



# Eight Public High Schools Earn Top Honors, Recognized as National *Schools of Opportunity*

**Key Takeaway:** Schools of Opportunity have created rich and equitable learning experiences for all of their students.

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**Press Release:** <http://nepc.info/node/9013>

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BOULDER, CO (January 22, 2018) - One high school increased the number of students of color taking its AP and college-level courses sixfold in just one year. In another high school, where half of the student population is homeless or involved in the Child Welfare system, strong supports helped its students match New York City's graduation rate. Yet another high school engages students in a rich, college preparatory course in an unusual location—a working farm within the Chicago city limits.

These are the new *Schools of Opportunity*, recognized by the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) at the University of Colorado Boulder for creating rich learning experiences for *all* of their students. The eight newly recognized schools join 37 other public high schools that are part of NEPC's Schools of Opportunity network. The 45 Schools of Opportunity show us how equitable learning environments can exist right now—not merely in some imaginary future. We can learn a great deal from them.

Principal of Hammond High School, Dr. John DiPaula, explains that “Hammond’s recognition as a School of Opportunity helps us communicate how our efforts to challenge students, support teachers, and connect with families create amazing, engaging learning opportunities and solid preparation for higher education.”

All eight of the new Schools of Opportunity have challenging and accessible curriculum as well as a healthy, supportive school culture. Yet there is no common profile—each school works to close opportunity gaps in its own unique way.

Gold-category Schools of Opportunity include:

- [\*Broome Street Academy Charter High School\*](#) in New York City. As a Community School in a partnership with an on-site youth development agency, Broome Street provides comprehensive support structures for a school population where 50% of the seats are reserved for students that are homeless, in foster care or involved with the Child Welfare system. Among other accomplishments, the school's strong relational trust-building and restorative practices have significantly reduced suspension rates.
- [\*Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences\*](#) in Chicago, Illinois. Located on the last working farm within Chicago's city limits, this magnet school has an interdisciplinary college-prep and agricultural curriculum with authentic assessments of student work and internships for all students. This diverse school supports all kinds of learners, notably its considerable autistic population, with full inclusion models in academic and agricultural courses with real work on the farm.
- [\*Denver South High School\*](#) in Denver, Colorado. South has seen dramatic increases in students of color accessing AP and college-level courses. Exemplary programs for emerging bilingual students include heritage classes in Spanish and Arabic and a culturally relevant curriculum for all students—including many who are resettled refugees, hailing from more than 50 countries.
- [\*Health Sciences High & Middle College\*](#) in San Diego, California. This charter school offers extraordinarily rich STEM course offerings, challenging its majority low-income student body to achieve at high levels. Internships and enrichment programs connect students to community programs, and many students concurrently enroll in two-year college courses.
- [\*Lincoln High School\*](#) in Lincoln, Nebraska. Diversity and unity drive a culture of support and academic challenge in a school where everyone—including emerging bilingual students representing 30 different languages—finds a place to belong. A rich arts program, available to all, serves as a common language for Lincoln's diverse student population.
- [\*Seaside High School\*](#) in Seaside, California. Using team-taught classes and an innovative curriculum, Seaside has also prepared a high rate of first-generation students of color for its multiple AP courses. The school seamlessly pairs career-pathway courses with rigorous college-preparation classes for every student.

Silver Awards went to:

- [\*Hammond High School\*](#) in Columbia, Maryland. Hammond's impressive curriculum is grounded in rich, project-based learning. The school has eliminated its low-track classes and significantly increased African American enrollment in its AP courses.
- [\*William C. Hinkley High School\*](#) in Aurora, Colorado. Hinkley's exemplary professional development opportunities for teachers foster leadership and collaboration. The school also boasts a thoughtful and successful "culture of care" and excellent restorative justice practices grounded in widely shared understandings among students and staff.

NEPC evaluates schools on [10 possible criteria](#), with each school choosing six to address in the application. As part of the comprehensive evaluation, recognized schools go through a six-phase review process that includes a self-assessment; criterion-based and holistic reviews by school district and university experts and by past awardees; and site visits by project evaluators. Gold schools demonstrate exemplary practices on a minimum of three criteria, while silver schools demonstrate exemplary practices on at least two criteria. Each of the eight

recognized schools was also required to earn advanced designations on at least two additional criteria.

Project co-director, Dr. Linda Molner Kelley notes, “Through the carefully supported application and review process, schools learn a lot about themselves. They have a chance to reflect on and accentuate their continual efforts to strive for improvement in the ways they serve their students.”

Dr. Adam York, the project’s manager, added that the mindset behind Schools of Opportunity recognitions is very different from other recognition programs. “We highlight the programs and policies that are closing the *opportunity* gaps that create achievement gaps. We want to hold up schools that use best practices to give all students an even chance to access meaningful learning opportunities.”

Next year’s application cycle is already open. If you know a potential School of Opportunity, please visit <http://schoolsofopportunity.org/> to learn more. Dr. York encourages schools to take a look and consider how well their practices match those of Schools of Opportunity. “We know there are unsung schools out there doing an outstanding job of serving their entire student populations, increasing challenging opportunities while attending to social, emotional and physical needs of students in order to support learning.”

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