



# **New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Charter Schools**

## **LEAP Academy University Charter School Collection of Best Practices**

**Name of Charter School:** LEAP Academy University Charter School, Inc.

**About the Charter School (Mission / Key Design Elements):** *LEAP's mission is to* “enhance opportunities for the children and families of Camden through the collaborative design, implementation, and integration of education, health, and human services programs and through community development.” The school’s educational philosophy has a dual focus on closing the achievement gap and ensuring college preparation and completion for African American and Latino students. LEAP’s academic focus has been sustained through four design elements: (1) the charter school approach used as a platform for transforming educational options for parents and children in Camden City by producing educational outcomes and establishing an organization that is entrepreneurial, efficient and highly accountable; (2) adoption of a rigorous curriculum that focuses on the STEM/STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Technology) content areas that is taught using multi-disciplinary collaborations and is supported by opportunities for students to engage in active, integrated and self-directed learning across grade levels; (3) embraced the importance of placing college and career readiness at the center of its organizational structure—one that encompasses high expectations for students, educators, and families; and (4) the LEAP model begins at infancy to ensure that children are part of a comprehensive educational pipeline that supports them into productive adulthood.

**Best Practice Topic(s) / Performance Area within Organizational Framework:**

College Preparation and Access

**Summary:** LEAP Academy University Charter School is a college preparatory school, where college readiness is embedded in the school’s mission and curriculum from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. A College Access Center works with students from K-12 and supports college admissions as the ultimate academic goal for all LEAP students. College access is anchored on three core areas: (1) early college to 12<sup>th</sup> grade pipeline college readiness, (2) academic rigor so the students can be prepared to complete their high school work and excel in their college trajectory, and (3) the provision of programs and services to improve students’ non-cognitive skills (academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mindsets, learning strategies, and social skills to compete in college and career). LEAP students are exposed to the core academic skills that are critical for success, including: writing, research skills, oral communications and analytic thinking skills. Juniors and seniors participate in dual college courses with Rutgers and other local institutions. These partnerships facilitate two-way interaction between LEAP and the anchor institutions of higher education in Camden. College students and faculty engage with the school in various roles, including tutoring, curriculum development (particularly in science, technology, mathematics, and engineering), and professional development. Through the services of the College Access Center, students have access to: college advisement, financial aid application assistance programs, national scholarships, participation in STEM, Business and Liberal Arts internships, national conferences and leadership institutes and National honors society. In addition, they participate in summer scholars programs in connection with colleges and universities, extracurricular programs, mentoring and relationship-building, college visits and preparation for college admissions examinations (SAT, PSAT). LEAP has established a successful high school graduation and college placement track record, with all 10 senior classes achieving 100% graduation and college placement rates since its first graduating class in 2005.

**Partner(s):** Rutgers University Camden through the Community Leadership Center; Rowan University; Camden Community College

**Dates: from 1997-present**

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**Resources:**

College Dual Enrollment Courses at Rutgers and other local institutions of higher education; College Access Office working with students from K-12; STEM Scholars program; STEM Fabrication Lab; Rutgers Alfredo Santiago Scholars Program; Rutgers Future Scholars Program; Rutgers Center for Community Leadership; and Parental Engagement Center.