

# CROSTOWN HIGH

(MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE)  
Public charter school  
SUMMER 2019



## A DEEPER DIVE

Envision students learning alongside dozens of businesses and nonprofit organizations, residents and institutions, all housed under the same roof. When Crosstown High opened in Memphis in 2018, it became a key piece of a dynamic, community-driven project to redevelop a historically significant landmark and restore it to active use.

The Crosstown Concourse is an ambitious redevelopment project in the city center, encompassing a 1.1-million-square-foot building that originally housed a Sears mail-order processing warehouse. This “vertical urban village” brings together the diversity of the Memphis community, including arts and health care organizations, residences, a branch of a local college, and other institutions.

Who has moved in? A contemporary arts organization, a medical clinic serving the working uninsured, Christian Brothers University, a YMCA, a market, the Memphis Teacher Residency program, Teach for America Memphis, a talent- and leadership-focused organization, a FedEx office, six restaurants, a brewery, a nail salon, credit union, pharmacy, juice bar, coffee shop, several foundations and nonprofits, the fundraising arm of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, seven administrative departments of a large local health system, doctors’ offices, religious organizations—and a high school.

Crosstown High students build relationships with their neighbors in the Concourse and across Memphis through personalized, project-based learning that allows them to master traditional core class offerings while exploring their interests and passions. That’s because the teachers and leaders at Crosstown believe kids learn best when they’re engaged in meaningful work in their community, and empowered to make an impact upon it.

Students at Crosstown are problem solvers, both at the school and in the community, as they work side-by-side with adults tackling challenges in the areas of health, education, civics, the arts, and more. They’re exposed on a daily basis to the real-life challenges faced by the professionals in Crosstown Concourse.

## AT A GLANCE

*Crosstown High launched in 2018 under a charter authorized by Shelby County Schools. It opened with 125 9th grade students, selected by lottery, and will add a grade per year over the next three years.*

**Executive Director:**  
Chris Terrill

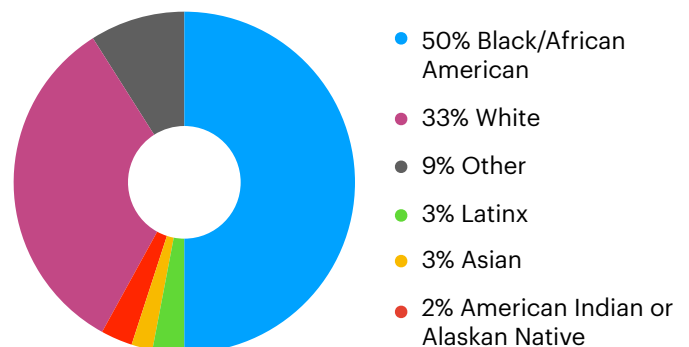
**Principal:**  
Alexis Gwin-Miller

**Director of Partnerships and Projects:**  
Ginger Spickler

## Students of Crosstown High

**2018-19 Enrollment: 148 Students**

**Projected Total Enrollment: 500 Students**



**41%**  
Qualify for free or reduced price lunch

**11%**  
Qualify for special education services

**5%**  
Require 504 Plan

**A DEEPER DIVE CONTINUED**

And they also tackle projects based on their own interests and the impact they want to have on the world. Students and adults alike learn from each other as they question, experiment, fail and ultimately succeed, together.

“There are going to be a lot of community partnerships that are right there inside of that vertical urban village,” Executive Director Chris Terrell said. “We’ll be able to make real-world connections with kids at a higher rate than probably a traditional high school would, just because of that proximity to a lot of really dynamic organizations inside the concourse.”

To describe teaching and learning at Crosstown, the best words to use are experiential, inquiry-oriented, and project-based. Student teams, plus an advisor, embark on critical-thinking projects to understand specific challenges in their communities and develop actionable solutions. All learning is viewed through the lens of an “essential question,” different each semester, that spurs students to make connections between what they’re learning and their own lives.

The learning day includes team-taught interdisciplinary academic blocks and a 120-minute “X Period” where students go deeply into project work, relationship-building with their advisory group, or personalized learning pursuits. Students explore the history, science, math, technology, and design elements that shape their quarterly projects. Advisors, other students, and community members serve as valuable resources. Team projects are assessed through presentations to other members of the Crosstown Concourse community, as well as student-produced events and installations that have a wide audience.

As a school that takes learners at a variety of academic levels, Crosstown’s competency-based approach ensures that students achieve mastery of essential skills before moving into more advanced material. Each learner receives the supports needed— academic or otherwise—to achieve mastery and build the foundations for college- and career-readiness. The Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) is at the core of Crosstown’s competency-based approach to personalization, because the ultimate goal is for each student to take ownership of his or her own learning.

At Crosstown, a teacher’s most vital role is as a PLP advisor. Intentional conversations between students and advisors about strengths, challenges, and goals not only build crucial relationships, but are themselves learning experiences that help students identify and understand their own abilities, aspirations, and challenges. Crosstown recruits teachers who have the skills and desire to take on this new type of challenge.

Youth voices are heard and valued at every step of Crosstown High’s development. In fact, the school design was inspired by input from more than 200 Memphis students, who explained that they felt undervalued and unheard. The Crosstown team wants more for its students. They want students to feel cared for in a school community that shares a strong sense of purpose. They want students to feel safe, not just from bullying and from crime, but from anything that keeps them from exploring their ideas, their identities, and the world around them. So, together with hundreds of neighbors, they’re building a school that fulfills that vision. But they’re not stopping there.

Eventually the Crosstown Collaboratory will become a living studio for prototyping and researching learning experiences with students from across the Memphis community. This will become a place where educators, parents, and students from Memphis and beyond can explore next-generation learning together, share ideas and challenges, get a real-life glimpse into the principles behind Crosstown High, and envision those principles at work in their own schools and classrooms.