

Quality Review Report 2009-2010

Community School for Social Justice

**High School 427
350 Gerard Avenue
Bronx
NY10451**

Principal: Sue Ann Rosch

Dates of review: May 3, 2010

Lead Reviewer: Jeff Soloff

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Community School for Social Justice serves students at the High school (General Academic) level. The school has 342 students enrolled in grades 9, 10, 11, 12, SE. The school population comprises 1% white students, 37% black students, 60% Hispanic students, 42% boys, and 58% girls. Currently, 8% of the student body are English language learners. The school enrolls 21% students with Individual Education Plans (IEP's). The average attendance rate for the 2009 school year was 84.6%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The strong leadership of a caring, visible principal has made the school a learning community focused on accelerating student learning by using performance assessments in lieu of Regents examinations. The rigorous curriculum includes higher-level work products and research projects that prepare students for college. A graduate said, "The requirements of the Performance-Based Assessment Task program were more difficult than my first year in college." Although the curriculum is rigorous, differentiated instruction is not yet evident in a majority of classrooms. This hinders the ability of all students to learn at their entry point. The collaborative inquiry teams focus on students who are at risk of not graduating and those who have not completed their required assessments. As a result, most of the targeted students exhibit improved student-learning outcomes and complete their assessment task requirements. Teachers frequently engage in peer observations so that they can acquire different strategies that they can use to impact student learning.

Effective communication is a strong feature of this school. All students belong to family groups that meet weekly with an advisor who takes a personal interest in their work and well-being. A student said, "My family group advisor knows everything about me inside and outside of school." Another student said that the advisor "is always there for me if I need her." However, students are not able to identify their next learning steps. This inhibits their ability to use their rubrics to identify how to improve their work. The school keeps parents informed about student progress through an online grade book. This online program gives parents up-to-date information about student progress and attendance that enables parents to support their child's education in a timely manner. Parents state that communication with teachers "is fantastic." A monthly principal's newsletter and mailings keep parents informed about school events and upcoming deadlines.

Teachers use performance-based assessment data to monitor student progress. However, the lack of formative assessments and benchmarks limits the teachers' ability to measure progress and make adjustments to improve learning. Measurable long-term outcomes with checkpoints are also lacking.

Highly effective outside partnerships assist students in preparing for college. College Summit assists students with applications and college visitations. It also provides professional development for teachers so that they can help students gain college admission. Bronx Works provides social services for students and families as well as recreational and college advisement for students coordinated by an on-site liaison.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- A rigorous performance-based curriculum that features highly demanding work products and research, preparing students for college and beyond.
 - The school participates in the Performance-Based Assessment Tasks (PBAT) program that provides a rigorous curriculum in which students demonstrate what they have learned through writing and oral presentations, and how it connects to their lives. The program focuses on higher-level thinking skills and research projects, preparing students for college and beyond. The success of the program is measured by a 97% college acceptance rate for this year.
 - The curriculum, which is aligned with State standards, was created by the teachers and engages students of all ability levels. As a result, all students receive the support they need to successfully present their performance projects to a panel of teachers.
- The school effectively communicates its high expectations about academics, attendance and behavior, giving parents an active voice in the decision-making process that accelerates student learning.
 - The school clearly communicates its expectations to students and parents through its website, mailings and parent meetings. In September, the school conducts meetings for each grade level so that parents are informed about the goals, rubrics and projects for the year. The phone messenger system makes parents aware of student absences.
 - Parents are actively involved in decision-making through the Parent-Teachers Association, school leadership team and formal and informal conversations with the accessible and visible principal. A parent said, “Our voice is welcomed, listened to and taken into account” when decisions are made by the principal. The high level of parental involvement results in higher levels of student achievement.
- Teacher teams use an inquiry approach to discuss the progress of targeted students, instruction and next steps for students in a collaborative framework.
 - Collaboration is a major part of the school's philosophy. Most teachers are involved in inquiry teams that meet twice a month to study and analyze the progress of their target populations so that adjustments can be made to the instructional program to accelerate student learning.
 - Peer observation is an embedded part of the school's instructional program, fostering distributed leadership. Twelve teachers volunteer their time and energy because they believe that they can “...learn from any colleague regardless of content expertise or experience” to improve their practice. As a result, teachers' instruction has a positive impact on student learning.

- Warm and respectful relationships among students, teachers, and school leaders result in an environment that is highly conducive to learning and supports the academic and personal growth of students.
 - The school's family-like environment exudes a positive culture that is focused on learning. Every student is part of a family group that meets with their advisor on a weekly basis. Advisors thoroughly know each of their students and monitor their social and academic growth and well-being. One student said that she "called her advisor's cell phone on a Saturday and was able to get help" with a personal situation.
 - The Performance-Based Assessment Task program interests students, keeps them highly engaged in their learning, and includes students in the decision-making process. A student said, "The principal hears our concerns and acts on them. She always has our best interest in mind."
- Highly effective internal and external partnerships with community-based organizations provide opportunities for students that accelerate their social, personal and academic growth.
 - A partnership with College Summit assists in preparing students for college. Students receive support with college applications and essay writing as well as opportunities to visit colleges with their parents. The organization provides extensive professional development for the family group advisors so that they can focus their students on college and beyond.
 - Bronx Works provides a full-time liaison to the school that coordinates tutoring, recreational programs, college advisement and arranges internships for tenth graders who have to perform community service as part of their tenth grade performance assessment task.
- The school's excellent communication systems keeps parents fully informed about student progress, attendance, and school activities in order to make parents active partners in their children's education.
 - Teachers enter grades and information about assignments online so that parents and students have access to current data and are kept informed of due dates and missing work. A parent said, "I check online weekly so that I can encourage my child to keep up with his work." A recent effort to increase attendance resulted in slightly higher attendance. The school uses the automated phone messenger system, phone calls and emails as well as a committee in its effort to increase attendance.
 - Progress reports are sent out every three weeks between marking periods so that parents are aware of student achievement and can work with their children to improve their learning.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the use of differentiated instruction so that lesson planning reflects purposeful groupings, all students are challenged and tasks accommodate different learning styles to maximize student learning.

- There is evidence of differentiation in some classes but it is not yet an embedded practice in all classes in the school. Some teachers give generic assignments which result in missed opportunities for some students to accelerate their learning.
- Although most students are engaged in their project-based learning, the lessons do not always reflect multiple entry points. In a collaborative team-teaching class, where students' ability levels ranged from a low level one to a level three, all students were working on the same assignment. This limited their learning experience because some students struggled with reading the material.
- Develop data-led interim goals and regular benchmarks for subgroups to measure progress, adjust instruction and evaluate success in a timely manner.
 - The analysis of formative data is not rigorous enough to determine the ongoing progress of subgroups. This prevents the school from identifying trends, strengths and areas of need. In addition, the lack of established interim benchmarks inhibits the evaluation of student progress against those benchmarks and contributes to the school's inability to revise and refine student-learning goals with precision.
- Develop a plan to set measurable long-term outcomes with interim checkpoints for school-wide goals so that progress can be measured, adjustments made and success evaluated.
 - The school measures student progress with rubrics for their performance assessment tasks. However, it does not consistently engage in a process that includes formative data to measure progress toward school-wide goals. The principal relies on verbal feedback from grade level meetings. Without the use of measurable data, the school is prevented from making necessary adjustments to strengthen the instructional program throughout the year and over time.
 - Teacher teams have not created a system to measure progress toward interim goals. This limits the teachers' ability to adjust goals and teaching strategies to improve outcomes.
- Institute procedures to ensure that students can articulate their academic goals so that they can focus on their next learning steps.
 - Teachers conduct ongoing rubric-based assessments through the Performance- Based Assessment Tasks program. However, students are not able to articulate their goals for specific subjects nor are they able to state the steps they need to take to improve their learning.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

School name: Community School for Social Justice	Δ	➤	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?				X
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?			X	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?			X	
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
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.				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			X	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			X	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

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.							
<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			
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X				
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.							
<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			
Overall score for Quality Statement 4				X			
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.							
<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				
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X				
Quality Review Scoring Key							
△	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed