Welcome to Tiger Ventures

Endicott, New York

A school for young entrepreneurs who are fueling their future and community.

How They Came to Be

Tiger Ventures’ XQ Super School Journey

After years of economic and industrial decline, Endicott, New York—the birthplace of IBM—is heading toward revitalization, and Tiger Ventures is part of the plan. In 2015, voters in the region approved a $14,219,000 district capital improvement project to make the alternative high school and incubator possible. The school opened in 2016 serving a diverse group of students struggling to succeed in traditional learning environments. The school's leaders immediately set to work developing partnerships with regional businesses and non-profits to introduce its students to their community. In doing so, they were also introducing their community to its newest resource.

Tiger Ventures was born out of the Union-Endicott Central School District’s belief that investing in young people as entrepreneurs can drive a community’s economic redevelopment.
Discover Tiger Ventures

At this innovative school, co-located in a building with a publicly supported business incubator, students work side-by-side local entrepreneurs on projects integrated with their academic coursework. Partners include start-up businesses like Ink & Graphics, a design and print shop, and AgZeit, a company designing an organic produce-growing system. A focus on real-world learning experiences empowers students to develop a sense of agency over their future.

Tiger Ventures, a public school serving 68 students in grades 9-12, opened in 2016.
Summit Shasta Design Features

1. Entrepreneurship as an engine of redevelopment

Located in a former industrial town that served as the launching point for global businesses, Tiger Ventures is designed to be an epicenter for community revitalization by creating a pipeline of new entrepreneurs and small businesses that will revitalize the local community. School leaders’ ultimate goal is to ensure students see first-hand how entrepreneurship can enable them to contribute to their community and develop their own business ideas simultaneously. To achieve this, Tiger Ventures staff received training and materials from IncubatorEdu, a national organization that develops entrepreneurship programs for schools, and students also have access to a program called the Hillside Work Scholarship Program, in which youth advocates talk to students about their interests and goals, identify specific work-based experiences for students, take them on college tours, and help them identify and pursue real-world opportunities beyond high school.
Tiger Ventures is fully integrated and co-located with a business incubator, where businesses get free rent and utilities in exchange for their partnership with the school. Current businesses include a resident artist, a mushroom farming company, a transportation company, a graphic design studio, a vegan catering business, a tech company, and an indoor agriculture company, though the roster continues to change.

Students get to work alongside local entrepreneurs to explore their own passions and turn those interests into real businesses that can help revitalize the local community. For example, 9th graders in the 2020-21 school year are taking part in the mXINC Marketplace, where they learn the process entrepreneurs use to create and build a product by working in teams to form a start-up, create a product, and pitch their ideas to investors to launch their company. All products will be sold online through a private e-commerce site.

2. A school and an incubator in one

Mary Mullock
Principal
“Tiger Ventures gives students the opportunity to develop a passion and to follow it.”

Luke Treaster
11th Grader
“The teachers and staff at Tiger Ventures are the main things that stand out to me. I’ve been to about 15 different schools during my life and I’ve never had a connection with teachers like this. When I get to school, I know that the teachers really care about me, because they take the time to make sure I’m doing okay at home and that I have everything I need. They really care about making sure all students succeed.”
At Tiger Ventures, students master the knowledge and skills needed for graduation from their teachers and through projects with business partners. Tiger Ventures school leaders’ commitment to promoting student entrepreneurship is particularly ambitious and meaningful. More than 49 percent of the school’s students qualify for special education services, and the school ensures that all students receive equal opportunities to engage with the real world. In this way, Tiger Ventures raises the bar for alternative education.

Educators at Tiger Venture choose business partners based on their relevance to the Regents Curriculum, a process that ensures projects are engaging and academically rigorous. The school day is organized into blocks, giving teachers and students long periods for projects and academics. The morning block focuses on the core academic courses: social studies and ELA are taught together to help students become critical readers and writers, while math and science teachers tie together projects to help students see the real-world possibilities. In the afternoon, all students work with the business and technology teachers to develop the entrepreneurial skills needed to start small businesses. Electives like Support Lab help prepare students for the Regents Exam. Teachers are eager about the potential of teaching through integrated projects and are building these skills through professional learning. All of these practices support students in earning New York State Regents or Advanced Regents diplomas, and the model is proving effective. Tiger Venture students are seeing success in their core courses, and have earned a pass rate on the Regents Exams that is well above the state and district averages.

Nick Greco
Business Teacher

“We’re trying to meet the students where they’re at, building projects based on their passions. Our 9th graders are working on a proposal to put a café in the school, and we brought in a local business owner who shares that same passion. The mentorship piece really sticks with the students, because it gives them a chance to see what it’s like firsthand from a professional.”

3. Academic learning through integrated projects
4. Students as empowered learners, leaders, and meaningful contributors.

As an alternative high school, educators designed Tiger Ventures to reach disengaged students, students identified for special education programs and services, and students who demonstrate an interest in the entrepreneurial model. Students have a major voice in setting their schedules, which can vary from week to week and day to day. Each quarter, every student works with an advisor to develop a personalized set of learning goals and an action plan. The plan includes formal courses (required and optional), projects, and independent study, as well as the means to evaluate each. The student council led the development of a schoolwide effort called ROAR (responsibility, organize, attitude, and respect) to develop community, build culture, discourage bullying, and help students understand how to support and accept differences. In addition, the staff at Tiger Ventures is trained in restorative practices, which they use in advisory courses and on an as-needed process.
Theory into Action

Student work: Seeing the need (and potential) for change

A Tiger Venture sociology project takes students on a field trip around their own community. They’re equipped with disposable cameras and asked to document the disparities between more and less affluent areas of town. Students take pictures focused on these contrasts, then create collages that get displayed in a gallery where visitors to the school can see the lack of economic equity within the surrounding neighborhoods. Students engage in deep discussions about their findings, concerns, and ideas for working toward socio-economic justice. They also learn how to communicate to the village council about the need for community improvement, beautification, affordable housing, and more.

Competencies Met:

- Ways of Thinking
- Generous Collaborators for Tough Problems

California State Standards Met

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

- 12.E3e The degree to which economic inequality reflects social, political, or economic injustices versus individual choices is hotly debated. The role that the government should play in decreasing this gap, including the variety of government programs designed to combat poverty, is debated as well.
Adriana Rigo
11th Grader

“This is my first time in student council. Right now, we’re organizing a nitro ball tournament, which has taught me a lot about responsibility. I’m planning to be treasurer, a job that will help me learn how to manage money and prepare me for life after high school.”

Lessons from a leader

Former Union-Endicott Superintendent Suzanne McLeod shared her insights with thousands of educators as part of a moderated panel discussing the evolution of equity in rethinking high school.

Student data

Tiger Ventures serves 73 students in grades 8-12 this school year.

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Blogs and Media

- Learning Spaces That Inspire
- XQ Super Schools Are STEAMing Ahead to the Future of Work
- School as Home: A Sense of One’s Own Belonging
- Easy Steps to Seamless Teacher Collaboration

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