

**Tenacity's Best Practices:
Nature of Activity**

Interview with Scott Lipman, Director

The Middle School Academy at Tenacity is a significant part of the organization's halfway model of youth development work. This work begins with students in 4th grade, and continues with the students through middle school, high school, postsecondary, and beyond.



Photo Credit: Tenacity

Key Takeaways:

- Activities are curricular focused and take the partner school's instructional priorities into consideration.
- The most successful activities use small groups and/or student choice.
- Structured choice is offered to youth.
- The rigor of the activities is tailored to meet the students' needs.

Q: How were activities structured at your site – was there an ongoing project all summer? Curricular units?

A: There is an academic coordinator at each site for the program. Each academic coordinator takes the curricular priorities and adapts them to the existing structure of the site. All of the coordinators meet bimonthly to discuss and share ideas for curriculum development. There are key structures in place across all of Tenacity's academic blocks, such as reading, vocabulary development, and drawing. The academic coordinators ensure that all partner schools' instructional priorities are reflected in all instruction occurring in the Tenacity classroom. Overall, the program uses broad strokes, is curricular focused, and makes sure that the partner school's instructional priorities are front and center.

Q: Of the activities offered this year, which do you feel were most successful? Consider youth engagement, critical thinking, collaboration, etc.

A: The most successful activities involved student choice and small group structures. We try to always have a 4-to-1 student-to-adult ratio. In the gym, students rotate through four stations each day. They work collaboratively and are also assigned group leaders. At the end of the day, we have a "hot shot" of the day, which is a student who is being recognized for their sportsmanship, teamwork, or hard work. The most successful weeks were "seam" weeks, where students worked together, not just in the gym but also in the academic blocks. Successful group

activities were book clubs, “math alive” – which taught real world application of math activities – and electives, such as sewing or basketball analytics.

Q: Did your site offer youth-choice for activities? If so, how was that facilitated?

A: We provide structured youth choice. Middle school students require structure in order to feel safe, but within that structure there is certainly room for student choice. This looks different in the classroom and the gym. For example, for the tennis block, students could choose between four different activities. But, in the classroom, students could choose how to spend their downtime, whether it was working on a homework assignment or an independent reading book. Choice was also presented when the students chose student leaders for particular tasks, choosing discussion topics, or circle questions for the day.

Q: How did your site ensure that activities were challenging, and stimulated thinking for youth participants?

A: The program really tailors the rigor of the activities to the ability, interests, and needs of our students. Teams debrief daily to reevaluate the needs of the students, make sure those needs are being met through a particular lesson or activity, and make adjustments as needed.

The Middle School Academy Tenacity is a significant part of the organization’s halfway model of youth development work. This work begins with students in 4th grade, and continues with the students through middle school, high school, postsecondary, and beyond. The Middle School Academy works with approximately 275 students across 5 Boston Public Middle Schools. Through BPS, the program begins with 6th grade students to provide either an out-of-school time experience or an embedded model through the extended school day. Regardless of structure, all programs cover the same specific domains.