

Funds of Knowledge in Planning for Alphonse’s Success

Alphonse is a student born in the United States whose parents have lived here for 10 years. Alphonse’s family speaks a variant of World English, as his parents and extended family are all from Jamaica. Alphonse just celebrated his 10th birthday and is in the fourth grade. While he is not a strong student and struggles with math, reading comprehension, and behavior (appearing hyperactive at times), he has an exceptional knowledge of diverse cultures and, accompanying that knowledge, a heightened sensitivity toward the needs of new students, those who may feel different, and those who appear to be left out. Alphonse is also a dynamic public speaker and enjoys giving presentations to the class and even to the entire grade at assemblies. Rather than labeling Alphonse a “problem” in terms of academics or behavior, his teachers leverage his existing strengths, including his knowledge of other cultures and his personality attributes. Alphonse is a member of the school’s new Heritage Club, which celebrates different student backgrounds. His teachers frequently pick him to be a buddy for new students, and he has given several oral speeches in lieu of—or in addition to—writing assignments in class. As a bonus, his teachers have noticed that when Alphonse gives presentations, his writing on the same topic tends to be stronger and more detailed. As Alphonse makes friends with new students, many of these new students are able to support him by serving as study buddies or peers to check his work, improving his academic performance as well. Rather than label Alphonse academically delayed, his teachers have found ways to showcase him as a leader in the classroom while helping him to build friendships that naturally support his growth as a learner—a win for everyone.