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## SEVEN NEW SCHOOLS OF OPPORTUNITY RECOGNIZED



It's easy (and wise!) to dismiss [ranking systems](#) that use test scores to rate schools, but what's the alternative? Can we instead learn from exemplary schools around the U.S. that have implemented research-based practices that close opportunity gaps? The mission of the National Education Policy Center's [Schools of Opportunity](#) recognition program is to do just that, and the program [just announced](#) seven high schools to join the 45 past honorees.

In recognizing seven new "Schools of Opportunity," NEPC is calling attention to the [kinds of approaches](#) that can and do increase learning opportunities. Below are brief descriptions of each honoree. More details are available at the [project website](#), and future newsletters will provide expanded profiles of each of these remarkable schools.

- Casco Bay High School in Portland, ME uses project-based learning, authentic assessments with real-world applications. Using the Expeditionary Learning model, students at Casco Bay join family style groups that allow them to explore their curriculum in an inquiry-focused school culture. At this school, the three Rs are rigor, relevance, and relationships.
- Clark Street Community School in Middleton, WI offers thematic seminars developed around students' interests, with multiple entry points and ways to demonstrate learning that ensures that all students fully participate, including a substantial number of students on Individual Education Plans.
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Early College in Denver, CO connects students with an impressive array of post-secondary partnerships, while also creatively allocating resources in order to provide three full-time mental health professionals who work on site with counselors and therapists from Denver Health.
- The Native American Community Academy in Albuquerque, NM uses a holistic approach to education by integrating content that includes indigenous studies, storytelling, oral traditions, cultural history, Native languages, community presentations, service learning, and Native literature.
- Pocomoke High School in Pocomoke, MD builds an extraordinary support network around each student, cultivating one-on-one relationships with students plus a team approach that brings families, home workers from social services, local agencies, and

college representatives to the school.

- The Salt Lake Center for Science Education in Salt Lake City, UT focuses on project-based learning grounded in real-world issues such as water treatment and wildlife, as well as rich arts electives and outdoor education.
- Social Justice Humanitas in Los Angeles, CA is a school where social justice is the curriculum and the culture, infusing every part of the school. The school is designed around small learning communities that address broad, interdisciplinary themes and enfold the students' learning within culturally sustaining learning opportunities.

A high school is great when it does all the right things. But if test scores are used to identify the nation's schools, the results are predictable: Schools that serve affluent communities and/or use selective enrollment practices inevitably end up on top. In the meantime, important factors such as student well-being tend to get lost in the shuffle. Further, seldom is there a serious attempt to account for the fact that societal ills like poverty and racism lead to unequal opportunities to learn inside and outside of our schools, leading to the achievement gaps that our policymakers continually lament.

For these reasons, the NEPC started the [Schools of Opportunity](#) recognition program to honor public high schools in the United States. Test scores are not part of the rigorous application process, which includes in-depth narratives, supporting documentation of practices, and site visits. The designation's criteria draw upon the principles of *Closing the Opportunity Gap*, a 2013 book jointly edited by [Prudence Carter](#), who is the dean of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Education, along with NEPC's director [Kevin Welner](#). The book describes research-based policies and practices with the potential to increase students' opportunities to learn and thrive in school.

Unless or until we seriously address the larger inequalities, we will have devastating achievement gaps. But these Schools of Opportunity are proof that educators' hands aren't tied. Schools can be islands of justice, safety, and rich learning—even if they can do little about the surrounding oceans of poverty and racism.

**Do you know a school that deserves the School of Opportunity designation?** Anyone can nominate a candidate. The 2019-2020 nomination form is quick, easy, and available [HERE](#) online.

## NEPC Resources on Schools of Opportunity

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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