



New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Charter Schools

LEAP Academy University Charter School

Collection of Best Practices

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<p>Name of Charter School: LEAP Academy University Charter School, Inc.</p>
<p>About the Charter School (Mission / Key Design Elements): <i>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.”</i> 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.</p>
<p>Best Practice Topic(s) / Performance Area within Organizational Framework:</p> <p>Parental and Family Engagement</p>
<p>Summary: Family engagement is paramount to the LEAP model. Parents and families have varied opportunities for personal and educational growth and for direct participation in school policy decision-making. The success of LEAP in maintaining a very high level of parental engagement is a direct result of its investment in building the capacity and “social capital” of parents to become effective partners in the overall education and development of their children. The parental engagement approach is grounded on five core elements: (1) Informed and Collective Decision Making by engaging parents in all aspects of school operations and governance through participation in school committees, the Board and family support centers; (2) School Participation and Civic Leadership by creating multiple opportunities for families to participate in career/work readiness training and school certificate programs and having access to volunteer in a variety of opportunities; (3) Comprehensive School-Based Services and Support through a variety of units offering parents access to health services; training opportunities, adult learning options, wellness programs among others; (4) Leadership Training, Capacity Building, Advocacy and Personal Growth through Parent Institutes and Academies that are offered for new parents and then for continuing families; and, (5) A powerful Parents Council organization to provide to support for the school, their children and community of learners.</p>
<p>Partner(s): Rutgers University Camden through the Community Leadership Center; Rutgers Camden School of Nursing; Cooper Medical Center; CLUES Program (Informal Science Museums Collaborative).</p>
<p>Dates: from 1997-present</p>
<p>School Contact: TBD: Janice Strigh, Lead Person (Janice.strigh@camden.rutgers.edu) Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago (gloriab@camden.rutgers.edu)</p>

Resources:

Parent Engagement Center; LEAP Health Center; LEAP Fitness Center; LEAP Wellness and Behavioral Health Center; College Access Center; Parents Academy for School Reform; Parents as Partners for Education Change Institute; Full-time Parent Coordinator; LEAP Parents Council; and Rutgers Parents Academy, Rutgers CLC