The LEAP (Leadership, Education, and Partnership) Academy University Charter School is a kindergarten through 12th-grade (K-12) public charter school that serves Camden City with one core principle: all children and families deserve access to a quality public education.

Since 1997, LEAP has become a national model for urban education. It provides a high-quality, holistic education for 1,000 urban learners and families, while guaranteeing every LEAP graduate an opportunity to earn a college degree.

LEAP Academy’s three academic units—LEAP Lower School (K-6), LEAP Upper School (7-12) and a specialized STEM High School (9-12)—promote high expectations for students, personal development and successful college and career goals.

For more than 15 years this innovative approach has translated into tremendous success for students and families. Each year LEAP Academy graduates 100 percent of its senior class with all alumni admitted to college, where they are shaping their futures and the future of Camden City.

The LEAP Academy Mission

The mission of the LEAP Academy University Charter School is to enhance opportunities for the children and families of Camden through the collaborative design, implementation, and integration of education, health, and human services programs and through community development.
LEAP WAS MADE FOR ME

A Supportive Environment for Everyone

LEAP Academy is family. It is this kind of supportive, family environment that keeps LEAP Academy on the path to excellence and creates close bonds between students, teachers and parents that can last a lifetime.

Students are the spirit and vitality of LEAP Academy. LEAP’s K-12 charter means that most students enroll in elementary school and continue through high school graduation. Their energy and enthusiasm for learning is what drives the school to success.

Parents are partners at LEAP Academy. Parents play an enormous role in the education of students. An empowered and well-informed parent population is the cornerstone of LEAP’s success.

LEAP Academy teachers are mentors. LEAP’s highly skilled and experienced faculty and staff are passionate about the school and committed to the success of their students.

At LEAP, the individual needs of every member of the school community are priority one, which is why all students, parents and teachers have the personal support they need to reach their potential.

Vanessa Jones (center-right) is a founding parent of LEAP Academy and now coordinates all parent engagement programs for LEAP. She holds regular Parent Center meetings with parents like Cowonnde Nicholson, Cheryl Pine and Omayra Borrero.
Since 1997, the LEAP Academy Lower School (grades K-6) has changed education in Camden by introducing a holistic academic support model. This approach treats all members of the school community as equal participants in the school’s success.

LEAP’s Lower School recognizes that a child’s early years of education heavily influence his or her future academic success and LEAP works hard to develop every student’s potential. Its K-6 curriculum emphasizes improved literacy, enhanced problem-solving skills in math and science, well-developed social skills and a healthy and active school day.

Small class sizes, strong parent engagement, and committed faculty create strong investments in student success and build on the foundations created in preschool to prepare children for advanced instruction at LEAP’s Upper School and STEM High School.

Justin Newell
“...when kids know their teachers view them as people and not just pupils, they know it’s safe to explore and learn.”

Justin Newell is a sixth-grade teacher at LEAP Lower School with nine years of experience in urban education. Justin’s class prepares students like Desiree Mack (below) for the transition into high school.
The LEAP Academy Upper School (grades 7-12) is transforming secondary education in Camden City by empowering children to attend college and become successful young adults.

The Upper School builds on each child’s K-6 fundamentals with a college preparatory curriculum that focuses on a sound math and science understanding, foreign language acquisition, creative arts experiences and strong writing and critical thinking skills.

LEAP’s partnership with Rutgers University and other institutions increases student exposure to college campuses and allows high school students the opportunity to attend college courses and earn academic credit.

In Camden, less than half of the city’s students complete high school. But each year, LEAP Upper School graduates 100 percent of its senior class.

GEHEEM SMITH

“"The teachers at LEAP are really fantastic. Anytime I need help they are willing to devote their extra time.""

Geheem Smith is a student in LEAP Academy’s Class of 2012 and a member of the National Honor Society and the Rutgers High School Scholars Dual-Enrollment Program. Geheem hopes to study pre-law and political science at Columbia University and work toward a career in business law and ethics reform.
The LEAP Academy STEM High School, established in 2010, offers a specialized academic curriculum that focuses on science, technology, engineering and math in order to improve the mastery of math and science for Latino and African-American students in ninth through twelfth grades.

STEM High School uses state-of-the-art practices and project-based learning to develop LEAP students’ skills in science and technology, the fastest growing career fields in the global 21st-century economy.

Courses include advanced physics, chemistry, computer programming and engineering. These rigorous classes challenge students to excel and to graduate with the specialization required to attend the nation’s most competitive universities for engineering and technology.

Sreeya Sreevatsa
“To go to college and succeed in college you need a strong math and science foundation.”

Sreeya Sreevatsa is a STEM physics teacher at LEAP who holds a doctorate in physics from the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Her physics class challenges talented students like Cindy Le, a tenth-grader with hopes to study engineering at Drexel University.
LEAP Academy understands that family health, parent involvement and teacher capacity have a direct impact on student achievement and are essential to creating a winning school environment.

That’s why LEAP and the Centers of Excellence at the Rutgers-Camden Community Leadership Center deliver the extended K-12 instruction, health services and professional support to maximize success for all students, parents and teachers. LEAP’s holistic service model focuses on four areas:

- Community health services to address the physical, social and emotional development of every student and family.
- Student academic support that supplements traditional instruction by offering tutoring, mentoring and comprehensive college advising.
- Parent engagement groups that promote strong parental involvement, build leadership and strengthen the home-school relationship.
- Teacher professional development training and merit-based salary incentives that spur classroom innovation and to improve student achievement.

Michele Pastorello

Health and nutrition are a primary focus at LEAP and the school has its own executive chef on staff. Michele Pastorello, who has over 30 years of international culinary experience, prepares all student meals and educates students and parents on healthy eating.
LEAP Academy’s success has been nothing short of miraculous. That success, in large part, is due to the school’s emphasis on partnership at all levels. Our partners recognize that schools are the key to community development.

Cities cannot prosper without a thriving, quality education system. But Camden lacks quality schools and LEAP cannot meet the demand of every family in the city.

LEAP Academy is committed to increasing the number of Camden City students it reaches and is expanding by opening new schools in Camden City. A new 240-student STEM High School and a 240-student K-3 elementary school are just the beginning of LEAP’s expansion efforts.

With the comprehensive investment of civic-minded leaders, LEAP has demonstrated that success in Camden City is possible.

The number of students and families seeking admission to LEAP continues to grow every year, with over 500 children on the waiting list for grades K-6 alone.
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On the Cover
Marleny Luna is a student in LEAP Academy’s Class of 2012.
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