



California Department of Education
2014 California Distinguished Schools Program



Elementary School Application: Part B



Signature Practices

Cornerstone Academy Preparatory School

Signature Practice 1 Summary

1. Name of Practice:

Instructional Coaching

2. How long has this practice been in place?

- Less than 2 years
- 2–4 years
- 5–8 years
- 8+ years

3. What is the Target Area? (*Choose at least one area.*)

Target Areas:

- Career Technical Education
- Chronic Absenteeism and Dropout Prevention
- Civic Education Awareness
- Closing the Achievement Gap
- Education Supports
- Nutrition and Physical Activity/Education
- Parent and Community Involvement
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
- Use of Technology
- Visual and Performing Arts

4. What are the target populations? (*Check all that apply.*)

Race/Ethnicity Subgroups:

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Filipino
- Hispanic or Latino

(Continued on next page)

Cornerstone Academy Preparatory School

- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 White
 Two or More Races

Other Student Groups:

- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged
 English Learners
 Students with Disabilities
 At-Risk Students (Academic, Social, Emotional, Behavioral, or Health)
 English-Language Arts—Students Not Yet Proficient
 English-Language Arts—Advanced Learners
 Mathematics—Students Not Yet Proficient
 Mathematics—Advanced Learners
 Other Core Subject Areas—Students Not Yet Proficient
 Other Core Subject Areas—Advanced Learners
 Other (*specify*)

5. What strategies are used to implement the practice? (*Check all that apply.*)

Strategies:

- School Climate
 Small Learning Communities
 Parent Involvement
 Data-Driven Decision Making
 Health Support
 Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support
 Professional Development
 Other (*specify*)

6. Is this practice initiated by your district and implemented districtwide?

Brief answer: No – We are a single site charter school implementing this practice.

If your answer above is yes, you must explain in the Signature Practice Narrative how your school implemented this practice at your school's site. Tell us how you are taking this districtwide practice beyond normal expectations and making it an integral part of your school's successes—remove these lines of text.

Signature Practice 1 Narrative

1. Rationale/Basis of the Practice

In East San Jose, there is an achievement gap between Latino students and English Learners and their non-Latino and native English speaking peers. In order to close the achievement gap in our community, we need the very best teachers in front of our scholars. Research has proven time and again that the single most important factor driving student achievement is teacher quality. Therefore, we believe that significant professional development and resources must be provided to each teacher to ensure our scholars are getting the highest quality instruction possible. Our primary vehicle for providing this professional development occurs through a school-wide system of intensive instructional coaching.

Why coaching? Atul Gawande, in his New Yorker magazine article “Personal Best”, stated “No matter how well trained people are, few can sustain their best performance on their own. That’s where coaching comes in.” In order to get better in the classroom, teachers must build their reflective capacity and have the opportunity to deeply analyze their practice and their student data. They must be given critical feedback from a trained eye so that they have the opportunity to improve with the urgency needed to serve our community.

Traditional education models have utilized coaching and feedback; however many teachers still report that they are observed infrequently, inconsistently, and often receive very superficial and overwhelmingly positive feedback. After analyzing how this practice has been underutilized, the Cornerstone Academy staff made a conscious decision to prioritize this practice on our site. Hiring practices and teacher evaluations were designed to emphasize teacher growth and development, in conjunction with student outcomes. The administration and Board of Directors also worked to ensure appropriate time, staff, and resources were devoted to instructional coaching.

2. Description of the Practice

Each teacher at Cornerstone is assigned a primary coach amongst the three administrators (all certified instructional coaches). The coach’s primary responsibility is to observe the teacher regularly, give concrete and actionable feedback, review lesson plans for rigor and alignment, and support the teacher in setting and attaining his or her professional goals. The coach also serves as a support system for the teacher, ensuring they are physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared for the rigor of teaching in a low income school with a variety of student needs.

The coaching relationship is highly differentiated based on the teacher’s level of experience and skill. New teachers are formally observed 2-3 times per week and expected to turn in 5-step lesson plans for those observations. Feedback is given instantly and discussed in greater detail during a 45 minute weekly meeting with the coach. If a new teacher is struggling, coaches often schedule additional sessions with the teacher to co-plan lessons or focus on classroom management, depending on the teacher’s area of need. Additionally, newer teachers often require emotional support to work through the challenges of being a new teachers and meeting the needs of so many scholars. The coach also provides a safe space and an outlet to discuss these issues and help new teachers remain positive,

solutions-oriented, and student-focused. This intensive coaching and support for new teachers enables them to ramp up quickly and advance their practice at a much more rapid pace than teachers in more traditional settings. As these new teachers progress, the coaching supports are modified so that the teacher can continue to improve, but also build capacity.

The coaching relationship is modified for veteran teachers who have a demonstrated track record of success in the classroom. Veteran teachers work collaboratively with their coach to select their focus area for improvement, define (using a rubric) what excellence in this area looks like, and drill down on this particular area in observations. Coaches utilize a more collaborative and facilitative stance with these teachers and the focus of coaching meetings is heavily on data and evidence of growth in the focus area. Classroom observations are often shorter and more focused on finding evidence of teacher growth.

By differentiating coaching, teachers of all levels feel that they are growing as professionals and using their time wisely. Staff surveys over the past 3 years have indicated over 95% satisfaction with the coaching program at our school and 100% of teachers have reported that their coach has helped push their practice in some way.

Coaching meetings also focus on other skills necessary for teachers to build their reflective capacity. Coaches facilitate data analysis meetings and analysis of student work through questioning strategies so that a teacher fully understands how to gather data from his or her students' outputs. These data are used to inform future lessons, as well as small group differentiated instruction. In addition, coaches utilize video observations and reflections to ensure teachers have the opportunity to see their practice in real time. Coaches watch taped lessons with the teacher and together, they reflect on the content, in particular the student actions. Finally, teachers are expected and encouraged to conduct peer observations. Coaches make recommendations for peer observations based on different teachers' strengths and often co-observe with the teacher to ensure the peer observation is focused and helpful.

In order to prioritize instructional coaching as a school-wide practice, our staff worked together to ensure our hiring process and teacher evaluation process fully aligned to this priority. During the hiring process, key questions are asked of prospective candidates to determine how receptive they are to feedback and how committed they are to professional growth and continuous improvement. Questions are also asked to determine the candidate's reflective capacity. Current staff fully participates in making the final hiring decisions in order to create a staff culture where adult learning is a priority.

Teacher Core Competencies			
Reflective	Problem Solver	Mission Driven	Team Player
-is relentless about improvement and is internally motivated to better his/her practice and self -solicits and quickly implements critical	- is resilient in the face of challenges and focuses on being part of the solution, not the problem -manages stress	-believes every child can and will go to college. -is highly structured, organized and exhibits a sense of urgency.	-willing to sacrifice individual accolades, beliefs and ideologies for the betterment of the team and continues to execute at a high

feedback and is responsive to trends in data -is able to separate the personal from the professional and constructively deal with failure.	appropriately by strategically focusing on his/her locus of control and prioritizing effectively.	-is able to deeply invest students, families and the community in the mission and vision of the school.	level. -flexible and adapts positively and proactively to change, fully understanding and accepting that change is a part of our work -responsible for and takes ownership of all scholars, both academically and behaviorally -respectful and courteous to all teammates, assuming positive intentions and communicating challenges and concerns appropriately
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Our teacher evaluation tool also prioritizes our school-wide focus on instructional coaching with a clear value placed on reflection, continuous growth, and the ability to improve practice. Key domains on our teacher evaluation rubric that encompass these values include: **Reflection and Professional Learning, Collaboration with Colleagues, and Using School Systems Effectively.**

3. Results of the Practice

The most important result of this practice has been strong student results. Despite having a young, relatively inexperienced teaching staff, our scholars have been able to achieve at very high levels. Our CST scores are the highest in our district and the highest amongst charter schools in the city of San Jose. This includes key subgroups such as Latino students and English Language Learners:

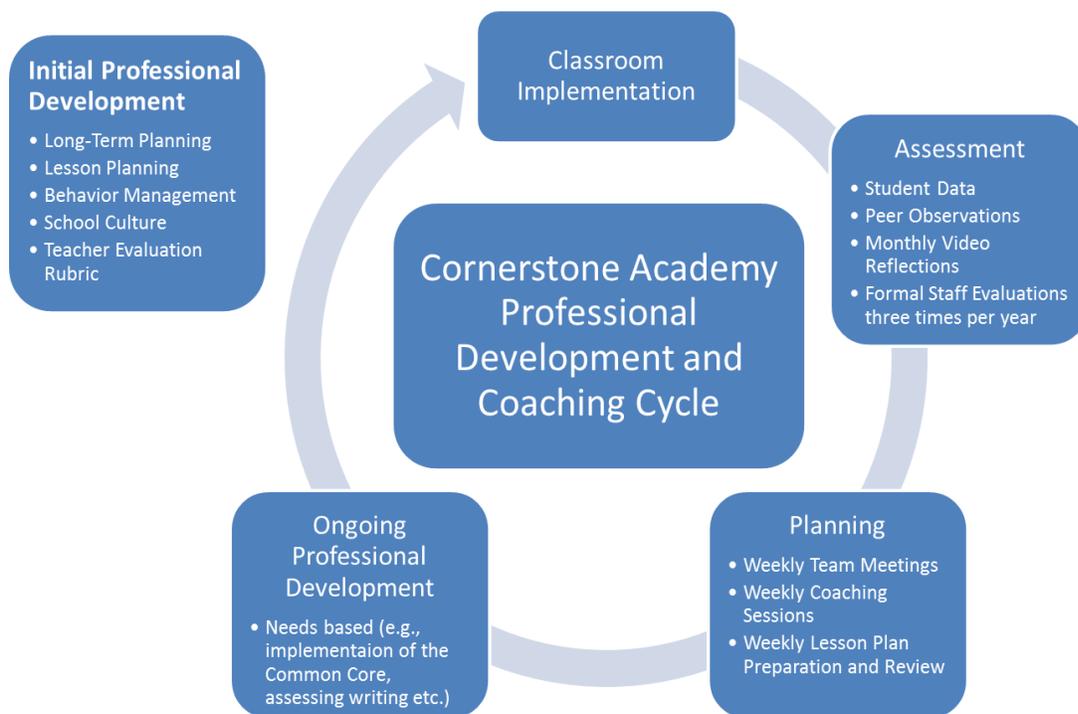
School Year	Overall API Score	Latino API Score	ELL API Score	# of teachers with less than 5 years of experience
2012-13	929	881	927	8 (out of 10 total)
2011-12	933	867	933	7 (out of 8 total)

Our student achievement data speaks to the importance of consistent instructional coaching for all teachers, but in particular new teachers. By providing intensive coaching on a regular and consistent basis, we are able to have our teachers drive extraordinary academic results.

We have also seen tremendous growth and improvement in our teachers due to this coaching model. For the past three years, teachers have been evaluated twice yearly and over the past three years, we have seen an 8 point average growth between the Fall and Spring evaluation cycles. Growth for newer teachers (0-3 years) is particularly compelling as we often see large point gains between the Fall and Spring evaluation.

Finally, we have had several young teachers recognized for their outstanding work in the classroom. Two of our second year teachers were named national semi-finalists for the Sue Lehmann Excellence in Teaching Award through Teach for America. A fifth year teacher was named to the Honor Roll in the Fishman Prize Competition with The New Teacher Project.

Graphic: PD and Coaching Cycle



Cornerstone Academy Preparatory School

Signature Practice 2 Summary

7. Name of Practice:

Consistent School Culture

8. How long has this practice been in place?

 Less than 2 years 2–4 years 5–8 years 8+ years9. What is the Target Area? (*Choose at least one area.*)

Target Areas:

- Career Technical Education
- Chronic Absenteeism and Dropout Prevention
- Civic Education Awareness
- Closing the Achievement Gap
- Education Supports
- Nutrition and Physical Activity/Education
- Parent and Community Involvement
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
- Use of Technology
- Visual and Performing Arts

10. What are the target populations? (*Check all that apply.*)

Race/Ethnicity Subgroups:

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
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- White
- Two or More Races

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Other Student Groups:

- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged
- English Learners
- Students with Disabilities
- At-Risk Students (Academic, Social, Emotional, Behavioral, or Health)
- English-Language Arts—Students Not Yet Proficient
- English-Language Arts—Advanced Learners
- Mathematics—Students Not Yet Proficient
- Mathematics—Advanced Learners
- Other Core Subject Areas—Students Not Yet Proficient
- Other Core Subject Areas—Advanced Learners
- Other (*specify*)

11. What strategies are used to implement the practice? (*Check all that apply.*)

Strategies:

- School Climate
- Small Learning Communities
- Parent Involvement
- Data-Driven Decision Making
- Health Support
- Social/Emotional/Behavioral Support
- Professional Development
- Other (*specify*)

12. Is this practice initiated by your district and implemented districtwide?

Brief answer: No

If your answer above is yes, you must explain in the Signature Practice Narrative how your school implemented this practice at your school's site. Tell us how you are taking this districtwide practice beyond normal expectations and making it an integral part of your school's successes—remove these lines of text.

Signature Practice 2 Narrative

4. Rationale/Basis of the Practice

Classroom management textbooks have long prescribed creating a consistent classroom culture with clear procedures, routines, and expectations, as well as a strong sense of community. At Cornerstone Academy, we have chosen to take this approach and implement it on a school-wide basis. We believe strongly that a consistent school culture benefits our scholars academically and socially, and creates a safe space where the focus can remain on learning. This is particularly important in our community where there is a glaring achievement gap and ongoing concerns about safety. We also believe that student behavior is primarily the product of adult decisions, and as such, we choose to work together as a team to create a school community that prioritizes academic achievement.

5. Description of the Practice

In order to fulfill our mission of preparing our scholars for college, we must start with a strong foundation of procedures and routines that are executed school-wide and include a shared vocabulary. We determine and establish these school-wide systems as a staff during summer professional development and continue to refine our approach and consistency through ongoing professional development throughout the year. When our scholars arrive at school in August, we invest a substantial amount of time investing them in the school culture by creating classroom visions and giving explicit training on what we expect from them. We sweat the details during this time to ensure that all scholars understand the expectations and are clear on how to execute on them. During this time, we also begin tying in our school-wide PRIDE Values – **P**ersonal Responsibility, **R**espect, **I**ntegrity, **D**etermination, and **E**xcellence – to explain the rationale behind why we do what we do.

Current focus procedures emphasize smooth transitions to maximize learning time and promote active listening during instruction. During transitions, scholars are taught to walk in HALLS - **H**ands to your side, **A**ll eyes forward, **L**ips zipped, **L**egs walking safely, and **S**tick together. This allows the transition to occur quickly and also prevents misbehavior when the scholars are moving. Scholars are also asked to sit in STAR - **S**it up, **T**rack the speaker, **A**sk and answer questions, and **R**espect those around you - in order to teach active listening and respect for their classmates. All scholars are expected to also respond to questions in complete sentences and track the speaker, whether that is their teacher or a classmate. With every teacher in the school using these terms and holding these expectations, there is consistency and a “Cornerstone Way” of doing things.

In addition to common procedures and routines, our school utilizes other school-wide practices to create a community of achievement. Our school names every classroom after the teacher’s college so that scholars have the opportunity to learn about a college in depth. Teachers in all grades create and use school-wide praises to honor scholar achievement and effort on a daily basis. Weekly Town Hall meetings bring the entire school together and traditions have developed during this time such as the Scholar of the Week Award, Honor Roll, and various awards for attendance, homework completion, and reading.

Parents are also an integral part of helping us maintain this consistent culture. All classrooms utilize the same behavior system (a behavior board with color levels and clips) and all scholars are expected to fill out a daily behavior log to report their progress to their parents. Parents are required to sign the log daily and communicate with their child's teacher if there are concerns. Parents are also required to monitor their child's reading and sign off on a weekly reading log. 20-30 minutes of reading is required daily at each grade level and monitored closely by teachers and administrators.

6. Results of the Practice

There have been many positive results that our school has seen as a result of creating a consistent school-wide culture and practices. Primarily, we have seen a very low number of scholar suspensions. Our scholars have responded very well to our clear expectations and they learn very early that they are accountable to all adults in the school. In the past three schools years, there have only been six suspensions and zero expulsions. With very few behavior issues, teachers are able to focus on teaching and learning, which has led to strong student achievement as evidenced by our CST results in the Signature Practice 1 Narrative.

Our staff's commitment to creating a safe learning-focused space has also built trust with our families. Our most recent family survey indicated a 98% satisfaction rate with school safety and discipline. It is clear that our families trust our staff and believe their children are safe and well cared for. Additionally, our current waitlist is close to 200 scholars, many of whom are referrals from current families. A referral for enrollment we feel is an indicator of parent satisfaction with our program.

Scholars in HALLS:



Scholars sitting in STAR:

