



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Cornerstone Academy for Social Action

Elementary School X189

**3441 Steenwick Avenue
Bronx
NY 10475**

Principal: Mr. James Bellon

**Date of review: December 22, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Ed.D.**

The School Context

The Cornerstone Academy for Social Action (CASA) is an elementary school with 406 students from Pre-Kindergarten through grade five. The school population comprises 55% Black, 39% Hispanic, 2% White, 1% Asian and 3% Other students. The student body includes 5% English language learners (ELLs) and 17% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	Focus	Proficient
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Celebration	Well Developed
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Additional Findings	Well Developed

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to the entire staff and provide quality training to help meet these expectations. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations connected to a path of college and career readiness and successfully partner with families to support student progress towards those expectations.

Impact

A culture of mutual accountability for high expectations exists among staff and families in support of college and career readiness expectations for students.

Supporting Evidence

- The introduction to CASA's 2014-2015 professional development (PD) plan describes its process of plan development and beliefs as follows: "We believe in building capacity. Teachers meet with their supervisors at the beginning of the school year and together goals are created. Administration provides staff with interest surveys when planning for PD. Teachers are required to turn key professional development to other staff. We believe in providing staff with multiple opportunities to participate in professional development." The plan addresses school-wide goals in the following areas: (a) Using Assessment in Instruction, (b) Questioning and Discussion, (c) Math Practices and Planning, (d) English language arts literacy in Grades K-2, (e) Development of *Expeditionary Learning*, and (f) Technology. The plan is individualized for each teacher, identifies teacher service and roles on various teams and cohorts, and includes topics like "dyslexia," "unit design," "Danielson," and "writing a quality Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Included in the plan are internal and external intervisitations focused on best practices. "We do a lot of intervisitations in a non-judgmental, non-evaluative way," said a teacher. "Principal Bellon gave us each a notebook to document best practices seen and heard during professional development. He says, 'We've got to push ourselves...let's aim higher.'"
- A parent shared that she chose to keep her third grader in CASA "...even though he scored 99 on the gifted and talented test. This school has a family feel...I would want to be here as a kid." Following a homework help workshop for parents of Kindergartners, participants shared the following reflections: "I will try to sound out letters; I want to know more about how I can get my child to work on numbers and how to read without confusing him; I will try to help him read every night; I want to know more about his development in spelling and reading. I liked this workshop and will return for many more." When asked about their contribution to the development of the School Comprehensive Education Plan, parents responded: "We had a lot of input. It was painful and took a lot of time, but we felt like equals at the table. Mr. Bellon made sure we were comfortable with the process."
- Parents volunteer in the library as Learning Leaders. Parents shared that a parent whose son is no longer here still volunteers in the library. Parents regularly receive communications through email, monthly newsletters, *SchoolMessenger*[®], and *ClassDoJo*—a positive behavior management software application. "I go on it every day on my phone," said the parent of a fifth grader. "I know my son who has an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) has grown a lot...he's very calm and more confident. He does more writing. He's better in math...his reading comprehension is low. Is he ready for middle school? I think he'll be okay, based on his teacher this year."

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core and integrate the instructional shifts. Curricula and academic tasks consistently emphasize rigorous habits and higher-order skills.

Impact

Purposeful decisions are made to build coherence and promote college and career readiness across grades and subjects for all students, including English language learners and special education students.

Supporting Evidence

- A 2014-2015 calendar of units for reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as important dates during each month of the school year was comprehensively charted by CASA. Prior to the Common Core, CASA was a member of the *Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project* (TCRWP) community of practice. "We considered using *ReadyGEN™* for a short time and were proactive in trying to make it work, but we realized that this program was not what we wanted," said Principal Bellon. "Second grade used *ReadyGEN™* last year for the whole year, but we saw that it had a lot of loops and holes," said a teacher. "It did have rigor but it was hard for students to reach and a lot of scaffolding was needed. Now we use *ReadyGEN™* as a guide and look more to the standards." *ReadyGEN™* modules and TCRWP units of study are incorporated into CASA's English language arts (ELA) curriculum in the lower grades as well as content from *Foundations®* (Wilson). *Expeditionary Learning* is implemented in grades 3-5. Upper grade teachers commented: "Although there is tons of vocabulary in *Expeditionary Learning*, there is not enough writing so we're using TCRWP to bring in more writing." Technology resources are also embedded in the curriculum units like the Discovery Channel, YouTube videos, Prezi presentations, and SMARTboard applications like Scholastic's *Story Starter*. In January 2015, teachers plan to begin using additional intervention programs like *Reading A-Z* and *Leveled Literacy Intervention* (LLI).
- CASA staff participated in a Summer Mathematics Academy two years ago and began to implement Common Core-aligned units from the states of Georgia and North Carolina. In response to staff concerns about the *Everyday Mathematics* program in use (developed by The University of Chicago School Mathematics Project), members of the school's mathematics planning team looked deeply at how mathematics should be taught. The mathematics team agreed that *GOMath!* "... was rigorous with tasks that require kids to think." Teachers create pacing calendars that incorporate components of *GOMath!* as well as *enVisionmath* by Scott Foresman/Addison Wesley, *Investigations in Number, Data, Space®* by TERC (Technical Education Research Centers), and the Van de Walle Professional Mathematics Series, *Teaching Student-Centered Mathematics*.
- Teachers are using student friendly "I Can Statements" and created bookmarks that outline the Common Core English language arts and mathematics shifts. The school's focuses on instructional shifts related to text-based evidence in English language arts and deep understanding in mathematics. "We pick the standards for each grade that are priority for our students," said a teacher. "We look at the standards that were hit the most on the English language arts test."

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and informed by Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching. Teaching strategies strategically provide multiple entry points into the curricula.

Impact

Teaching practices and discussions at the team and school levels reflect a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best. All learners, including English language learners and special education students, are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills in student work products.

Supporting Evidence

- Over the past few years, CASA's instructional focus was on strengthening questioning and discussion techniques, which is consistent with the Danielson component 3(b). The principal said that increased instructional rigor and cognitive engagement among students was the impact of this school-wide focus. Based on an analysis of teacher practice and student data, the school's new instructional focus for the 2014-2015 school year is deepening the use of assessment in instruction, consistent with Danielson component 3(d).
- CASA administrators and teachers are working to strengthen their English language arts and mathematics academic discussions. Professional development and articles are shared and discussed among staff on such topics as "5 Practices for Orchestrating Productive Math Discussions" (Margaret S. Smith & Mary Kay Stein, 2011), which identifies (1) anticipating, (2) monitoring, (3) selecting, (4) sequencing, and (5) connecting as practices that will provide teachers with more control over student-centered pedagogy within their planning and implementation of instruction. The principal highlighted the school's on-site United Federation for Teachers (UFT) Teacher Center, which he said "...is a place where teachers can meet often and where we have opportunities to have open conversations about what is working well." On the walls of the Teacher Center are suggestions from teachers to teachers encouraging each other to "Try it...you might like it...it worked for me." Examples of suggestions include: "Phone a friend—when students are struggling to answer or need more time, they can call a friend," "Track the speaker—stand behind the student speaker," and "Use *ClassDojo* points to increase participation."
- During a third-grade mathematics class, students worked in small groups or with partners on the topic of distributive property of multiplication. The teacher stated, "If you need help, you can go to another group." She added: "For those of you finished I have a challenge problem. Instead of breaking 9×6 into two parts, break it into three parts. It will look something like this: $(\underline{\quad} \times 6) + (\underline{\quad} \times 6) + (\underline{\quad} \times 6)$." The principal highlighted how the students were able to maintain engagement in the task while the teacher worked with a small group of students. When asked whether school work was easy or hard, a third-grade student responded, "Hard, but my teacher tries to push us so we would learn."
- Paraprofessionals are active members of classroom instruction, facilitating small student groups and planning with teachers. In a grade four ICT class focused on fractions, co-teachers are engaged in parallel teaching, while two paraprofessionals work with small groups. "They tell us what they're noticing," said a teacher. "They're part of our daily life."

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Across the vast majority of classrooms, teachers use and create assessments, rubrics, and grading policies that are aligned with the school's curricula and offer a clear portrait of student mastery. Across classrooms, teachers' assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding and student self-assessment.

Impact

Actionable and meaningful feedback regarding student achievement is provided to students and teachers. Teachers make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- "Based on surveys of staff, it was clear to us that we needed more work in assessment," said a teacher. "We noticed that we were testing 40% of the school year." This sentiment is captured in a very detailed written analysis by CASA's UFT representative who is the school's technology teacher. This analysis highlighted that the Common Core-aligned programs selected by CASA were "very assessment laden" and were in addition to the Measures of Student Learning (MoSL) data administered twice each year. The school developed a template for reflecting on student outcomes which they named "Cornerstone Assessment Analysis Form" (CAAF). In the written analysis, the CAAF's intended usage is described as follows: "Through the CAAF, teachers document the overall strengths and weaknesses of the class, create strategy and skill groups based on common strengths or needs, and identify students that are outliers and may need differentiated instruction. With CAAF in hand, teachers are expected to plan their units and lessons to meet the needs of the class, groups, and specific students." A first-grade teacher's CAAF completed at the end of a chapter on addition strategies stated: "Students were given the post assessment. This assessment was handed out and each problem was read aloud by me. Students were given time to thoughtfully answer each question. Once the test was completed, students were encouraged to look over the test and check their work. All students in the class did well, receiving scores in the 100th, 90th, and 80th percentile. The class average was 94%."
- In response to the written analysis of CASA's assessment practices, it was decided that there would be common periodic assessments as well as teacher choice of other interim assessments. "We wanted a real picture of student ability, so we moved the baseline to the end of the year for the benefit of the next grade," said a math teacher. "We came into this school year with relevant student data." Fountas & Pinnell reading levels as well as math data are tracked school wide on two bulletin boards that serve as data walls. Posted in the UFT Teacher Center is a statement reflecting CASA's perspective on assessment practices, which reads: "We define assessment as students recognizing/demonstrating characteristics of high quality work. CASA students hold themselves and each other accountable for their learning and monitor their understanding through the use of assessment tools. CASA student know how they are going to be successful."
- Exit slips, thumbs up/down, and the Stop Light method are used to check for understanding. Student feedback is provided as glows (strengths) and grows (next steps). A second-grade teacher asked students, "Who can remind us what we were doing today in Reading Workshop?" Student: "Self-monitoring." Teacher: "What does it mean to self-monitor?" Student: "We're checking for progress." Teacher: "What did your partner share with you about self-monitoring?" Student: "Self-monitoring helped her with tricky words."

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

Teacher teams systematically analyze key elements of teacher work including classroom practice, assessment data, and student work for students they share or on whom they are focused. Distributive leadership structures are embedded within the school.

Impact

There are shared improvements in teacher practice and mastery of goals for groups of students. There is effective teacher leadership and teachers play an integral role in key decisions that affect student learning across the school.

Supporting Evidence

- During monthly curriculum team meetings, assistant principals and teachers review student work and data using the *Understanding by Design* (UBD) framework as they refine curricula. Principal Bellon shared that vertical curricular alignment is a priority, so student transition from one grade to the next grade is smoother. Consistent with UBD's Backward Design approach, the curriculum team's discussion last month focused on what students need to know in English language arts to be prepared for next year. "We do wish lists...what do you wish the kids would come into your grade with," said a teacher. "We talked about what students need to master in the fifth grade and how can grades four, three, two, and one help," said another teacher. An outcome of this discussion is the use of close reading protocols in the lower grades this year.
- In a grade three common planning meeting facilitated by a grade leader, teachers unpacked items from English language arts and mathematics test simulations conducted earlier in the month. The resource used was released questions with annotations from the New York State Testing Program dated August 2014, which had been downloaded from EngageNY. Team members looked at the frequency of the standards that were tested and looked for trends in the item analysis. Using a graphic organizer to capture their noticings, teachers discussed what students must know and do to answer questions correctly, common misconceptions and errors, and the implications for instruction. Team members regularly discuss successes and challenges in the progress toward academic and behavioral goals for targeted students, which are tracked during individual conferencing with students.
- "Every grade has kids with difficulty and each grade team is piloting something to address student needs," said Principal Bellon. Kindergarten is piloting a school-wide academic intervention services reading model. First grade is piloting the Stop Light method of student self-assessment. Second grade is piloting a close reading protocol. Third grade is piloting the use of graphic organizers to improve writing organization and volume. Fourth grade is piloting station teaching. Fifth grade is piloting the use of Performance Series as a benchmark system of tracking reading growth. "All piloted initiatives have come from collaborative teacher teams," said Principal Bellon.