



Ms. Fatima Cooke and Sumner Academy JPA Partner

JPA and CPS's Sumner Academy Work Together to Support Student Mental Health and Early Literacy

Sumner Academy, one of JPA's partners, is a neighborhood school located at 4320 W. 5th Ave. in Chicago's North Lawndale neighborhood. With approximately 300 PreK-8th grade students, it is 98% African American and 2% Hispanic. Ninety-three percent of its students are from low-income families.

The Steans Family Foundation matched JPA with Sumner to support our mission to improve student mental health as an essential factor in better learning and literacy. This significant initiative, is called North Lawndale reads. It is focused on supporting Pre-K through third grade students to achieve grade-level literacy.

Studies have shown that if they're able to achieve this goal by third grade, their trajectory for positive academic outcomes exponentially increases as they grow older. It is currently in the third year of a three-year effort that includes reading support from AARP, additional phonics intervention, parent engagement, and another therapy service along with JPA's presence in the school.

Jenna Kraft, JPA's Sumner-based therapist, provides teacher consultation as well as individual and classroom sessions. "One direction we're going in as a larger organization is trying to incorporate more teacher and administrative consulting into our work portfolio," she says.

[Sumner's Facebook page](#) radiates energy and optimism. While Chicago's public schools are

often described negatively, Sumner's community is full of drive, with activities like 8th Grade Career Day, teachers creating inspiring videos for their students, and hopeful young faces beginning their first day at school.

We asked Sumner's principal, Ms. Fatima Cooke, to respond to some emailed questions about Sumner and its relationship with JPA. She has been at Sumner for three years, first as Assistant Principal and now as Principal. She has had a long and distinguished career at CPS, implementing a \$1.2 million school improvement grant at Bowen H.S. and being an instructional coach for CPS teachers.

Here are her answers, slightly edited for space and clarity.

1. How did your school learn about JPA?

JPA was introduced to Sumner through a grant written through the Steans Family Foundation. They have set out to test the theory of supporting the whole child to see if we can begin to close the literacy gap of students by the third grade.

This effort seemed so important to me because I was fully aware of the consequences of untreated trauma, neglect, abuse and violence on a child's ability to focus and learn in school. It is important that my students are equipped with the skills to build positive relationships and be self-aware of their feeling and emotions.

2. What was the primary reason you decided to partner with us?

The school also did research and found that JPA has a long-standing reputation in the City and in schools. It was definitely a welcomed partnership. I have always worked in high needs schools located in high needs neighborhoods and know all too well what can happen when students don't have any outlet to address issues they are experiencing.

3. Can you give us a brief example or two about how JPA has helped your teachers and students?

We have had the pleasure of having a full-time [JPA] therapist and multiple interns who help support students and staff with individual therapy, group therapy and classroom conversations on topics of the teacher's choice.

Teachers and the therapist have collaborative relationships and share strategies that help support students being served. Because our therapist works so closely with staff and families, they are better equipped to intervene to help address student behaviors that may interfere with the activities of the classroom and with those students whose learning is impeded by trauma or stress.

We have found that parents are more open to services when they are given in a familiar place, like schools. The partnership with JPA allows our staff to have consistent language when we are talking about childhood trauma and triggers that students may have.

Our JPA therapist has previously served on our Behavior Health Team. This team takes referrals from teachers and looks at students on a case by case basis to determine what intervention might be appropriate for the given behaviors that are manifesting in school. She shares her expertise and adds to the conversations as we try to determine the best fit for students.

4. What would you like to see happen with the partnership in the future?

I would love if JPA can work [even] more closely with teachers and staff who support students on a regular basis to determine not only how to help students when they come back to class but to learn to identify certain behaviors related to trauma and stress. Teachers are often not aware of their own stresses due to caring for a classroom of students who may have multiple traumas. **JPA**

