

Casco Bay High School
Frequently Asked Questions
September 2007

Current Teaching and Learning at CBHS

1. How is Casco Bay High School (CBHS) the same as Portland (PHS) and Deering (DHS) high schools?

CBHS, PHS, and DHS are all committed to *Assuring that all students are learning for their future*. Specifically, the following are the same among the high schools:

- Graduation requirements,
- Curriculum grounded in the Maine Learning Results,
- Support and challenge for a range of learners,
- Opportunities for sports and clubs,
- A student body that mirrors Portland,
- A commitment to get each student ready for College/Work/Citizenship.

2. How is CBHS different from DHS and PHS?

Besides being the newest high school in Maine, CBHS (190 – 3 grades) is significantly smaller than either DHS (1225 – 4 grades) or PHS (1042 – 4 grades) and focuses its curriculum around Expeditionary Learning. Its newness means that CBHS is ever-evolving, and students, parents and staff work together to cultivate positive change. Although student-staff ratios aim to be the same as at DHS and PHS, CBHS strives to take advantage of its small overall size by getting to know each student well and customizing the curriculum and instruction to meet individual student needs. Expeditionary Learning is a model for comprehensive school reform for elementary, middle and high schools that emphasizes high achievement through active learning, character growth and teamwork. Specifically, the following teaching and learning strategies are distinct to CBHS curriculum:

- Elective “intensives” – Intensives are courses lasting for five full school days in which students are engaged in either an in-depth study of a topic, intense and targeted academic support, or an adventure/fitness program.
- Learning Expeditions result in extensive fieldwork and community partnerships. Teams of teachers work together to design and implement interdisciplinary learning expeditions - each of which include: 1) a deep focus on a compelling topic (depth over breadth) with an authentic connection to students, 2) integrated project-based learning that leads to real products, exhibitions and demonstrations, 3) a consistent focus on the quality of student work, 4) effective literacy instruction geared to varied readers, consistent meaningful outside of school fieldwork (service, internships, etc.) and 4) a technology and resource rich environment geared to varied learners.
- Crew - Crew is a required, graded, credit-based class. It meets for a minimum of 2.5 hours per week and includes either single grade or multi-grade groups of no more than 16 students. Crew advisors stay with the same crew for two to four years. Most all faculty members are crew leaders, including the principal. The following broad areas provide the focus for crew sessions: relationships, literacy, community service, portfolio preparation, adventure and fitness, post-secondary and school announcements.
- “With Honors” designation is possible in every class when a student’s work consistently “Exceeds the Standards.”
- Junior Internship - A requirement that every junior will complete a one-week apprenticeship. Students will research careers and receive life skills training in areas from resume writing to office etiquette. Students will lead the process to chose and negotiate their apprenticeships.
- Junior Journey – A two-week expedition to the American Southwest, Guadeloupe or Costa Rica. The purpose is to challenge all juniors to expand their sense of both their world and who they are through service-learning, adventure learning, cultural immersion and, possibly, second language study.

3. How are CBHS students doing so far?

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It is too early to make definitive statements on how CBHS students are doing. However, early results are quite promising:

- CBHS students reported better than the national norm on 75% of the measures evaluated by the “My Voice” student survey administered in the fall 2006 – a positive measure of the extent to which the school culture supports student learning.
- CBHS parent surveys in November 2006 indicate a high degree of parent satisfaction (99% believe that “My child’s teacher cares about my child,” 96% believe that “My child is encouraged to learn and achieve at his/her highest potential,” 96% believe that “My child’s teachers provide quality instruction,” and 100% believe that “My child’s experience at CBHS has been positive.”
- 15% of the CBHS students scored in the top 10% of sophomores nationally on the PSAT’s in Math, Reading and/or Writing in 2006. Although it is difficult to compare such a new, smaller school with PHS and DHS, it does appear that PSAT scores are comparable.
- We’ve successfully implemented more educational reforms and “best practices” in our first 18 months than most schools have been able to do in a generation, including: teaming, advisory, standards-based grading, differentiated instruction to heterogeneously grouped learners and, of course, interdisciplinary learning expeditions with rigorous standards and culminating products or performances that benefit the community.
- Our students are doing quality work! A range of learners is feeling more success and satisfaction than they ever have in school. Our full range of learners is performing Shakespeare and educating Portland about flu pandemics and researching global genocides. They are making films and music; they’re building boats and robots.

4. Why does Portland need another high school?

The Portland Public Schools (PPS) mission is *Assuring that all students are learning for their futures*. There is considerable evidence that PPS is not meeting that mission for many Portland students. High school completion rates for DHS and PHS are significantly below state averages (87.22% for public high schools) at 78.93% and 74.13% respectively. Intent to enroll in post-secondary programs is also disappointing at 77.29% for DHS and 73.33% at PHS. Source: Maine State Department of Education 2004/2005 Data.

Despite the best efforts of our school community – students, teachers, and staff – there is a clear need to do school differently. Casco Bay High School has been designed to fulfill Portland’s stated “vision for secondary education by employing research tested educational “best” practices in a much smaller setting with a representative population of Portland teens.

Also, compared to neighboring communities, one of Portland’s great educational advantages is our ability to offer meaningful choice in schooling to Portland families. With eleven elementary schools and three middle schools, a third high school – distinct in size and approach from the two venerable and comprehensive high schools – is both reasonable and beneficial.

5. What kind of kid benefits most from CBHS?

Any Portland teen who wants a small school with big opportunities for student choice and voice and who values rigor, relevance and relationships in their education.

6. Who are those in the educational realm, locally, statewide, and nationally, that support this model?

Center for Research on the Education of Students at Risk (CRESPAR), 2002

In “Comprehensive School Reform and Student Achievement: a Meta-Analysis,” researchers looked at 29 comprehensive school reform models including Expeditionary Learning. The report characterized

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Expeditionary Learning's research base as showing "highly promising evidence of effectiveness." This was the highest rating given to any model that was created in the last ten years. Only three of the 29 other models assessed received higher ratings, and they had all been in the field for a decade longer than EL to build a larger research base.

National Staff Development Council (NSDC), 2002 and 1999

A series of NSDC reports entitled "What Works: Results-Based Staff Development" have featured Expeditionary Learning as a leading professional development organization. The 2002 NSDC report on elementary school professional development notes that "using both independent third-party evaluations and internal assessment, consistent improvement in student achievement has been demonstrated throughout the [design's] history." The 1999 middle school report concluded that EL was the only program of 26 studied to meet all 27 standards for high quality professional development. The 2002 report on high school professional development mentions Expeditionary Learning's "heavy emphasis on teacher content development and the rigorous expectation of adult learning and collaboration for all teachers."

Center for Research in Educational Policy, 2002

In comparison to a group of schools with similar demographics, teachers at the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning (RMSEL) in Denver used significantly more coaching and project-based learning and significantly less direct instruction and independent seatwork. The study found that RMSEL students consistently outscored the weighted average of students from its four feeder districts across all grade levels for each year of the five-year study period on the Colorado State Assessment Program. RMSEL students scored on average 11.9 percentage points higher in reading than those of the comparison group.

American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), 2001

Finding common ground between service learning and comprehensive school reform was the theme of the AYPF survey of 28 leading school reform models. The report gave Expeditionary Learning a five-star rating for being "highly compatible" in linking community service to academics and building "an ethos ...of service to others."

Polly Utichney, Ed. D., Brown University, 2000

This study analyzed data from two New England Expeditionary Learning schools. Before adopting Expeditionary Learning, King Middle School in Portland, Maine scored lower than its district and state on the Maine Educational Assessment. In 1998-1999, however, King students outscored the state average in 6 of 7 disciplines. At the Rafael Hernandez School, a K-8 two-way bilingual school in Boston, students performed better on the MCAS tests than a district school with a demographically similar population. Ulichney concludes, "Expeditionary Learning implementation appears to be providing a strong academic curriculum that allows students from typically disadvantaged backgrounds to thrive."

American Institutes for Research, 1999

This study of comprehensive school reform determined that Expeditionary Learning was one of only eight school-wide reforms with a research base showing positive effects on student achievement, and noted that the positive effects were seen across subjects.

Academy for Educational Development, 1995

A study and evaluation of Expeditionary Learning's first three years concluded that nine of ten original demonstration site EL schools showed significant improvement in the standardized tests

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mandated by their districts. Teachers reported that classroom practices changed markedly, including more collaboration with other teachers, a more systematic connection between content and skill learning, and the development of clear criteria for assessing student work. The study found that students produced high quality work and demonstrated high levels of engagement.

King Middle School

The Portland community has seen Expeditionary Learning make a difference at the middle school level – grades six through eight. In 1993 Principal Mike McCarthy began the process to implement Expeditionary Learning at King Middle School. Since 1992, the year prior to Expeditionary Learning implementation, King middle school students have made significant progress:

- Almost all special education students are integrated into regular classrooms.
- An increase in the number of English Language Learners (ELL) mainstreamed in regular classrooms,
- A decrease in the number of students leaving King to attend schools in other districts,
- An increase in the number of students leaving private schools to attend King,
- The school's physical education program is adventure-based,
- Student participation in sports and in all co-curricular activities has increase significantly,
- Parent-teacher portfolio conferences led by students are held twice a year. Since the conferences began parental attendance and participation at teacher-parent conferences has increased from 65 to 98 percent.

7. What are the implications of this high school for our other high schools, particularly Portland High?

CBHS joins PHS, DHS, and PATHS to provide Portland students and their families with a range of teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of all our youth.

The most important implication is that the Portland Public Schools is better able to meet its mission to assure that all high school students are learning for their futures and to realize significant improvement in key achievement indicators – specifically, high school completion rates and post-secondary enrollment rates.

Why are we limiting our enrollment to 70 for the next two years?

There are clear advantages to this adjustment in enrollment. This decision was made when we thought we were moving to Baxter, and we did not want to outgrow our space. Secondly, more gradual growth will allow us to work on implementing all of our ambitious and vital new curriculum and structures on a smaller scale. This will enable us to do more personalization for students while making the work more sustainable for staff.

After our first graduating class wows the world in 2009 (as we know they will!), we will be in a stronger position to scale up as appropriate in terms of facility, programming, finances and enrollment.

Little will change with our program; our exciting plan for junior and senior year will remain intact. We are still committed to preparing every kid for college, career and citizenship. We are still determined to use rigor, relevance and relationships to cultivate the wonderful in each child. Our student body will continue to reflect Portland's diversity.

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Budget

8. What is the cost of CBHS?

FY2008 is still in process.

However, FY2007 per student costs are as follows: CBHS – FY07 Education Budget - \$5,201/student
Education Budget is defined as the following accounts: Salary, Contracted Services, and Supplies.

For comparative information: PHS – FY07 Education Budget - \$5,344/student and DHS – FY07
Education Budget - \$5,361/student

9. Two years ago, when the School Committee voted on the new high school, the intent was that CBHS would become "cost-neutral." Is that still the plan?

Yes.

10. What are the resource implications of this high school for our other high schools, particularly Portland High?

Resources are largely allocated on a per pupil basis, and Casco Bay's impact on other schools' per pupil allocation is minimal. The overall size of the resource pie (dependent on state subsidy, local revenue, federal revenue) is the prime determining factor. Any budget is a reflection of choices and priorities, and the Portland Public Schools budget must meet complex needs and demands. Given finite resources, allocation of resources to CBHS does mean that they are not allocated elsewhere, but this impact is spread over the entire budget and not directed at any one school. PPS definitively believes that CBHS is worth the resource investment as CBHS joins PHS, DHS, and PATHS to provide Portland students and their families with a range of teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of all our youth.

The most important implication is that the Portland Public Schools is better able to meet its mission to assure that all high school students are learning for their futures and to realize significant improvement in key achievement indicators - specifically, high school completion rates and post-secondary enrollment rates.

11. What is the actual cost of educating a secondary student in Portland? What are the implications of that in terms of how much money is allocated to PHS/DHS/CBHS?

FY2008 is still in process.

However, FY2007 per student costs are as follows: CBHS – FY07 Education Budget - \$5,201/student
Education Budget is defined as the following accounts: Salary, Contracted Services, and Supplies.

For comparative information: PHS – FY07 Education Budget - \$5,344/student and DHS – FY07
Education Budget - \$5,361/student.

In addition, PHS received \$170,266 in federal funds to supplement educational programming for PHS' most at risk students. Those funds MUST continue to be used to supplement PHS local funding and may not be used to supplant equitable, local funding.

Future CBHS Teaching and Learning Plans

12. What is the CBHS partnership with USM?

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The University of Southern Maine (USM) and CBHS are pleased to announce a new partnership that USM Provost Joe Wood notes, “will make USM’s Portland campus an extension of the Casco Bay campus.” We’re calling it, “U. Start Ahead.” Most importantly, the partnership enables all CBHS students to have the opportunity to take a college class for credit while still in high school through the state-funded Aspirations Program.

Like other Maine high school students, CBHS upperclassmen may take USM courses through the Aspirations Program on a space-available basis, after regular student enrollment is complete. But the partnership makes doing so more systematic. Students will be steered towards appropriate introductory courses that meet on the Portland campus after the CBHS day ends at 2:00 p.m. Despite some logistical limitations, this will open amazing opportunities that will appeal to the full range of our students. Examples of courses that students may take include Latin, sociology, women’s studies, advanced algebra, calculus, philosophy, and psychology. CBHS early college students will also receive targeted support and counseling, from both USM and their high school advisors, to ensure a successful experience. Students will be responsible for paying standard USM student fees, including the cost of course books. CBHS will seek resources to assist needy students. As is the case for all Aspirations Program students at USM, the state pays for one-half of tuition costs through funding allocated by the legislature, and the University waives the remaining tuition.

The USM-CBHS partnership will facilitate other connections between the two institutions. CBHS students will have periodic access to USM athletic facilities for health and physical education classes. In addition, they will have the opportunity to develop research and information literacy skills at the University’s Glickman Library and will, like all community members, have borrowing privileges. This new partnership builds on earlier collaborations in which University faculty has contributed to the high school’s learning expeditions in topics ranging from astronomy to economics, technology to Greek philosophy. The partnership will expand and nurture these collaborations and will also take advantage of natural synergies: CBHS will benefit from USM’s knowledge about college admissions and academic preparedness. CBHS can serve as a site for teacher preparation as well as a resource for university research into student’s college readiness. Certainly CBHS students can come to appreciate the quality of USM faculty and course offerings, potentially choosing to enroll upon graduation.

13. What is our plan for Junior and Senior year?

A Readiness Task Force met all fall and devised the following recommendations about our junior and senior year programs. The group included parents, students, staff and community leaders – as well as a School Committee representative (Susan Hopkins). The group sought feedback from students, staff, parents and the broader community before issuing these recommendations.

Revised Recommendations (Draft 2-07)

- A detracked *core curriculum consistent with the University of Maine’s “Statement of College Readiness.”* This means four years of English courses, four years of math courses that include at least Algebra 2 and “a 12th grade college preparatory math course that provides a solid foundation in quantitative and algebraic reasoning;” at least three years of lab science that “include the study of biology, chemistry and physics;” at least “three years of history and social science,” and “at least two years of study in a language other than English.”
- A core curriculum driven by *interdisciplinary Learning Expeditions*. These will look different than freshmen and sophomore expeditions with more student ownership and choice. Learning expeditions may also be more course-based (as opposed to involving multiple courses).
- A *Senior Expedition* designed by each student around a particular passion or field of interest. Seniors will be coached through this process through a Senior Seminar class.

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- *Senior Crew* that focuses on post-secondary planning and life skills. One requirement of Senior Crew will be that each senior complete *an application for a college or post-secondary program* as well as a post-secondary plan. Each student will be supported through his or her particular post-secondary process through crew. College visits will take place every year. The senior crew curriculum will also include training to help build students' resilience and preparedness for the social and emotional challenges of post-high school life, whether in the work place or college. Course work will also include training in "life skills" necessary to help students be productive citizens (e.g.: how to balance a check book, how to register to vote, how credit works, how to take out a loan and pay it back, etc).
- A requirement that every junior will complete *a one-week apprenticeship* (pending adequate staffing and resources). Junior crew will prepare students through career research and life skills training in areas from resume writing to office etiquette. Ideally, the student's apprenticeship will tie to a future career interest, but it might also represent a field that the student is interested in learning more about. Following the apprenticeship, each student will be expected to reflect on their learning. Preferably, the work and learning of the apprenticeship will also be integrated into a Junior learning expeditions (eg : a Public Policy Paper in Humanities). The Junior Apprenticeship will also serve as a stepping stone to the Senior Expedition.
- An expectation that every student will have *an early college experience* in their junior or senior year, either through an AP course, an online college course (AcademE) or a course or workshop offered by local university (USM, UNE, MECA, SMCC). We will strive for a "porous campus" that blurs the lines between high school and college. Our junior/senior curriculum will likely include *an elective AP course* in math, science, English and social studies that will be the equivalent of a semester college course.
- An expectation that every junior will complete *the Junior Journey*, a two-week expedition to the American Southwest, Guadeloupe or Costa Rica. The purpose is to challenge all juniors to expand their sense of both their world and who they are through service learning, adventure learning, cultural immersion and, possibly, second language study. We will undertake the Junior Journey in spring 2008 (pending adequate fundraising progress by June 2007) and review annually whether or not this becomes an annual undertaking.