

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Cornerstone Academy for Social Action

Elementary School 189
3441 Steenwick Avenue
Bronx
NY 10475

Principal: Dr. Malissa Mootoo

Dates of review: March 16 - 17, 2009

Lead Reviewer: Nancy Birson

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Cornerstone Academy for Social Action is an elementary school with 322 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 6. The school population comprises 54% Black, 43% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 28% English language learners and 5% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 89.2%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 60% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The Cornerstone Academy for Social Action elementary school was newly founded in 2007. It was conceived based on three pillars: cultural competency, community action and commitment to academic excellence. A dynamic principal heads the school and is ably supported by three assistant principals who each bring their own level of expertise and unique backgrounds. A unified sense of community is apparent in the school and this translates into team spirit and teamwork. Parents are especially appreciative of this collaborative approach as it applies to their children. One parent stated that she feels the school is like another parent working with her child to achieve.

As a new school, there is expected growth in the student population. The school however, also serves as an overflow site for the district. New students are enrolled and discharged on a constant basis as slots open up in their home-zoned schools. The school has flexibly adapted to this state but also finds itself in the position of updating targets and goals on a more continual basis than the average school. For this reason the need for precise timetables, roles and expectations for implementation of plans are even more critical.

Teachers take advantage of multiple opportunities to collaborate around student strengths and needs. The school collects a variety of summative, formative and classroom data. While there is a commitment to ensuring the use of multiple sources of data, these have not yet yielded differentiated teaching approaches and practices throughout the school that lead to clear, rigorous student learning goals.

As unanticipated needs surface, the school reacts with a measured, even-keeled response. Staff and administration keep their focus on academic needs and supports for its student population. There has been a concerted effort this year to attend to students' affective needs as they transition into a new school environment outside their immediate neighborhoods. The school has implemented CASA CARES, a modified positive behavior intervention program as well as a series of advisories for the upper grades and the creation of a character education committee. This has resulted in fewer discipline issues school-wide. Students accept their own roles in monitoring their behavior. One kindergartner stated, "Empowered means it's up to me to make the right choices".

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school makes it a priority to engage parents in conversations around high expectations to support students' academic and personal growth.
- There is a commitment to ensure high levels of respect that has been reflected in positive attitudes throughout the school.
- The principal provides opportunities for the involvement of various school constituencies at several stages in school improvement planning.
- All constituents are appreciative of the school's risk-free environment that lends itself to opportunities for continued growth.
- The school's data collection and analysis process allows for a thorough student view that is applied across content areas.
- The school's practice of reflection and revision of plans provide timely and flexible support to students and faculty.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that student learning goals are based on clear, student-centered and rigorous criteria so there is clarity on student next steps.
- Enhance the use of assessment tools and student workfolios to facilitate opportunities for differentiation so that all student needs are met.
- Further develop teacher professional development plans to include measurable interim goals and timeframes to evaluate efficacy and success.
- Refine school action plans to support the implementation of the procedures and systems that support academic, personal and professional growth.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school obtains information on students' strengths and needs through its careful attention to student data. They compile summative, formative, diagnostic and biographical information in order to obtain a better-informed, reliable use of data with which to build student profiles. The school further utilizes this data for academic progress reviews by grade, class, subgroup and individual students, in intervals of six to eight weeks. The school's periodic review of data in English language arts, math and physical education/health provides administration with opportunities to discuss progress towards students' year-end goals. Through examination of baseline data and grade and developmental benchmark expectations, the school facilitates ongoing decisions regarding extra student support and enrichment.

In the context of PS189, the maintenance of a positive, collaborative relationship between the school and the high school that shares the same building is an essential concern for all involved. The implementation of the fitness program presents a challenge in monitoring of students' fitness awareness and goals as the school must share the facility with the high school in the same building. Nevertheless, the school has adapted and made the necessary accommodations and concessions in order to carry out the stated objectives. Its math analysis is presently enhanced through the school's decision to design its own interim assessments from an item bank. This has provided the school with a more efficient, timely and fine-tuned analysis of student strengths and knowledge gaps for specific learning targets. The school made a decision this year, to implement an English language arts assessment that was more in line with teacher knowledge and use. Teachers are better able to analyze reading levels using materials with which they are familiar. While an in-depth review and data collection process is in place for these core subjects, the school has not yet applied it towards all content areas.

The school informs students and parents of goals and progress during specific marking periods and through progress reports at intervals between these designated periods. The school accepts students who are not zoned for the area and this presents a challenge for some parents to attend open school events and meetings with teachers to discuss their child's progress. As a result, the school does not reach all families through these means for an open exchange of information.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The staff provide careful attention to planning and preparation for units of study that build on what students know and can do, as well as next steps to achieve goals. The administration and grade level teachers prepare these units of study through

collaborative meetings on an ongoing basis; on pre-designated Data Days, as well as during teachers' weekly common planning days. During these sessions, teachers flesh out units of study that were developed earlier in the school term, as well as modify and revise as indicated by student achievement data. Students therefore receive instruction on skills and strategies that they have not yet mastered from previous lessons. Although the school devises small- group instruction through these means, lessons do not always address the needs of higher-achieving students.

Teachers use individual conferring sessions, at least monthly, to set and monitor goals with students. This facilitates the completion of Independent Reading Goal templates, and progress tracking forms in math and physical education/health that serve to visually represent the areas students have mastered and what they still need to work on. Students refer to these forms when articulating their next steps and as markers of their progress. Next steps are not always clear for teachers or students as some students stated, "I need to learn to multiply" or "I have to write more" rather than saying what they needed to do to reach these goals. The school presently has tracking forms for other content areas, but also has not fully developed their implementation or the process of review. As a result, students and staff do not have clear next steps clear for planning and goal-setting purposes. The school encourages upper elementary students to self-reflect on periodic assessments and set their own goals in order to affirm their achievements and cultivate self-motivated practices in line with the school's empowerment core value.

The school's improvement planning draws on collaboration between school staff and parents. It is an ongoing process that also continues during the summer months prior to the commencement of the new academic school year and at monthly, after-school Town Hall meetings. This allows the school to hear from as many constituent voices as possible and provides flexibility in addressing pressing needs identified from data. The school's new behavior policy is an example of this response to data and ongoing collaboration between staff and parents. The character education committee developed a school incentive plan which encourages appropriate behavior, academic performance and attendance under a new program called CASA CARES which encourages children to take responsibility for their actions. Staff track and reward students' performance in these areas through "CASA cash" which students redeem for prizes or extra center time activities. This program has resulted in excitement and positive response from students, parents and staff. It has also connected students' behavior goals with formulated behavior plans.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students' learning goals.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school provides a rich curriculum that incorporates art, through its artist-in-residence grant, music and Spanish as a second language or support for native speakers. They have instituted activities, such as lunch clubs, Debate Club, Reader's Theater, Dance and a Science Green Team, as a means for developing students' personal and social skills. These curricular decisions have built the students' confidence and self-esteem as well as reinforcing language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Teachers' assessment systems allow for clear, differential information that can assist them with lesson activities. Teachers document and maintain information on standardized assessments, teacher-designed tests and checklists, and teacher

observations. This data is placed in binders and expanded student workfolios. Based on individual student data review, teachers set up classroom libraries to provide reading and content area support to meet varying levels of student achievement and interest. These libraries are presently being restocked to align with the school's adoption of the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. Internet access and desktop computers in all classrooms allow for variety and active involvement in learning activities. Teachers also use these computers to extend lessons and provide support in areas of need for individual students. While some classes demonstrate teaching approaches that emphasize active student participation and utilize the context of student learning styles and needs, this is not yet evident across all grades and content areas.

The school has a transient student population due to the fact that it is designated as an "overflow" school for the district. Some students, as a result, may be enrolled in the school for weeks or a few months before they return to their home school. This initially causes an imbalance in these students' ability to engage and show interest. However, the school's climate, of respect and trust among adults, transfers to all students and assists newcomers in feeling welcome and supported.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The commitment of the teachers and administration to continuing professional development and to collaboration within the school is evident. Teachers have multiple opportunities to discuss data to improve student outcomes. Staff members participate in a range of workshops that are aligned to the school's educational goals. Classroom and school environment was an area of focus for the school and the results are now evident from the print-rich, student-centered classrooms. Student work displays in the hallways highlight works-in-progress and finished products assessed through rubrics. This year, the school is ensuring that teachers receive in-class support in student writing through an outside consultant arrangement. This is unifying the staff in shared expectations and a common language in the teaching of writing.

Administration conducts learning walks, "Popservations" or informal observations, as well as formal observations. They provide feedback through both oral and written means, as well as through email and the school wiki. Teachers are appreciative of the accessibility of administration. While evaluative feedback takes into consideration each teacher's individual professional development plan, it has not yet fully considered the revision of classroom practice through the lens of student outcomes. Feedback that is provided around student work focuses on how teachers are assessing rather than what students learned. Timeframes have not yet been established for progress towards each teacher's goals.

New teachers receive mentoring through the New York City Department of Education's mentoring program. They are introduced and familiarized by veteran teachers in the school through collaborative planning and inter-visitation opportunities. This has enabled new teachers to also self-select the support they need based on analysis of their students' needs.

The school recognized a need for a code of behavior and guidance plan that addressed its unique situation as an overflow school. They have instituted the CASA CARES program, a modified positive behavior intervention system as well as an advisory

program for grades 5 and 6. Teachers and administration are encouraged by the reduction in discipline problems and the good relationship between staff and students.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school's vision is encompassed in its three pillars and is a reference point for many of the policies, procedures and activities of the school. The principal and her staff work to ensure that the mission guides ongoing decisions throughout the year. As a new school, the school has made strategic hiring decisions to include veteran teachers as well as those relatively new to the profession. Teachers' complementary skills therefore contribute to highly effective teamwork during collaborative planning sessions. The addition of Spanish as a second language has broadened the curriculum and serves as an example to students and families of the cultural competency pillar.

By its nature, the school plan is in a constant state of evolution and it is intended that it will be revised and further developed in conjunction with the analysis of data. The school invested considerable care in developing action plans to advance the priorities stated in various data sources. The school's ongoing review of its plan lacks clarity regarding a precise timetable and a more discrete and identifiable planning team to facilitate the implementation of procedures and systems that support academic, personal and professional growth.

The current review of curriculum maps has pointed to the need for essential skills to provide a guaranteed curriculum for all students. Staff and administration are in the process of identifying these skills for all content areas. The school has adjusted the second grade math curriculum based on results of assessments and a review of the percentage of questions asked on the summative assessment. Teachers are excited about the coherence this analysis has brought to the grade and the clear expectations that have been established.

The inquiry team structure in both math and English language arts has further established a culture of reflection and revision. They have examined conditions of learning and established the need for changes in the use of content area language, problem-solving protocols and teacher-student conferences in math. As a result of collaborative inquiry, the school will also review its kindergarten through grade 2 assessments. They will implement a systemic change after having established that data in these grades stress an over-reliance on anecdotal assessments and lack the depth of multiple sources of data that provide more complete student profiles.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: The Cornerstone Academy for Social Action Elementary School	△	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?			X	
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all sub-groups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?		X		
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	➤	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?		X		
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?			X	
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and sub-groups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and sub-groups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYO, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Sub-groups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB sub-groups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.							
<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X				
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X					
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X				
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.							
<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?		X					
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X				
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?			X				
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X				
Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.							
<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+			
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?			X				
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X				
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X				
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?		X					
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed