

**True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School
Grades 5-8**

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A passionate commitment to high student academic performance coupled with the operational effectiveness to carry out that commitment distinguishes True North Rochester Preparatory Charter School (TNRPCS) from many other educational organizations. Staff, students and families focus their energy toward the school's vision

of ensuring that students “develop the skills, knowledge, and character necessary to grant them full access to opportunity and prosperity, including enrollment and success in college.” The school achieves its mission of “college and character” through consistent application of **proven instructional practices** guided by data and **targeted instructional intervention** and enrichment made possible by a longer school day and year. **Thoughtful organizational structures** and governance policies provide a strong framework within which students can thrive in the rigorous academic environment.



TNRPCS opened in 2006 for students in grades 5 and 6, adding a grade each year to reach its current configuration serving grades K- 1 and 5 – 8. The first class to complete TNRPCS graduated in June 2010. Also in 2010, the school revised its existing charter to add elementary grades beginning with grades K-1 enrolling 165 students. TNRPCS is a member of the Uncommon Schools network, a non-profit organization that develops and manages regional networks of schools with a common mission – to prepare urban students to graduate from college.

Effective instructional practice is at the heart of the educational program at TNRPCS. Teachers apply the proven instructional strategies described in the book, *Teach Like a Champion*, by Uncommon Schools Managing Director, Doug Lemov. The core practices of all Uncommon Schools are the teaching techniques defined in the book, which stretch across the spectrum of effective education practice from setting high academic expectations, establishing a strong classroom culture, engaging students in the lesson to building character and trust. These proven techniques are the core vocabulary of the professional conversation about effective practice at TNRPCS.

Consistent application of proven instructional practices creates an environment ideally suited to learning at TNRPCS. Distractions are limited or eliminated so students and teachers can focus on the task at hand, developing the skills and building the knowledge that will foster success in college and career. By eighth grade, students at TNRPCS outperform others in the city and county by large margins, with 97% of students scoring proficient on the NYS Grade 8 ELA test, and 93% reaching proficiency in math. The success of the students on state assessments validates the effectiveness of the school’s instructional approach.

Instructional content decisions are guided by data describing student strengths and gaps. In addition to state assessments, internal interval assessments mirroring the structure and content of state tests are administered four times per year. Staff uses 6 week diagnostic assessments to target individual student needs in both math and ELA and design intervention plans to address these areas.

The approach to support for student achievement can best be described as a “whatever it takes” model. Data from

the assessments coupled with classroom tests and quizzes enable teachers to provide targeted interventions or enrichment in whole class or small group structures. All students participate in the morning core academic classes and



teachers group, re-group, and meet individually during the extended day and afternoon blocks to provide “whatever it takes” to ensure academic success.

Classes at TNRPCS are leveled based on diagnostic assessments administered at the start of the school year. One advantage of leveled classes is that students with greater academic needs are grouped into smaller homeroom classes, allowing teachers options for targeted interventions in core content areas. With information from diagnostic, interval and classroom measures, teachers can tailor their instruction efficiently for each class.

The daily schedule for students at the school begins in the morning with 75 minute blocks for reading, writing, and mathematics. In the afternoon, students have a second 60-minute math class as well as art or gym, and history or science depending on grade level and groupings. The school day extends from 7:40 am – 4:40 pm and the school year is 195 days long, 15 more than typical public schools. Saturday school is held approximately twice per month for students who need additional practice, and extends learning time even further for remediation or enrichment. This additional time allows students and teachers to dig deeply into topics and to practice new skills to reinforce learning.

Student with disabilities and English learners are beneficiaries of the structure and routines at TNRPCS. Parents of students with behavioral disabilities in particular are attracted to the structured environment, high expectations for all and “whatever it takes” mindset. The school meets with families and reviews the specifications of the student’s individual educational plan (IEP) to align the school’s supports with those in the IEP. At one point, the school noticed a rise in the percentage



of enrolling students identified with autism spectrum disorders. Parents mentioned that they had “spread the word” to others that the **clear and consistent routines, high expectations for all** , the **regularity of consequences and rewards** and the **controlled environment** at TNRPCS made it an ideal place to allow children with autism to excel in a mainstream setting.

While the school has a small percentage of students who are English learners, their needs are well served within the regular classroom because of the frequent opportunities for small group interventions throughout the day. Every student is provided access to remediation or enrichment depending on their need, from English learners to struggling readers to mathematics whiz kids.

Beyond support for academic success, the school creates an environment where students are excited to participate in learning without fear of teasing or ridicule as “geeks,” “nerds or “dorks.” To carry out the “character” part of its mission, the school regularly engages students in robust dialogue about virtues, one of which is compassion. Classes can win virtue points and earn rewards by demonstrating admirable traits, such as concern and respect for all. Last week’s virtue points winner leads a “shout out” to this week’s champion at regular community meetings. The school’s program seeks to ensure that every student who graduates from TNRPCS has built a strong character as well as a strong academic foundation.



Consistent application of a core set of teaching practices and a “**whatever it takes**” intervention model founded on data-based decisions are just two components of the school’s educational program that contribute to student success. In addition, **thoughtful organizational structures** set the framework for **efficient use of skills and talents among the professional staff**.

The school uses a dual leadership structure, with a Principal responsible for overseeing the work of the instructional staff and a Director of Operations attending to facilities, financial management, compliance reporting, and other non-instructional aspects of the school. The dual leadership structure allows the principal more time in classrooms, following a schedule of regular and frequent observations and time to provide focused and meaningful feedback to improve instructional outcomes.



The principal, department chairs and members of the instructional leadership team collaborate to **monitor consistent implementation of the core instructional model** and to **provide support to teachers** in its effective application. These school leaders use a shared observation tracker when visiting teachers in classrooms to highlight the major components of the lesson, both in terms of delivery and management. Following the observation, this data is shared with the teacher to highlight both their strengths as well as areas for growth. Remediation plans are designed as needed to allow the teacher to observe expert colleagues, co-teach or partner teach with others, and debrief with instructional leaders to reinforce their professional learning. School leaders track teacher progress throughout the year to maintain the high quality of the instructional staff at TNRPCS.

To ensure effective teaching in every classroom, TNRPCS provides **extensive professional development** throughout the year and **intensively during three weeks in August**. With reliable data on current practices from the observation tracker as a guide, the school's instructional leaders design and conduct regular professional development sessions on early release Fridays. Teachers strengthen their skill in implementing specific practices identified for review from the array of proven techniques

described in *Teach Like a Champion*. They develop enrichment and remedial lessons for their curriculum in anticipation of the range of capabilities in the typical student population. Targeted support and clear, explicit expectations enable novice, experienced as well as veteran teachers to work in concert to achieve the school's central goal – high academic achievement for all students.



Policies that govern TNRPCS create a safe and structured environment to support strong teaching and deep learning. Staff at the school apply the technique called “sweat the small stuff” to ensure consistent enforcement of rules for uniforms, hallway and lunchroom behaviors, and homework folders. Attention to detail in all aspects of the school creates an atmosphere that supports student success.

Expectations for parents, students and teachers are clear and explicit, and uniformly enforced. The school’s staff, leaders and founders not only *voice* their commitment to high academic achievement, they *act* on that commitment through organizational practices that create the conditions for success.

The effectiveness of True North Rochester Prep Charter School is a product of the collective focus of the students, staff, leaders and families on strong academic performance and principled character in preparation for success in college and career. The dedication of the school’s founders and leaders to this goal is evident in the design and implementation of a quality educational program and policies and practices to ensure students have access to the “opportunity and prosperity” promised in the school’s mission.

Reference:

Lemov, D, & Atkins, N. (2010). *Teach like a champion: 49 techniques that put students on the path to college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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