Project BOOST admits students with a range of skills and talents.** Whereas many other enrichment programs accept only the “best and the brightest,” Project BOOST admits students with mid-range test scores who demonstrate commitment to success. A majority of students in Project BOOST score at levels 3 or high 2 on standardized tests—score levels that would normally keep them out of contention for quality high schools. Through Project BOOST, we help these students move up in performance levels and build the additional assets necessary to help them stand out in the high school admissions process.
- **Services are integrated into the school day.** Project BOOST is designed to serve as an extension of the school day.
- **The CEI-PEA School Network serves as the vehicle for implementation.** Program quality is ensured by implementing enrichment programs in a school-based model where every school is supported by a network of other quality schools.
- **CEI-PEA field personnel provide on-site assistance and guidance.** Schools participating in Project BOOST work with members of our field staff who come to the school site to work with them. This field operations model ensures consistency in program delivery across school sites, helps individual schools address emerging issues, and allows us to quickly make course corrections, when necessary.
- **The program fosters cross-grade collaboration.** One of the problems that faces children in the New York City public school system is that elementary, middle and high schools often do not communicate, let alone collaborate, in the education of children. Project BOOST fosters cross-grade collaboration through its “feeder pattern” model that pairs elementary and middle schools together to serve cohorts of students as they progress from the fourth through the eighth grades. This collaboration helps create alliances that extend beyond implementation of

Project BOOST. It helps them address such issues as providing continuity in instruction from the elementary to middle school.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Project BOOST students participate in academic and cultural enrichment activities, test prep programs, guidance and counseling programs, as well as community service activities. All of these activities are aimed at helping 4th through 8th graders gain the skills and assets necessary to be competitive in the high school admissions process. Below are summaries of the types of activities conducted at the Project BOOST schools.

In many cases, the schools attempt to develop integrated programming, either around a theme, long-term project or collective goal. For example, one school decided to use travel and international culture as their theme. Students researched countries and cities through online sources and then developed, designed and printed brochures to advertise the destinations, some of which were not the traditional tourist destinations. They then developed a travel agency plan and held a travel bizarre at the end of the school year. Another school is focusing Project BOOST on helping students prepare for the fifth grade social studies test by having students study New York State through innovative academic and cultural activities. To study the city, students took a double deck bus tour of New York City, while they learned more about the upstate region by touring an apple orchard in Beekman, New York. Prior to each trip, students researched the sites and activities they were going to engage in and afterwards, each prepared a journal piece about their experience.

Many of these program activities are based on in-kind programmatic services that CEI-PEA secured for the schools. Among the major in-kind programs are:

- Amer-i-can
- Botanical Gardens Junior Intern Explainer Program
- Chess in Schools
- Girls for Planet Earth - Bronx Zoo
- Hall of Science
- Hayden Astrophysics Program at the American Museum of Natural History,
- Impact Debate
- Sports and Arts in Schools Foundation
- Summer Search.

We estimate these in-kind programs to be valued in excess of \$1 million a year.

1. Academic Enrichment

Every Project BOOST school must provide at least one activity within three of the following areas throughout the school year. Often, schools selected a theme to guide their academic enrichment activities, such as the history of slavery, living green, or engineering. This integrated approach to academic enrichment also carries over to the other activities, with Project BOOST students visiting museums with exhibits related to the theme (e.g. the slavery exhibit at the New York Historical Society or participating in Earth Day) and carrying out community service projects related to the theme (e.g. holding a "School Green Day"). Below are descriptions of some of the activities that students took part in this past school year.

Computer/Technology Project

- Created travel brochures of different countries such as Italy, France, Japan, Greece, Brazil, Egypt and others as part of a larger project on travel and international cultures.
- Study of the agriculture, businesses and cultural practices of New York State regions using online tools, textbooks and periodicals.
- Participation on LEGO robotics competitions.

- Research project on nano-technology to design futuristic fashion and survival clothes. They used fabric scraps to make life-sized models of their designs.
- Online study of engineering through the DaVinci website.

Reading/Literacy Project

- Read *Bridge to Terabithia* and compared and contrasted the film with the book. Discussed the themes associated with the book, including bullying, trust, respect and friendship.
- Children's book authors visit to teach students how to read aloud. Session is videotaped in a television production studio and the video is presented "live" at local elementary schools where the students talk about their experiences.
- Read aloud programs between elementary and middle feeder schools at the local Barnes and Noble stores.
- As part of the NYC DEP art and poetry competition, students researched the city's water supply and waste water treatment systems. They discussed what they learned and then each student wrote a poem about water and its importance in our lives, as well as a poster to illustrate their poem.
- Read *Wizard of Oz* and participated in a five-week book club to discuss the text. They focused on the craft that author Frank Baum used throughout the text. They concluded the book club by watching the film to compare and contrast the book and film.

Math/Science/Logic Project

- Elementary students learned to use the standard and metric systems of measurement to measure height and length of buildings and mountains, miles for distance, weight of statues, etc. They used these measures to create models of landmarks from various countries that they researched as part of a larger project on travel and international cultures.
- Participated in a math-a-thon for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Math projects completed included decahedrons, pyramids, and making connections to social studies.
- Participated in a science fair to demonstrate the correct scientific method.
- Family trips to the Hall of Science.
- Served as assistants in the school science lab.
- Participated in a "math bee".
- Participated in Channel 11 "Weather Day" at Shea Stadium.
- Created inventions using recycled materials for the Staten Island Ecology Fair.
- Studied robotics and math tessellations.
- Visited "Top of the Rock" observation deck at Rockefeller Center and developed math word problems based on New York City statistics that their classmates then solved.
- Creation of a school garden in collaboration with GreenApple and the New York City Parks Department Park Rangers.

Research/Writing Project

- Researched and wrote about tourist locations worldwide as part of a larger project on travel and international cultures.
- Researched New York State agriculture, businesses and cultural practices. Produced reports on both current and historical conditions of specific regions.
- Researched the history and work of the American Red Cross and prepared essays on the idea of "preparedness."
- Researched the life of Frank Baum (author of the *Wizard of Oz*); created a timeline of the major events in his life, as well as the major events in the United States during the early 1900s, when the book was published.
- At one elementary school, Project BOOST students launched a school newspaper, which they researched, wrote, edited and designed on the computer. Articles submitted to the paper fall under writing genres studied at their grade level, including informational, narrative procedures, narrative accounts, and response to literature.
- An elementary school located in the Washington Heights where there are no bookstores, made their first trip of the year to a Barnes and Noble. Each student received \$10 to purchase a book, which for many was their first book purchase.

- Fourth and fifth grade students at one school formed a buddy reading program with the kindergarteners. During lunch time, once a week, the students visited with kindergarten classrooms and read with one or two students for 15 minutes.
- Students at one school wrote autobiographies or letters to the school community to introduce themselves. The work was displayed on the Project BOOST bulleting board, along with pictures of the students in order to make the students more visible within the school community.
- Researched Rockefeller Center and the Great Depression in preparation for a trip to “The Top of the Rock” observation deck at Rockefeller Center.
- Researched the history of slavery in the United States; culminated in a trip to the NY Historical Society to see the new slavery exhibit.

Arts Project

- Created models of landmarks from various countries as part of a larger project on travel and international cultures.
- Designed brochures for international travel, using graphic design software.
- Researched U.S. landmarks and built replicas of ten landmarks.
- Created posters depicting the ways that the American Red Cross responds and helps people.
- Developed a culinary arts project in partnership with the Culinary Arts Institute at Truman High School. Middle school students traveled to the school weekly to meet with the chef to prepare items. They learned all aspects of food preparation, prepared original dishes, and then held a “food fest” to sample their creations.
- Created jewelry and sculptures from recycled materials to display at the Staten Island Ecology Fair. The theme of their work was “Trash to Treasure.”
- Built model skyscrapers at the Center for Architecture.
- Learned to draw classic architectural orders (ionic, Doric, Corinthian) in order to display differences in cornices, columns and scrolls in architectural design.
- Created posters for Earth Day to display in the school and local community.

Speech/Drama Project

- Presented travel brochures at a tourism party where they played the role of “travel agent” for guests.
- Performed *The Wizard of Oz* and *Guys & Dolls, Jr.* for the school.
- Students read four plays across the year and then selected their favorite book/chapter of a book to turn into a play. Students write the dialogue, develop the set and props, conduct rehearsals, advertise the event and put on the performance for the school community.
- Oral presentations of research projects.
- Produced, choreographed and acted in a production of “All About the Town.”
- Produced a review called “We Love the 70s, 80s, 90s.”
- Learned from artists in residence in the areas of dance, percussion, songwriting and chorus.
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2. Cultural Enrichment

For many participants in Project BOOST, the opportunity to take part in the rich cultural programming available in New York City is economically unfeasible. And yet, being able to speak and write about cultural activities and programs is often what sets applicants apart in the high school admissions process. Through Project BOOST, students are exposed to the institutions and programs that make living and learning in New York City a unique experience. Below are listings of the institutions, programs, events and activities that Project BOOST scholars took part in this past year.

Note that the cultural enrichment activities are integrated into the academic enrichment and guidance/counseling activities, making the experiences more than isolated events. For example, a trip to the Skyscraper Museum was coupled with creating model skyscrapers and learning about the physics of architecture. Similarly, students often are required to maintain journals of their experiences attending such spectacular performances as Broadway plays and musicals.

Trips to Museums, Zoos and Parks

- Staten Island Museum (Rainforest Exhibit)
- Ellis Island Museum
- American Museum of Natural History
- New York Hall of Science
- South Street Seaport Museum
- New York Aquarium
- Hayden Planetarium
- Bronx Zoo
- Staten Island Zoo
- USS Intrepid
- Brooklyn Botanical Gardens
- The Schomburg Library and Museum
- Whitney Museum of American Art
- Museum of Chinese in America
- Battery Weed National Park
- Children's Museum of Manhattan
- Skyscraper Museum
- Center for Architecture
- Brooklyn Museum
- Top of the Rock Observatory
- Police Museum of New York City

Trips to Historical Societies & Exhibits

- Bronx Historical Society
- Fraunces Tavern
- Lefferts Homestead
- Open Village at Historic Richmond Town
- New York Historical Society

Trips to see Plays and Performances

- The Lion King
- Tarzan – compared the Broadway show with the film *Greystroke Legend of Tarzan* with other legends.
- Mary Poppins
- Westchester Broadway Theatre performance
- Medieval Times performance
- Beauty and the Beast
- Freedom Train performance at Lehman College

Tours/Exhibits/Events

- Double deck bus tour of New York City
- Tour of upstate New York orchard
- Tour of Yankee Stadium
- NBC Studio Tour
- Water tour of the Hudson River
- Camden Aquarium in New Jersey
- Earth Day events
- Jazz concert
- Children's opera
- Walking tour of Chinatown to learn more about Asian cultures
- Greenwood Cemetary

Trips to Other Cities

- Trip to Washington D.C. to tour monuments and The Smithsonian Institute.
- Norwalk Aquarium in Norwalk, Connecticut

Cultural Exchanges with Other Schools

- Visits from elementary school students to their feeder middle schools to learn about their next educational environment.

Other Self-designed Events

- College Life Trip – students visited Fordham University's Rose Hill Campus
- Cultural eating out night at Harlem's SpoonBread Too Soul Food restaurant in Harlem to celebrate their study of the Harlem Renaissance
- Ice skating at Lasker Rink in Central Park with parents.
- Community scavenger hunt (e.g. find the bumpiest road, the most construction, the cheesiest pizza, etc.)

2. Test Preparation

Every school must provide ongoing test prep. Some use commercial test prep programs, others establish linkages to resources and programs capable of preparing students for testing. Most utilize the Internet to provide students with access to online test prep programs, and all provide individualized tutoring based on the New York City Department of Education's GROW reports, which outline specific areas in which students need extra help to be successful. Below is a listing of sample programs, resources and strategies that Project BOOST schools used for test prep.

Commercial Test Prep Programs

- "Taking the High Road" ELA test prep
- "Test Ready"
- Delta Science Kits
- Kaplan
- Measuring Up Science and Math by Peoples Publishing Group
- Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies by Curriculum Associates
- Soaring Scores on CTB Reading and Math by Steck-Vaughn Berrent
- DSM II Science Kits

Linkages to Resources and Programs

- Tutors from Teacher's College at Columbia University
- Platform Learning provided instruction in English Language Arts and Math
- Kensington After School provided academic tutoring services
- Virtual Y provided homework assistance and enrichment
- 21st Century Learning Communities (sometimes located in the school) provided tutoring, homework help and test prep.

- Engineering students at Polytechnic University taught students basic engineering terms and applications.
- Botany program by New York City Park Rangers – GreenApple Program

Access to Internet Resources & Programs

- Grolier-On-Line and Grolier CDs
- Princeton Review website
- Kaplan Online Test Prep
- World Book Online
- Various websites for research, including www.factmonster.com, www.thinkquest.org/library, www.tekmom.com.

Individualized Tutoring

- One-on-one coaching to help students prep for the tests with which they most need assistance.
- 30-minute a day test prep sessions in the month prior to testing.
- Cross-grade and inter-school tutoring (e.g. 8th graders tutor elementary school students).
- Family nights where parents serve as learning volunteers.
- Great Leaps program for reading to provide individualized instruction.
- Adopt a student program for community volunteers to tutor students.
- Cross-grade and inter-school tutoring during 8th period club twice a week.

3. Guidance and Counseling

All schools must provide ongoing guidance and counseling for Project BOOST students. While the guidance and counseling services differ between the elementary and middle school levels, all counseling is aimed at ultimately helping students gain admission to a quality high school. Below are summaries of the types of guidance and counseling services offered through Project BOOST.

Character Education

- Use of “The Six Pillars of Character” program to help elementary students learn about trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.
- Character education lessons prepared by school guidance counselors on topics such as managing aggressive behavior, building self-esteem, resolving conflicts, tolerance and practicing core values
- Students wrote about a “value of the month” by documenting experiences in their daily lives that touch upon the value.
- Use of Harlem Children’s Zone Peacemakers program to teach students good decision-making strategies.
- Use of the “Bully Free Classroom” program to teach students about the effects of bullies and how to handle bullying in a productive way.
- Students serve as school “ambassadors,” hosting guests on school visits.
- Heroes Project – students research their “heroes” and make presentations to small groups, followed by open discussion of one another’s heroes to identify common traits and values.
- Workshops on developing positive character traits
- Cross-grade mentorships.
- Used Project ENACT Theatre Game Toolbox to build rapport among students and teachers.
- Use of “Competent Kids’ Caring Classroom”.

Training in Proper Self-Presentation

- Practice self-presentation sessions conducted through peer-groups
- Schools held events as culminations to academic work. Prior to the event, teachers helped them develop strategies for self-presentation, including creation of presentation tools (brochures, PowerPoints, etc.), proper dress, and public speaking.
- Students made presentations on the work of the Heifer Organization in order to gain support from fellow students for the Read-to-Feed program (see “Reading//Literacy Projects”)
- Role playing scenarios in which students confront and manage bullying
- Presentations made at the Project BOOST culmination ceremony

- Workshops on public speaking, presentation of materials and effective personal communications (e.g. writing letters, resumes, etc.)
- Students ate out at restaurants where they learned the basics of public eating etiquette, such as ordering from a menu, proper use of tableware, etc.

Assistance in the Application to Middle and High Schools

- Students attended open houses at middle and high schools.
- Teachers supported student applications to prestigious preparatory programs.
- Parent workshops on the high school admissions process.
- Workshops for students on how to prepare a successful high school application.
- Tours of private schools, special programs at public high schools.
- Individualized guidance on completion of applications and selecting the right high school.

4. Community Service

One of the central premises of Project BOOST is that successful students are also excellent citizens. Through the community service portion of the project they are able to give back to the community. This community service work also gives students a record of commitment to share with high schools during the admissions process.

Among the service programs that students participated in were:

- Penny Harvest and food drive programs.
- Pennies for Patients – students collected pennies to buy gifts for leukemia patients.
- St. Jude Math-a-thon – students acquired sponsors to complete a math event. The proceeds go to the St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital. One school raised more than \$2,500 this year.
- Fundraiser for victims of the recent fires in the Bronx – raised more than \$2,300.
- Anti-bullying workshops presented by Project BOOST students to their peers within the school.
- School assistance programs, including helping to keep the cafeteria clean, assisting secretaries in the main office, and assisting teachers with classroom organization.
- Made holiday cards for Meals on Wheels recipients.
- Send cards to U.S. veterans.
- Participated in Earth Day events.
- Established a School Green Day and encouraged students and families to participate in living “green” for a day.
- Contacted their local councilman to organize a clean up project in the community.

OUTCOMES

The experiences that students gain in Project BOOST are often life-altering for them in many ways. The CEI-PEA field personnel regularly meet with the students to gain their feedback and input into the programs. Among the aspects of the programs that students say they benefit from are:

- **Gaining access to resources otherwise beyond their reach.** For many, a trip to a museum or participating in a sports or arts program is simply beyond the economic capacity of their families. As these types of programs are also beyond the economic capacity of many school budgets, the students would never be able to participate in them if they were not offered through Project BOOST.
- **Experiencing one-on-one mentoring and guidance.** Students regularly express their happiness in developing strong, close relationships with the adults who operate these programs. For many students, these are the first close relationships they have made with adults outside of their family structure.
- **Increased self-esteem.** Many of these programs consist of hands-on activities that have specific, measurable outcomes. Students express a sense of accomplishment from seeing

the value of their efforts. A vast majority of students express a rise in self-esteem following the year-end celebrations that we hold to honor students participating in Project BOOST.

- **Experience working as part of a team.** All of the Project BOOST activities have a strong team-work element in their design. Students express a joy in working as part of a team, even when their team is not the most successful team. These activities channel their desire for peer approval into a process based on values and hard work.
- **Gaining positive values and skills.** While students rarely express this benefit in the terms of “gaining positive values,” many identify to our field personnel experiences such as learning to follow through on commitments and being accountable for the quality of their work. For example, students who participate in the Penny Harvest program express notions such as “I feel good about myself” from their fundraising and philanthropy projects.
- **Improving academic outcomes.** Students describe the *experience* of improving their academic outcomes in such simple but resounding statements as “I feel smarter,” “I know my parents are proud of me,” and “I’m not scared of math anymore.” These are the types of experiences that cannot be quantified, but have an exponential impact on the long-term academic careers of these students.

Perhaps the greatest benefit students gain from these programs are the skills and assets necessary to gain admission into a quality high school by the time they complete the programs in the 8th grade. During the 2004-2005 school year, all 119 of the “graduating” students from these programs (8th graders) gained admission to quality high schools both inside the New York City public school system and private schools across the country.

Following is a list of the high schools to which Project BOOST 8th graders were admitted this past year.

High School Admissions

- A. Philip Randolph High School
- Astor Collegiate High School
- Aviation High School (Aerospace Engineering Program)
- Bard College High School
- Bayside High School
- Beacon High School
- Bishop Ford Central Catholic High School
- Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School
- Brewster Academy
- Bronx High School of Science
- Bronx Lab School
- Bronx Leadership Academy School for Law and Justice
- Bronx Science
- Brooklyn College High School Program
- Brooklyn Latin High School
- Brooklyn Technical High School
- Brooklyn Technical High School
- Cardozo High School
- Carl Sagan Science/Math Honors Academy
- Celia Cruz High School
- Clinton Macey Gifted Program
- Columbus Institute for Math and Science
- Eagle Academy for Young Men
- FLAGGS
- Forrest Hills High School of Science & Math (Honors)
- Francis Lewis High School
- Frederick Douglass Academy
- Harry S. Truman High School

- High School for Environmental Science
- High School for Math and Engineering
- High School for Teach & the Professions
- High School for Youth and Community Development (located in Florida)
- High School of American Studies at Lehman College
- Hillcrest High School
- Hotchkiss
- Hunter College of Science High School
- Laguardia High School
- Lehman Computer Technology
- Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics
- Manhattan Village Academy
- Mathematics, Science Research and Technology Magnet High School
- Medical Science Institute
- Medical Science Institute
- Medical Professions Academy
- Middle College High School at Medger Evers (Science & Engineering Program)
- Mott Hall High School
- Murray Bergtraum High School
- Nazareth Regional High School
- New Design High School
- Park East High School
- Pelham Preparatory Academy
- Progress High School (Computer Science Academy)
- Queens High School of the Sciences at York College
- Richard R. Green High School
- Science Tech & Research High School
- Stuyvesant High School
- Telecommunication Arts & Technology
- The Taft School
- Thomas Edison High School (Auto Mechanics Program)
- Thomas Edison High School (Computer Science & Engineering Program)
- Thomas Edison High School (Pre-medical Program)
- Townsend Harris High School
- University Neighborhood High School
- WATCH High School (Health Academy)
- Yeshiva University High School for Girls

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Project BOOST, contact Harvey Newman, CEI-PEA Senior Fellow at 212-302-8800 or hnewman@cei-pea.org.