The Quality Review Report

The Quality Review is a two-day school visit by an experienced educator. During the review, the reviewer visits classrooms, talks with parents, students, teachers, and school leaders and uses a rubric to evaluate how well the school is organized to support student achievement.

The Quality Review Report provides a rating for all ten indicators of the Quality Review Rubric in three categories: Instructional Core, School Culture, and Systems for Improvement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Celebration to highlight an area in which the school does well to support student learning and achievement. One indicator is identified as the Area of Focus to highlight an area the school should work on to support student learning and achievement. The remaining indicators are identified as Additional Finding. This report presents written findings, impact, and site-specific supporting evidence for six indicators.

Information about the School

Cornerstone Academy For Social Action Middle School (Casa) serves students in grade 6 through grade 8. You will find information about this school, including enrollment, attendance, student demographics, and data regarding academic performance, at http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm.

School Quality Ratings

### Instructional Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## School Quality Ratings continued

### School Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes that supports the academic and personal growth of students and adults</td>
<td>Area of Celebration</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Systems for Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does the school...</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Well Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Observe teachers using the Danielson Framework for Teaching along with the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection</td>
<td>Area of Focus</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>Additional Finding</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Area of Celebration

| Quality Indicator: | 1.4 Positive Learning Environment | Rating: | Well Developed |

Findings
There is a theory of action that supports all of the social-emotional and academic needs of the entire school community. There are a variety of structures in place that directly impact students’ personal growth, most notably through weekly community circles.

Impact
Student voice is meaningfully involved in all decision making in a school that fosters positive student personal and academic behaviors.

Supporting Evidence

- The entire school community engages in community circles every Friday morning engaging staff and students in an opportunity to share something positive, shout out a peer or teacher, or apologize to any adult for something that may have happened in the prior week. In addition, students have opportunities to share poetry, music, artwork and other student created work products and receive acknowledgment from peers and staff. Students are also celebrated and acknowledged for displaying positive behavior and awarded with a variety of rewards. During the student meeting, all students shared how impactful community circles are to them. They stated how they look forward to being recognized, recognizing their classmates and supporting their classmates as they share their work. “It is a way for us to celebrate ourselves and our classmates,” is what one student said. Additionally, another student stated, “It is a time where we can apologize to a teacher or classmate for something we said or did to them.”

- The school has implemented an advisory program to help support students’ social and academic needs. The school advisory program has students focus on four components: self-determination, effective communication, self-reflection/metacognition, and building community. Furthermore, students who are targeted as needing additional support are provided with an advisor who they work with and meet with regularly. Teachers are matched with those students who have similar interests and needs, thus creating a well thought out match. In addition, the school follows the Seven Habits of Highly Successful Students, protocols that have impacted students in a positive way by allowing them to be proactive and learning how to effectively listen to others. Students shared the community in their school “feels like a family.” Consequently, the school reports a decline in students’ negative behavior and an increase in student academics.

- The peer mediation program was created because of student interest and need. Students shared how they wanted to see less conflict in the school amongst their peers. As a result, staff and 30 students have been trained in the peer mediation program and as such they work with their classmates to help mediate conflict, leading to a drop in school suspensions and the amount of detentions when compared to the same time last year. Although the school is not designated as a formal Community School by the Department of Education, it is doing much to offer students services that are similar to those in a Community School such as mental health supports from a visiting health professional, in addition to the help offered by on-site guidance counselors and social workers. Furthermore, students have decorated every hallway in the school with artwork they feel reflects the values of the school. During the student meeting, students shared how their “voice is everywhere in the school.” They said that their voice is heard all the time, and if they feel as if their voice is not heard for some reason, they bring it up during the community circles for the whole student body to hear.
**Area of Focus**

| Quality Indicator: | 4.1 Teacher Support and Supervision | Rating: | Developing |

**Findings**

Teachers are offered feedback that inconsistently captures strengths and challenges and at times does not provide actionable next steps connected to Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

**Impact**

Feedback that inconsistently articulates clear expectations for teacher development fails at times to elevate schoolwide instructional practices.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Written feedback to teachers throughout the observation reports reviewed was uneven. Many reports accurately captured strengths, areas of focus and clear next steps, while others offered limited feedback or did not offer any feedback at all. For example, feedback on one observation report detailed how the teacher engaged students in collaborative practices and how the teacher used effective questioning in order to further push student thinking. However, in another observation report for the same teacher, although the observer made mention how the teacher did a “good job” conferencing with a student and how students did not get an opportunity to engage in discussion, the observer did not offer the teacher any next steps or resources that would help the teacher improve her pedagogical practices.

- School leaders engage in conversations with all teachers following either formal or informal visits, and in many cases immediately following the lesson engage in constructive conversations that include ways to improve future lessons. In addition, school leaders meet with teachers during initial planning conferences and throughout the year to engage in conversations that help teachers develop personal goals, and via ongoing emails the principal communicates resources and support. The principal recently sent an email to his staff sharing student dialogue protocols resources that are directly connected to part of the school’s instructional focus. However, feedback such as this is uneven and not seen as frequently throughout teacher observation reports.

- A classroom observation report to a science teacher shared some of the interactions the teacher had with students during the lesson and complimented the teacher for “asking really good questions.” However, even though the observer noted that there were “many students that did not seem engaged” no next steps were offered relative to student engagement nor were any sort of resources suggested that would assist with helping the teacher engage students during the lesson. In another observation report the observer rated the teacher effective in six areas but offered no feedback directly connected to those areas that would help the teacher improve.
**Additional Finding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.1 Curriculum</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

Planning documents reviewed all displayed alignment to Common Core Learning Standards, rigorous tasks for all students and the integration of instructional shifts, most notably writing across the curriculum.

**Impact**

The coherence throughout planning documents in all subject areas and grade levels promotes college and career readiness.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teachers design lessons that give students many opportunities to engage in rigorous conversations. For instance, in an eighth grade English Language Arts (ELA) lesson plan, all students will be involved in group conversations based around the question, “How does economic crisis impact people’s choices?” This debate style lesson allows students to explain why they chose the information they did and reflect on the discussions of their peers. A sixth grade humanities lesson plan planned to engage students in a wide range of discussions around the theme of bullying. Questions posed to students required them speak about the impact of bullying, and what they can do to make a difference in the life of a classmate. Lesson plans such as these were seen across grades and subject areas.

- The school’s focus on writing is evident across all curricular documents. Every eight to 10 weeks, students are engaging in some form of exploratory, narrative, and/or argumentative writing. A seventh grade humanities lesson plan had students writing independently during a portion of the lesson in order to summarize the events of the Boston Massacre and to determine which group, in their opinion, instigated the event. A sixth grade humanities lesson plan plans for students to connect learning throughout a Socratic seminar and write down which phrases they think will be the most powerful, fully explain their understanding of a particular phrase and why it was meaningful to them. Additionally, writing is infused in all math planning documents allowing students to respond in written prompts.

- Rigorous tasks for all students was evidenced throughout planning documents reviewed. In many lessons, students are asked to make connections to not only previous learning but current trends in society. Students are also asked to read a variety of texts, both fiction and non-fiction and be able to cite textual evidence. Additionally, throughout curricular documents, students are asked to actively determine the meaning of words and phrases and infuse into their work the academic vocabulary associated with a particular subject. In addition, students are often engaged in lessons that give them hands-on opportunities to create and build items. For example, during a sixth grade Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) lesson, students are asked to construct a physical model of an atom using the Periodic Table of Elements.
## Additional Finding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>1.2 Pedagogy</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Well Developed</th>
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### Findings

Across the vast majority of classes, teacher practices are aligned to the school’s belief in how students learn best, most notable rigorous student discussions.

### Impact

Students are producing high levels of work products on a regular basis and taking ownership of their learning as a result.

### Supporting Evidence

- Rigorous student discussions involving making inferences was observed across the vast majority of classes. During an eighth grade ELA lesson, students were engaged in group discussions and activities that included a vocabulary word search, a bindle activity and a poem response. This activity led to students predicting what the novel *Of Mice and Men* would be about. Students shared responses such as, “I think this book will be about people who travel a lot”, and “It sounds like this book will take place on farm land.” Opportunities like this that allowed students to make inferences was seen throughout the classrooms visited. During a sixth grade humanities lesson all students engaged in a Socratic style seminar openly and honesty discussing the effects of bullying. As students shared, there was clear use of accountable talk stems interjected into the conversations. Students were open and comfortable in sharing, so much so that two students became emotional when discussing their experiences with bullying.

- During a sixth grade computer science lesson, students designed, developed and implemented computer code to create an artifact that responds to an event, such as a mobile application (app) that responds to a sensor. The level of rigor in this lesson was extremely high, as students were able to articulate how the code is designed, why it is implemented in a specific way, and what adjustments they needed to make in order to call the code successful. During a sixth grade STEAM lesson, students worked in predetermined groups to design a physical model of an atom using the periodic table of elements as a guide. During the group conversations students were able to articulate the difference between an atom and an element, the parts of an atom, and how electrons are distributed within an atom. During this lesson, students took ownership of every aspect of the activity needing very little assistance from the teacher.

- During a seventh grade humanities class, students had been participating in the reading of the novel *My Brother Sam is Dead* and used this knowledge to engage in groups discussing the social, political and economic effects of the Revolutionary War. During this lesson, there was evidence of students using accountable talk stems, academic vocabulary and citing evidence from the text when speaking with their peers. During a seventh grade humanities class, students engaged in discussions about the sequence of events that led to the colonies declaring independence from Great Britain. This lesson also exhibited active student discussions along with the use of academic vocabulary such as propaganda, patriots, and loyalists. Students also cited specific textual evidence and were able to make inferences throughout their conversations.
Additional Finding

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<tr>
<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>2.2 Assessment</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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Findings

Common assessments are used to determine student progress towards goals. There are a variety of ways that teachers are checking for understanding, most notably through the use of exit tickets.

Impact

Teachers make effective adjustments to lessons in order to meet the needs of all learners.

Supporting Evidence

- The school has a strong focus on the use of exit tickets in order to adjust the following day’s lesson to meet the needs of students; this is most notable in math classes. Math teachers give exit tickets every day and have a system in place that allows students to get additional support based on their exit ticket score. The day after an exit ticket, during the student’s regularly scheduled math class, students walk to the corner of the math wing and look at a large monitor for their name. Students then go to a different math teacher based on how they scored on the prior day’s exit ticket. When asked about the process, students explained how everyday they come to the screen before their math class to look for their name in order to see if they need to go get extra help on the previous day’s lessons.

- During their meeting teachers shared the variety of ways that they are tracking student progress towards goals, including daily conferring. Teachers conference every day with students, recording and tracking the data they observe. In ELA, teachers are giving writing assessments every eight to 10 weeks to gauge students’ writing and their ability to cite evidence, support claims and construct arguments. The principal explained how this year, based on the ongoing review of students’ reading levels, teachers are able to identify a set of students not showing progress and those students were given a literacy diagnostic by the school’s speech teacher in order to identify what skills needed additional support.

- Throughout classrooms, teachers used a variety of ways to check for student understanding. Teachers regularly used a checklist or anecdotal notes during conferencing with students to assess in-the-moment and track student progress, as evident during an eighth grade humanities class where students worked collaboratively to analyze lines of dialogue to reveal aspects of characters. During a sixth grade humanities class, the teacher used a predetermined checklist as students engaged in a Socratic Seminar responding to open-ended questions such as “Why do you think the character is taking it upon herself to speak up?” and “What outcome do you think this character is expecting with this Slam Poem?” Data from these check-ins are used to adjust curriculum and the delivery of lessons by creating similar-skilled groups in order to provide targeted support to address student’s misconceptions.
### Additional Finding

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<th>Quality Indicator:</th>
<th>4.2 Teacher Teams and Leadership Development</th>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
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**Findings**

The majority of teachers are engaged in inquiry-based collaborations that analyze student work products, and improve and adjust teacher pedagogical practices.

**Impact**

Teachers promote the achievement of school goals and strengthen their instructional practice, resulting in improved progress towards student goals, most notably through increased student math and ELA grades during the first marking period.

**Supporting Evidence**

- Teacher inquiry sessions are organized and structured so that teachers have equal voice and rotate the responsibility of facilitating each meeting. During the math teacher team meeting, team members used the Student Inquiry Protocol to look at various levels of an ELL student’s work products. The teacher facilitator began the meeting by reviewing protocols and procedures and then allowed for time for teachers to review the student’s work products. Areas identified by the teachers included how the student seemed to rush through his work and seemed to struggle with language. In addition teachers identified gaps in the student’s thinking, including how the student visually expressed a math problem and what the student actually wrote down in his written response, and questions about how the student saw the graph either as a line segment or continuous. Teachers agreed that what would be beneficial to the student is to annotate the word problems, add in the use of a timer and graphic organizers.

- Teachers are involved in structured inquiry work that looks at student work products, analyzes student data and reviews pedagogical practices. This has made an impact on teachers in a variety of ways including an increase in teacher attendance and punctuality based on teacher attendance reports. For example, teachers shared that meeting regularly across grades and subject areas has allowed them to have in-depth discussions about students they share and develop strategies as a team in order to support those students across all subjects. Teacher team work has not only affected teachers’ instructional capacity but has also impacted students specifically in math. For example, the school reports that last year 17 percent of all students passed math after the first marking period and this year 34 percent of students passed math the first marking period.

- During the teacher meeting, teachers shared that collaboration has improved greatly among all staff. Teachers believe that there is now much higher levels of communication between teachers. “We are constantly sharing ideas and resources not only in meetings but via email at all hours of the day and night.” Teachers report that in the past there has not been that feeling of everyone being on the “same page,” and now, teachers are reporting a much higher level of consistency amongst teachers and throughout the curriculum. School leaders and teachers firmly believe that the school now includes great student-to-student discourse as an outgrowth of teacher planning.