



St Ann's Bay, Jamaica

Marcus Garvey Technical High School

**How to tackle a culture of
violence in school**



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL**
Overcoming
Adversity



TEMPLETON WORLD
CHARITY FOUNDATION



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES**

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Introduction

Marcus Garvey Technical High School seeks to excel despite its lack of resources. Its motto, "One God, One Aim, One Destiny...Excellence!" is based on the legacy of the Right Excellent Marcus Garvey, Jamaica's first national hero. It successfully turned around a culture of student infighting and poor academic performance.



Profile:



Country:

Jamaica



Region:

St. Ann's Bay



School type:

Public school



Location area:

Town



Student population:

1501 to 2000



Prize Category:

Overcoming Adversity

“School has to be more fun than your home, it has to be more fun than the games shops or other places that our kids go to and so we just made a decision. We’re competing with the streets, we’re not going to lose.”

– Anniona Jones,
Principal of Marcus
Garvey Technical High
School



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Marcus Garvey Technical High School believes in a culture of excellence. The student population predominantly comes from inner cities or communities which experience significant social issues.

The school once had a culture of daily student in-fighting. Violent outbreaks were so frequent that St. Ann's Bay Hospital had a ward dedicated to injured students. The violence resulted in hundreds of students being expelled in a single year.

Many of the students who enrol at Marcus Garvey Technical High School tend to underperform academically, in particular at literacy and numeracy. Lack of parental involvement and lack of student interest in learning


were problems that needed tackling. "We do tend to get the children who are amongst the weakest, many reading below grade 3 when they enter our school at grade 7," Anniona Jones, the school's principal explains. The school works to build their confidence. "Self-confidence, self-awareness - this belief that you may not be reading at grade level, you're still very talented," Jones says. "Those things are core for us at Marcus Garvey Technical High School".

The school has had to tackle its social issues and combat poor academic performance despite an extremely limited budget: schools in Jamaica receive \$125 annually per student.



If a child is on social welfare, the school is given an additional \$12. Poor internet and lack of device access also exacerbated the challenge of teaching students remotely during the pandemic.





“I wanted to reach out to every and any child, regardless of the situation. That was the driving force behind me even going out into the community and trying to reach them. Along with the passion, it's just the fact that I know that there is something that can be done to reach these students regardless of the situation that they're in.”

- Alesha McLean-Downer, Teacher at Marcus Garvey Technical High School



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

The school tackled student infighting through a series of motivational talks and activities such as football, table tennis, quizzes and clubs to engage students during and after breaks. This gave students more to do, facilitating a more peaceful environment for students to learn and develop.

It drew upon the work of Dr. Herbert Gayle, a social anthropology lecturer at the University of the West Indies who has carried out extensive research on the impact of the Jamaican education system on young boys. The research showed how boys are grouped in class has an impact on their learning and that they are more engaged in a practical way through project-based assessments.

The school scheduled extra contact hours so that students could receive more lessons in Mathematics and English Language. The school also gave two extra hours of contact time where students had the space to sit and talk with their teachers about issues that concerned them. This, alongside making school a fun environment, helped keep students distracted from negative influences such as gangs.

Another key challenge was working with parents, who in response to the constant outbreak of violence, would often assign blame to other students, causing social tensions between students, parents and members of the school staff. To address these attitudes and create a better rapport amongst all groups, the school utilised WhatsApp groups and other forms of social media for students and their parents.



Every term the principal would address the school community members via Facebook Live and would provide her personal contact number, and was prepared to face any questions posed by students and parents. The social media engagement through the Principal's Hour feature encouraged parents to be more involved in their child's learning and development and has helped improve school attendance and students' performance overall.



“We always strive to work with excellence in whatever area that students put forward themselves... that dictates how I operate as a teacher in the classroom.”

- Oral Lawson, Teacher at Marcus Garvey Technical High School



OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

Student expulsion

As a result of creating stronger student-teacher rapport and other initiatives, student expulsions decreased significantly. In the 2017 academic year around 374 students were suspended from school, in the present day it's "rare for a student to get sent home," says Principal Jones. The school recognised that the more interest that was shown towards students, their personal circumstances and development, the easier it was to cultivate their learning. To members of the faculty, it appeared that students were searching for someone to believe in their ability to achieve beyond what was expected of them and that they can become productive members of society.

Pandemic

The school reached out to several local organisations and formed partnerships to help students get access to tablets so that children who initially struggled to access the internet could attend online classes and participate in their studies from home.

Academic success

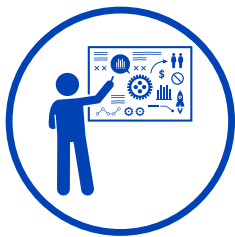
The school produced excellent results in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE). Additionally, the school saw the first set of students who graduated after having successfully completed the associate degree programmes that the principal introduced as part of the measure of school reforms.



Students who went on to study vocational courses such as tourism, physical education, and entrepreneurship had a 100% pass rate, whilst students who took on business management had a 75% pass rate. In communications, 93% of students passed their examinations. Student results in Mathematics recorded a 120% rise in pass rates, English Literature grades improved by 67%, while English Language, Physics, and Biology recorded a 50% increase in passes.



Key Steps



EXAMINING PAST RECORDS

Records were looked at decade by decade to determine students' performance and attendance.



DETERMINING THE SCHOOL'S DIRECTION

A new vision was drafted by the administration to ensure better outcomes overall. The school decided to focus on developing different programmes that would cater to students who wanted to gain qualifications in certain industries such as tourism.





CREATING RAPPORT WITH STUDENTS' FAMILIES

Parents were called in to give their input on what they can do to assist their children when they are home and in their communities. The school focused attention on reaching out to the wider community in case students refused to attend their classes or their exams.



BUILDING STUDENT STRENGTHS

They built a rapport with students one-by-one, area-by-area. Because students' work ethic and listening skills were often low, the school faculty set up initiatives to focus on improving those characteristics.





PROVIDING ADDITIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT

The clubs, societies and sporting programmes proved to be an additional leg of support for students to stand on and helped them to reconnect to school. During the pandemic, some of these programmes were put up online including a sports day. Often several students struggled to stay engaged whilst at home due to their own issues in their home life, so faculty sought to create safer spaces and, in some cases, teachers went into the community themselves to help students with their needs.



MAINTAINING CLUBS AND CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES




In order to keep students engaged in wider school life, there was a concerted effort amongst the faculty to promote extracurricular activities, such as football and other sports to provide a healthy outlet for any frustrations students felt as a result of emotional distress or due to personal circumstances.



Advice and Guidance

Listen to all stakeholders including parents, children and staff in order to create a programme that helps maintain social harmony in the wider school community and think of creative ways to keep students engaged, even if it deviates from typical school environments. Understand that students may react to their environment in a negative or frustrating way and encourage teachers to be more understanding of the overall context their students are situated. “As an adult, if you get frustrated and you have a level of authority and you act out – imagine being 12 or 13 with no authority or power,” Principal Jones says, speaking of the need to be empathetic. Finally, it is critically important to create safe spaces and if faculty lack the experience to engage with students in this way, training in this area is necessary.

More information

-  [Marcus Garvey Technical High School](#)
-  [Garvey TV](#)
-  [@marcusgarveytechsch](#)

