

Quality Review Report 2011-2012

The Creston Academy for Responsibility and Excellence

Middle School X447

The Creston Academy

125 East 181st Street

Bronx

NY 10453

Principal: Pamela Edwards

Dates of review: December 12 - 13, 2011

Lead Reviewer: Anne Laitres

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

CRESTON ACADEMY is a Middle school with 419 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 19% Black, 80% Hispanic, 0% White, 1% Asian students and 0% other students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 23% special education students. Boys account for 59% of the students enrolled and girls account for 41%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2010 - 2011 was 93.2%.

Overall Evaluation

This school is Proficient.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The culture of mutual respect, evident throughout the school, creates a safe environment that promotes student learning and progress. (1.4)
 - The administration and faculty strongly believe that students learn best when they feel secure and respected. The two guidance counselors and Dean provide ongoing support to all students including English language learners (ELL's) and students with special needs. Students indicate that "whenever you have a problem, the counselors are always available to help." Students and teachers set goals together based on student strengths and areas of needs. These goals are reviewed and as they are met, new goals set. Students are able to articulate progress they have made and the steps that need to be taken to meet their goals. In addition to the School Survey, the administration conducts additional student surveys to ascertain student feedback regarding their feelings about what needs to be changed in the school. The Student Council meets every two weeks and provides input into event planning and discipline. This focus on the social emotional growth of the students supports a safe and inclusive school culture evident in increased attendance and fewer Superintendent's suspensions.
 - Creston Academy sets high expectations for every student and provides supports toward meeting these goals. This is evidenced by student articulation of their individual goals and acknowledgement that they are expected to work toward reaching their potential. Assessment based on rubrics provide information about the status of their work and the school wide grading policy enables them and their families to assess how they are moving toward meeting those high expectations. Teachers are available after school to provide additional help to students who need it. This results in increased student engagement and a desire to succeed.
- School leaders and faculty consistently engage families in open discussions that promote trust and clear expectations for student achievement. (2.4)
 - Administration and faculty maintain an open door policy for parents. Parents indicate that the school is supportive of the needs of the family and teachers care about the students. Problems are solved as they arise. A written report about student progress, attendance, and behavior is mailed to the parents during the months when there are no report cards. In addition, teachers often call to discuss progress with parents – both commendable and problematic. On Open School Night students attaining the Honor Roll (85-90 average) or Principal's List (90-100 average) and their parents are celebrated with a dinner and award ceremony. This not only underscores their achievement but encourages others to make the additional effort to achieve academically as evident in increased gains on the latest formative assessment.
 - Parents are provided information about how to use the ARIS Parent Link to access information regarding their child's progress. This year, in addition to communication with teachers and the ARIS Parent Link, comprehensive information about classroom assignments, attendance, and homework is available on line through Engrade. This site is used extensively by parents, as noted in parent interviews. Feedback is immediate and assists parents in

understanding the underlying factors in their child's academic progress so that they know the next learning steps for their children.

- The principal effectively aligns resources to support the school's instructional goals resulting in improved student achievement. (1.3)
 - The principal and staff consistently strive to meet the social-emotional needs of their students via full time counselors and the collaboration with Good Shepherd Services. A consultant is in place this year to provide on going support in the areas of curriculum and instruction through workshops, small group meetings, coaching, and "Lunch and Learns." The schedule allows for teachers to meet weekly to plan lessons that engage students and provide opportunities for all students, including students with special needs and English language learners to develop higher order thinking skill. The principal scheduled grade conferences and Saturday planning meetings to increase collaboration around the evaluation of student work based on rubrics. This alignment of resources allows the school to work towards articulated goals.
 - In order to support lower teacher/student ratio so that seventh grade classes have a team teaching model, two teachers share responsibility for a cohort of students leading to better student work products. In addition, all related services are provided using the "push in" model in an effort to lessen interruptions during instructional time. A partnership with Good Shepherd Services provides students access to the arts including theater, visual arts, and music theory during Advisory periods. Before and after school there are opportunities for students to participate in a wide variety of sports through partnerships with NYC Roadrunners and CHAMPS (Cooperative Healthy Active Motivate Positive Students). During this same time, there is the availability for additional help with English Language Arts and math. These practices are in place to support students in producing meaningful work products and attaining the high expectation the school has for each of its students.
- School leaders compile and analyze a comprehensive portfolio of data which results in decisions that strengthen the school's instructional practices. (2.1)
 - A comprehensive picture of the school is compiled from an extensive range of data including summative and formative data. A complete analysis for each class as well as every child in the school is compiled by Data Corp and presented in a visually explicit form that is easily used by teachers to keep track of student progress. Results of these assessments are analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the classroom curriculum and instruction in order to make decisions that strengthen the curriculum and meet the needs of all the students, including ELL's and special needs children. As a result, students made gains on the latest formative assessment.
 - Teachers are provided with all the data compiled by Data Corp for their class and individual children. They supplement this information with the Scholastic Reading Inventory and Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention to assess comprehension and reading levels and provide meaningful interventions, particularly with the lowest performing students. In addition, classroom data such as student portfolios, work samples, and analysis of student work, based on school wide rubrics, enables teachers to make

strategic instructional decisions that meet the needs of diverse learners resulting in improved student writing.

- Teachers consistently develop and use multiple sources of data to inform classroom practice resulting in improved student outcomes. (2.2)
 - Teachers consistently monitor periodic assessments, grade level assessments and end of unit tests developed by teachers to gain a clear picture of their students' progress. This information is used to form groups and individualize instruction. Teachers meet weekly by grade to review student work with the focus on what students can do well, gaps in skills, with the implication for adjusting curricula decisions and instruction based on individual needs and a clear set of expectations set forth in standard based rubrics. Coaches frame the content of the meeting but there is shared responsibility for leading the discussion and presenting the work of specific students with the aim of creating individual plans to move students forward toward their goal and the overarching goal of the school.
 - The Common Core Standards support all discussions as the staff reflects on the gaps that exist between the curriculum and standards. Teachers use information from supplemental data to identify students' strengths and needs. An Inquiry team meets weekly to focus on students who scored Level 1 on both the English language arts and Math State tests. This cohort of students receives targeted intervention 3 times a week which results in meeting the individual needs of the students and improved outcomes on formative assessments.
- School leaders set clear expectations for classroom teaching that results in reflective practice and professional growth for all teachers. (4.1)
 - The school embraces the Danielson Framework to set forth clear expectations for their teachers. Teachers set SMART goals around this priority that is aligned with the school's goal that "all teachers across the school will strengthen their teaching practice, in alignment with the DOE's 6 Priority Competencies." They meet one on one with the principal to reflect on their goals and receive meaningful feedback. There are both formal and informal observations. The Framework provides a common language for the teachers to reflect and discuss their work and implement consistent, effective practice across the school. Increased student engagement and higher order thinking around more challenging tasks has resulted.
 - Professional Development is framed around the areas of individual growth for each teacher. Actionable feedback is given to move the teacher to the next level. Informally, grade level teachers support the new teachers as mentors. An educational consultant provides on-going instructional and curricular support to the staff through workshops, small group meetings, and coaching. The use of these supports foster improved teacher practice providing rigor and data driven effective differentiation of instruction and its delivery resulting in increased gains on periodic assessments.

What the school needs to improve

- Refine tasks across the content areas to ensure that students are consistently cognitively engaged. (1.1)

- The school incorporates the state standards into the curriculum as they plan across the grades in all content areas. Teacher teams developed a sequenced unit of instruction focused on non-fiction with multiple entry points, including supports for ELL's and students with disabilities. With the Common Core Learning Task as a model, teacher teams are developing units of study. This is not an embedded practice across grades limiting additional opportunities for differentiated instruction and vocabulary development.
- Teachers use student work to plan and address the needs of various learners. The school has implemented double periods of guided reading and guided math as well as skills classes. There are opportunities for high functioning students to extend their learning while low performing students receive targeted instructional support. The opportunities that are provided for the average performing students do not challenge and extend their higher order thinking skills preventing all students from performing at their highest potential.
- Expand teacher implementation of instructional strategies that ensure differentiation and multiple entry points for all learners. (1.2)
 - The faculty is engaged in discussions around the CCLS, rigor and differentiated instruction. In some classrooms, teachers are integrating teaching strategies such as accountable talk, tiered activities, and hands on activities to challenge students and some support is given to English language learners. However, the absence of strategic differentiation with extensions that engage and challenge higher achieving learners and questioning techniques that effectively extend student thinking hinders the acceleration of learning.
- Sharpen school improvement planning and development of specific interim and long term goals with measurable outcomes. (5.3)
 - The long term goals of the school are clearly aligned to the yearly goals of improving student performance in literacy and math and improving and increasing teacher effectiveness. The goal of improving teacher practice is clearly articulated as the overarching goal through which the school will achieve the goals for instruction. However, a gap exists between the analysis of student work and making immediate adjustments in improving teacher practice. This results in a lag in meeting interim goals for targeted groups of students.
- Broaden the process of evaluating curriculum development and instructional practice to build coherence between what is taught and how it is taught. (5.1)
 - The school uses monthly data accountability forms and grouping sheets as well as identifying the bottom one-third of students who need more intensive instruction, including an after school program. An Inquiry team focuses on students who received a Level 1 on both the Math and ELA test. This targeted cohort receives intervention three times a week. Unit tests, quizzes, and student writing samples provide targeted and actionable feedback that supports intermediate goals. However, adjustments are not always made or evaluated based on the data. This hinders the school's ability to assess the effectiveness of the instructional program and its impact on the movement of the academic performance of the students to a higher level of achievement.

Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2011-2012

School name:	UD	D	P	WD
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>	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
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>	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
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>	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							
UD	Underdeveloped	D	Developing	P	Proficient	WD	Well Developed