

Fresh approach adds up

'E Prep' officials attribute improvement to school's structure: longer days, respect for teachers

By **CHUCK SODER**

4:30 am, July 2, 2007

Test scores have skyrocketed and detentions nearly have disappeared for the inner-city students who make up the inaugural class of the new Entrepreneurship Preparatory School.

Most students at the Cleveland school, commonly called "E Prep," passed both the reading and math portions of the Ohio Achievement Test in March, even though almost all the students failed a test consisting of similar questions seven months earlier.

Passage rates for the reading portion of the test increased to 75% from 7% in August, when the school opened, and passage rates for math jumped to 62% from 11%. The test given in August was compiled from reworded questions from the Ohio Achievement Test, an annual state exam meant to assess the academic progress of students in third through eighth grades, and textbook questions covering similar content.

The nonprofit charter school, which aims to teach students to succeed in business as well as life, attributes the surge in passage rates to its longer school days and its structure-based education model, which requires students to focus constantly on the teacher, walk quietly between classes and wear uniforms, said co-founders John Zitzner and Marshall Emerson III.

"This is all about a culture of high expectations," Mr. Zitzner said.

E Prep currently has 96 sixth-graders, who are still in class because their summer vacation won't start until July 19. The school will expand to include seventh grade when class starts again Aug. 19, and school officials aim to add a grade each year until its original class graduates high school.

The school plans to incorporate more programs focused on teaching about entrepreneurship and the business world when it starts offering high school classes, but for those in junior high, E Prep is focusing on traditional academics.

Many of the students, almost all of them black children from Cleveland and inner suburbs on the East Side, were behind on the fundamentals when they arrived. E Prep, however, promises they will be accepted to college if they attend the school through 12th grade. The sixth-graders even are referred to as the Class of 2017 — the year they would graduate from a four-year college.



Nadia Cuff (left to right), Justin Alvis and Jeffri Black work together in the computer lab at the Entrepreneurship Preparatory Academy charter school.

Photo credit: MARC GOLUB

RELATED LINKS

[E Prep](#)

"Almost all these kids, they'll be first-generation college students," Mr. Zitzner said.

Attitude adjustment

Not only had the students' test scores been low, but many had behavioral problems, too. Fifty or 60 of them were issued detentions during the first few days of school. Today, the school issues only about one detention per day.

Students at E Prep, located on the fourth floor of 540 E. 105th St., just north of St. Clair Avenue, seemed similarly well-mannered one morning last week.

They spoke in class only when asking questions or participating in discussions, they walked to lunch quietly and they greeted visitors with a handshake and eye contact — a skill the school teaches early on.

Sixth-grader De'Vonte Dammons of Cleveland said E Prep has taught him to stop "being smart" with teachers and to get along better with others. Classmate Paige Bobbitt of Richmond Heights said she no longer has a bad attitude.

"They teach you discipline, and they teach you (that) you have to respect people to get them to respect you," she said.

De'Vonte would like to play basketball in the NBA one day but also would like to be an engineer. Paige aims to be either a cosmetologist or a pediatrician.

They're not pushed toward particular careers, even though the school eventually will add a business curriculum, said Mr. Emerson, who also is headmaster.

"I think the main goal is they leave here with the entrepreneurial spirit," Mr. Emerson said. "They're free thinkers, problem solvers."



Entrepreneurship Preparatory School teacher Melissa Warren leads a classroom participation exercise.

Photo credit: MARC GOLUB

Forward thinking

The school surpassed its goal to raise \$1 million by July 1, much of which came from the business community, and it aims to raise another \$1.3 million over the next year to continue operations.

Anything extra the school raises would go to a fund to support the opening of another E Prep in the Cleveland area. Messrs. Zitzner and Marshall would like to open several similar schools in the region, but paying for them would require a change in school financing, they said, noting their support for a proposal being written by state Sen. Steve Stivers, R-Columbus, to give extra money to

schools that extend the school day.

The school will accept another 30 students for next year's seventh-grade class in hopes that at least 15 will stay all year, Mr. Zitzner said, noting that about 30 left last year because of the challenge. The school in future years will not accept new students after seventh grade.