



***Mastery Schools***

MODEL  
OVERVIEW

# Mastery Model Overview

Mastery schools have one driving mission: *All students learn the academic and personal skills they need to be truly prepared for postsecondary success and able to pursue their dreams.*

We believe educational inequity is the most pressing social problem facing our country and the civil rights issue of our day. Mastery exists to solve the problem. Our ultimate goal is to create a model urban school district that serves all students with excellence.

17 of our 25 schools are turnarounds of previously failing district or charter schools. As a result, Mastery serves an unusually high percentage of special education and low-income students.

To address the needs of all of our students and deliver academic excellence at scale, we developed an operational model with six interlocking management systems:

<b>Talent Management</b>	Recruit, develop and retain high-quality talent
<b>Instructional Effectiveness</b>	Systematize high-quality instruction
<b>Data &amp; Assessment</b>	Measure, track and respond to student academic data to improve outcomes
<b>School Culture</b>	Create a productive and joyful learning environment
<b>Student Support</b>	Provide a continuum of supports to ensure both struggling and advanced students achieve
<b>Active Leadership</b>	Empower school leaders to drive results at their schools

## Talent Management

Students can't learn and achieve without great teachers and school leaders.

**Talent Recruitment & Screening Process** – We recruit and hire teachers who can build relationships with students, maintain appropriate authority in the classroom, accept feedback and have smarts.

**Teacher Development & Performance-Based Pay** – We pride ourselves on helping teachers maximize their potential. School leaders observe teachers several times each year – including informal quick visits – to provide feedback and coaching.

Teachers are placed in one of four instructor categories based on years of experience and certifications. Professional development and growth plans are aligned to teacher categories for clarity and transparency. Advancement is based on instructional quality and student achievement, not seniority, so star teachers can earn more money and advance quickly.

**Competitive Pay & Benefits** – We pay well. Mastery matches or exceeds the salary and benefits of traditional school districts and most of our peers across the region.

# Instructional Effectiveness

We believe instruction is a craft that can be perfected with specific guidance and coaching. To help teachers master instruction quickly, we provide the following:

**Common Foundation** – One set of curricula and assessments across the Mastery network.

**Comprehensive Curricular Materials** – We provide teachers with a comprehensive set of curricular materials and detailed daily lesson plans so they can spend their time preparing how to deliver the lessons instead of creating them from scratch.

**Instructional Standards** – There are a set of foundational pedagogical practices that apply across all subjects. We define those practices and expectations for teachers in a set of instructional standards that describe core teacher actions and student outcomes which that should be present in all Mastery classrooms.

**Teacher Coaching & Development** – We help teachers improve their craft in three primary ways:

- **Formal coaching**
  - All new and select veteran teachers receive coaching.
  - Coaching cycles last from four to eight weeks and are directed by school leaders and/or central office coaches.
- **Classroom observation**
  - School leaders observe classrooms on a regular basis and provide real-time feedback.
  - Feedback is based on pre-established expectations and metrics, and delivered in common, clear language.
- **Professional development**
  - Teachers have allotted time each week for professional development and collaboration with colleagues.
  - Formal sessions, led by master teachers, central office coaches, or school-based leaders, cover everything from classroom management and restorative justice to content mastery and higher-order thinking.

**Multiple Student Pathways** – We believe students learn the most when instruction matches their current skill set. This is systematized in two ways:

- **Grouping:** Students receive the same curriculum but are grouped (within a class or by cohort) by current skill level.
- **Multiple Tracks:** To meet the needs of students who are significantly behind or ahead, two or more pathways or tracks are created. Students in each track receive a separate curriculum or program.

**Intellectual Preparation** – Common core instruction is significantly more rigorous and difficult to deliver than traditional instruction. We provide proactive supports to ensure teachers fully understand the curricula, can plan lessons and provide excellent instruction. We are also piloting ways for teachers to meet weekly with content experts to further prepare them for classroom success.

## Data & Assessment

We base all instruction and school-level decisions on data. Key supporting systems include:

**Benchmark Assessments** – Benchmarks assess the skills and knowledge students are expected to master in a given report period. Students take the assessments in all primary subjects at the end of each nine-week report period.

**Mastery Value-Added System** – To pinpoint student growth and areas of need, we built a Mastery Value-Added System (MVAS). It determines the change in students' growth in each new assessment period relative to their previous growth trajectory. This system enables us to identify students whose progress is lagging as well as teachers who are exceptionally effective or ineffective.

We are also rolling out a new assessment, the MAP, which will enable us to measure students' academic growth compared to their peers nationally.

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## School Culture

Mastery's school culture systems are designed to create productive, joyful school communities that support students' personal development and maturation, and an orderly, safe learning environment. Our school culture system is based on three guiding principles:

**Adult-Student Relationships:** We believe the foundation for a successful school is a genuine relationship between teachers and students, rooted in a belief that all students can achieve.

**Clear Expectations:** We know students can be successful when behavior expectations are clear, classroom and school rules are simple and disciplinary consequences are consistent.

**School Community is Sacred:** Students are expected to take responsibility and leadership to ensure the school is safe, supportive and inclusive.

Key supporting systems include:

**Classroom Management** – Mastery uses common, age-appropriate classroom management systems.

**Disciplinary System** – Consequences for infractions are consistent and include traditional detentions and loss of privileges. In addition, we frequently use restorative practices, an approach that requires students to take personal responsibility for wrongdoing and repair any negative impact their actions caused to relationships within the school community.

**Cultural Context** – We know that culture, race and identity strongly influence how we teach, how students learn and how the school community interacts. We believe culturally-competent educators can build quality relationships with students and parents that are based on mutual respect and high expectations.

**School Rituals** – We intentionally create a community that feels both orderly and joyful. The School Culture Team supports common rituals such as morning circles, community meetings and school events that celebrate the school community and the joy of learning.

## Student Support

To ensure all students succeed, Mastery provides a comprehensive safety net to help students overcome their academic and emotional challenges. Key supporting systems include:

### Academic Remediation

**Emotional Support** – Mastery schools are located in some of Philadelphia and Camden’s most impoverished neighborhoods. Our students are exposed to trauma four to eight times more than the general population, which correlates with difficulty regulating emotions, inability to concentrate and depression. To support our students, Mastery provides the following:

- *In class or school interventions*
  - *Counseling*
  - *Small group therapy/support group*
  - *Anchor Classrooms*
  - *Outsourced mental health program*
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## Active Leadership

Each Mastery school has a leadership team comprised of a principal and assistant principals of instruction, school culture, special education and operations. These leaders manage staff and resources to maximize student achievement.



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