

# Quality Review Report 2011-2012

**Cornerstone Academy for Social Action**

**Elementary school X189**

**3441 STEENWICK AVENUE**

**BRONX  
NY 10475**

**Principal: James Bellon**

**Dates of review: March 1, 2, 2012**

**Lead Reviewer: Laura Colavecchio**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Cornerstone Academy for Social Action is an Elementary school with 398 students from Pre-kindergarten through grade 5. The school population comprises 51% Black, 43% Hispanic, 3.5% White, 1% Asian students and 10% other students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 90.4%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school has developed a safe and inclusive culture that promotes and support high expectations for student behavior, resulting in academic and personal growth for the whole school community. (1.4)
  - o The school analyzed the student incident reports and identified significant number of critical occurrences during the school day. This prompted the school to revamp the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) through incentives that allow students to earn Bellon Bucks. These incentives are then used by students to purchase school items at the Bellon Bucks reward store as well as to access school events. Students report that these incentives are motivating them for “doing the right thing” and teachers indicate increased focus on academics rather than behavior as the impact of this initiative. As a result of the strengthened system for behavior modification, level 4 and 5 incidences have dropped from 49% last year to 26% this year.
  - o The principal’s open door policy allows students access to communicating their ideas and needs directly to the administration. Students submit daily written requests to the principal indicating their individual experiences and ideas to improve the school. Students proudly cite the Valentine’s Day School Dance as the major event that they initiated. The school also incorporates a part-time guidance counselor into its social emotional support structure, making her available to students during lunch and recess. As a result, students are excited to come to school, and name multiple adults who support their learning and growth as evidenced by a 2% increase in attendance compared to the previous year.
- The school strategically aligns its curricula to key Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and New York State (NYS) Standards, engaging all students in rigorous academic tasks and learning. (1.1)
  - o The school has been using the Teacher's College Reading and Writing Curricula (TCRWP) for two years. Teachers and coaches identified key CCLS standards, with a focus on informational writing, and have aligned their curricula to these standards. Curriculum maps include anchor texts, big ideas and essential questions to promote higher order thinking. A modified Every Day Math curriculum now includes units that target related concepts grouped together in an effort to provide sufficient time for students to build mastery. As a result, the curriculum in the school is leveraged to promote readiness for middle school and beyond.
  - o Grade and content area teams and individual teachers utilize end of unit assessments informed by the Understanding by Design (UBD) curriculum framework, conferencing notes, student work products and teacher made rubrics to modify instructional units and strengthen alignment to the standards and learning targets. Based on the assessment of students’ responses to writing, teachers critically evaluated their questioning and discussion prompts and strengthened them to raise the level of critical thinking and further support differentiation to meet the increased expectations of the CCLS. Revised prompts and questions address standards for writing and engage students in deeper levels of thinking and analysis and support all students in constructing viable arguments. Students also shared work and spoke about increasing their writing stamina, having opportunities to discuss topics with teachers and friends and having models for good work and receiving feedback on how to improve their

work. As a result, students are able to discuss and produce writing responses that are more complex, incorporate guidance and support from peers as well as adults, meeting grade level expectations.

- The school leadership effectively utilizes classroom observations and student work analysis process to provide goal aligned and actionable feedback to teachers that enhance professional growth and pedagogy. (4.1)
  - o The school consistently provides professional development through a broad range of opportunities for all teachers both new to the profession and highly experienced. Teacher needs are identified by the principal and assistant principals who have engaged in frequent cycles of short, focused, informal and formal observations that are in line with a clearly delineated framework that includes timely feedback with collaboratively defined goals. The principal and assistant principals are seen as coaches and the school provides targeted, highly specific next steps to address the diagnosed needs through mentoring. Identified teachers serve as literacy leaders, and provide school-wide professional development with recognized experts from Teacher's College and network team in identified areas based on observation data. This cycle of observations, targeted feedback, aligned support, and follow-up observations has resulted in a culture of high expectations, self reflective practice and improved achievement for staff and students.
- School leaders make strategic organizational decisions that support the school's instructional goals and pedagogical practice. (1.3)
  - The principal, in collaboration with his administrative team, identified a high need to build teacher curriculum content knowledge and pedagogical practice within grades levels. This led to strategic teacher assignments within the same grade level over time, resulting in cultivation of effective grade level expertise across the school. The principal also assigned administrators to support literacy and math content within grade levels they supervise. Each grade has an identified lead teacher who opens up their classrooms as lab sites and facilitates intervisitations, support lesson planning and team meetings including the weekly "Data Mondays" sessions. Strategic decisions around resource use that include Teacher's College for reading and writing, UFT Teacher Center to support math and trainings sought from the Children's First Network (CFN) team all support implementation of the 2011-2012 Citywide Instructional Expectations, as integral components of the school's goals. Teachers and administrators refer to these decisions as the primary force behind increasing collaborative and reflective school culture that is focused on student achievement as evidenced by student and teacher work products.
- Teams of teachers and individual teachers use student assessment data to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level. (2.2)
  - o During weekly team meetings, grade norm their understanding of the writing rubrics using sample student work. As they discuss their rationale for specific ratings, they also surface specific student deficiencies such as transferring oral language to written work. Implications for mini-lessons are listed as specific modifications that support understanding, including various ways to check in with students and provide supports. As a result of these teacher team meetings, students receive more consistent and accurate assessment of their writing ability through the use of common rubrics that pinpoint student performance and next instructional steps.

- o Across classrooms teachers engage students in frequent checks for understanding including conferring, use of graphic organizers to self monitor, turn and talk, strategic questioning that leads to invitations to small group learning with the teacher. Teachers use student information gathered through these checks to make adjustments in their teaching approaches, use of instructional materials and supports as well as extensions, resulting in actionable feedback to themselves and students for improvements. In one class, students were learning about “how to...” books and the teacher modeled an example of one area she was an expert in. After children indicated they were ready to try this in their writing by giving a “thumbs-up” to the teacher they moved into table groups of four that included all of the tools and resources, including some how to and non fiction books. As the teacher and assistant teacher moved around to conference with students, they handed out pink cards that said “you have been invited”. This strategy provided an additional mini lesson for those students who demonstrated a need to hear it again in a smaller group and engage in further guided practice with the teacher and peers. As a result, all students were provided targeted instruction targeted to meet their needs based on current performance.
- The principal uses a wide range of data to regularly assess the effectiveness of organizational decisions, interventions, and professional development as well as staff assignments. (5.4)
  - o The schools has engaged in learning walks to understand how the teacher team work around questioning and discussion is taking root across grades and within classrooms. Through the use of formative and summative assessment analysis, the principal has identified teacher movement practices including looping that do not support deep ownership of curriculum and secure pedagogy on grade levels. He then has put in place teacher assignment strategies for building stamina throughout the school, and increasing staff ownership by including teacher groups in the hiring practices as stakeholders. The principal switched paraprofessional assignments within the building as a result of multiple sources of data including observations, student achievement trends and feedback from teachers and parents to support instructional effectiveness and increased student outcomes.

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

- Strengthen data based student goal setting systems and increase teacher capacity to set curricula aligned goals with actionable next steps for increased student outcomes. (3.2)
  - o Some teacher teams and individual teachers are using data to set goals for students. For example, the first grade teacher team discussed breaking up groups for word work to address differentiated approaches and individual student needs based on observed classroom patterns and after school program data. Discussion included the use of a resource titled “Words Their Way” that provide targeted strategies for specific lessons in word work. However, this practice is not consistent across classes and grade levels for all students. As a result, there are missed opportunities to maximize student engagement and goal setting practice is not fully developed to leverage change across the classrooms and grades for all students.
- Strengthen teacher practice to consistently meet varied student needs and engage students in high levels of thinking and learning. (1.2)

- Although there is evidence that many teachers plan lessons using formative and summative data in literacy and math that allow for differentiation through appropriate student groupings, purposeful differentiation that meet student needs is not consistent across grades and content areas. In one room, the students were listening to part of a read aloud about a historical immigrant experience focusing on the difference between big ideas and details with timely opportunities to turn and talk in their mini book club groups. There were posted reminders on the desks to guide the discussion as well as information ring as an appropriate scaffold for English Language Learners in the group. Teacher modeling through the smart board further supported students who needed more visual and organizational reinforcement. However, in another room, the whole class lesson was focused on breaking down one review question on a simulation math test where students were using ditto sheets and through teacher modeling with a document camera. Questioning used was general for all students and did not provide understanding of rationales behind correct and incorrect responses. As a result of this inconsistency, students are engaged in thinking that is uneven, some producing work that reflects the rigor of instruction, high expectations and effective teacher moves, others simply copy what is on the Smart Board or the document camera, answering isolated questions that only require them to recall, repeat and circle the correct answer, hindering the opportunities for all students to receive instruction that is tailored to their learning needs.
- **Increase effective partnerships with families to promote involvement and support for learning so that the school, students and families work toward meeting the school's goals. (3.4)**
  - o The school consistently communicates high expectations to families through progress reporting, attendance follow up and progressive discipline policy. Although parents have been introduced to ARIS parent link and the Common Core Learning Standards through workshops offered by the parent teacher association and the school leadership team structures, parents have expressed an interest in more information about assessments and promotional criteria to better understand the instructional expectations of the school, city and state. Parents and students also expressed a need for increased partnership with families through the use of guidance counselors to increase children's self confidence and build social emotional skills. In the absence of more effective partnerships with families that effectively target social emotional development, opportunities to prepare students for their next level of learning are not fully leveraged to advance school-wide goals.
- **Expand the existing team structures so that a vast majority of teachers are engaged in professional collaborations resulting in embedded opportunities for teachers to practice distributive leadership. (4.2)**
  - o A majority of teachers currently participate in teacher team work, including weekly grade level meetings that examine student work and "Data Monday" teams that develop writing rubrics and create and revise units using the UBD framework. However, most out of classroom teachers are not strategically included across grade level teams. Furthermore, although distributive leadership results in teachers' voice on instructional matters, the leadership structures are not embedded across all teams preventing the school to include all teachers to play an integral role in key decision making at the school.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name: Cornerstone Academy for Social Action	UD	D	P	WD
Overall QR Score			X	
<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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 as evidenced by meaningful student work products?			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
<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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 Align assessments to curriculum, use on-going assessment practices and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom level?			X	
2.3 Use grading policies and tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize, aggregate, and analyze student performance trends to inform instruction and curriculum?			X	
2.4 Engage families in school decision-making, activities and an open exchange of information regarding students' progress toward school and class expectations?			X	
<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>	UD	D	P	WD
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 staff, students and families, and support students and families to achieve them?			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>	UD	D	P	WD
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, guidance/advisement support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?			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>	UD	D	P	WD
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, with particular attention to the CCLS?			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	

**Quality Review Scoring Key**

<b>UD</b>	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>Well Developed</b>
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