

# **Quality Review Report 2009-2010**

**Cornerstone Academy for Social Action**

**Elementary School 189  
3441 Steenwick Avenue  
Bronx  
NY 10475**

**Principal: Dr. Malissa Mootoo**

**Dates of review: February 23 – 24, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Catherine M. Powis**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Cornerstone Academy for Social Action is an elementary school with 454 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 47% Black, 43% Hispanic, 4% White, and 4% Asian students. The student body includes 13% English language learners and 12% special education students. Boys account for 56% of the students enrolled and girls account for 44%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 91.2%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The founding principal of Cornerstone Academy for Social Action (CASA) leads the school with a powerful vision for developing a reflective, data-driven learning community. This is a school that shows no sense of complacency. School leaders and teams of teachers are strategic in collecting baseline data about the school in June to drive tightly focused annual improvement goals for the upcoming year. Needs assessment surveys, design-your-own periodic assessments, and self-reflections are just some of the very efficient tools developed to provide intentional and actionable feedback to inform the next steps for teaching and learning. Large data walls capture this ongoing analysis and provide visual bar graphs of longitudinal and linear progress for all students with emphasis on closing the achievement gap for sub-groups. A constant evaluation and adjustment of plans to secure student achievement gains have led to a significant increase in attendance, from 89.1% to 92.3% over two years. Accessing a variety of student data leads to varying levels of differentiated instruction across classrooms. As a result, individual students and groups of students are making gains in English language arts and math, thus narrowing the achievement gap. However, the school recognizes that differentiated instruction is not yet an embedded practice and therefore not all students are making good strides in their learning. Similarly, feedback to students does not always provide detailed reasons for their success, or clear next steps for improvement to help them achieve their learning goals. All students benefit from a well-balanced curriculum that includes Spanish and the arts, and a variety of elective courses. Nevertheless, parents recognize that high expectations are not always reflected in the level of challenge and rigor seen in work products. Parents appreciate the school's transformed system for reporting progress so that individual student goals and next steps are shared throughout the year. High rates of suspension have significantly decreased in response to a school-wide CASA Cares program to cultivate mutual respect and positive attitudes among students and staff.

Professional collaboration on teams using action research is a high priority, resulting in shared leadership and improved student learning. To this end the principal has scheduled common planning time for teams to meet and refine their practices to meet their students' needs. Nevertheless, collaborative inquiry work is not yet a fully embedded practice and therefore is not yet as effective as it could be in improving student outcomes. Various professional development strategies result from school leaders utilizing observation processes to assess instructional practice, alongside teachers' self-reflection on how to improve their teaching. Grade level academic support personnel coach new teachers as well as seasoned ones and are redeployed in response to the school's core team evaluation of the effectiveness of professional development.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders and teacher teams rigorously gather and analyze a comprehensive range of assessment data which enables them to identify strengths and areas of need in student achievement to a fine degree.
  - Responding to a school-wide comprehensive analysis of assessment data, grade level teacher teams are focusing on math with their target population. This informs their work through the very effective design of their own interim assessments that generate a detailed item analysis to determine next learning steps for students. In complementing this work, comparisons of student performance are readily made by teachers who maintain a very detailed and current assessment data binder for each subject that houses item analyses, a conferencing system, ongoing running records, school-created assessment action plans, and content specific data used to drive focused instructional decisions.
  - Color-coded data walls are regularly updated by teacher teams and school leaders. These strategically display ongoing and frequent review of reading levels and math unit-of-study assessments to identify trends by comparing individual and sub-group progress with class, grade, and school wide trends.
- Recognizing the challenge of being an overflow site for the district, all stakeholders place high priority on their responsibility for the social, emotional, and academic development of every student.
  - CASA Cares, a modified positive behavior intervention system, has transformed the culture of the school to ensure that the school's core beliefs are evident in all aspects of learning, as well as fostering a caring community where teachers tailor this school-wide behavior management system to engage students as learners. Students are excited to earn their CASA cash for their display of positive attitudes and team spirit, resulting in a decline in suspensions since the program's inception.
- School leaders incisively analyze an extensive range of data to inform professional development planning as well as individual growth to help teachers develop consistent, effective instructional strategies.
  - Having normed their observation of classroom teaching and analysis of learning outcomes, school leaders are strategic in determining plans to improve pedagogy. This is coupled with engaging teachers in needs assessment surveys, learning walks, and self-reflections that empower them to decide on their professional growth plans, launch a professional development catalogue, and create a WIKI to share best practice.
  - A week-long schedule of professional collaboration was planned for all staff in August with a menu of school-wide and grade-level offerings to build instructional capacity aligned to the school's annual and interim goals, and which is especially tailored for new teachers.

- Methods of communication to families have been transformed into reports of progress over time to encourage academic and personal success for all students.
  - The school has transformed its system for reporting student progress and goal setting to families. They have redesigned the school report card to include periodic content goals, matched to strategies for accelerating progress, and ways that parents could help their children at home, bringing greater consistency in communicating with parents.
  - Families welcome the information included in Grade Expectations, grade-level packets indicating benchmarks for all content areas, and social-emotional expectations, as well as units of study, that enable them to more efficiently collaborate with the school to support student learning.
- School leaders and faculty have structures in place to regularly evaluate and adjust curriculum, instructional practices, and professional development planning in response to staff and student learning needs.
  - In response to teacher-created periodic assessment item analysis, school leaders and teacher teams adjust curriculum calendars and frequently re-evaluate designated resources, such as extended day opportunities for struggling students as well as enrichment for higher achievers.
  - A core team of administrators and teachers meets weekly to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development matched to teacher and student goals. This, together with a review of academic support logs and administrators' teacher observation logs, results in adjustments to the spring professional development catalogue and redeployment of academic support personnel.
- The principal is an analytic thinker who engages staff in making informed and strategic organizational decisions that empower teachers and support the school's instructional goals, resulting in higher levels of engagement.
  - Tactical scheduling creates common planning time for teacher teams to meet regularly with intended outcomes of planning a cohesive curriculum across grades and driving student success through action research. In addition, teachers' talents are tapped to enrich the curriculum with a variety of electives for all students in a cohesive extended day program.
  - The wise use of resources results in academic support personnel on each grade to support the school's instructional initiatives through strategies such as assisting teacher team work, mentoring new teachers, planning for professional development, and the study of the Spanish language in all grades to enable students to learn about culture.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Create structures to regularly evaluate and adjust ways in which teachers assess the progress of targeted students, so that feedback provides more detailed reasons for success and clear next steps toward achieving learning goals.
  - Analysis of student work and conference notes reveals that a few teachers have not developed mastery in utilizing these opportunities with

students to isolate granular and specific areas of need in order to provide more meaningful and detailed feedback, tailored to each student and that identifies specifically the next steps for improvement.

- Frequent use of graphic organizers and other instructional strategies to organize thinking are widespread. However, the use of rubrics to establish leveled criteria and organize feedback for students is not yet embedded in teacher practice.
- Ensure multiple entry points to learning so that content, process, and student work products are differentiated to match individual student needs and projected outcomes.
  - In the best lessons, students are fully challenged by work that is modified to accommodate individual needs. However, teacher practice is inconsistent across classrooms and does not reflect a cohesive approach that supports differentiation. There are some differences in curriculum and instructional strategies for higher achievers from those used for other students. Similarly, student notebooks and work folders do not show sufficient evidence of tiered supports to ensure progress for struggling learners. Consequently, the special needs of these groups of students are not addressed sufficiently well to ensure consistent progress.
- Develop a plan to support and deepen the collaborative inquiry work of teacher teams, and continue to monitor and evaluate their effectiveness in improving their teacher practice and student outcomes.
  - As a result of the core inquiry team's analysis of how the school's teacher teams operate, professional development was planned to develop effective team norms across the school. However, a few teams are at the middle stages of development and do not yet realize the full potential of collaborative inquiry as an opportunity to make key decisions that affect student learning across the school.
  - A first grade team functions as an exemplar of action research. They collaboratively develop strategies in response to benchmarks for the progress of student subgroups in math, as well as revisiting and adjusting curriculum along the way. However, this work is not yet embedded in all teams across grades to improve student outcomes and create a more effective culture of confident, professional collaborations.
- Ensure that teachers communicate high expectations through classroom routines, rigorous instruction, and goal setting to all students and their families in order to raise the level of learning across the school.
  - Most students are usually engaged in their learning, yet at times some higher achieving students say that they "are bored and do not feel challenged", very often completing the work before others who require additional help. Similarly, parents would like to see more challenging work for their high achieving children. Consequently, student work is not yet consistent in reflecting higher level thinking and routine habits that push their thinking and cultivate higher expectations for performance and progress for this particular sub-group.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

<b>School name: Cornerstone Academy for Social Action</b>	△	▷	✓	+
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			<b>X</b>	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?		<b>X</b>		
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?				<b>X</b>
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?				<b>X</b>
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?				<b>X</b>
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				<b>X</b>
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>				<b>X</b>

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?			X				
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?			X				
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>			X				
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?			X				
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?			X				
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>			X				
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>			X				
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>