

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Crotona Academy High School  
High School 321**

**639 St. Ann's Avenue  
Bronx, New York 10455**

**Principal: Anthony Harris**

**Dates of review: Nov 14-15, 2012  
Lead Reviewer: Monique Darrisaw-Akil**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Crotona Academy High School is a transfer school with 124 students from 9 through grade 12. The school population comprises 43% Black, 54% Hispanic, 1% White, and 1% Asian students. The student body includes 2% English language learners and 0% special education students. Boys account for 31% of the students enrolled and girls account for 69%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 61%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is developing.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- School leaders and staff have begun to revise curriculum to integrate the Common Learning Standards to support higher levels of thinking and learning. (1.1)
  - Teachers use a combination of teacher-made units of study and adapted bundles from the Common Core Library. School staff is in the process of aligning their curriculum maps to the Common Core Learning Standards with an emphasis on the instructional shifts, resulting in students being exposed to instruction aligned to the shifts in selected classes. The school has recognized that the development of writing skills is important and has begun to incorporate writing in all lessons across the content areas including the arts, which has led to students using writing as a vehicle to demonstrate understanding across classrooms.
  - Teachers are using essential questions in their lesson plans and in their curriculum maps. Examples of essential questions in an English unit on *The Tempest* are: “What are the moral responsibilities of intelligence?” and “Is forgiveness a responsibility or a virtue?” Teachers are designing and planning learning experiences that require students to think critically and use higher order skills particularly in the chemistry, economics and United States History and Government classes. Additionally, in some classes students are being asked to read and analyze a variety of texts including, informational text. As a result of these learning experiences students are engaging in rich discussions based on the text and producing short pieces of argumentative writing.
- The school has established a safe, positive and nurturing school culture that supports student and adult learning. (1.4)
  - The school has provided a safe learning community in which there is mutual respect among students and staff. School leaders have been intentional in improving the school tone as evidenced in the results of the most recent learning environment survey. Students reported that they could not recall any incidences of fighting or other forms of violence taking place at the school. An extensive new student orientation and lessons on the discipline code reinforce the expectations for student behavior. Teachers and staff have developed strong, supportive relationships with students. Students feel supported and believe staff has high expectations for them. Students indicate that teachers are there for them and help them to graduate from high school. One parent said she loves the school because it is helping her child succeed in life. A teacher stated, “Students have hope, they are encouraged, they can see their graduation.” Additionally, the staff has established a practice of inter-visitation in which teachers conduct low-inference observations to provide each other feedback using an established protocol and a uniform written format; resulting in a culture of collaboration and sharing of best practices.

- The school has established structures to ensure that every student is well-known by at least one adult. School staff, youth advocates and staff from South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (SOBRO), the school's community-based partner, meet with students regularly to address social-emotional learning needs. Youth advocates are assigned thirty students to track and monitor student attendance and academic progress. A social worker meets with students with individualized learning plans once a week for additional support and follows up. The school purposefully programs individual students to insure that an individual plan toward graduation is developed for every student. Student attendance is monitored by a team that includes counselors, youth advocates, administrators, teachers and the school's parent coordinator. Teachers are expected to participate in attendance outreach by calling absent students. Students at Crotona Academy have the opportunity to work at paid afterschool internships facilitated by SOBRO's Learning to Work program. Student attendance is strategically linked to the internships so that students must be present in school in order to work at the internship thus creating a significant incentive for students to attend school regularly. This system of supports for students results in the development of positive student academic and social behaviors.
- School leaders communicate clear expectations that promote on-going communication and collaborative effort of staff, partners and families which results in helping students achieve graduation and focus on post-secondary opportunities. (3.4)
  - School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for staff as evidenced in the faculty conference agendas, the cycle of formal and informal observations and weekly instructional bulletins. School leaders regularly conduct instructional walkthroughs and provide actionable feedback to teachers. Teachers use a common lesson plan template aligned to the Danielson rubric. In addition to school-wide professional development offerings, each staff member has an individual professional development plan resulting in a professional culture of continuous learning. Moreover, they state that they are encouraged to participate in professional development offered by the network as well as other providers. Teachers said the principal provides either substitute coverage or per session so that faculty can attend professional development offerings. Teachers are expected to provide written summaries to the staff of workshops they have attended and they are also expected to present to their peers thus, holding staff accountable for their learning.
  - School staff communicates expectations to students and families regarding college and career readiness planning by providing feedback to families in the form of progress reports, newsletters, parent mixers, parent/school contracts and regular meetings. The school organizes college fairs for parents and families. The school offers a "Learn to Work" class, a "Leadership" class and student internships to support student transitions to college and careers. Students believe that these two classes best prepare them for life after high school. The "Leadership" class, for example, provides seniors with support for writing personal statements, resumes and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) which supports the school's focus on student articulation to college and other post-secondary opportunities. Students discuss what they learned in class including the differences between

public and private colleges, large and small colleges and in-state versus out of state colleges enabling students to make better informed decisions about the type of institution they would apply to. In the “Learn to Work” class students discuss money management and the pros and cons of using check cashing places instead of banks to process their paychecks. Students also discuss direct deposit and online bill pay which leads to high levels of student engagement.

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

- Deepen pedagogic practices to further develop effective teaching strategies that provide multiple entry points so that all students can access challenging curriculum. (1.2)
  - The school is beginning to demonstrate evidence of the use of multiple teaching strategies to engage all learners including the use of different texts, graphic organizers and support materials such as bilingual dictionaries and the use of technology. However, evidence of higher order thinking skills in student work was uneven across classrooms. Many instructional tasks lack the rigor necessary to engage students in work that would prepare them for post-secondary learning. Numerous questions posed by teachers asked students to recall or summarize information thus limiting opportunities for high levels of student thinking and participation. The use of higher order thinking questions is not a practice found consistently in all classrooms resulting in a limited number of students having access to challenging curricula. There is a lack of consistent use of differentiated strategies in class. In many classes, students are given the same task regardless of student ability levels; providing few entry points for students with special needs or English language learners. Students are not purposefully grouped to maximize learning opportunities. In some classes students were organized into groups without a clear purpose for the groupings. The lack of a clearly articulated purpose for learning groups contributes to the inconsistent degrees of challenge across classrooms.
  - Across classrooms teachers are establishing effective routines for student learning such as integrating technology, word walls and content-specific vocabulary in their lessons; however student work products and discussion did not reflect high levels of thinking. Student written work in folders generally comprised of completed worksheets, Venn diagrams and graphic organizers. Though in a few classes students were asked to read and compare different texts and to use text to support their arguments, in most classes students were not required to support their writing with evidence. Although students are compliantly engaged in all classrooms, opportunities for student participation varied. While curriculum maps identified essential questions, teachers used few open ended questions during instruction. Thus, teacher questioning did not sufficiently promote high levels of student thinking resulting in uneven work products and discussion.
- Establish a system to align curricula with on-going assessment and grading practices so that instructional decisions can be revised based on student learning needs. (2.2)

- There is little evidence to show that teachers across classrooms use on-going checks for understanding and provide sufficient opportunities for students to assess their own progress in class. Students have access to rubrics in class but there is little evidence of established routines for student use of these rubrics to assess their own work. Students rely on report cards and teacher comments to determine how they are doing in class. There are no school-wide systems for students to assess their progress towards learning goals thus limiting opportunities for students to understand their own areas for growth. Teachers use the student conferencing sheets to track student progress but conferencing notes do not specifically focus on student learning needs or targets but instead record general observations regarding student behavior or completion of assignments. Additionally, while school staff uses item-analysis and review of scores from Regents examinations to make program decisions, information is not used to revise the curriculum. Student assessment data is used to refer students to after-school or morning tutoring. Teachers are using some common assessments. For example, they use the baseline assessment administered in the beginning of the year to identify student strengths and weaknesses. However, there is insufficient evidence that teachers are revising their curricula or plans based on data gathered from these assessments. Student assessment data is also not being used to strategically group students or provide additional interventions for students within the class thus, missing the opportunity to improve curriculum in order to best meet the learning needs of students.
- Create a system to evaluate and revise school level decisions and curricula to ensure alignment of practices to the Common Core Learning Standards. (5.1)
  - While individual teachers analyze the Regents examinations and student performance data, there is no school-wide system for analyzing performance trends and determining student learning needs. Although the school is working on implementing Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) units of study, there is no system to evaluate the success of these units in order to determine what further instructional adjustments are needed. The school uses test performance data and credit accumulation data to make decisions about hiring and programming but does not use student performance data to inform assessment, curriculum or instructional decisions.
  - The school values collaborative work as demonstrated by the regular informal teacher meetings. Teachers meet to plan frequently but protocols and agendas are not used to guide the discussions. Notes from meetings and professional development are recorded and stored in a binder. However school leaders do not evaluate professional development and teacher team meetings to ensure alignment with the Common Core Learning Standards. There is neither a formal teacher team structure nor a process to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher team work. This hinders the school's ability to revise instruction and assessments to address the shifts in the Common Core Learning Standards.
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## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: Crotona Academy High School	UD	D	P	WD			
Overall QR Score		X					
<b>Instructional Core</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, physical and health education, 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 that is informed by a research-based, common teaching framework and is aligned to curricula, engaging and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products?		X					
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels?		X					
<b>School Culture</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X				
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve them?			X				
<b>Systems for Improvement</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	UD	D	P	WD			
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet students' learning needs as evidenced by meaningful student work products?		X					
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of school improvement that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are tracked for progress and are understood and supported by the entire school community?		X					
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching with a research-based, common teaching framework 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 <b>inquiry approach</b> that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?		X					
5.1 Evaluate the quality of school- level decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school, with particular attention to the CCLS?	X						
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
<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>