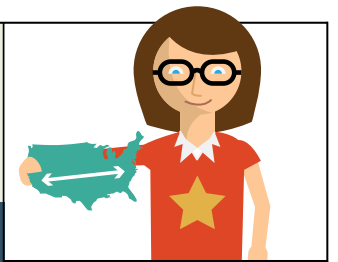


TOUCHSTONE EDUCATION

NEW CHARTER WITH EXPERIENCED LEADER
LEARNS FROM EXTENDING TEACHERS' REACH

AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE
CASE STUDY



SPRING 2013 VIEW

Reach Models in Use

- ★ Multi-Classroom Leadership
- ★ Time-Technology Swap—Modified Flex

Fact File

- ★ Newark, N.J., charter management organization, planning to oversee “regions” of charter schools
- ★ Flagship school: Merit Preparatory Charter School of Newark (“Merit Prep Newark”), opened fall 2012, enrolling 84 students in grade 6; 90 percent of its students are low-income; student body is 98 percent African-American and 2 percent Latino. It plans to serve 560 students in grades 6–12, with middle school and high school each having three teachers per content team in math, science, and language arts/social studies, plus a “floating” associate teacher or two if needed in high school
- ★ Touchstone growth plans: To open 50 schools in seven years; enrolling 30,000 students at capacity
- ★ Year One results: Most students came into Merit Prep several years behind grade level. As of March 2013, sixth-graders at Merit Prep had already demonstrated two years of growth in reading and 1.25 years of growth in science, according to the Northwest Evaluation Association. Students gained three-fourths of a year in math by March—solid results, but not enough to close gaps.
- ★ Leaders are rapidly changing school model, based on early results, to emphasize multi-classroom leadership



SUMMARY

In 2012, Touchstone Education opened its first school, Merit Preparatory Charter School of Newark (“Merit Prep Newark”), in New Jersey, with 84 sixth-graders, 90 percent of whom are low-income, with most entering Merit Prep several years behind grade level. In reading and science, Merit Prep Newark has shown strong early results in its first year: In March 2013 tests, students already demonstrated two years of growth in reading and 1.25 years of growth in science, based on the Northwest Evaluation Association’s Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment.

Its reading scores came out of an English language arts (ELA) program led by a “master teacher,” an excellent teacher who taught with and led a first-year teacher. In math, where Touchstone leaders were unable to hire a master teacher, Merit Prep’s students had made three-fourths of a year of growth by March. Touchstone plans to develop the math team in the next year, in hopes of achieving results similar to the other subjects.

This case study provides a first look at a small first-year school within a charter school organization that has big plans for growth. At full capacity, Merit Prep Newark will have 560 students in grades 6–12, and will extend its excellent teachers’ reach by having one master teacher per content team (math, science, and language arts/social studies) oversee all the students in either middle or high school.

As a charter management organization, Touchstone intends to open 50 schools in seven years, ultimately reaching 30,000 students. Touchstone will grow by creating “regions” of charter schools, with Merit Prep as its first region, and Merit Prep Newark as its first school.

Merit Prep Newark is a blended-learning school, in which students learn through a mix of digital instruction and in-person teaching. In its first year, its most compelling results were achieved by the strong language arts teacher-leader and her mentee, a new teacher, who combined direct instruction with online learning. This study looks at how Touchstone uses the lessons of those student results to adjust and strengthen its models with master teachers in each content area, without backing off of the potential of blended learning to extend teachers’ reach and enable higher pay. Public Impact will continue to follow Touchstone through its growth and adjustments.

Merit Prep Newark is in the early stages of intentionally creating an Opportunity Culture for teachers. As the Newark school and Touchstone scale up, they plan to extend the reach of their excellent teachers to many more students than they reach now. Touchstone uses versions of two Opportunity Culture models:

- * **Multi-Classroom Leadership**, which enables excellent “master teachers” to teach with and develop teams of novice and developing teachers. In Newark, Touchstone had just one master teacher this year, the language arts and social studies teacher who worked with one novice teacher. As the school grows, this teacher will extend her reach to as many as 240 students and lead a team of teachers; master teachers will lead math and science teams.
- * **Time-Technology Swap**, which engages students in digital learning for a part of their day to enable great teachers to reach more students and focus on teaching higher-order thinking skills. At Merit Prep Newark, each student has a daily “playlist,” or schedule of activities, personalized to that student’s skill level. Teachers use student learning data to adjust students’ playlists by selecting appropriate digital content and traditional learning activities, and they have the autonomy to change the curriculum or use of class time as needed. The school’s teachers have used digital instruction to differing degrees; their use of technology for instruction will likely vary and evolve as the school refines its use of blended learning.

Merit Prep Newark extends the school day to 5 p.m., currently using the final three hours as an intervention block providing very personalized reading instruction, beyond the ELA morning instruction.

Touchstone’s career ladder enables consistently excellent teachers to climb to the “master teacher” position, in which they can earn up to \$100,000 a year without leaving the classroom, within per-pupil funding. According to a 2010 analysis by *The (Newark) Star-Ledger*, not quite 2 percent of New Jersey’s teachers earn more than \$100,000 a year.

Touchstone expects its model to be financially sustainable even with lower per-pupil funding than it receives for Merit Prep Newark, by relying on a combination of lower costs for employees and benefits outside of New Jersey, larger grade cohorts per teaching team (even while keeping group sizes smaller), lower-cost facilities and technology, and use of digital instruction in some special subjects.

HOW TOUCHSTONE EXTENDS EXCELLENT TEACHER REACH & CREATES AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE

Reaching More Students with Excellent Teachers

While planning for a network of schools focused on excellent teaching for all students, Touchstone settled on multi-classroom leadership and flexibly scheduled blended learning to extend excellent teachers’ reach. These brought meaningful roles, major challenges, and real excitement as the Merit Prep Newark teachers came to grips with such different notions of how to run a school.

“Traditional education looks a certain way,” says Master Teacher Tiffany McAfee, who has taught English language arts for about a decade. “The challenge is to change the way I think education should be—to revert back to my innocence. Once you’ve been in education for a while, you’ve been jaded.”



Master Teacher Tiffany McAfee’s students made impressive gains in reading through her work as a teacher-leader.

Touchstone's leadership is committed to rapidly revising its strategies, discarding failed approaches and spreading those that work. "You condition your mind to work within the system," McAfee continues. "I had to uncondition my mind when I came here. . . . I have to give myself permission to be creative, to think outside the box, to be flexible, to be OK if it doesn't work. Because we can change it on the spot."

In the Touchstone model, students start their eight-hour school day eating breakfast with their advisory group, a pod of 15 students (30 once the school is at full capacity) led by a teacher. The teacher then spends 30 minutes leading her advisory group through a community-building activity, such as a "positive thought circle" or "think topic of the day." These activities are part of a schoolwide social and emotional curriculum created by Touchstone's teachers. Each teacher builds relationships with his or her pod's students, and is responsible for communicating with their families about the students' social and emotional well-being. Students then move into subject blocks, working online and with teachers.

All students bring their personal MacBook Air laptops, provided by the school, to class, on which they follow their individualized "playlists" (see sample, pg. 5). Playlists show each student what lessons, activities, and assignments—both in-person and online—to complete during the week. Students may start out with whole-class lessons to learn new material from the teacher, but they spend most of their class time following the playlist's guidance through personalized lessons. These lessons may include whole-group discussion, partner work on practice worksheets, small-group activities in seminar rooms with in-person teachers, or personalized online modules.

Multi-Classroom Leadership

Touchstone's model calls for a master teacher leading the instruction of all students in a content area. At Merit Prep Newark, the master teacher and a team of two teachers—one teacher and one associate teacher—will teach 80 or more students during each block at full capacity. Although each content team will be responsible for the student outcomes of all students within that subject, the master teacher will have ultimate accountability for leading the content team to strong student outcomes by developing her team members and taking on the hardest teaching roles.

"We have learned that the one most important thing we can do to positively impact the learning of a child is to consistently provide them with a great teacher," says Ben Rayer, Touchstone's founder and CEO, and former president of Mastery Charter Schools. "In our model, we have reframed what teachers do and how they are developed. By working in teams and being trained by more experienced teachers, our teachers have time to develop as professionals. At the same time, our students have access to the most talented teachers for the most difficult learning."



Ben Rayer, founder and CEO of Touchstone, sees a great teacher as the key to each student's learning.

Until it grows further, Merit Prep Newark has just one master teacher, McAfee; the school was unable to find a suitable candidate for math. In Merit's first year, she has been working on a team with first-year Teach For America teacher Jonathan Wigfall, developing his skills.

In the school's first year, with just a sixth grade, McAfee and Wigfall have about 27 students in a typical subject block; Touchstone kept the student:teacher ratio low to test the model and adjust it before extending teachers' reach in the second year. Students sit in groups of four based on skill level, all equipped with laptops using the "Canvas" platform, which allows teachers and students to share files. McAfee directs students through their playlists, works one-on-one with students, and leads whole-group instruction, while Wigfall supports her by rotating among the students, guiding, redirecting, and assisting them when they have questions.

For example, one day students worked in groups to study slides on figurative language, then watched a music video while listening on headphones, taking notes on examples of figurative language in the lyrics. Meanwhile, both teachers moved through the room, overseeing their work. Students then came together for a whole-class discussion with McAfee, who asked higher-level questions about the purpose of figurative language and the author's intent.

Throughout each day, McAfee also coaches Wigfall—and working with him and the school's other teachers has proved especially rewarding.

"It's meaningful; they want the teamwork," she says. "I've never seen that in 10 years of teaching—a group of people so excited about working together."

She and Wigfall spend significant planning time together, throughout the week but mainly on Fridays, when they review that week's data. They have the autonomy to change the curriculum or how they use class time based on week-to-week student results. Then Wigfall creates weekly assessments, using questions pulled

from item banks aligned to MAP assessments, while McAfee takes the lead on creating instructional playlists for students.

In addition, she meets weekly with the school's reading specialist to plan the daily, three-hour afternoon reading intervention time, during which the school most takes advantage of the personalized instruction that blended-learning models offer. In this block, McAfee, as the master teacher, leads all the other teachers in the school, including the reading specialist and special education teacher, in working with students on literacy. Students and teachers start the block together, then are put in daily-changing groups according to their learning needs, generally working online and in small groups. During this block, students also get pulled out for an hour of physical education each day.

For Wigfall, this model provides opportunities to test new ideas while learning from McAfee. "I tell him, 'watch me for 30 minutes,'" she says. "'Notice my tone. What am I asking? What are the kids doing? Are they engaged?'" I feel like I am responsible for maybe 60 percent of his growth in who he is as a teacher. I really love that."

Wigfall says McAfee empowers him to be a better teacher and advocate for their students. "Having a passionate, master-level co-teacher as a role model and confidante has equipped me with such confidence in my own abilities," he says. "[She] empowers me to

deeply consider the needs of our students first, and leave my own agenda behind."

And McAfee's influence has extended to developing the rest of the teaching staff, says Joan Massey, Touchstone's chief academic officer. "She's definitely guiding the whole school not just on curriculum, but on instructional strategies."

For McAfee, extending her reach to so many students is "every teacher's dream."

"Both of my roles [still affect] students. I can't tear them apart. Being in a classroom, you get just those kids, those classrooms. My impact [through teaching and leading] is larger," says McAfee, who expects to expand her impact further as Touchstone grows.

In its first year, Merit Prep's math results showed Rayer the immediate need for a multi-classroom leader there, too. Math was taught largely using the blended-learning model detailed below, and largely by a first-year teacher; next year, this teacher will work in a team with two other much more experienced teachers.

"We will have a stronger math team for next year, with strong leadership," Rayer says. "It will be interesting to see what great results they can accomplish with better focus and structure, and excellent, experienced teachers leading math—just as we have now with language arts."



English language arts teacher Jonathan Wigfall helps guide students through their playlists.

Time-Technology Swap

In tandem with Multi-Classroom Leadership, all Touchstone teachers implement a Time-Technology Swap. Swapping a portion of teaching time for digital learning gives teachers the time to teach more students, focusing that teaching on higher-order thinking skills, as well as the chance to plan and collaborate with other teachers.

In Touchstone's modified "flex" version of a time-technology swap, students sit in groups of four or five in an open "stadium" space, with glassed-in seminar rooms along the back. Student groups are flexibly assigned by level or mastery, and teachers place students into new groups every week based on formative assessment data. During the subject block, students may work in groups, in pairs, or individually on projects and assignments determined by the teacher. Merit Prep's students rotate among science, English language arts, and math in fixed 100-minute blocks. Science classes are held in a lab, while ELA and math classes are held simultaneously in the stadium.

Fixed schedules are characteristic of another type of time-technology swap—the "rotation" model. At Touchstone, students rotate through specific subjects at specific times. But students move fluidly *within* these schedule blocks, at their teachers' direction, with the personalized playlists guiding the type of learning activity for each student each day (see sample playlist at right).

First-year math teacher Ben Conant, who will have master teachers next year to guide him, feels comfortable with this model now, but spent his first year significantly adjusting it to fit his needs—experimentation encouraged by Touchstone, but a struggle nonetheless.

Early in the year, he focused on whole-class teaching, then tried variations of a rotation model that did not work, before settling on a very flexible approach planned a week at a time. Now, he kicks off the introduction to new content at the beginning of each week through a whole-class lesson, then has students work their way through their playlists at their own paces, with Conant following the data and leading the class in differentiated digital and in-person work.

He thinks that the new approach produced better student learning as the year progressed.

"I change what I'm going to focus on a lot, in response to how the other weeks have gone," Conant says.

With students working so independently at their own pace, he can focus on individual needs. "My favorite time is when I'm walking around, answering questions that kids have in the classroom."

In language arts, devising useful online activities in language arts often felt tough, McAfee says. Rayer notes that although the school used significant amounts of blended learning in ELA, they learned how different it is from math work online, which can follow a more linear approach.

Wednesday, April 10, 2013 through Thursday, April 11, 2013

You **MUST** complete the following task by EOC (End of Class) Thursday!

RL 6.2: Determine the central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details, providing a summary of the text.

1. Compass Lesson Inferencing Review 3
2. Practice inferencing on the website, please copy and paste this link <http://www.tv411.org/reading/understanding-what-you-read/strategies-better-reading> and then click BEGIN LESSON at the bottom of the page
3. Inferencing Practice Group 3 in Canvas in the module ELA Investment Playlist
4. Learn Zillion Poetry Playlist (Please use the note taking sheet to take notes as you watch the videos. The note-taking sheet can be found in Canvas in the ELA Investment Playlist module.)
5. Exit Ticket 4.11.13

Sample playlist for students at Merit Prep Newark.

"We're constantly making sure we look at the data, trying to come up with creative ways to merge the technology with the direct instruction," McAfee says. "ELA is not like math. Jon and I are always trying to find interesting ways to teach ELA digitally."

Massey acknowledges that the school's professional development in using the technology effectively needs improvement, especially given that blended-learning teachers can find few external support networks.

Although McAfee continues to use significant amounts of whole-group instruction—not the approach that Rayer envisioned—she has shaped it into something in which she remains comfortable *and* continues to get learning results, with students growing two years on average in ELA as of March.

Letting excellent teachers stay excellent by allowing them to choose how to use the models will make their schools successful, Rayer says. The school's flexible approach to how instruction is delivered within subject blocks gives teachers autonomy and lets each teacher use his or her instructional strengths.

"Because Tiffany has been the coach of Jon, Jon does a lot more whole-group instruction," Rayer says. "That's her style, and that has become his style. This was not my vision. But we're very comfortable with having things play out."

Next year, Rayer says, he and Massey will push the ELA team to integrate still more blended learning, to move toward even higher growth than the great results McAfee and Wigfall already produced.

Even while staying within her comfort zone this year, McAfee says, Touchstone required a lot of her.

"I work more at Touchstone, definitely—the newness of it. There is no expert on blended learning. There's no 'Teach Like a Champion' for a blended-learning teacher."

Paying Teachers More, Within Budget

New Jersey allots \$14,700 per pupil, a high budget, but Rayer says Touchstone’s model would work at \$9,000 per pupil, with the savings coming partly through extending the reach of teachers to more students. Financial savings occur because master teachers are (or will be) paired with two novice or developing teachers in teams of three, and they will reach a larger number of students—up to 115 in total—than in a typical school. They will teach larger groups of students during each block in the open stadium space.

Critically, the use of some digital instruction will keep student *group* sizes small for much of instruction, even when the “class size” is technically larger than normal, while freeing funds for higher pay.

Rayer also finds savings through some lower costs for employees and benefits outside of New Jersey, lower-cost technology (such as using Chromebooks instead of MacBook Airs), reduced facilities costs (he estimates they use at least 25 percent less space than traditional schools), and fewer special-area teachers, such as art, music, and foreign languages, for which they rely on online resources.

“We can envision expanding the reach of our teacher teams of three [adults to 115 students at a time], depending on the quality of curricular supports,” Rayer says. “We will do what we have to do in this regard while balancing the high academic results we desire.”

A master teacher could earn up to \$100,000 a year, while an associate teacher—those at the beginning of the career ladder—could start at \$50,000. “If you can find a master teacher who can manage 100 kids [with her team], you’ll pay a lot of money for that,” Rayer says.

Once great teachers join Touchstone, what will keep them there? Rayer and Massey say the opportunities for teamwork, autonomy, and developing and refining the school model will keep teachers. McAfee and Conant agree—but in addition, they say, higher pay is crucial for retention.

More Pay for New Roles: Merit Prep’s Approximate Pay Ranges*	
Teaching Role	Pay Range
Master Teacher	\$70,000 to \$100,000
Teacher	\$60,000 to \$70,000
Associate Teacher	\$50,000 to \$60,000

*In a 2010 analysis by *The (Newark) Star-Ledger*, the average teacher pay in New Jersey was \$63,154, with more than half of the teachers earning from \$40,000 to \$60,000. Retrieved from http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2010/05/nj_teachers_pay_freeze_salarie.html

Creating Opportunities for All Educators

Developing teachers through a career ladder with multiple opportunities, as Touchstone intends, provides appealing options for its current teachers.

To actually think that I could be paid what I’m worth is the *best* feeling in the world.—Tiffany McAfee

The ladder has three rungs:

- * **Associate Teacher:** Designed for new teachers, such as those in their first Teach For America year, this role allows early-career teachers to support others on their team through tutoring, supervising online learning, grading, and administrative duties. Rather than trying to find only “superman or superwoman” candidates, Rayer says, he intends to hire high-potential new and solid teachers whom Touchstone’s master teachers can develop toward excellence, too.
- * **Teacher:** These teachers support their master teacher through direct instruction, interventions, and small-group activities. This role provides a spot for experienced people who want to teach but not lead others. “In our model, that should be OK,” Rayer says.
- * **Master Teacher:** Rayer sees this role as the key to retaining excellent teachers who want to keep teaching and also lead their peers, providing them with the development they need to manage other teachers. “They’ll have to start taking on managerial responsibilities,” he says. “You will never be a master teacher unless you embrace accountability for [your] content area—assigning yourself and [your team members] appropriately, and doing what it takes to make sure your team is successful.”

The prospect of development pleases McAfee. “I don’t want this just to be about new teachers. I want to be developed, too. I want it formally,” she says.

And she still sounds slightly amazed at the pay possibilities this model offers. “I think the sky is the limit. I never would have thought that about teacher salary—usually, it’s, ‘I’m going to cap out soon as a teacher. I do it because I love it, etc.’,” she says. “But to actually think that I could be paid what I’m worth is the *best* feeling in the world. Teachers are so underappreciated and devalued, especially ELA teachers.”

Within the ladder’s three rungs, Rayer and Massey plan for more flexibility for teachers—to work part-time, for example, or spend some of their time out of the classroom, creating instructional materials.

Rayer and Massey’s intention to demonstrate through pay how valued teachers are may indeed create the desired effect of retaining excellent teachers, at least in McAfee’s case. “I can see myself here for a while because of that. I can see myself moving within the organization,” she says.

Learn More about Touchstone:

Touchstone Education

Merit Prep Charter Schools

NGLC Profile on Touchstone

NGLC Video on Touchstone:

“Reinventing What Schools Look Like”

Learn More about Extending the Reach of Excellent Teachers and Creating an Opportunity Culture

FOR AN OVERVIEW:

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VISIT  [Multi-Classroom Leadership](#)

VISIT  [Time-Technology Swap—Rotation and Flex](#)

WATCH A VIDEO ABOUT BUILDING AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE



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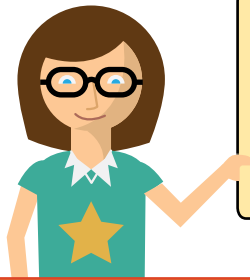


<http://opportunityculture.org/multimedia/extending-the-reach-video-part-1/>

Let Us Know if Your School is Extending Reach and Creating an Opportunity Culture

Contact Public Impact using the Opportunity Culture [Feedback Form](#), or e-mail us at: opportunitycultureinput@publicimpact.com.





How Touchstone Education Will Meet the Reach Extension Principles at Scale



Reach Extension Principles	Touchstone's Plans	
<p>Reach more children successfully with excellent teachers.</p>	✓	<p>Using Multi-Classroom Leadership and a Time-Technology Swap, master teachers at Touchstone will lead content teams that teach a subject or subject pair and reach all students; at Merit Prep Newark, that will be 240 students in the middle school and 320 in the high school.</p>
<p>Pay excellent teachers more for reaching more children successfully.</p>	✓	<p>A master teacher could earn up to \$100,000 a year.</p>
<p>Achieve permanent financial sustainability, keeping post-transition costs within the budgets available from regular per-pupil funding sources.</p>	✓	<p>Touchstone will pay teachers more through the savings created by extending the reach of excellent teachers to more students, as well as savings in facilities and technology use. Content teams of three teachers will teach up to 115 students at a time, reaching all students in the school throughout the day. (Note: Newark is well-funded, but this model will also work in locations with lower per-pupil funds.)</p>
<p>Include roles for other educators that enable solid performers both to learn from excellent peers and to contribute to excellent outcomes for children.</p>	✓	<p>Touchstone's three-rung career ladder has spots for new and developing teachers, as well as excellent teachers who want to teach but not lead peer teachers. They are led and developed by a master teacher acting as a multi-classroom leader (or a school-level leader).</p>
<p>Identify the adult who is accountable for each student's outcomes, and clarify what people, technology, and other resources (s)he is empowered to choose and manage.</p>	✓	<p>Touchstone's master teachers are accountable for all the students in their team, as well as for leading and developing the teachers on their team.</p>

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