

CASCO BAY HIGH SCHOOL

Get Smart to Do Good

Casco Bay is a community of learners where the wonderful in each student is known and nurtured, where learning is catalyzed by student inquiry and academic adventure, and where every graduate is prepared for college, work, and citizenship.

Principal Derek Pierce

SCHOOL INFO:

Location: Portland, ME

Type: District

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:

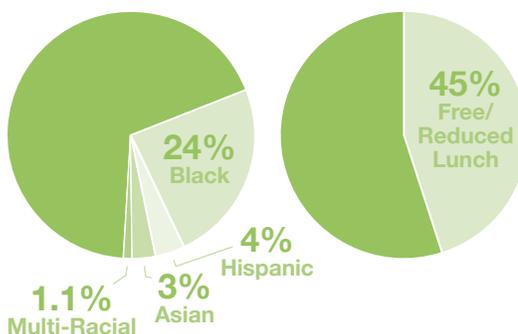
Date Opened: 2005

Grades Served: 9-12

Enrollment: 335

Teachers: 23

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.

Principal Derek Pierce describes the mission of Casco Bay High School as educating each student to meet rigorous, vital standards, as well as to consistently exceed personal bests in scholarship, service, and character. Pierce and his staff are dedicated to making sure that each student who comes through their Expeditionary Learning (EL) program obtains the long-term benefits of that mission, and achieves their overarching goal of learning to build relationships as part of a curriculum that is relevant and rigorous.

"Casco Bay celebrates academic rigor the way other high schools celebrate football stars," Pierce explained. Learning Expeditions, a central curricular structure, are founded on the belief that students should and can solve real-world problems while mastering skills and content. Each year, the projects within learning expeditions require students to think critically, work independently and cooperatively, and create a culminating project that proves their mastery of the required material.

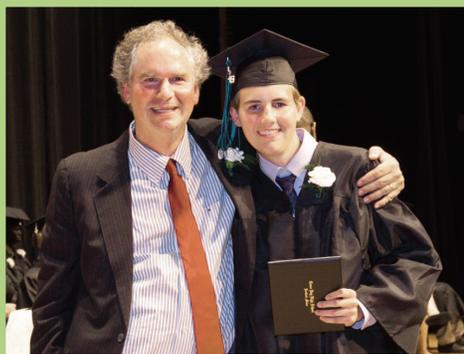
Course standards and long-term learning targets are part of the proficiency-based assessment and grading system. Each class requires students to master 10 to 15 learning targets, based on Common Core State Standards. According to Pierce, students must exhibit mastery of each of those standards on multiple rigorous assessments and performance tasks in order to receive credit for the course. "Communicating ideas is a core component of literacy across the disciplines," said Pierce. "For example, science classes have a 'scientific communication' course standard," and all Learning Expeditions contain strong writing and presentation elements, each of which uses rubrics to foster strong communication skills.

A Set of Distinct Practices Define Casco Bay High School's Academic Program:



- Learning Expeditions
- Rigorous Academics and Focus on College Preparation
- Building Character and an Ethic of Service
- Portfolios
- Adventure and Fitness
- Fieldwork

Student Spotlight:



Principal Pierce (L) and Sam Pierce at Casco Bay's 2013 graduation ceremony.

Sam Pierce's senior project was about STEM education. Its culmination was the Creator Expo, a venue for artisans, crafters, engineers, and inventors to display their work and educate the public about what they do and how they do it.

For Pierce, who plans to study engineering in college, it was a way to spread his dreams and thoughts to everyone in the community and to share his passion for the processes employed by "anyone who uses their mind to invent or build something."

His principal, Derek Pierce (no relation), could hardly contain his enthusiasm. "Sam's 'Maker Faire' is precisely what we envision with our Senior Expeditions. It's an opportunity for students to not only pursue a passion but deepen it - and share it with the world."

USING TEAM WORK AND EXPEDITIONS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS AND STAFF

A major portion of students' experience at Casco Bay is their participation in several interdisciplinary Learning Expeditions each year. For example, in one Expedition students studied the Appalachian coal mining industry by interviewing senior citizens whom either worked in the industry or were impacted by it, and created multimedia biographies of those interviews.

While on the Expedition, students also participated as volunteers with Habitat for Humanity, but said the highlight of their trip was the time they spent interviewing people about their lives. "These projects are inherently motivating and intense. They get kids thinking hard and wanting to figure out the answers," said Pierce. "They confront kids with compelling topics that force investment of both head and heart."

Regarding the type of work students are required to complete, freshmen put on an environmental symposium at the local university, in which they present information they've researched about how to create a sustainable Maine. Sophomores make pitches to a panel of experts in an attempt to win a grant to support a humanitarian cause in Africa. Juniors research and write public policy-oriented white papers, which they defend before a panel of community experts. Finally, seniors design their own Learning Expeditions for the purpose of taking action in their community to positively impact a condition or situation they've researched.

One of the most significant student displays is the Sophomore Passage Presentation, which comes at the halfway point of high school. Sophomore Passage gives each student an opportunity to demonstrate who they are and where they want to go, reflect on growth, develop their presentation skills, and share and develop their own talents and passions. It's the gateway to being an upperclassman and requires a 15 minute presentation that indicates "substantive reflection" on the questions: Who am I? How am I doing? What are my plans for the future? The audience includes a panel of students and staff, and the presentation grade appears on the student's transcript.

Among the things student presentations must illustrate is the integration of Casco Bay's Habits of Work—which include collaboration, accountability, and perseverance—into the student's academic mindset. "Students working together to accomplish more than they could individually is a central tenet of the EL model. Learning Expeditions are designed to encourage collaborative problem solving, while ensuring each student is accountable for learning and participation," Pierce said.



GettingSmart.com
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