



Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Alfred De B. Mason

Elementary School K226

**6006 23rd Avenue
Brooklyn
NY 11204**

Principal: Sherry Tannenbaum

**Date of review: March 31, 2015
Lead Reviewer: Steven Chernigoff**

The School Context

Alfred De B. Mason is an elementary school with 1,037 students from grade pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 2% Black, 31% Hispanic, 40% White, and 27% Asian students. The student body includes 19% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 53% of the students enrolled and girls account for 47%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 94.4%.

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	Additional Findings	Well Developed
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	Proficient
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	Focus	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations to staff around professionalism, instruction and the Danielson Framework for Teaching. School leaders and staff effectively communicate expectations to families and students connected to a path to college and career readiness.

Impact

High expectations result in a culture of mutual accountability, allow the school to successfully partner with families and support student progress toward those expectations.

Supporting Evidence

- Official communications from school leaders to staff constantly reference expectations for classroom instruction and high student achievement. Teachers report getting good feedback on observations around the Danielson Framework. They expect that school leaders will help them improve their practice, even if they get Effective or Highly Effective ratings. The school's professional development plan comes from teacher wants and needs, through surveys, discussions with teachers and observation data. Once a month the principal meets with the professional development committee, which only has teachers on it (no other administrators), so the principal can hear what the teachers feel they need to improve their practice. Teachers request to attend off-site professional development to broaden their base of content and pedagogical knowledge; administrators encourage those requests as well. Teachers do inter-visitations of each other's classes, to learn best practices, and then meet afterwards to discuss their findings and learnings. This is done by teachers on their own as well as when administrators advise it.
- Parents marvel at the extent of communication to them from the school. The school uses texts and emails, and makes phone calls on a regular basis. Teachers call, text and email parents, and respond to parents very quickly. The school also sends out weekly and monthly school and class newsletters to parents and welcomes them to visit the school whenever they want. The school does workshops on a variety of academic concerns, from the Common Core Learning Standards and testing, to readings and book talks, as well as on social and emotional concerns.
- The school inculcates the importance of education and going to college to its students starting in the early grades. One student said, "The school isn't only about the state test—it's about exceeding the test on your own individual level... that's how you exceed expectations." Another student is looking forward to starting the after-school preparation for the specialized high schools exam. One parent actually said, "The teachers see more potential in my children than I see! They always push them." Another said, "They push further...they show you your kids can do more than you think." Two parents said that their children are learning to compare and contrast in third grade, and learning about college too, doing research about which colleges to go to, good majors, the tuition and even the mascot of certain schools. Another parent said, "Our kids have the understanding that school doesn't end at high school, [it's] not even an option—you'll go to college." And finally, the parent of a grade 4 student said her child is deciding between going for a doctorate or an MBA.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

The majority of teachers are engaged in structured, inquiry-based professional collaborations. Teacher teams consistently analyze student assessment data and student work, but miss opportunities for modifying and adjusting curricula on a regular basis.

Impact

Professional collaborations promote the achievement of school goals and result in improved teacher practice and progress toward goals for students, but teachers miss opportunities for shared improvements and mastery of goals for groups of students.

Supporting Evidence

- Teachers meet in teams once per week. In the elementary school they meet by grade level while in the middle school they meet by subject area. However, middle school teachers do not meet by grade level, limiting their ability to discuss their students' progress across subject areas, to create common strategies for supporting struggling students, and to plan and modify interdisciplinary curriculum.
- Teacher teams analyze student data and review it on a grade-wide basis in the elementary school. The third grade team looked at a student's writing sample, discussed whether he responded to the question and then brainstormed ideas for helping him. One teacher asked, "What would be a strategy he could use [to improve it]?" Another teacher responded that he should use a graphic organizer to get the main idea of the text and to make it flow more. The team immediately accepted the graphic organizer as the next step without discussing what the teacher should instruct the student to do to improve his writing.
- The eighth grade English language arts teacher meets with the sixth and seventh grade ELA teachers. She gives them advice about eighth grade tasks, to make sure they are preparing students well for the next level, and also looks at high school level tasks, to prepare her students. However, this is not a school-wide practice across subject areas, thus limiting opportunities for teacher and student growth.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

School leaders and faculty ensure that curricula are aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and/or content standards and strategically integrate the instructional shifts. Rigorous habits and higher-order skills are emphasized in curricula and are embedded in a coherent way.

Impact

Fully-aligned curricula across grades and subjects promote college and career readiness for all students. Academic tasks that promote rigorous habits that enable all learners including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities to demonstrate their thinking.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses Ready Gen for its literacy curriculum resource in the elementary grades. Teachers create their own materials to supplement Ready Gen with writing units of study, tasks and assessments. This allows them to incorporate more writing instruction into their 90-minute literacy block. In the middle school, teachers use CodeX, which incorporates units of study. Teachers supplement CodeX with book studies and supplementary materials related to the units where appropriate, as well as for grammar and phonics when needed. In math, the school uses Envision K-5 and Go Math in 6-8. Envision is aligned to the CCLS, but the teachers have found too many gaps. So they supplement with GoMath material to include more rigorous questioning and other features. The school has decided to fully transition to Go Math in the elementary school next year, as it does in the middle school.
- A school-wide emphasis on questioning informs teachers units and lessons and helps teachers incorporate higher-order thinking questions as much as possible. All teachers are aware of the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and the different levels of questions, and put into their lesson plans as many DOK level 3 and 4 questions as possible and essential questions into their curriculum maps. Also, all students have to provide textual evidence to support their claims and counter-claims in their discussion and writing, not only in English language arts, but also in the content areas as well.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers push into a number of classes to provide supports for ELLs. Teachers of ELLs and students with disabilities provide pictures, videos, translated texts, graphic organizers and technology to allow ELLs and students with disabilities access to the curriculum and opportunities to demonstrate their thinking. General education teachers also learn ELL strategies to support further ELLs and all students.

Quality Indicator:	1.2 Pedagogy	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices are aligned to the curricula and reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best.

Impact

Informed by the Danielson Framework, teaching practices engage students in learning, and student work products and discussions reflect high levels of thinking and participation.

Supporting Evidence

- The school uses the workshop model to engage students. This includes a 15-minute mini-lesson, a work period in which teachers work with student groups and/or individual students, and a summary/share-out. This helps the school achieve its instructional focus of improving questioning and discussion to improve classroom instruction. In a seventh grade Integrated Co-Teaching math lesson, after the mini-lesson each teacher took a group of students to explain how to write and solve two-step equations, and check their answers. Then students worked on solving $5/9m - 32 = 35$ and discussed their ideas.
- Informed by the Danielson Framework, the school focuses on questioning and discussion techniques, both by teachers when having small or large group discussions with students, and between students in groups. In a seventh grade English language arts lesson analyzing a text by Jeffrey Sachs about reducing poverty in the world, the teacher asked the class, "Why is Sachs talking about John Maynard Keynes [in the book]? How does this help him support his claim?" This question also addresses the instructional shifts by asking students to understand claims and counterclaims when examining non-fiction text. In a second grade math lesson, a student said that a cube has six faces and so the teacher asked, "What's another word for face?" Students replied "flat surfaces." Then the teacher asked, "What's another attribute of a cube?" and students responded with a variety of answers.
- Students engaged each other in substantive conversations about their work and demonstrated their thinking. In a fourth grade Integrated Co-Teaching class studying decimals in math, one student in the blue group explained to another the standard form, expanded form and word form. In an eighth grade English language arts class, studying an article from CodeX about astronauts' bio suits and how they may be able to help children with cerebral palsy, in one group a student asked, "Why would we test this on a mature infant instead of on an adult?" A second student made an inference and responded, "Because we want to see if an infant or young child can handle being in the suit." The first student replied, "Does this mean the bio suit has a wide array of uses?" The other student said, "Yes, it's not just for astronauts, others may be able to benefit from it, that's the point [of the article]." He then cited evidence from the article as to how others may benefit in the future from the use of a bio suit.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Well Developed
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Findings

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

Impact

Assessments provide meaningful feedback to students and teachers regarding student achievement. Teachers' assessments practices allow them to make effective adjustments to meet all students' learning needs, and students are aware of their next learning steps.

Supporting Evidence

- Based on student data, the school completely redesigned its Diagnostic Writing Assessment. Now, students are given an article from Achieve 3000 on their lexile level and asked to read it, write a Free Write and then write a persuasive essay about it. The school does this three times per year and charts student progress. Then teachers review the results against the standards to surface the gaps in student learning and how to address them. Grading policy and procedure in the school is uniform: teachers give out progress reports to all students across the school every six weeks. The report card is now aligned with the CCLS, giving parents information about whether their child is performing Above, On, Below or Far Below the standards of that grade. And teachers use the same 1-4 grading rubric in all subjects across a grade.
- Teachers use checks for understanding in the classroom to assess student learning. A sixth grade math teacher showed a short video from Flocabulary about surface area. After the video he asked students to think about what they had viewed, "Stop and jot. What is the relationship between surface area and volume?" Then he circulated to see what students were discussing and writing in their notebooks, and realized that some students misunderstood the concept. One student said, "Both surface area and volume use length times width times height to calculate the amount of cubic units." The teacher asked, "Both?" and the student said yes. Then the teacher clarified, "Surface area is *outside* the [3-dimensional] shape. It's the sum of areas. What's another word for areas?" A student said, "Faces". Then the teacher asked, "So how do you find surface area?" And another student said, "You find length times width for all the faces on the box." And so then the teacher knew that his students understood. In a third grade literacy lesson, the teacher also showed a video about the fable of the boy who cried wolf. The teacher asked, "What is the theme? What events in the story led you to that? Turn and talk to your classmate next to you." While students talked, the teacher circulated with a clipboard, recording information about the students' answers. One student said to another, "The boy was crying [at the end] because the wolf was there, but they didn't believe him." The teacher probed, "Why didn't they believe him?" He replied, "Because he lied too much." The second student said, "If someone lies to you and tricks you then you don't believe them anymore."
- Students report that their teachers consistently give them checklists for their writing, and ask them to engage in self- and peer-assessment. The school has focused on giving students feedback during the writing process, on early drafts rather than merely on the final one and students are asked to think deeply about their own writing process. Students write a first draft on white paper, the second on yellow, and receive feedback for each draft, so that they know what their next learning steps are.