Casco Bay High School for Expeditionary Learning

GET SMART TO DO GOOD
Casco Bay High School for Expeditionary Learning (CBHS) is a small and rigorous public high school that reflects the increasing diversity of Portland, Maine. Founded in 2005, CBHS is a school of choice for about 325 students. At Casco Bay we challenge and support our students to become ready for college, career and citizenship through our 3R’s: Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. For three of our first five graduating classes, 100% of the graduates were accepted to college. In 2012, CBHS was named one of Maine’s top high schools by US News and World Report. In 2013, we were named by “Getting Smart” as one of 20 “Deeper Learning Schools” in the country. Our aim is for each student to “Get Smart to Do Good.”

Part of a National Learning Network

Casco Bay High School is part of a national cohort of 160 high-achieving, progressive and urban high schools in the Expeditionary Learning network (elschools.org). For the second year in a row, we are proud to serve as one of Expeditionary Learning’s “Mentor Schools.”

In 2010, we were cited as a "model school" by the International Center for Leadership in Education. In the last several years, our work has been supported by Portland taxpayers, the state of Maine, our Parent Advisory Group and the following foundations: the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, Ronald McDonald House, the Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust, the Stupks Foundation, FAME, the White Pine Foundation, the Quimby Family Foundation and L.L. Bean Charitable Giving.

We also work with a wide array of community partners who provide direct learning experiences for our students, including the Lerner Foundation, UNUM, the Portland Pirates, Rippleffect, The Telling Room, 317 Main Street, Habitat for Humanity, Portland Trails, Compass Project, SALT Documentary Studies, Junior Achievement, Bernstein Shur, Portland Public Library, IDEXX, Smith Barney, and others.
“I’m extremely impressed with Casco Bay High School. Your innovative programs and enthusiastic students are making a difference.”

~ Joe Foley, Senior Vice President, UNUM
Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships

CBHS is intentionally small so that we can get to know each student deeply, and so we can better personalize instruction that will help students become their best selves. We strive to infuse each student's academic experience with our three paramount values: Rigor, Relevance and Relationships.

Rigor

We will work to inspire each student to attain and surpass their personal best.

Students earn course credit when they have met each course standard assessed.

Students may strive to exceed the standards and earn honors in every course.

We assess our students on their habits of work, as well as their academic achievement, and we expect - and teach - students to behave ethically, respectfully and responsibly.

Students will often complete multiple attempts and drafts to meet course standards, and will be encouraged to take academic risks, learn from their mistakes and persevere.

Students will take ownership of their learning and progress while holding themselves to a high level of academic integrity.

Each student is asked to present and defend what s/he has learned publicly, several times a year.

Each student is encouraged to earn college credit before graduation.

All of our classes are college preparatory, and all of our students will complete a college application.

The particular and powerful intelligence of each child will be valued and cultivated.

Relevance

We encourage students to ask: "Why are we doing this? Why does this work matter?"

There are clear and important learning targets for each class lesson and expedition.

Our curriculum is often interdisciplinary, drawing on the natural connections among courses—to both enrich and deepen our studies.

Our learning expeditions center around compelling issues of social and environmental justice through local, national and global case studies.

We frequently bring in outside experts; students also go out into the field on expeditions, capitalizing on community resources.

Our culminating performances and products typically have an authentic value, both to the creator and the broader community.

Students and parents partner with staff in forming and re-forming our school community, practicing democratic values and tackling the issues of the day.

Relationships

We are intentionally small, no more than 100 students per grade level, and each of our faculty serves as both course teacher and advisor.

Our school is designed – through structures such as crew and teaming – to set up long-term connections between teachers and students.

We work deliberately to create a cohesive, inclusive community for our students – at the crew, grade and school levels – because students are more likely to put forth their best when they feel a part of something.

Our faculty work collaboratively – every day. We know we are role models, and we strive to be as good to one another as we are to our students.

We seek and welcome partnerships with our students’ families, so we can all work together to promote meaningful learning.

We actively forge connections with community leaders and organizations that can deepen our students’ learning.

We are committed to knowing each student as a person and as a learner – to inform our instruction as well as to support him/her through challenges.
“[My daughter] has at last found a place that challenges her academically and accepts her for who she is as an individual. It is an honor for us to be a part of the CBHS community.”

~ Tatiana Green, CBHS (Alumni) Parent
Our Curriculum

CBHS students participate in a demanding, college preparatory curriculum. Students typically enroll in six yearlong courses that meet for nearly 90 minutes every other day. Additional support and accommodations are provided as necessary for our English language learners and special education students. A few highlights:

» Humanities courses (9-12) integrate English and social studies and meet daily.
» The math program is inquiry-based and technology rich.
» Science courses are lab and field-based.
» French 1-4 and Spanish 1-4 emphasize oral proficiency for use in real contexts.
» Honors (or “exceeds”) work is available in each course. We also offer four AP courses.
  › Our U. Start Ahead Program gives upperclassmen the opportunity to take at least one college course before graduation.
  › In Senior Humanities, students prepare for life after graduation and complete a customized senior project, the Senior Expedition.

Learning Expeditions

Our instruction is driven by Learning Expeditions that result in quality work about real-life problems for a real audience. Learning Expeditions are long-term, in-depth studies of a single topic that explore compelling social-justice questions. They incorporate high academic standards, involve fieldwork, and culminate in an authentic project, product or performance. In past expeditions, our students have explored topics ranging from Portland’s Working Waterfront to Ancient Greece, from Flu Pandemics to the BP Oil Spill. They have investigated questions from “How and why do I change the world?” to “What is the impact of a generation?”

Class of 2014 Learning Expedition

The Class of 2014 completed a cross-disciplinary expedition that centered on the Upper Big Branch Coal Mine explosion and its larger ramifications. It included the research and presentation of policy briefs (white papers) to environmental and energy experts, fundraising $30,000 for the class “Junior Journey” to Appalachia, and service with Habitat for Humanity while in West Virginia. The expeditions concluded with multimedia oral histories documenting the untold stories of West Virginians interviewed during the trip. The oral histories resulted in a DVD that simultaneously premiered in Maine and West Virginia.

Casco Bay High School is a “particularly good” example of a school that provokes “deeper learning. They ask students to think and struggle.”

Other Distinctive Experiences at CBHS:

**Intensives** - Compact expeditions where students complete specialized electives during one 30-hour week. Intensive offerings include boat building, filmmaking, fractal geometry, robotic art, songwriting, winter camping, and personal finance.

**Fieldwork** - Our students have worked with scientists, writers, politicians, businesspeople, graduate students, actors, documentarians, inventors, and more. Off-site fieldwork has ranged from deep-sea fishing to Augusta internships.

**Sophomore Passage** - Sophomores individually—and publicly—address who they are, how they are doing, and their plans for the future.

**Junior Year Internship** - a 30-hour internship in a career area of interest. We place our students with television and radio stations, hospitals, city and state government, universities, architectural and design firms, retail stores, corporations, hotels, farms, environmental and community-based projects, and many others.

**Casco Bay Quest** - A three night, four-day expedition in kayaking and personal writing that launches the freshmen and senior years.

**Senior Expedition** - A Senior Humanities expedition, in which each senior designs and implements a long-term project and formally presents the learning to an authentic audience. Topics have included art in public spaces, literacy in Nicaragua, smoking in public housing, addressing "nature deficit syndrome," and hosting Maine’s first student-run maker faire.

**The Final Word** - This capstone to the CBHS experience requires that each senior craft and deliver a brief speech to an audience that consists of their fellow seniors as well as staff, family and loved ones. Students are challenged to answer questions in their writing such as, “What is most important for me to say to the world about who I am, where I’ve been and where I am going?”

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“I have matured greatly and instead of being a high school failure and drop out, I discovered myself and am now successfully moving onto college to study mechanical engineering.”

~ Zach Sawyer, 2010

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**Standards-Based Grading**

To earn credit at CBHS, a student must master content, meeting each of ten to fifteen “course standards.” A course standard is a description of a learning target that can be achieved during a particular course; it represents the essential things all students must know or be able to do in a course. CBHS does not rank students or weight GPAs. Our grading system is as follows:

1 = Does Not Meet the Standards
2 = Approaches the Standards
3 = Meets the Standards: this is a rigorous standard. Only this grade and higher earns credit. 3.25 to 4 = Exceeds the Standards
H = “With Honors”: this is earned with a trimester course grade of 3.75 or higher.

**College Acceptances**

Since 2009, CBHS graduates have been accepted to nearly 200 post-secondary institutions and are currently matriculated at Maine institutions such as USM, UMO, Maine Maritime and SMCC, as well as many of the nation’s top colleges and universities, including Barnard, Bates, Bowdoin, UC Berkeley, Brown, McGill, Mount Holyoke, NYU, Oberlin, Smith and Yale. Nearly 80% of our graduates have been accepted to 4-year universities.

**Crew**

Each student at our school is a member of a crew. We strive to have student crews stay together for four years, with one advisor for grades 9 &10 and another for grades 11 &12. Crew advisors are also often their advisees’ classroom teachers. Our primary focus in Crew is to ensure that each student: (1) is known well by at least one adult within the school and (2) is an active member of an on-going, small peer community. Crew is a dynamic vehicle for students to explore several Guiding Questions: Who am I? What can I do to become more aware of who I am as an individual, a learner and a contributor to the school and broader community? How am I doing? What are my plans for the future? Crew is a required, one credit course and typically meets daily for thirty minutes. Each year, a student must meet all Crew standards in order to pass. This includes preparing for and leading student-parent advisor conferences, one in the fall and one in late winter.
“I know that if I ever need it, I will be able to just close my eyes and hear the applause of this community, which gave and gave and asked for nothing, and that will guide me through any adversity.”

~ Grania Power, 2012

Portland Public Schools’ (PPS) Vision:

All learners will be fully prepared to participate and succeed in a diverse and ever-changing world.

PPS Mission:

The Portland Public Schools are responsible for ensuring a challenging, relevant, and joyful education that empowers every learner to make a difference in the world. We build relationships among families, educators, and the community to promote the healthy development and academic achievement of every learner.