



The Lehman Alternative Community School

Founded in 1974, The Lehman Alternative Community School (LACS) is Ithaca's public alternative middle and high school, operating within Ithaca City School District and New York State Department of Education guidelines.

In the Finger Lakes region of New York State, Ithaca has a population of approximately 50,000 residents. The chief industry is education: Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College. Our school district covers 155 square miles of rural, suburban, and urban areas, among the most ethnically diverse in the state, outside of the five largest cities.

LACS enrolls approximately 300 students, drawn by lottery from an applicant pool open to all; we typically have a long waiting list. Our school reflects the geographic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity of the Ithaca City School District. Our students are particularly known for their community service, political and social advocacy, drama productions, photography and video, and participation in district-wide interscholastic sports.

The Lehman Alternative Community School Transcript

A copy of a student's **college application** includes:

- **official college application forms** (if required)
- **letters of recommendation** from the principal and guidance counselor
- **student resume**
- **an official transcript** listing specific courses, projects, committees, and other educational programs; as well as PBATs
- **narrative evaluations** of the student's program of study with references to demonstrations in each student's **digital portfolio**.

LACS, in collaboration with the New York State Education Department, has developed our unique Graduation by Exhibition (GBE) system that requires students to document mastery of essential skills, knowledge and habits for global citizenship. This provides an in-depth picture of each student through narrative evaluations, portfolios and performances. **We do not typically calculate GPA or class rank** but our guidance office will work closely with colleges to help them better understand our students and their qualifications for admissions and merit-based scholarships

Rather than grades, each LACS student receives individualized written evaluations each quarter. Each teacher writes a narrative response to student self-reflections, references demonstrations of skills and knowledge in their digital portfolio, and makes recommendations for growth. Each evaluation identifies whether the student has **Met Expectations** for the course that quarter (attendance, homework completion, etc.) and whether the student is **On Track** with Portfolio demonstrations. **Regardless of whether or not a student has consistently Met Expectations, they will be eligible for graduation when they have successfully completed more than 70 essential portfolio demonstrations and the 4 Performance Based Assessment Tasks.**

Graduation by Exhibition (GBE)

LACS has been a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a national school reform movement, since 1987. In 1994, LACS became one of the first twelve Compact Partnership Schools in New York State. LACS has joined the New York Standards Based Consortium to continue to work with the Board of Regents to reform education, resulting in these **essentials for the global citizen**.

LACS Graduates will be:

community participants and leaders who work and live cooperatively with others, contribute to the community, and explore career possibilities;

communicators who read, write, and speak in English and a second language; use the language of mathematics; use graphic, observational or objective drawing; and use the personal computer effectively;

critical thinkers and problem solvers with an anti-bias attitude who use the process of conflict resolution;

designers, producers, and performers who pursue concentrated study in theater, music, movement, visual arts, media, or technology;

researchers with a historical and multicultural perspective of US history, the democratic process, and local, national, and global economics;

contributors to sustaining the natural environment who understand its physical, biological, and chemical components, their interrelatedness, and their own personal impact; and

healthy persons who demonstrate progress toward physical fitness, group participation, and the meeting of personal physical challenges and who understand human sexuality and current major health issues (such as STDs and substance abuse).

In addition, each student must pass culminating **Performance Based Assessment Tasks (PBATs)** in English, math, social studies and science assessed according to the rubrics and protocols of the New York State Performance Standards Consortium.

Our mission is to prepare students to have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to be respectful and responsible global citizens. To that end, each student prepares and presents an individual senior project as well as a portfolio that includes two or more in-depth courses of study that represent the student's personal development in learning habits of behavior and critical habits of mind.

Letter From Our Principal



Lehman Alternative Community School • Ithaca, New York

Dear Admission Officer:

This school profile accompanying our student's transcript introduces the Lehman Alternative Community School's philosophy. Our unique school, an integral part of the Ithaca public school system, has been a well-supported and highly regarded model of progressive education for over 40 years, not only in our region but well beyond our city and state.

We believe students should exercise ownership of their school and their education. Students are expected to participate on action committees, participate in the democratic process through attendance at weekly all school meetings, and serve the school as well as the greater community. Because we honor young people as valued contributors to their school and community, our students are respected and empowered to determine their goals, manage their time, and make decisions related to school operations and offerings. With this level of trust and freedom, we consider the Lehman Alternative Community School a college for high school students. Our expectations for quality, student agency and voice, and self-discipline are similar to what colleges demand and hope to develop.

Our rigorous approach to authentic assessment is central to learning at LACS. Each student populates their digital portfolio with successful demonstrations of the core skills, knowledge and habits needed for graduation in 10 Essential Areas. In addition, each student must pass culminating Performance Based Assessment Tasks (PBATS) in English, math, social studies and science assessed according to the rubrics and protocols of the New York State Performance Standards Consortium.

Our evaluation system stresses student metacognition and responsibility for learning. Each quarter students' complete narrative self-reflections for each class, project period and committee. Teachers write personalized narrative evaluations that highlight student portfolio demonstrations, habits of learning, mastery of core content and recommendations for continued growth. The evaluations and portfolios paint an intimate picture of each individual student.

I sincerely hope you are able to capture the dynamic essence of what has made our school so endearing and special to generations of students, parents and teachers. Most important, I hope you glimpse the warmth, closeness and meaningful personal relationships shared by our young citizens and their adult counterparts. Students engage with agency in the act of critical thinking, collaboration, consultation and problem solving in the context of diverse thought.

Thank you for your interest in our school and particularly in the student applying to join your community, whom we feel with confidence is well prepared for their continued pursuit of lifelong learning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Ptak", written in a cursive style.

Deborah Ptak
Principal

About Our Learning Environment

Each year students in grades 6 through 12 participate in designing their own educational program by selecting the following components:

- **courses** (meeting four times per week), both conventional and interdisciplinary, meeting New York State guidelines for academic requirements with input from students;
- **projects** (meeting twice per week for extended time), such as physical education, science labs, art and technology projects, music, mock trials, and drama productions;
- **independent studies** focusing on a particular student-proposed, teacher-supported research;
- **community studies** including career explorations, apprenticeships, internships, and community service (an LACS graduation requirement); and
- **studies at other education facilities** including Cornell University, Ithaca College, Tompkins Cortland Community College, and Ithaca High School.

LACS is a *democratic learning community* where students and staff share the daily operation of the school.

Each student participates in governance:

- **Family Groups** (meeting twice per week) of 1 to 2 staff members and 12 to 14 students for advising and support;
- **Committees** (meeting twice per week) making decisions (e.g. Alternative Community Court, Agenda Committee) or taking action (e.g. Eco-action, Maintenance, LACS Café) to help run the school; and
- **All School Meeting** (once per week) for the entire LACS community to discuss and decide issues generated by students and staff.
- **LACS students plan week-long spring trips every spring**, where staff and students travel, learn, and work together. These trips require extensive research, planning, and fundraising. Trips Week gives each student a challenging personal and group experience in a non-school environment.
- **LACS students work closely with members of the Ithaca community**. At any given time, approximately twenty percent of our students work at community placements in areas ranging from horticulture labs and veterinary hospitals to retail establishments and artists' studios. Within our community our students have earned the reputation for service to others as well as for depth and maturity.

Staff

LACS has a committed staff of professionals and paraprofessionals. Staff members teach all academic content as well as have the opportunity to share their special interests and expertise during projects and trips week. Most hold masters degrees; some hold doctorates or certificates of advanced graduate study.