

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I    [ ] Charter    [ ] Magnet    [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Sheila A. Sydnor

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Penn Alexander School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 4209 Spruce Street

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Philadelphia    State PA    Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 19104-4022

County Philadelphia

Telephone (215) 823-5465    Fax (215) 382-2031

Web site/URL http://www.philasd.org/schools/pennalexander    E-mail mbradcliff@philasd.org

Twitter Handle https://twitter.com/PennAlexander    Facebook Page \_\_\_\_\_    Google+ \_\_\_\_\_

YouTube/URL \_\_\_\_\_    Blog \_\_\_\_\_    Other Social Media Link \_\_\_\_\_

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. William Hite    E-mail superintendent@philasd.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name School District of Philadelphia    Tel. (215) 400-4000

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Ms. Marjorie Neff  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 147 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 16 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 54 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 217 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	38	30	68
1	38	34	72
2	39	33	72
3	29	43	72
4	35	34	69
5	32	17	49
6	25	28	53
7	24	27	51
8	23	24	47
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	283	270	553

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 18 % Asian
  - 23 % Black or African American
  - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 39 % White
  - 12 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 7%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	15
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	20
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	35
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	529
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.066
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 10 %  
54 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Adangme, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese, French, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Mandingo, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Thai, Tigrinya, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 100 %  
Total number students who qualify: 553
8. Students receiving special education services: 5 %  
24 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 4 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 1 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 8 Other Health Impaired
- 8 Specific Learning Disability
- 9 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 15
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers	25
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	8
Paraprofessionals	1
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	97%	96%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2015.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

Maximize the academic and personal competence of all its students to become successful life-long learners and productive citizens in a diverse and highly technological society

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

## PART III – SUMMARY

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Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership (PAS) opened in 2001 as the result of an unprecedented partnership between the School District of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the University of Pennsylvania to demonstrate that urban neighborhood schools can be successful academically and socially for all students and serve to revive a struggling neighborhood. Located in the vibrant and diverse urban community of West Philadelphia, PAS serves 550 K-8 students who represent the diverse socio-economic richness of the community.

Our new school building with its light-filled classrooms is set in a park-like setting that was once a distressed large city block. It has become a regular gathering space, bringing a range of ethnicities and ages together to enjoy the fresh air, and talk about school.

The Penn partnership has afforded our school the ability to select a leader and a faculty who prioritize a rigorous instructional program within a nurturing environment. Penn provides an annual financial contribution of \$1,330 per student, reducing class-size to 18 students in Kindergarten and 24 students in grades 1-8. Penn also works with PAS to enrich the students' educational experiences by providing student teachers in the classrooms, professional development for staff, and enrichment clubs for our students that our staff cannot provide.

Our partnership has even given us a namesake that serves as a role model to our students. Named in honor of the life and legacy of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, the first African-American woman to graduate from the Law School of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Alexander was the kind of person that we hope every Penn Alexander student will grow up to be. Alexander was a great American, a person who prepared well for life's journey and made the most of her opportunities in an age when women and people of color faced enormous obstacles. She used her talent, training, skills, and experience to help advance the civil rights of all. Guided by her model, the school bridges the gap and helps our students make the most of their opportunities for generations to come.

Our eclectic mix of students strengthens us all, as evidenced by the accomplishments of students and teachers. Penn Alexander has earned a reputation as one of the top elementary schools in the city, and this year it was designated as a city leader in achievement, climate, and growth. The school has produced 11 Nationally Board Certified Teachers, has maintained a 95% acceptance rate to selective high schools in the city, and has earned many awards for student achievement in science, technology and music.

Navigated by an instructional leader who sets a tone of high expectations for all, the school invests in the whole child, developing both creative intelligence and academic competencies. A challenging coherent instructional program leads students to the mastery of fundamental ideas and skills, and prepares them to meet the highest academic standards. Learning strategies, such as developing students' abilities to be independent and self-directed in pursuing high standards of learning, complements our student-centered approach towards ensuring that all students are achieving.

The Penn Alexander faculty spends a great deal of time developing programming and extracurricular activities to engage and support our diverse community. We believe the growth and achievement outside of the classroom has a direct impact on bridging the gap of student achievement inside the classroom. As a result, students take pride in their school, their achievements, and strive for success in all areas. Before and after school, teachers provide academic support and enrichment for students. Students are involved in robotics, science fair, student government, spelling bee and instrumental music programs as well as informal sports clubs, such as soccer, basketball, yoga, volleyball, a running club, and the Penn Relays team. These activities help to develop their growth and well-being outside of the classroom.

Penn Alexander School embraces building relationships with the families and community to further support our students. Ample opportunities, developed and chaired by faculty members, are available for the Penn Alexander students to form positive bonds with adults and other students in a climate that models respect for learning, promotes appreciation for unique qualities and needs of each child, and engages students in active participation and learning. Our year commences with a free ice cream social, followed by a fall festival, winter concert, Everyone Eats Rice celebration, pancake breakfast, spaghetti dinner and bingo. In the spring, there are author celebrations and a musical. Our culminating community activity is our 5K Run for Arts and Sciences. Through building community, families and teachers alike can ensure that student needs are met and learning can flourish.

Our diverse student body has attained their full potential and been enabled to reach high academic achievement because of the nurturing environment of parents, principal, teachers and the university partners.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

Penn Alexander (PAS) has a rigorous curriculum aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Students are immersed into learning that focuses on real-world, robust learning situations that are relevant and applicable to everyday knowledge. These expectations equip students with the 21st Century Skills of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem solving and prepares the students to actively engage in the globally competitive world.

Students at PAS receive a minimum of one hundred twenty minutes of instruction in English Language Arts to develop a balanced set of literacy skills. Teachers investigate diverse texts for student engagement, creating continuity throughout the school. Instructional and independent reading materials are chosen with purpose based on Lexile levels. The literacy block contains independent, guided, and modeled reading and writing.

Reading Workshop focuses on genre-specific skill building and a strategies-based approach to enhance the skill of close reading. Using this strategy, students are able to develop critical and analytical reading skills while annotating and engaging with difficult texts. The Workshop model includes mini-lessons, focused and extensive writing time, as well as sharing and conferencing time. This allows students to refine their skills in writing using the three major genres: narrative, informational and argumentative.

Explicit instruction on academic vocabulary allows for students to speak and write comparable to experts. Students are placed in literacy groups based on their ability, allowing at-level and below-level students to spend additional time receiving explicit instruction and above-level students to engage in enrichment activities. The groups are constantly being evaluated and this type of flexible grouping allows for teachers to maximize student achievement and close the achievement gap.

The Mathematics instruction at PAS is aligned to the CCSS. Students are given ninety minutes of daily Mathematics instruction. The curriculum is presented with discovery, questioning, and application components. Students are not merely taught an algorithm to memorize and solve a problem. Rather, they discover procedures on their own through the use of real-world application problems. Eventually, the students learn procedures and algorithms, but they know why they are employing these strategies rather than just knowing how to solve the problem. This process helps students on many levels: It allows them to become lifelong learners of mathematics in the real world.

The teacher is more of a facilitator rather than a lecturer guiding the students to help them connect their discoveries to a mathematical procedure. Incorporated into math time is whole group instruction, group work, guided practice with the teacher and independent practice. The group work is an integral component that allows students to share ideas with one another, and gain additional insights from each other. If a student is having difficulty grasping concepts, the teacher works with them individually or in small groups. Students that are ahead of the class are allowed the freedom to explore the concepts to a deeper level with more complex problems.

In science students are exposed to labs and hands on experiments every week, engaging students and creating a love for science at the elementary and middle school level. The curriculum introduces and builds foundational concepts through inquiry and exploratory learning. These skills are built upon and enhanced in the middle grades as the curriculum spirals from the early years through middle school. Students are exposed to the content multiple times during their nine years at PAS, allowing diverse learners multiple opportunities to master the content, improve the skills of students performing below grade level and enrich the skills of those performing above grade level. Students also engage in project-based learning activities (such as robotics, school recycling, and Science Olympiad) that promote STEM education and environmental responsibility.

Social Studies instruction is approached cross-curricular by examining narratives and historical fiction text to engage students in learning history. Students are exposed to a variety of informational texts and are expected to cite evidence in order to provide an analysis of the content. Students also use annotations and other reading strategies to increase their understanding of complex texts. The informational texts are both primary and secondary sources. Students are taught how to effectively address conflicting information across sources, thereby ensuring that students view history as a complex concept larger than a single narrative.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The music program for grades K-8 gives every student access to a wide array of music education and performance opportunities. Every student has music class once a week for forty-five minutes, and students in grades 3-8 have forty five minutes of instrumental music lessons. Students in grades K-2 focus on foundational studies which prepare them for instrumental ensembles, choirs, and technology labs offered in grades 3-8. The entire music program provides music education opportunities as a viable and integral component of the overall curriculum at PAS, ensuring that students graduate with a deeper understanding and appreciation of music.

Penn Alexander offers visual art once a week for forty-five minutes. Two art teachers meet with classroom teachers on a monthly basis to ensure lessons coincide with the current math and literacy curriculums. Art encourages students to translate the world around them and motivates them to create images inspired by poems, music, stories and events. This requires understanding of spatial relationships, symmetry, geometrical shapes and measurement.

All students have physical education once a week for forty-five minutes, while kindergarten through fifth grade have thirty minutes of recess daily. Physical Education builds self-esteem that promotes academic learning, sportsmanship, teamwork, and cooperation. Students learn to interact together for a common goal that transfers into the classroom. The teacher is flexible in the strategies used to increase skills and abilities at all grade levels. Providing students a variety of experiences from team sports to individual skill development allows all students to find their own level of success during gym classes. Additionally, kindergarten students participate in square dancing, while fifth grade learn ballroom dancing. Activity Works is a program that is used to encourage movement on days when the weather doesn't allow for outdoor recess.

All students have technology once a week for forty-five minutes. The students at Penn Alexander have access to ipads starting in kindergarten, smart tables in first grade, smart boards, four desktops in all classrooms starting in first grade, laptops in middle school, and two state of the art computer labs. Google Classroom is used with middle school students to support assignments through the use of Chromebooks. Through the use of technology, teachers have brought all content areas to life and have created a learning environment that promotes creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration and information and media literacy - skills that are required for the 21st Century and level the learning playing field.

Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students have enrichment class twice a week for fifty minutes. Each middle school student is given the opportunity to select a program of their interests. Student enrichment fosters identity development, promotes accountability and provides opportunities to develop individual talents, while still allowing for skill development at all levels. Groups of middle school students have foreign language twice a week for one hour. Being exposed to language instruction helps prepare them for the future and with vocabulary acquisition. Penn Alexander is in compliance with the program's foreign language requirement.

The school library sits as the hub of the school, providing both information- and technology-based instruction and access. The librarian follows a curriculum mandated by School District of Philadelphia and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Education guidelines, but is enhanced by the guidelines of the American Library Association of School Librarians (AASL). Our library is especially crucial in helping bridge the ever-present gap between those who have access, and those who do not. The library at Penn

Alexander works to nurture 21st century learners who can develop and carry the lifelong skill of independent learning, and evaluative and behavioral skills to their high school, college, and career experiences. In order to do so, the library provides access to surrounding technological resources including 26 computers and online databases such as the Power Library, Grolier Multi-Media Encyclopedia and Facts On File. The library itself is student centered, matching the needs materially and aesthetically for students ranging from K-12. We have also added e-books that provide easy and unlimited access by all students.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Penn Alexander's mission is to maximize the academic and personal competence of all its students to become successful life-long learners and productive citizens in a diverse and highly technological society. To fulfill that mission, we implement a comprehensive system of supports built around standards-aligned instruction, which serves to connect what students should know to how teachers design delivery of content.

Technology-based support is available from kindergarten through eighth grade. Teachers use SMART technology and Notebook software to create interactive learning environments to enhance student engagement and differentiate instruction. SMART Response technology is often used to administer daily informal assessments, allowing for teachers to track data over time. Chromebooks engage middle school students in cyber-learning through Google Classroom. Lower school students work with iPads to increase early literacy and mathematics skills.

Using information and data gained from various forms of assessments, teachers collaborate during weekly grade group meetings to assist each other in designing instruction for learners not meeting performance levels. They also analyze the standards into discrete learning targets, identify prior knowledge needed, and scaffold content when needed.

School wide, a series of universal screening tools such as Aimsweb, DRA and Gates are used to identify students who are at-risk of falling below learning targets. Teachers utilize various forms of assessment data to make decisions regarding student placement in flexible learning groups. If data shows that students are consistently performing below level, those students are considered in need of intensive intervention. Students in need of Tier Two programs are instructed using a research-based program aligned to meet their needs. Reading students are placed in programs such as Lexia, Corrective Reading, and Heinemann Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System depending on their areas of weakness. Math students are placed in the Voyager Math Program to assist with computational fluency. The Adaptive Curriculum program, customized for individual students, is also implemented. Language acquisition for English Language Learners is achieved through explicit vocabulary instruction. This allows students to build academic vocabulary.

Growth measurement is consistent and constant. Informative and formative data as well as standardized assessment raw scores, parent and teacher conferences are used to alter/adjust teaching to the individual needs of the lowest performing students in all content areas. By scaffolding information, using manipulatives, our lowest performing students can eventually find success full-time in the traditional classroom.

### 4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

Professional development days prior to the school year are devoted to reviewing and analyzing Pennsylvania's state assessment data in order to identify school strengths, weaknesses and trends. This helps teachers plan instruction for the year, and allows for students whose scores show discrepancies to receive additional support or enrichment through extra-curricular instruction, or in a separate intervention block. Two years ago, the PSSA trend showed a need for additional support for students in the area of non-fiction open-ended responses. The principal was able to provide professional development for the entire staff and purchase additional non-fiction texts for use in all classrooms.

Throughout the year, PAS students, in grades 3-8, take three benchmark assessments. These assessments gauge student understanding of eligible content and provide the teacher with critical feedback, so that instruction can be adjusted and reteaching can occur if necessary. Teachers use these early assessments to gather baseline data in order to design appropriate instruction for their students as well as to create flexible groupings for small group instruction, intervention, and reteaching. Teachers meet weekly in grade level groups to discuss the results of formal and informal assessments in order to make informed curricular decisions. Teachers in grades 3-8 teach common core subjects at the same time, allowing students to be reorganized into appropriate groups for differentiated instruction. Teachers, students, and parents are informed of results through SchoolNet, an instructional management system used to track student records and data. In addition to the data provided by SchoolNet, parents also receive quarterly interim reports and quarterly report cards regarding their child's progress.

In the classrooms, Penn Alexander students are given diagnostic pre-assessments in the beginning of each school year in both reading and math. Elementary school students are assessed in reading using DIBELS, DRA, and AimsWeb. Middle school students are assessed in reading with the Gates-MacGinitie Reading tests, San Diego Quick Assessment of Reading Ability, and possibly WrAP or Woodcock Reading Mastery assessment. In writing, students are given the pre-assessment for Lucy Calkin's Writing Workshop at the beginning of each unit. In mathematics, students are given diagnostic tests from AimsWeb, diagnostic assessments from the Investigations math program, and Key Math. A diagnostic test on problem solving with fractions, created by a University of Pennsylvania professor, was administered to students in grades five through eight since fractions was an area of weakness spanning several grades.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

The staff has high expectations of student behavior and academic achievement, a shared vision and mission, communal values and beliefs, parent engagement and student/staff collaboration. The established policies and procedures are simple for students to understand. A sense of service, along with a positive perception and understanding of possible student barriers, epitomizes the culture of our school.

The recognized methods of perception are characteristics of our culture. The sounds of our school are purposeful and engaging. One might hear instrumental music playing, the collaborative learning of students working, student voices communicating their ideas, teachers gathering to discuss instructional strategies or identifying students weaknesses and strengths, or lower school students holding hands chatting as they deliver the attendance to the office. The school décor is intentional. Student work is displayed throughout the hallways. Banners and awards of academic achievement adorn our atrium recognizing our Intel Award, our Regional Spelling Bee Winner, our Robotics Team’s Regional Win and entry into the Lego League World Championship in St. Louis, and the many Pennsylvania Adequate Yearly Progress Banners.

Teachers have developed safety nets to support the well-being of students whether the need is remediation/enrichment or social/emotional support. A University of Pennsylvania social worker and the counselor support students with group and individual counseling. Middle School students arrive to school at seven-thirty to receive support in literacy and/or mathematics or to use computers to complete research projects. They also have the opportunity to select an elective of their choice twice a week that spans the spectrum from athletics to technology. Lower school students remain after school to participate in reading or math activities.

The culture of the school governs the climate. Teacher’s consistent and equitable treatment of all students is paramount. Students are physically, emotionally and socially safe which allows them to function in an orderly environment. Students are challenged due to the rigorous academic opportunities, supported because of meaningful connections to adults, and contribute as cooperative team players in the school community. In the spirit of giving back, middle school students pair with the lower school to assist in various endeavors such as poetry café, the annual food drive, and supporting classroom teachers during their service assignments.

An atmosphere of collaboration, congeniality, curiosity and respect is created by the teachers and supported by the administration, parents and other stakeholders. This culture is filtered down to students through classroom instruction.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Parents, teachers and community members have become pivotal partners in the educational process. Through shared-decision making, parents and community members have become aligned with the school’s goals and high expectations. All students receive the same message and support. The principal maintains an open door policy enabling parents and community members to resolve any student concerns immediately or to discuss ideas for supporting student growth, such as writing a grant for a smoothie bike to learn about simple machines while eating healthy food.

Families receive the weekly Pony Express containing a calendar reminder, upcoming activities, as well as free community events and programs. This information is available in multiple languages. Back-to-school night is held in the fall for families to learn their teacher’s expectations, instructional approaches, and classroom policies. Each family receives a handbook of policies, programs and resources that support learning.

Collaboratively, staff, parents and community have created a tradition of annual events that bring together our diverse population. These include Fall Festival, a running club, a robotics club, musical concerts, set

and costume design day for our annual musical, a pancake breakfast, a spaghetti dinner, a talent show and hoagie dinner and family bingo night. These community-building events strengthen the social capital students need to be successful learners.

The school has a well-established parent association and school advisory council. Elected by parents, these function with the sole purpose of bringing together parents and teachers to support student growth. Monthly meetings are conducted, on topics like helping your child with the science fair, supporting literacy and math at home, or soliciting volunteers to lead a student book club. Parents are encouraged to participate in one or more of the various school events. Committees based on parent interest are created to address topical issues such as wellness. After conducting a Center for Disease Control Needs Assessment, our Wellness Council has increased physical activity and incorporated a health program for middle school students.

The community is our context for learning. Community groups have worked integrally with the school to repair our playground, provide hands on activities in the arts, upkeep our garden, and to enhance the dearth of greenspace. The Philadelphia Orchard Project and Nature Conservancy have awarded grants to create an outdoor classroom with native pollinators. Through these endeavors, students are able to apply knowledge and to think critically which is at the heart of the new more rigorous standards.

### 3. Professional Development:

Professional development is our avenue to ignite our teachers' thirst for knowledge by reviewing current research based effective instructional practices that support student achievement and school improvement. Professional development is constantly changing as performance data is analyzed and teacher's needs are addressed. Teachers receive professional development in various content areas from University of Pennsylvania professors, school district content area leaders, and identified vendors.

In 2013, prior to the formal release of the Common Core State Standards, the school began providing professional development to teachers around understanding the standards and their impact on classroom instruction. The principal offered one week of full-day professional development hosted by the Philadelphia Writing Project on Achieving the Common Core. Once the Common Core State Standards were finalized, additional student performance data analysis generated the need for further professional development in literacy, text dependent analysis, mathematics, and assessment.

The principal provides professional development for staff members on analyzing student performance data. This professional development is conducted at the beginning of every school year allowing staff members to collaborate in grade group meetings as well as in cross grade articulation sessions. Collaboration was imperative to closing the achievement gap and increasing student achievement. Teachers identified areas of weaknesses based on the results of the state assessment. Lesson plans were developed, units of study were designed, and the necessary resources needed for implementing identified strategies were acquired.

Grants and fundraising have equipped the school with Smart Interactive White Boards in grades two through eight to enrich the classroom experience influencing all types of learners. The boards provide students with opportunities to share and participate in the instructional process, and a platform to demonstrate their grasp of the content. Administration and teachers recognized the need for professional development in this area. The technology teacher and the Smart Corporation provided the professional development on incorporating this technology in the classroom.

Additionally, staff received professional development in Response to Instruction and Intervention, a multi-step school improvement approach whose goal is to provide early academic and behavioral supports to struggling students. Teachers identified the researched-based interventions aligned to state standards to support students who struggle with reading and math. Teachers began to search and share information as it related to the Common Core State Standards. The way teachers began to convey knowledge and simplifying the learning process was astonishing.

Thus, the beginning of closing of the achievement gap and increased student achievement.

#### 4. School Leadership:

The principal is the instructional leader who supports a reform-based curriculum that provides a coherent, sequenced core content with rich challenging experiences for students. Teachers are provided opportunities to attend professional development, critically study pedagogy, comprehend Common Core State Standards, and to become cognizant of the curriculum in order to be self-reflective. The principal practices distributed leadership that fosters high levels of trust, transparency and mutual respect developing a school where student achievement is the driver of decisions and the overarching goal for staffing/ resource allocations. The foundation is professional collaboration; the leadership team is comprised of the entire staff, principal, teachers, specialists, support staff and subsequently divided into grade groups and voluntary subgroups.

Common planning time for teachers is utilized to analyze current student performance data, the Common Core State Standards, and the necessary intervention resources needed for implementation. Effective research based instructional strategies are identified to address students' strengths and weaknesses in the content areas. Implementing research-based interventions before and after school has resulted in closing the achievement gap.

Focusing on literacy and math was not the only essential component in closing the achievement gap. Our belief of educating the whole child, in addition to the offering of school-wide events created by sub-groups of teachers for students and the community also strengthens student learning. Events such as the science fair, computer science fair, spelling bee, poetry cafe, informational text day, an annual Broadway Musical, a talent show and a winter concert affords learning experiences for students to demonstrate their mastery in other areas besides reading and math. Our inclusion model for special education students creates individualized support as well as assistance for teachers to modify and adapt the curriculum. An in-house social worker and a full-time counselor provide students and families with social and emotional support individually or in groups.

The School's Advisory Council consists of the community association, four parents, two teachers and the principal. The Council recommends and advises the principal on school improvement, reviews the budget, and analyzes student performance data. For example, the Council recommended that a parent survey be conducted to determine if homework help for children was needed. This resulted in an initiative to create an after school homework club for students.

Collaboration, analyzing student performance data, understanding the Common Core State Standards, and educating the whole child to become lifelong learners has made our school successful in closing the achievement gap.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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No indicator of academic success is more evident or emphasized at Penn Alexander School than the commitment to a collaborative vision that promotes high expectations for success. Noted sociologist and ethnographer Elijah Anderson once wrote, "No matter what race, gender, or ability, all children, if given the opportunity, support and encouragement can learn to succeed." This quotation, the first page in the teacher handbook, embodies the philosophical foundation and vision that leads, and has led, this unique partnership school to its continued, and current, success.

Penn Alexander opened in 2001 as the result of an unprecedented partnership between the School District of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the University of Pennsylvania. It is successful because every partner-principal, parents, teachers, the University of Pennsylvania and the University City community-is committed to ensuring that every student meets, or exceeds, the social and academic identified objectives.

The school uses the site-selection process to guarantee that each educator who teaches at Penn Alexander School embodies this vision. Instruction at Penn Alexander is rigorous, standards-driven, and aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Rigorous instructional objectives are set, and then exemplary inquiry based lessons, using gradual release of responsibility, are delivered. Through the observation and analysis of both informal and formal assessments, teachers are able to identify skills and concepts that need re-teaching, as well as the students that might need additional support. Then, instruction (including scaffolding, and/or remediation and enrichment) are provided, so that students can meet or exceed the mastery objectives. Clear and consistent feedback is provided to students and parents regarding the child's progress towards the targeted learning objectives.

Academic achievement and closing the achievement gap would not be possible without the support of every partner, and the strong belief that education is not limited to classroom-based academic interactions. Teachers and students are supported in this endeavor in various ways- through annual school and community events, through community and partner programming, through worthwhile parental engagement, and through the rich opportunities provided by the Penn partnership. This network of individuals work together in collaboration to ensure that every child receives what he or she needs both academically and socially, so that the school's vision can be achieved.