

Quality Review Report

2008-2009

Community School for Social Justice

High School 427

350 Gerard Avenue

Bronx

NY 10451

Principal: Sue – Ann Rosch

Dates of review: December 8 - 9, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Richard Woolf

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Community School for Social Justice is a high school with 354 students from grade 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 40% Black, 58% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 7% English language learners and 19% special education students. Boys account for 41% of the students enrolled and girls account for 59%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007 - 2008 was 81.0%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 85% eligibility.

The school together with another high school has partial occupancy of two floors of a building originally designed as an industrial factory.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

This is a caring school where students and staff value each other and respect one another's opinions. The staff take time to listen to student concerns and as a result, there is a great deal of mutual respect and trust. Students feel safe and secure in an environment, which is conducive to learning. The school has a democratically organized student council where students express their opinions to the staff.

The school uses data well to support student learning across all of the core subjects. This is helping in teachers being better able to differentiate their work. However, there is still an inconsistency in the delivery of differentiated instruction across every classroom as there is in the sharing of other teaching practice for the benefit of every teacher. Currently, the school's highest achievers receive less challenge in their work than their individual achievement data suggests they are capable of reaching. The school has strength in setting individual student learning goals. This takes place within the family-group lesson structure. Students and their teachers confer, on a weekly basis, to set academic and learning goals. Students value this in helping them to keep on track. They greatly value the family group structure as a place to share emotions and concerns in a non-threatening environment. The school offers students an engaging curriculum that covers a wide range of subjects so it is of some concern that attendance rates, although rising significantly over the past year, still fall short of those considered satisfactory. Teachers have opportunities to participate in a very strong program of professional development. Each teacher has an individualized plan that meets his or her personal and professional needs. Delivering professional development in this way is allowing more staff to improve their practice and therefore student learning.

The school has incredible support from outside sponsors. The Citizens Advice Bureau supports and is an advocator of the school in helping to deal with students' emotional, social and intellectual needs. It provides assistance during the school day and offers an extensive after school project. The organization also works with student families in providing assistance of a social nature. Parents welcome this as they try to support their children in moving on to college. Parental participation is still an area the school is striving to improve, especially in engaging more parents in understanding how to help their children learn effectively at home. This reflective school evaluates itself against a number of well-considered criteria. There are signs of improving student progress because of such actions.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The school has in place a strong program of professional development that assists teachers in improving student learning.
- The school has excellent relationships with outside agencies that help develop students academically, emotionally and socially.
- This reflective school possess the ability to learn from a wide range of sources that is helping to improve the education of its students.
- The school increasingly uses data to gain a stronger understanding of the individual needs of its students.
- This is a harmonious school where students and adults learn together in a safe and secure environment that encourages learning to take place.
- The setting of regular student learning and personal goals is a strong feature of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop a more systematic way of sharing good instructional practice amongst all staff.
- Continue to extend the provision of differentiated instruction for all students but more particularly for those capable of high achievements.
- Ensure more guidance is given to engage parents in the learning process of their children.
- Continue to improve rates of attendance to allow more students to access and benefit from the broad curriculum.

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 analyzes data very well, using it to guide numerous activities, which improve student learning. Each grade level leader has a spreadsheet with an extensive range of data that allows them to build up a profile of each of their students. The sharing of this data takes place at regular grade level meetings. These meetings are also the fulcrums for teachers to plan lessons individually or with a specific grade level focus. One of the school's main goals for the year is to improve writing through the better use of conferencing and writing. Each grade level has to demonstrate how, through data driven instruction, they are contributing to this goal.

The school utilizes a great deal of data on their special education students and English language learners to understand their individual needs. Despite this close analysis moving these two groups of students to sustained higher levels of performance still proves challenging. However, there are currently signs that improvements are taking place across a number of subjects and the school hopes their endeavors will gain them additional credits on the progress report. The school has a close understanding of other subgroups and their educational needs. This is particularly the case for tracking the reasons for the significant but lessening numbers of long-term absentees. More and more information is available for parents and students using online programs. Students welcome this as they can track their own progress. Parents also have access to information but the school is unable to track the numbers accessing it to analyze the effectiveness the system. Parents are able to conference with teachers so they know the progress of their children and they understand the purpose and function of the report card system in being able to track their child's progress and achievement. The school has a substantial amount of data on individual students, and cohorts that allows them to be reflective, cite trends and adapt practice when the need arises. The school is planning to use this sharp analysis particularly in terms of the whole school writing initiative.

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.

An aspect of the school's work that is proving beneficial for students is goal setting. This is particularly the case for student goals. A systematic process revolves around the family group. Weekly, students set their own personal goals for the ensuing week. These are usually based on organizational goals, for example, "not to be tardy" or "ensure all assignments are in on time". The family-group teacher confers with students

to reflect on the achievement of their goals. In addition, subject teachers also set learning goals but these are usually for a longer period of approximately one month. This joint approach of setting personal and academic goals is proving effective as marking period outcomes are showing an overall improvement in student scholarship. A major reason for this is that students receive very clear next-step learning strategies that enable them to enhance their work.

The school shares the setting of its Comprehensive Educational Plan goals with a wide audience that includes parents and students. In order to develop note-taking skills for college preparation a senior student acts as the minute secretary for this group. The goals have a foundation in data and are responsive to the current academic needs of the school. The school has a new inquiry team that has a target group of students that data shows performing at a low level of English language arts proficiency. The aim is to undertake a piece of action research to show that through better teacher conferencing techniques, students will be able to understand the writing process more easily and improve their skills across all subjects. This approach, although new, is already proving beneficial in progressing the target group. The school reaches out to parents in a number of ways including open nights, parent handbooks and newsletters. However, the school is not able to engage sufficient numbers to actively share an interest in the learning process of their children. Despite an improving attendance rate, the school is still to embrace all its students and for them to attend regularly. The school accepts this as being a significant challenge but continues to work hard with the entire community to allow more students to access and benefit from the broad curriculum and thereby overcome this barrier.

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 is a member of group of schools who have a waiver from New York State to undertake a variation in external examinations. These are project based assessment tasks (PBATs). The school commences these projects in grade 9 to introduce students to the process. Students build upon this in other grades and then present a final project as part of their graduation. Over the next two years, this form of assessment is to become the primary determinant of student progress across all major subject areas. The school has an expertise in the field of project based assessment tasks and sees the expansion of this style of working as a natural extension of their current instructional delivery. This methodology is proving very popular amongst both staff and students as an alternative to more formal systems of external examination. Another focus is the development of differentiated instruction so that teachers meet the individual needs of students. Currently, the school does not extend this provision to match the needs of the highest achieving students and in doing so fully meet their individual academic needs. The school undertakes a number of do it yourself assessments (DYOs) especially in math.

The principal is an effective resource manager. The primary focus is always to sustain and improve teaching and learning. The school has sufficient resources for teachers to carry out their work. There is an increasing use of technology to engage students in their learning although the school acknowledges how this is still an area for growth. The

school has a strong focus on developing reading and writing skills across the curriculum so leveled libraries now feature in classrooms with appropriate texts for all students to access.

The school environment is a happy and harmonious place in which staff and students have mutual respect for each other. All the school's constituents recognize it as place that is conducive to learning. Students enjoy being part of their family group as it allows them to cement their relationships with a single teacher as well as fellow students.

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 school has an effective individualized professional development program for all the teachers. This stems from the goal-setting process undertaken with the principal before the commencement of the school year. Teacher goals are in alignment with overall school goals and therefore professional development complements this process. The administration carries out a number of informal and formal observations. Teachers welcome the feedback and the supportive suggestions from these to improve their own instruction and learning. The school has several new teachers to both the school and profession who acknowledge the great encouragement and effective support they receive in challenging students to improve their learning both from the administration and colleagues and through the effective meetings structure. This is an exceptionally supportive staff. They are sensitive to each other's concerns and pressures and as a result, collaboration is a key feature of their work. Intervisitations do take place but the school does not have a planned program that has total staff participation. The school has yet to develop ways of ensuring that there is a consistency of practice in every classroom and as such, not all teachers complete the online assessments every day. As students use this as a self-monitoring and motivational tool when checking their work their progress is somewhat impeded.

The school collaborates with many outside organizations, which ensure students have opportunities to grow intellectually, socially and emotionally. Their link with the Citizens Advice Bureau is paramount and in its seventh year. The organization provides students with a range of programs that are supportive of and additional to the school day and cover academic and social issues. Parents welcome this help for their children and for themselves in dealing with family and parental concerns.

The school links in with Hostos community college as part of the "College Now" program and gives students another avenue to explore their talents by gaining college credits. Another additional piece is the importance of the Manhattan Theater Club; working through the performing arts to develop the students' artistic talents. The school acknowledges the work of its partner organizations as being invaluable in developing its students as well-rounded lifelong learners.

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.

Following the good collection of data, the school is able to monitor student progress closely. The administration checks on whole school progress and that of individual groups of students across each grade level and against subgroups. The outcome is an effective method of determining the progress towards achieving the whole school goals. Monitoring of the student's personal goals takes place weekly during their family group lessons. This is a reflective process and in conjunction with their family teacher, students set new goals for themselves. Teachers and administrators are also able to adjust plans and goals as a result of meetings that take place at least monthly.

The school has a number of interim checkpoints within its structures that allows the administration to monitor teachers as they progress to meeting their goals and those of their students. These involve regular one-to-one conferences and grade level meetings. The school systems are robust enough to allow changes to take place in either curriculum or instructional activities. The school is exceptionally good at using the plethora of data it receives from a growing number of outside sources to improve its practice. Using issues arising from the most recent Progress Report and Quality Review, the school initiated new policies and procedures. These are now beginning to positively impact upon student learning notably the implementation of a whole school writing rubric. The improving levels of attendance are another indication of greater involvement of students in the learning process.

The principal has a clear vision for this school and one, which the entire faculty acknowledges as being an important factor in the school's drive to improve itself. The school has a good understanding of how far it has come over the years and the curriculum changes now occurring to strengthen student engagement in the learning process is a measure of the school's resolve to continue this improvement.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Community School for Social Justice	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	Δ	➤	✓	+
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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>	△	➤	✓	+			
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							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed