

Pelham Academy

Investing in students and the city
with Mastery Connect

 Bronx, NYC  339 Students  Adopted Mastery Connect: 2016



The educators at Pelham Academy are dedicated to “working hard to create the kind of school where ALL kids can learn and mature.” To share their journey to data-driven instruction with Mastery Connect, founding principal, Anthony Rivera, teachers, Danielle Bertran, Maria Litos, and Shawina Jardine, as well as Teaching Matters consultants, Jelbin DeLaCruz and Nick Siewert, told their story.

THE CHALLENGE

Rivera recalled his first time commuting into work at Pelham Academy in 2009, “...There were textbooks that were being tossed out the window and I thought to myself, ‘What did I get myself into?’”

He knew the challenge ahead of him was daunting, yet his personal connection to the community strengthened his commitment to finding a solution that elevated student achievement.

“Very early on, we realized that it was important...to have a grasp of student mastery. I just don’t think we knew exactly how to achieve that,” Rivera said.

“We all agreed that we wanted to be tracking how students were doing and collecting as much data as possible. We found it overwhelming to go with a clipboard or a binder or something like that,” Bertran said.

To empower teachers with more actionable, data-informed insights, Pelham Academy adopted Mastery Connect and partnered with Teaching Matters, a NYC-based organization committed to increasing teacher retention.

Key Insights

- Mastery Connect allowed teachers to quickly identify student proficiency and respond in real time to their needs.
- Student proficiency increased by 159% as a result of the school’s dedication to data analysis and partnership with Mastery Connect and Teaching Matters.
- Facilitating teacher buy-in requires access to technology, such as iPads and Mastery Connect, that teachers can easily introduce to their instruction.
- Data from assessment management systems like Mastery Connect streamline teacher collaboration and implementation of best instructional practices.

THE SOLUTION

To lessen the data-collection burden, Pelham Academy’s teachers used iPads during instruction to pull real-time data from Mastery Connect to see student proficiency by standard.

“But if we were going around with the iPads...this [standard] is what we knew that we were going to check and see if you understand and we could just go around quickly, gather the data...It really changed the impact we’re having on the students. It let us get to them sooner,” Bertran said.

Earlier this year we began looking at and tracking cohort data. We compared how [students] performed three years ago to how they performed just this past spring, and what we saw was a 159% increase in student proficiency over that time [since implementing Mastery Connect].

Anthony Rivera, Founding Principal at Pelham Academy

OPEN DOORS, OPEN MINDS

In addition to being dedicated to student success, Pelham Academy's teachers are committed to collaboration. When describing how her 6th grade team stays connected with the support of Mastery Connect and Teaching Matters, Litos said, "This is not the old way of teaching where teachers lock their door behind them and never communicate. We're emailing and texting each other constantly." And staying connected isn't the only measure of an effective teacher in today's classroom. Jardine added, "We're here to educate and inspire. I can't teach you if I'm not open to learning myself."

"The most effective teachers know how to change up the lesson like if something's not working right and you see the majority of the class is struggling on a standard, you need to throw away the script you have and reteach what they're missing," Litos said.

This commitment to bettering themselves and their students is reflected in their adoption of Mastery Connect. This adoption process has presented them with the opportunity to learn a new technology that ultimately simplifies data-informed instruction. Identifying how students are performing in the classroom allows teachers to respond immediately and implement any necessary interventions. The partnership with Teaching Matters also empowered teachers to make the most of this technology and continue supporting all students, according to their consultant, Siewert.

"If you believe these kids deserve the best teacher possible, you have to believe in the kids. The teachers insist that they can improve and get better. The idea of measuring progress and figuring out what your impact needs to be is at the heart of this [collaboration]."

VALIDATION WHEN IT'S NEEDED MOST

After implementing Mastery Connect, working with Teaching Matters, and analyzing the cohort data, Rivera said that their hard work was reflected in an increase in student achievement.

"It was humbling and it was also validating because [Mastery Connect] provided us with the evidence that we needed to help us see that the decisions that we were making, and the tools that we were using, and the structures that we had in place were all impactful," he says. "We saw that in the student results."

A robust Assessment Management System (AMS) like Mastery Connect has allowed Pelham Academy's teachers to identify and respond to students during instruction to ensure they're progressing toward mastery. [Explore our free ebook to learn more about how to choose an AMS for your school.](#)

THE RESULTS

Siewert asserted that "a belief in the potential of teachers to improve and students to achieve is at the core of Pelham's success" and that the ability to measure progress with Mastery Connect is an investment—in both the students and the broader city.

In summary, Siewert said, "The expertise to solve some of the most vexing problems in schools lies in the schools, and it's obviously in that school's interest to share that across the school. We feel that it is also essential to share with other schools."