

SPRINGFIELD RENAISSANCE SCHOOL

Work Hard. Be Nice. Get Smart.

The accomplishments of Springfield Renaissance School's students prove that a child's zip code does not determine his or her destiny.

SCHOOL INFO:

Location: Springfield, MA

Type: Magnet

Focus: Applied- and Project-Based Learning

Network: Expeditionary Learning

Expeditionary Learning promotes high achievement in over 160 schools across the country by connecting student learning to the real world - using "learning expeditions" (extended projects) that join rigorous academics with citizenship and service to their community.

BY THE NUMBERS:

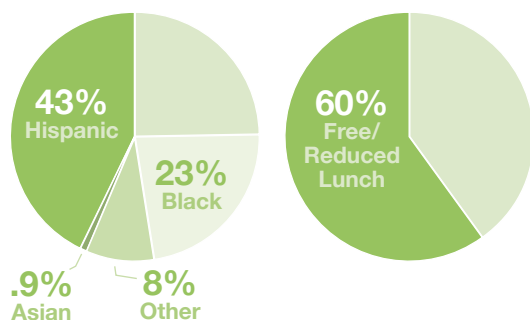
Date Opened: 2006

Grades Served: 6-12

Enrollment: 700

Teachers: 45

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.

"From the minute students join Springfield Renaissance School (Renaissance), be that as rising sixth graders or transferring juniors, they are asked to accept our 'college-bound' aspiration for all students, and to commit to 'working hard, being nice, and getting smart'," according to Principal Stephen Mahoney. Once they have made that commitment, they find that Renaissance is designed to provide a rigorous college-bound program that impels and supports students to use their minds well, care for themselves and others, and rise to the duties and challenges of citizenship.

"The entire curriculum is centered upon issues, problems, and challenges that either face our society now or have lessons applicable to modern times," said Mahoney. "Guiding questions are open-ended and push students to search for evidence, form and articulate opinions and positions, put together recommendations or conclusions, and then defend those results in a public setting."

The school has developed several codes of conduct that guide behavior for students and staff alike. These include Habits of Work, Character Traits, and Qualities of a Renaissance Learner. And, Mahoney says that all three are used within course assessments and as the driving targets for high-stakes assessments like passage portfolios, internships, senior talks, and student-led family conferences.

According to the Student and Family Handbook, which each student and their parent/guardian must review and sign at the start of the school year, "Good Habits of Work support a safe learning environment, develop self-discipline, and provide the foundation for a culture of achievement."

The School-Wide Habits of Work are:

- I come to class ready to learn
- I actively and respectfully participate in class
- I assess and revise my own work
- I complete daily homework

Student Spotlight:



Some of the Springfield Renaissance family, with Dr. Mahoney front and center (arms crossed, black shirt, big smile).

In the five years since the opening of the school, Renaissance students in grades 6-12 have conducted over 4,900 Student Led Family Conferences (SLFC), each of which brings family, peers, and teachers together to review a student's work. Students must present concrete evidence from all classes showcasing their strengths and weaknesses, illustrating their work habits, and illuminating evidence of their contributions to their own crew team and the overall school community. These thrice-yearly events involve Deeper Learning by requiring effective communication of their mastery of content, as well as forcing students to think critically in order to incorporate the feedback they receive into the development of new goals for the next SLFC.

All of this develops the academic mindset that is essential in order to achieve Deeper Learning and success in and after school. SLFCs encourage organization of both thoughts and outcomes, requiring students to reflect on and articulate their accomplishments and areas of challenge in a public venue. SLFCs also help students become the lead actors in the stories of their own education.



GettingSmart.com
Deeperlearning4all.org

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STUDENTS ACHIEVING EXPEDITIONARY EXCELLENCE

Courses and student assessments are organized by learning targets, narrative statements of skill, and content knowledge. Students must demonstrate mastery of these elements in order to receive course credit. The curriculum is organized around interdisciplinary expeditions and investigations.

Expeditionary Learning (EL) requires students to participate in big projects designed to contextualize what they are learning by addressing real-life challenges, often including field work, and allowing students eight to ten weeks to follow those issues wherever they lead.

Various forms of assessment include traditional tests, narrative reports (such as essays and research papers), lab reports, and project rubrics. "We prefer analysis of learning, as demonstrated through narrative statements of skill and content knowledge," said Mahoney. Students must demonstrate mastery of content in order to receive course credit.

A recent tenth grade learning expedition looked at bicycling and the ways the city of Renaissance might be different if it fostered a culture of biking rather than driving. The project incorporated aspects of the students' biology, U.S. history, and geometry course work. For example, students explored the relationships between shapes and design, which increased their understanding of how math in general, and geometry in particular, are used to design and engineer streets, buildings, sidewalks, ramps and bicycles, things they see and use all the time.

Students are directly connected to course concepts in geometry, biology, and history by working with legislators, engineers, and nonprofits. This kind of project makes learning relevant to the students and promotes understanding, contextualization, and the ability to replicate the process to address other questions.

EL schools start with an advisory period called "crew." Learning how to learn and taking responsibility for one's own education are at the heart of the school's crew experience, according to Mahoney. They are also the goals for the three annual student-led family conferences, its passage portfolios in eighth and tenth grade, and its senior talks.

Students work collaboratively every day in every class. Their movement through classes is organized around a workshop model. "Teacher collaboration is a key piece to the professional culture—students see adults collaborating on a daily basis," said Mahoney.

Some might assume that a school in which 70 percent of students qualify for free and/or reduced lunch would be unable to keep up with schools in wealthier areas, but Mahoney would disagree. According to him, it's the students themselves, and the team he has gathered to work with them, that led to Renaissance being recognized by the state and Magnet Schools of America. The school is now recognized as a "model of urban education excellence," and was named a Model School by EL.

"In every respect we are one of the top urban schools in the state and can compete with kids in wealthy suburban towns," said Mahoney. That said, Mahoney still refers to Renaissance as a work in progress, adding that he and the teachers are constantly evaluating everything they do. "It's in our DNA to keep trying to get better. Any school that is committed to Deeper Learning has to be deeply committed to being a learning organization."