

# DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

## El Paso Academy

2011-12

### **Mission Statement**

*The El Paso Academy exists to provide students with the opportunity to discover their individual promise and creative gifts that allow them to develop post-high school opportunities in order that they contribute productively to their community and the world.*

**“Believe, Achieve, and Succeed”**

Reviewed by Board of Directors

Date: July 13, 2011

Approved by Board of Directors

Date: August 11, 2011

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## **Legal Requirement**

*Each school district shall have a district improvement plan that is developed, evaluated, and revised annually, in accordance with district policy, by the superintendent with the assistance of the district-level committee. (Section 11.251 of the Texas Education Code)*

## **Description of Instructional Program**

The academic year for El Paso Academy is very similar to regular public schools: 180 days of instruction for students, 187 workdays for teachers and paraprofessionals associated with the instructional program. The number of instructional days may be shortened, should it be necessary and beneficial to the instructional program, for staff development.

Students come to the Academy through a lottery system. A maximum of 500 students may attend the two high schools. Students accepted into the Academy may continue in the school until graduation. Siblings of current students are not automatically accepted into the academy. Available slots for students are subject to the lottery, which is conducted in the summer months. Special needs students are not restricted from the Academy.

There are two four-class sessions each instructional day, with each class session being 60 minutes long. Students may attend either the morning or the afternoon session, but in extremely rare cases, a student may have a split schedule depending on his/her needs, and on which courses are available in the other session. A senior student who will be one-half credit short of graduation requirements when entering his/her last quarter may take a fifth class, if it is available in the master schedule of whichever session he/she is not attending.

The instructional program is designed to accelerate the attainment of credits for high-school students 1) who have fallen behind while at their home campuses or 2) students who are eager to graduate early. The Academy actually covers subject matter in half the time traditional schools cover the same material. This is accomplished through low student/teacher ratios, and through a heavy emphasis on individualized instruction and technology.

There are four nine-week (approximately) quarters in each academic year. One-half credit may be earned in each nine-week quarter. For instance, the first half of the

traditional Algebra 1 may be earned in nine weeks, and the second half in the next nine-week quarter.

Students may test out of courses by taking credit-by-exam examinations through Texas Tech University. Students may also take online elective courses through American Preparatory Institute (API). Core courses may be taken at API only when students have passed their exit-level tests. Only one online course may be taken at a time, and there must be a content-area specific teacher on the campus for monitoring each student's progress, and signing off at the end of the course. Online courses and credit-by-exam tests must be completed in a timely manner so that grades may be entered on student transcripts at the end of each quarter.

The passing standard is 80% or above, whether the course is teacher-taught, credit-by-exam, or online.

Lessons in the core areas are based on the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS. Core subjects are English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Teachers who teach courses outside the core subjects are required to be thoroughly familiar with the TEKS so that they can reinforce and extend students' knowledge while they are learning non-core subjects. Teachers are required use C-Scope, a TEKS-aligned instructional guide, in lesson planning and preparation. In addition, teachers are required to use software called "Eduphoria" that allows them to monitor students' progress in mastering essential elements outlined in TEKS.

Students are required to wear uniforms to school.

Students may attain enough credits for graduation during any of the nine-week quarters. Currently, however, there is only one graduation ceremony, which is held in June.

### Current Status: Charter Authority

The El Paso Academy is operating under a charter granted by the Texas Education Agency June 21, 2000. There is no evidence of any action by the Agency that would invalidate the original charter. The District is currently seeking copies of all of the Charter's founding documents through a formal Public Information Request.

## Areas of Concern

### Academics

1. Students at grades 9 through exit-level are not performing well in mathematics, with the following passing rates on TAKS tests: Grade 9, 40%; Grade 10, 38%; Grade 11, 60%. (Testing performed Spring 2011)
2. Students at grades 10 through exit-level are not performing well in science, with the following passing rates on TAKS tests: Grade 10, 34%; Grade 11; 73%. (Testing performed Spring 2011)
3. Although the school is considered to be a drop-out recovery school, dropout rates are relatively high when comparing them with state averages. (12.4% vs. 2.9%, 2008-09 data)
4. College readiness, as measured by the number of students taking advanced/dual credit courses, is about half of the state average. (12.0% vs. 24.6%, 2008-09 data)
5. Attendance rates at the school are very low when compared with state averages. (86.5% vs. 95.6%, 2010-11 data)
6. Although the District has spent large sums on programs to articulate and coordinate the instructional program, faculties either resist using the programs or are unaware of the high-cost assistance of which they are entitled.

### Governance, Operations, Organization

1. Policies, procedures, regulations and guidelines are present in various forms, but not organized into an orderly system.
2. Employee handbooks at the district or campus level are not current.
3. Job descriptions are not fully current, and they need to be standardized per state and Federal requirements.
4. The Academy's organization chart needs to be updated, showing formal channels of communication and levels of authority.
5. Policies related to special-needs students are in need of consolidation.

## Culture and Climate of the Organization

1. A recent climate survey of both campuses indicated that morale is very low at both locations.
2. The climate survey of both campuses indicated that approximately half of the staff is not certain of the goals and purposes of the organization.
3. The climate survey indicated significant desire for positive exemplar behavior from campus leadership.
4. The climate survey indicated that approximately half of instructional staff did not have positive feelings about senior management.
5. Although parents are eager to participate in the schools, the Academy lacks a viable and welcoming structure for their participation.

## Original Goals of the El Paso Academy

The founding document of the El Paso Academy lists three (3) academic goals, two (2) non-academic goals, and three (3) institutional goals as follows:

### Academic Goals

1. To create a school environment that leads to success in student learning as measured by TAAS [TAKS] testing
2. To produce high rates of student attendance and retention and low rates of expulsion and suspension
3. To show improvement in TAAS [TAKS] reading and mathematics testing on the Texas Learning Index

### Non-Academic Goals

1. To ensure that students and their parents and guardians participate in school activities that expand educational opportunities and meet the needs of students.
2. To achieve a high level of institutional accountability (in addition to academic accountability goals set forth above)

### Institutional Goals

1. To ensure that major constituents other than students (school personnel, parents and guardians, and community partners) are satisfied with the school's overall service delivery to its students (service delivery includes things such as grades, attendance, participation in enriched learning activities, and decreased disciplinary actions, etc.)
2. To support students by establishing partnerships with other local education agencies (LEAs), businesses or business leaders, governmental agencies or leaders, and other community members capable of influencing or expanding educational opportunities and meeting needs of students.
3. To ensure that the school reflects the communities it serves.

## Significant Excerpts from Charter Application

*“Teachers must be qualified to execute instructional strategies, strategies for student growth and development, strategies for classroom management and organization, strategies for policy implementation, and possess good communication skills.” (Page 17)*

*“As part of the “positive school” environment, El Paso Academy East will promote the harmonious interaction and interrelations of all people in a school. By emphasizing the team concept of faculty, staff, parents and students working toward common goals, the school will gain a more cohesive atmosphere. As part of the “positive school” environment, El Paso East will seek to make the school responsive to human needs. Procedures, rules, and regulations will serve the people in the schools.” (Pages 44-45)*

*“...the Board will:*

*Emphasize positive expectations for the success of both teachers and administrators.*

*State clear goals for teachers and administrators individually as well as team goals for teachers and administrators and ensure that progress toward reaching specified goals and objectives is fairly evaluated.*

*Help establish and maintain an orderly environment in which teachers and administrators work in calm and dignity.*

*Focus on the feelings and self-worth of all people.*

*Give frequent positive reinforcement, praise and recognition to administrators and teachers in order to show support and approval including words that demonstrate support.*

*Promote team building (the process of building an effective organization of people working together for a common purpose). Teamwork is two or more people pursuing a common goal. To have an effective team requires the total commitment of all team members. Each team member must put team goals ahead of individual desires. Ideally, the goals of the team will closely parallel those of the team members.*

*Help teachers and administrators utilize each member’s strengths and tolerate each member’s weaknesses. El Paso Academy East will strive to help each member reach his/her potential by focusing on his/her strengths and reinforcing behavior through recognition and rewards. We believe that people who feel that they are contributing to a plan that has merit and benefits others produce good results.*

*Promote the modeling of integrity, character, good habits, family life, lifestyle, [and] community service among all faculty and staff.” (Page 45-46)*

*“El Paso Academy East will encourage parents to develop partnerships with teachers, administrators, and the Board and to participate in decision making matters involving the proposed school.” (Page 46)*

*“The model also promotes parents as true partners through proactive and consistent communication and opportunities to volunteer in the classroom on a regular basis.” (Page 49)*

*“El Paso Academy’s mission includes:*

*Implementing high academic standards that incorporate skills, knowledge, and experience.*

*Preparing youth for full lives as citizens and individuals providing instruction that includes teamwork, creativity and innovation.*

*Recognizing the responsibilities of citizenship and the individual's hopes and dreams.*

*Developing a learning environment where the purpose for learning does not lie only in the future, but where skills, knowledge and experiences will be relevant to the present.*

*Stimulating the imagination with a quality picture that invokes curiosity, self-confidence and dreams.” (Page 48)*

*“To achieve success with this education model the following basic elements will be adopted:*

- 1. The role of the teacher must be that of facilitator/collaborator and team leader rather than classroom instructor.*
- 2. The academic performance standards must be clearly defined and expected.*
- 3. Student action and achievement rather than passive recipient of processed information must define the learning.*
- 4. A variety of opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge must be provided through peer teaching, small group work, individualized study, and teamwork.*
- 5. Connections between the classroom work and projects must be clearly formed.*
- 6. An audience beyond the teacher must be included so that student products receive affirmation that the work is important, needed and worth doing.*
- 7. Each year should build a knowledge base that includes content and concept.*
- 8. Each staff member must “walk the walk” and “talk the talk” becoming a model that reflects respect and honor to life-long learning.*
- 9. Time for reflection must be included as an essential activity that must take place in the learning environment.*
- 10. The task must include ongoing assessments of acquired skills and knowledge by both student and staff.” (Page 49-50)*

*“All curriculum is well-defined in a planned, articulated, coordinated syllabus which incorporates the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) into all areas”. (Page 64)*

*“The core curriculum will be integrated and will require mastery and skill development in each area. Strategies predicated on a research-based learning styles model in that the age and individual learning preferences will determine the way skills are taught. All Students will learn together. Special needs students and students speaking other languages will learn along with peers and will not be segregated to learn a second curriculum.” (Page 65)*

*“El Paso Academy will serve the community by preparing students to function in a productive manner as citizens of tomorrow. A four-part foundation is vital to the success of the students:*

Basic Skills requires that the student be literate in the areas of reading, writing, arithmetic, listening, and speaking.

Thinking Skills requires that the student think creatively, make decisions, solve problems, visualize, reason, and know how to learn.

Personal Qualities are those which display responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity and honesty.

Technology will equip the student with keyboarding skills, software application knowledge and use, program development and creativity.” (Page 66)

## Plan of Action by Perceived Priority

Priority	Strategy	Responsibility	Measurement/Date
<p>1. Student Performance: Math</p>	<p>1. Principals will become thoroughly familiar with C-Scope program and lesson-planning capabilities                      2. Principals will provide training for math teachers, with weekly follow-ups to check for understanding and utilization                      3. Staff development workshops for teachers at Region 19</p>	<p>Executive Director, Principals</p>	<p>Ongoing measurement on TEKS acquisition with Eduphoria Software – Weekly</p> <p>End-of-year state mandated tests – March-May 2012</p> <p>Debriefing of faculty by principal and executive director after workshops – As needed following workshops</p>
<p>2. Student Performance: Science</p>	<p>1. Principals will become thoroughly familiar with C-Scope program and lesson-planning capabilities                      2. Principals will provide training for science teachers, with weekly follow-ups to check for understanding and utilization                      3. Staff development workshops for teachers at Region 19</p>	<p>Executive Director, Principals</p>	<p>Ongoing measurement on TEKS acquisition with Eduphoria Software – Weekly</p> <p>End-of-year state mandated tests – March-May 2012</p> <p>Debriefing of faculty by principal and executive director after workshops – As needed following workshops</p>
<p>3. Student Retention: Dropout Rate</p>	<p>1. Counselor and principal at each location will review each student's record to see if there are indicators that point to dropout danger.                      2. Counselor and/or principal will conference with students showing dropout indicators to ensure the school is meeting student's needs.                      3. Parents/Guardians of vulnerable students will be called and provided with direct-contact staff phone numbers to call if they need help with attendance issues.                      4. Principals will seek and assign outside mentors to likely dropouts.</p>	<p>Counselors, Principals</p>	<p>1. Monitoring on bi-weekly basis of students who may be vulnerable to becoming dropouts.                      2. Following up with parents of students who leave the Academy to determine if students are working, or in another school                      3. Dropout rates for the academy will be reduced on state reports</p>

Priority	Strategy	Responsibility	Measurement/Date
4. Student Retention: Attendance Rate	Awards for 95%-100% attendance will be distributed each quarter.	Principals, Assistant Principals	Attendance rates will increase on state reports.
5. Instructional Leadership: Mission of the Academy	Principals, Assistant Principals will become thoroughly familiar with the mission of the El Paso Academy, and communicate it to the staff continually.	Principals, Assistant Principals, Executive Director	End-of-year climate survey. Assessment of principals' performance in development of instructional staff effectiveness.
6. Instructional Leadership: Staff Morale	Administrators will adhere to the concept that they work for the faculty and campus support staff as facilitators and supporters of effective instructional practices.	Principals, Assistant Principals, Executive Director	End-of-year climate survey.
7. Instructional Leadership: Exemplar Administrative Behavior.	Principals will work with teachers to team-teach, or to provide exemplar lessons at least once per semester per teacher.	Principals, Assistant Principals	Reduction of complaints to Executive Director regarding negative principal behavior.
8. Senior Management: Evidence of Support	Executive Director will become visible on both campuses, and make himself available for constructive criticism.	Executive Director, Board of Directors	Reduction of complaints to Executive Director regarding support for classroom teachers
9. Senior Management: Clarity of Policies	Executive Director will continue to update policies, with the goal of clarity of purpose.	Executive Director, Board of Directors	Reduction of confusion regarding Academy policies, mission, and daily goals and objectives.
10. Community Support: Parental Involvement	Principals will develop informal and formal structures to involve parents.	Principals, Executive Director, Director of State and Federal Programs.	Evidence of parental involvement from increased visits to actual parental involvement and support of instructional program.