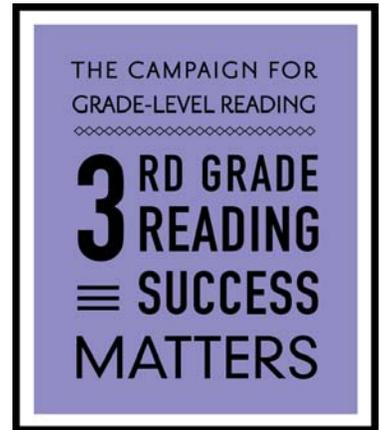


BRIGHT SPOTS

High Opportunity Schools



Pittsburgh Dilworth Pre-K–5th, Pittsburgh, PA

Pittsburgh Dilworth was already an arts-focused magnet school when Dr. Monica D. Lamar became its principal in 2006. It was a perfect match. “The arts helped me find enjoyment and success in school and in life,” says Dr. Lamar, explaining that she herself struggled with reading until work with a school based reading specialist combined with participation in the arts helped her succeed. At Pittsburgh Dilworth, she has worked with the staff on improving their skills in reading instruction in all subjects and using the arts to build reading proficiency. Their efforts have raised third grade scores by 20 points in five years.

Pittsburgh Dilworth is fortunate in having a full complement of art, music, gym, library and academic teachers on board, as well as two artists-in-residence who infuse the arts throughout the curriculum. Determined to give her children diverse learning opportunities, Lamar invests in a full-time arts team rather than additional administrative staff because “the more experiences that students can have, the better off they are.”

A great believer in mentoring and training teachers as well as students, Lamar has cultivated leadership teams throughout the school, including grade-level, vertical, and subject-matter teams. She observes teachers at work in their classrooms, designs their professional development plans accordingly, and talks to them honestly about their practices in “Look, My Friend” conferences.

Data drive all decisions

While the arts infuse reading at Pittsburgh Dilworth, the overall approach to instruction remains data-driven. The staff begins with a pre-assessment of skills, and then tailors instruction to meet each student’s needs based on the differentiated instruction model articulated by Carol Tomlinson. A child might

WHO THEY ARE

410 students, Pre-K–5th

57% African American, 32%

Caucasian

75% FARM

25 average class size

15 years average teaching experience

WHAT THEY ACHIEVE

2010 PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) Reading:

3rd grade 82%

4th grade 70%

CONTACT

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Dr. Monica D. Lamar, Principal

be a good reader, for example, and yet need specific instruction in the concept of a “main idea.” A typical classroom includes instruction at three levels of sophistication, from remedial to accelerated.

The staff expects children to read throughout the day, starting when they first arrive in the morning, and to read at least 30 books every year. Principal Lamar encourages reading and often reads a book aloud during the daily Morning Meeting. She also celebrates the children’s reading achievement with positive accolades and reward trips.

Macmillan/McGraw-Hill’s [Treasures](#), the primary reading curriculum, couples high-quality literature with instruction, practice, and frequent assessment. Supplements include:

- The weekly news magazine, [TIME for Kids](#).
- Leveled readers that let students at varying skill levels read.
- Differentiated Instruction that provides students individualized instruction to help improve their ability to read.

Pittsburgh Dilworth employs the Response to Intervention and Instruction strategy that includes intervention curriculums such as “[Read Naturally](#)” — teacher modeling, repeated reading, progress monitoring — for children who need help with phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The highly structured, remedial [Wilson Reading System](#) provides word decoding and multisensory language instruction for readers unable to learn with other strategies. Additionally, children identified as gifted receive enriched instruction in groups through novel studies and Junior Great Books.

Lamar and her staff also teach students to manage stress and take care of themselves. At test time, the children go outside and run after Morning Meeting, and Lamar runs with them. The children also do calming yoga breathing, and drink lots of water before and during the test. As a special treat — and mental stimulant — the staff doles out three tiny mints to each child. Says Lamar, “We get a lot of mileage out of Tic Tacs.”

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- **Treasures reading curriculum**
- **Arts-infused program emphasizes multi-dimensional experiences**
- **Differentiated instructional model that advocates active planning for and attention to student differences in the classroom**
- **TIME for Kids weekly news magazine**
- **Read Naturally approach to the essential components of reading**
- **Wilson Reading System for children unable to learn with traditional strategies**
- **Novels, Junior Great Books and leveled readers**
- **Exercise and stress management in preparation for state testing**