

TOUCHSTONE EDUCATION

MERIT PREP NEWARK

COMBINING A CULTURE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS WITH LEARNING INNOVATIONS

“Our goal is to push what happens when students are ‘offline’ in a blended learning school. We want to challenge students to take the content standards they’re learning online to show mastery when they are working offline.”

BEN RAYER, TOUCHSTONE EDUCATION

KEY FEATURES:

- ✓ New School
- ✓ Flex Blended Model
- ✓ Next Generation Staffing Model
- ✓ Flexible Learning Spaces

AT A GLANCE:

Start Date: Fall 2012

Grades Served: 6-12

Location: Newark, NJ

Operator: Touchstone Education

Operator Type: Charter

Setting: Urban

Students at Start: 80

Students at Capacity: 630

MODEL TOOLBOX:

Learning Management System:
Canvas

Student and Teacher Platform:
Touchstone Scoreboard (internally developed)

Gradebook: Developed by Touchstone/Illuminate

Assessment Tools and Approaches: NWEA MAP (quarterly), Illuminate Education (weekly), teacher-developed exit tickets (daily)

Digital Content Providers: Compass Learning, Achieve 3000, iReady, ST Math, IXL Math, No Red Ink, Khan Academy

Behavior Management: Kickboard

The Touchstone Education model hinges on six key values: achievement, innovation, excellence, teamwork, urgency, and integrity. The model is explicitly designed to scale, and scale broadly.

At its core, however, is an uncompromising focus on high expectations—not just for students, but also for the model itself. When designing their first school, developers searched for a way to deliver differentiated support and personalization, while also ensuring that students were prepared for the rigors of college and the workplace.

Merit Prep Newark, Touchstone’s first 6–12 school in Newark, New Jersey, attempts to maximize the best of both technology and “offline” time with teachers and peers. The hoped-for result is that students work through content at their own pace while demonstrating what they learn in ways that reflect critical thinking, creativity, and other 21st-century

skills they will eventually need in the workplace.

Each day, students log in to the Touchstone Scoreboard, a platform developed internally by Touchstone staff which shows their daily schedule of online content and which skills they need to conquer. They learn these skills by working from online playlists that teachers personalize and differentiate for students.

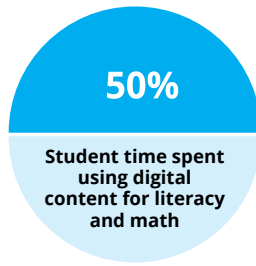
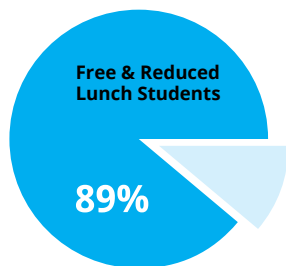
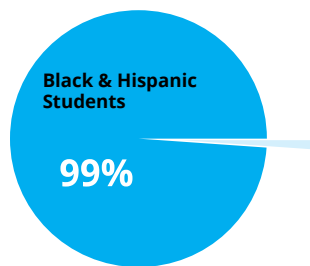
Playlists include self-paced, interactive digital content as well as teacher-led instruction. The playlists also include daily and weekly assessments.

Touchstone envisions a suite of tools that would enable performance data from completed activities or online assessments to be fed into a two-way dashboard that reflects real-time results to both students and teachers. In this scenario, teacher dashboards would provide snapshots of group performance to help teachers select students for small group instruction and suggest new content

A DAY IN THE LIFE

	8:00-8:30	8:30-10:15	10:15-12:00	12:30-2:15	2:15-4:00	4:00-5:00
MON:	Advisory	English	Math	Science	Flex	After School
TUE:	Advisory	Science	Math	English	Flex	After School
WED:	Advisory	Math	Science	English	Flex	After School
THU:	Advisory	English	Math	Science	Flex	After School
FRI:	Advisory	Flex	Flex	Data Analysis / PD / Student Plans		

For students, each day begins with a 30-minute advisory that uses a social-emotional curriculum designed to help build trust, surface and discuss shared challenges, and engage students in reflection about their learning. The rest of the day, students work through 105-minute content blocks where they might divide time between online content and teacher-led instruction, discussion, or group work. During “flex” time, struggling students can work with teachers for remediation, while advanced students can move on to accelerated content, Advanced Placement courses, or electives.



BLENDED SUBJECTS:
Math, Literacy, Science, Social Studies

BY THE NUMBERS:

Year 1 public revenue per pupil:
\$14,520

Year 1 expenses per pupil:
\$16,500

Year 4 revenue per pupil:
\$14,823

Year 4 expenses per pupil:
\$14,823

Years to sustainability: 1

for the following day. Through Scoreboard and the Illuminate Education assessment platform, Touchstone is working toward that aspiration. Their technology solution allows teachers and students to review data, though not in real-time, in order to create future playlists—that is, the plan for what students will learn and what interventions teachers will provide in the week ahead.

Two hours per day and half of Fridays, teachers work in teams to review student data and create student groups and lesson plans for the following week. This dedicated planning and professional development time helps individual teachers pinpoint which students need remediation and targeted instruction in the week ahead. When students are not logged in to their computers, “offline” time

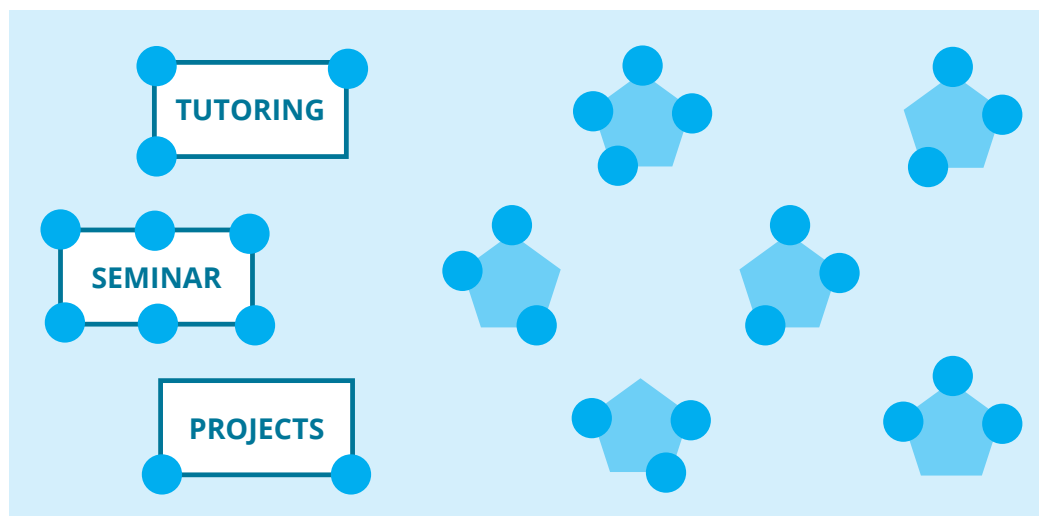
“When students are not logged in to their computers, ‘offline’ time is dedicated to critical thinking and deeper learning. In small groups with master teachers, students are challenged to demonstrate their learning through projects, experiments, guided group work, and discussions.”

is dedicated to critical thinking and deeper learning. In small groups with master teachers, students are challenged to demonstrate their learning through projects, experiments, guided group work, and discussions designed to show that students can apply their skills to relevant and challenging activities.

Expansion is a key part of the Touchstone vision. As Merit Prep Newark continues to add grade levels each year, Touchstone started a second school, Merit Prep Newark

II, in fall 2013 with 80 6th graders. The organization intends to create a model that gets great results for students and design it in such a way as to create systems and processes that can scale anywhere. Technology is an essential factor that will enable both.

The ultimate goal is to build a national nonprofit that will operate networks of schools under the Touchstone model. Those networks will provide regional staff, financial resources, and support to schools that adopt the model with high fidelity.



At Merit Prep Newark, work occurs in a large, open room that looks more like a workplace than a school space. During any class period, students might get pulled aside for tutoring, peer projects, or a teacher-led seminar.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

School URL: <http://www.meritprepschools.org>

Operator URL: <http://touchstoneeducation.org> | Contact: Ben Rayer, brayer@touchstoneeducation.org



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