

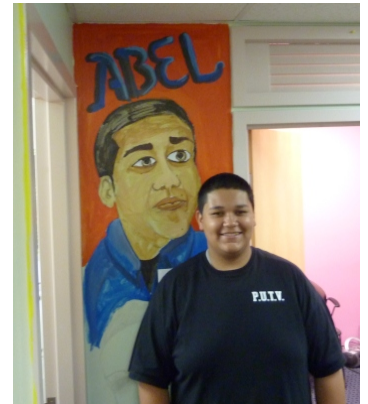
# EAST BAY MET SCHOOL - A visit by Australian Big Picture educators, August 2010



Following the successful Big Bang 9 at The Met, Providence, the Australian visitors spent the day at East Bay Met school. East Bay Met (<http://eastbaymet.org/site/index.cfm>) is located in Newport, Rhode Island – home of the America’s Cup, the mansions ..... and many young people in need.

Principal Charlie Plant is more than a little different to most principals. He was more than happy to let many others do the talking about the school: students, teachers, parents and mentors. That’s a sure sign of a confident principal. He had little trouble finding people in his school community willing to come back to school in vacation time to speak to visitors about the school.

Charlie’s students illustrated the diversity that the school represents. Abel in Grade 10 (shown next to his ‘life imitating art’ mural) has been at the school for two years, after years of producing low grades at nearby Middleton Middle School - a situation not helped by his learning disability. He misses the “high school experience” of his former school but his success at East Bay Met is telling. He had an internship in a professional kitchen and is now with a sailing organization.



Corinne (pictured left) is in Grade 11 and is organizing to visit Australia in the near future. Corinne has had internships with a dressmaking firm and with an antique store.

Corey in Grade 12 (pictured right with Abel) is still somewhat lacking in direction but is still at school after being enticed to East Bay Met from Tiverton Middle School. His current research is into the lesser known activities of the redoubtable Senator Joe Kennedy, diplomat, father of JFK and bootlegger/smuggler extraordinaire.



The visitors were split into two and my group was shown around the school by Abel and Corey. The school has around 100 students in seven advisories, plus two counsellors forming a behavior response team. Three of the advisors are education specialists, able to provide specific support when needed in a range of subjects. Abel sees his advisory (PUTV – pop up the volume) as a home away from home. There are many successes and the occasional tension. Says Abel: “advisories are like families – families fight but they get back together”. Last year only one student switched advisory.



East Bay Met is reasonably well-equipped, but in a confined space. Apart from the advisory spaces the school has a tinking craft lab (shown left), library, music production studio etc. Abel’s advisor, Tod Trombino, has an English teaching background and seems to cope very well with other demands on his time and expertise. His students do one research paper each year, usually posed as a question to be investigated. Tod has 16 students, six with some learning disability. Tod explained some of the tensions between the learning focus of the school with political (state government) pressures to raise maths test scores to get Federal funding under Obama’s ‘Race to the Top’. This tension is felt by many Big Picture schools.

Before lunch the group of visitors boarded the school bus (pictured right) and headed across the Newport Bridge to Jamestown. There we met Ron Dimauro, a Jamestown architect and his staff (pictured below). Ron has hosted East Bay Met internees and is committed to internships and mentoring. Ron talked about a couple of students. One (Chad) was particularly shy but did excellent work. Chad's background had not been easy but Ron and his staff were very pleased with his progress. Unfortunately Chad's father did not allow him to continue at East Bay Met.



Another of Ron's mentees, Turel, proved to be more of a challenge. He was a streetwise young man who needed considerable advice and support. The bottom line? He is still at school. Criticism of the school? Ron felt that more attention could be paid to basics.... a criticism of schools which has only been around since Socrates.

Discussion centred on the (sometimes conflicting) dual role of Ron and staff as being both internship providers and mentors. He had no hesitation in supporting internships, not only for the benefits for mentees but also as a way of supporting young people and their school.

The group headed back to school after lunch to meet with parents Elizabeth and Laura, mothers of Abel and Corinne respectively. They are pictured (right) sitting either side of Charlie Plant. Both were strong supporters of the school. Elizabeth is a community activist; she recounted Abel's difficulties at his former school, particularly in getting appropriate support. She is quite amazed at his increased confidence at his new school. Both parents were unreserved in their support for the school, citing close attention in the advisories, small groups, teacher support. They are looking forward to expansion of the current space.



East Bay Met seems an excellent school, offering opportunities for their students which were simply not available in their previous schools.

Chris Bonnor, BPEA Board

Pictured enjoying dinner in Providence are: Michelle Muir, Ngata Ngahuia, Bronwyn Harcourt, Cluny Addis, Viv White, Chris Bonnor, Janet Austin, Katrina Rudolf, Nori Parata, Mark Heuston. Not in photograph: Cathy Wish-Wilson

