

Unique Public High Schools Cited by Obama, Get Substantial Backing from Science Investor, Jeffrey Epstein

A group of uniquely run public schools in New York State and New Jersey have been brought into the spotlight from recent financial backing from science investor, Jeffrey Epstein and his foundation, The Jeffrey Epstein VI Foundation. The schools are called the Bard High School Early College schools (BHSEC) and are located in Manhattan and Queens of New York City and in Newark, New Jersey.

The Bard schools are not charter schools. They operate under the governance of New York State and New Jersey. However, they run with the efficiency and success of a prominent charter school. The schools are small, with less than 600 students each and a student teacher ratio of 20 to 1. Admission is academically exclusive, focusing on academic records, writing and math assessments and an eagerness for ideas and learning. And like most charter schools, the BHSEC schools critically have autonomy, even though they have to meet Regent state exams and graduation guidelines. They have the autonomy to run their teaching staff, budget and choose their curriculum.

Unlike charter schools however, the BHSEC schools provide an entire high school curriculum in just two years and then two years of college level credits. After four years, students graduate with sixty college credits, a New York State Regents or New Jersey high school diploma, and a Bard College Associate in Arts degree in liberal arts and sciences. The accelerated approach stems from the schools' belief that many young people are ready and eager to do serious college work at age sixteen and that young adults' ambition to learn must be taken seriously.

The results have been exceptional: 95% of BHSEC graduates move on to a four-year college. In July, 2009, President Obama, addressing the NAACP's centennial convention cited the schools as a public education role model for the nation: "Innovations like Bard High School Early College and Medgar Evers College Preparatory School that are challenging students to complete high school and earn a free associate's degree or college credit in just four years." In 2012, *The New York Observer* ranked the BHSEC Manhattan school as the #1 public high school in New York City, with an A+ grade, outranking the top private school.

BHSEC has its roots in the college system. In June 2001, The New York City Board of Education and Bard College jointly created Bard High School Early College (BHSEC), with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Since the 1960's Bard College, originally called, Bard College of Simon's Rock, was the nation's only four year college and was specifically designed for younger scholars.

"Competition is tough," Jeffrey Epstein notes, whose foundation actively supports public education across the country. "Approximately 7,000 applicants compete for 150 seats each fall. So we need to continue working with state education boards to duplicate this successful model."