

METEAST HIGH SCHOOL

Educating Camden's Students One at a Time

Schools should be guided by one clear principle; everything they do should be what's best for students.

SCHOOL INFO:

Location: Camden, NJ

Type: District

Focus: Interest-Based Learning

Network: Big Picture Learning

Big Picture Learning supports a network of over 55 public schools which creates an individual learning program for each student, starting with student interests and needs while addressing essential learning goals.

BY THE NUMBERS:

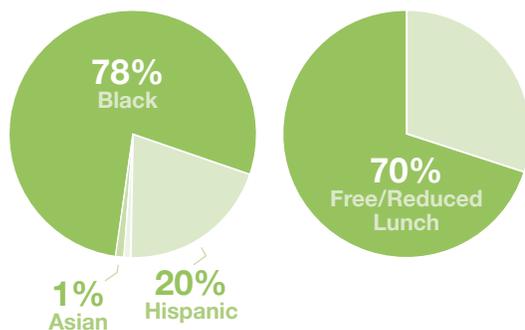
Date Opened: 2005

Grades Served: 9-12

Enrollment: 116

Teachers: 17

Students Demographics:



What is Deeper Learning?

Deeper Learning teaches students to master core academic content, think critically, solve complex problems, work collaboratively, communicate effectively, direct their own learning, and develop an academic mindset.

MetEast High School focuses on academic rigor, personalized learning, interest-driven internships and training, graduation with a diploma, a post high school plan, and mastery of skills necessary for college and career success. These are attained by giving students the opportunity to learn in a place where they are known by their teachers, and people treat one another with respect. Personalized learning plans and internships connect students' interests to their learning, resulting in self-directed thinkers and learners with the skills necessary to succeed in college and beyond.

Principal Timothy Jenkins said that student-directed learning emphasizes empirical reasoning, quantitative reasoning, communication, social reasoning, and personal qualities. As an example, Jenkins notes that traditionally, ninth graders read *Romeo and Juliet*. "We don't make them read it here," Jenkins, said. "We emphasize student interest, so they engage with a play and learn to understand dialogue, but it doesn't have to be *Romeo and Juliet*."



Student Spotlight:

A student came to Jenkins asking for a transfer because MetEast was too hard and the exhibitions were challenging. Jenkins knew this would be a mistake, so he scheduled a meeting with the student and her mother. During the meeting he phoned in a former student, a junior at Morehouse College, who encouraged her to stick with it. He explained that his ability to speak with adults, something he said he'd learned through those "challenging" exhibitions, had created new opportunities for him in college.

This powerful conversation with a MetEast alumnus helped change the young woman's mind. Both the student and her parents decided it was not a good decision to transfer and she went on to successfully complete her challenging exhibition.

PERSONALIZED LEARNING AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS

At MetEast, students demonstrate a mastery of core academic content through quarterly exhibitions. "Every one of our students make an oral presentation that highlights everything they have accomplished, through the previous marking period, in each learning goal," Jenkins, said. Presentations are 30 minutes in ninth grade and eventually increase to 90 minutes in twelfth grade.

Jenkins described a past presentation on quantitative reasoning, explaining that the student began by saying they had focused on polynomials because it was a weakness of theirs, but after hard work and after-school tutoring they mastered the concept. The student then solved real problems in front of the class and passed around homework, as well as a test, for their peers to complete. This display demonstrated the student's newly gained proficiency with polynomials.

Students are responsible for their own learning. Jenkins referred to that phrase as the school's mantra, with the corollary being, "Students have to think things through." He said the major manifestation of these concepts is the Senior Thesis Project (STP), smaller versions of which are required each preceding year.

Each student prepares and presents a STP focused on something that both meets the students' interests and benefits the community. In one case, a student decided to counter Camden's negative image with a documentary full of positive things about her hometown. Another student wanted to address the issue of absentee fathers, so she organized a father-daughter dance at the business where she was interning.

Collaboration is the key to these accomplishments. Jenkins described the elective structure as a prime example of students working together. He explained that in addition to designing their own curriculum, students also request and design all of the electives, clubs, and teams in their school. Students are asked for the top three opportunities they want to explore and then Jenkins polls the staff for a qualified mentor. If there isn't a staff member qualified to instruct on a particular topic, or if only a small number of students show interest in an elective, students can create an independent project to learn what they want to learn. Even if they don't get their first choice, Jenkins says they will get one of their choices.

Jenkins noted that while all students at MetEast are expected to live up to higher expectations than many local schools, seniors have the most to accomplish. In addition to their STP, they must do a research paper, create an autobiography, write and deliver a valedictory speech, and complete extensive community service before graduation.



GettingSmart.com
Deeperlearning4all.org

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