

Schools of Distinction



Bergen County Academies, Hackensack, New Jersey

Winner: Mathematics Achievement, High School

Snapshot: Magnet, suburban, 1,122 students, 31 ELL students, .5% student turnover, 100% high school graduation rate

Bergen County Academies (BCA) is a model for excellence, promoting optimal achievement for students. Unique to this school, though, is the way the power and beauty of mathematics is woven into the fabric of the educational programs. Students are not taught theory in a vacuum; instead they experience learning through inquiry-based, hands-on activities that are designed to capture their interest and provide a springboard for provocative questioning. This fosters students' appreciation for what math can do in the world today.

The most basic philosophical tenet in their instructional model is to make learning relevant to their students. Though their test scores are exemplary – in this year's Proficiency Assessment in Mathematics, BCA achieved 100% proficiency, with 97.9% of students earning "advanced" proficiency – BCA provides opportunities for students to extend their talent for math into practical approaches. For instance, students are challenged to use their mathematical skills as they compete in an intra-class bridge building contest, in designing and building robots, or in the design of quality-of-life improvements for students in their sister school housing handicapped students.

School leaders recruit and hire mostly "alternative route" teachers, who have the benefit of having used mathematics in their professions. In addition to the traditional professional development models, they create teacher teams where an experienced teacher mentors a less experienced teacher. BCA also employs "Lesson-Study," where groups of teachers identify a common problem area in student achievement and craft a series of potential solutions to it.

Bergen County Academies receive the full benefit of advanced technology in the classroom, and they partner with universities and businesses to align with today's real-world application of mathematics. It is impossible to capture the richness of the BCA education experience in a few short paragraphs.