

# Quality Review Report 2012-2013

**Cornerstone Academy for Social Action Middle School**

**11x462**

**3441 Steenwick Avenue**

**Bronx**

**NY 10475**

**Principal: Jamaal Bowman**

**Dates of review: May 30 - 31, 2013**

**Lead Reviewer: Elizabeth A. White**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Cornerstone Academy for Social Action is a middle school with 254 students from sixth through grade eight. The school population comprises 60% Black, 36% Hispanic, 2% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 5% English language learners and 18% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2011 - 2012 was 93.2%.

### Overall Evaluation

**This school is proficient.**

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The school's culture of positive student and staff attitudes result in an environment that fosters enhanced academic and social-emotional growth. (1.4)
  - Vibrant hall and in-class bulletin boards displaying student work promotes student achievement. Parents state that "an active administration" quickly resolves issues and concerns. Teachers are accessible and are always willing to help. Students are also encouraged to seek the assistance of an adult when something is bothering them. Community circle is a weekly forum where the school community openly discusses personal behaviors that lead to academic success. The adoption of a personal motto, "*I am responsible for myself and my education,*" helps to drive appropriate individual student behavior. Both parents and students feel that students are known by adults resulting in larger numbers of students seeking out staff members to discuss very personal issues related to themselves, family and friends. These efforts have led to positive supports provided to families such as, outside counseling and psychotherapeutic services that have positively impacted student academic performance.
- The school integrates writing into core content areas to effectively ramp up the literacy demand in curricula resulting in tasks that promote deep thinking and real-world connections. (1.1)
  - Curricula is planned through teacher teams that target a cross-section of students to ensure that academic tasks and data are focused on students with a range of learning needs using Danielson as the guiding framework. As a result, the school has developed coherent thematic units of study that focus on coherent reading and writing tasks. For example, in an argumentative writing task students are asked to do close read of articles about both junk food and the value of zoos. Students then complete graphic organizers to identify a claim, supportive facts and conclusions. These graphic organizers are varied to lend appropriate supports to all learners, including English language learners (ELL) and students with individual education plans. Afterwards, students are asked to critique the authors by offering advice on how their argument could have been made stronger. In this way, students self-identify strengths and drawbacks of argumentative writing enabling them to better write argumentatively themselves. To ensure that the needs of all learners are met, the school uses a *Writing Performance Task Tracker*. This tool enables teacher teams to assess student success for each unit of study resulting in curricular modifications as needed. In this way performance tasks become more deeply rooted in cognitive demand while allowing for multiple entry points for engagement thus contributing to closing the achievement gap.
- Teaching practices consistently reflect school curricula and beliefs about learning resulting in high levels of student participation that leads to positive student outcomes. (1.2)

- Instruction focuses on content literacy, multiple entry points and embedded assessment in most classrooms. Students have choice in demonstrating their proficiency via culminating projects. For example, in a science task entitled, Newton's Laws of Motion, students were asked to explain how these laws may be applied in the real world. Using a tripod format with sketches students composed written explanations of the three laws regarding motion (Force, Acceleration and Action/Reaction). Heavy emphasis on interdisciplinary vocabulary and writing has led to improved composition proficiency for most students. Periodic assessments for ELLs exempt from state exams also show improved writing proficiency. Students are also encouraged to engage in discussions around topics with groups of peers. For example, in a math classroom the teacher showed the previous day's responses on two exit tickets to review proportional relationships. This led to class-wide discussion on which ticket is correct and where an error was made. Afterwards, students had to independently come up with the correct response as the teacher hovered over shoulders to assess for understanding. These practices result in high levels of student engagement and ownership of learning. They also exemplify the application of the strategies based on the school's study of the text for pedagogy, Teach Like A Champion.
- Across classrooms assessment measures effectively identify student learning needs providing actionable feedback to students and teachers to inform next steps for student achievement. (2.2)
  - The school has placed heavy emphasis on the use and analysis of data using tools like *Skedula*, Common Core-aligned performance tasks, Acuity for English as a Second Language (ESL), IXL, and Achieve 3000. For example, through IXL, student individual reports are generated and used to monitor student proficiency levels. Students receive interim reports and teacher feedback about their work via commentary informed by Common Core-aligned rubrics. This enables pupils to gauge their performance and improve upon skills and their application to assigned tasks. Cross-grade collection of interim benchmark data also enables the school to align academic supports as needed. During teacher team meetings common assessments are reviewed as teachers regularly evaluate student work against the expectations of Common Core standards especially in literacy. Teachers analyze Acuity and Fountas and Pinnell interim test data to pinpoint students' academic strengths and deficiencies enabling them to set next steps for instruction. The use of on-going data analysis to modify instructional approaches as needed results in improved student progression towards mastery for all students. The progress report growth percentile reflects a 43% jump over the previous year. This validates that the school's assessment practice is successful and they continue it.

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

- Formalize regular classroom evaluation processes with individualized professional development supports to bolster teacher practices that promote improved student outcomes. (4.1)
  - The school uses the strategies in the book, Teach Like a Champion and the Danielson framework for pedagogical practice as foundation for a

common instructional focus and expectations for pedagogy. The principal conducts frequent informal observations for all teachers. However, written feedback from formal observations is limited to a few which diminishes the potential impact of the observation process for school-wide teacher improvement. In addition, evaluative feedback offered lacks specific reference to student outcomes or work products. Feedback also does not yet indicate the degree of pedagogical competency in alignment with the tenets of the framework. These shortcomings limit the quality of feedback. Ultimately, this minimizes the ability for effective, targeted promotion of professional growth and accountability to match individual pedagogical expectations.

- Devise a formal system to regularly monitor and evaluate processes for capturing current school-wide data with greater efficiency to identify trends in order to enhance the impact of policies and practices across the school. (5.1)
  - Teacher teams and individual teachers make good use of tools like *running records and Acuity* to gather and assess classroom and individual student data to determine growth in English Language Arts and math. Teams regularly share task performance results for those students who they have targeted, and each individual teacher also provides information to their students and families. However, ongoing school-wide data is not yet sufficiently organized to allow for a more accessible view of current aggregated trends across the school particularly for students who scored Tier 1 on past benchmark assessments. This limits the school's ability to efficiently aggregate and identify emerging school-wide trends and impedes the opportunity to make timely adjustments based on student outcome data to enhance school-wide processes.
  - The school utilizes a school-based cross-walk document to align effective teaching practices with pedagogical standards. In addition, groups of teachers attend off-site conferences on *lesson design and delivery*, as well as participate in visiting innovative school models such as *KIPP Infinity*, *NYC I-School* and *Westside Collaborative*, to support teacher practice. However, a transparent system to determine the effectiveness of support initiatives to improve teacher development has not been fully established. For example, while teachers turn-key to peers their learning from school visitations via teacher team meetings, a process to determine school-wide instructional impact has not yet been fully developed. The result is a lack of a systemic approach to gauge teacher development over time thus limiting the ability to determine the impact of pedagogical initiatives on teacher practice and provide appropriate teacher supports to foster continuous professional growth and accountability.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2012-2013

School name: <b>Cornerstone Academy for Social Action</b>	UD	D	P	WD			
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			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>