

A portrait of Kevin Armstrong, a Black man with a shaved head, wearing a light blue suit jacket, a light blue checkered shirt, and a colorful patterned tie. He is smiling and looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred interior space with wooden beams and a staircase.

### **Kevin Armstrong**

**Executive Principal  
DuPont Hadley Middle Prep  
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, Old Hickory, Tennessee**

#### **The Stats:**

- Years as principal: 7
- 2017 National Distinguished Principal
- Governor's Academy for School Leadership, mentor principal
- Principals' Leadership Academy of Nashville (PLAN), mentor principal
- Educational Leadership Learning Exchange (ELLE), Vanderbilt University

#### **Education:**

- Middle Tennessee State University, B.S., Education
- Trevecca Nazarene University, M.Ed., Educational Leadership
- Trevecca Nazarene University, Ed.D., Leadership & Professional Practice

#### **School details:**

- 660 students
- Grade span: 5–8
- School mission: DuPont Hadley Middle Prep students learn in a personalized and safe environment with nurturing adults who create rigor in learning while challenging, developing, and encouraging the unique talents and abilities of every student.

#### **Programs:**

- One Cart, One Class program: a dedicated laptop cart in each core academic classroom
- DuPont Hadley Middle Prep Youth Court: first middle school youth court in Tennessee

**“Closing the achievement gap begins and ends with school climate and culture.”  
— Kevin Armstrong**

# Tennessee Principal Uses Data to Reach Students

**His school made significant strides toward closing the ethnic achievement gap**

**D**uPont Hadley Middle Prep (DHMP) principal Kevin Armstrong doesn't believe in shying away from challenges. His school's mantra, "We Are Hadley," means, *No matter what, keep your head down and continue striving for excellence.* That's what Armstrong does, and what he expects his students and staff to do as well.

Armstrong attributes his accomplishments to his collaborative leadership team, as well as to their use of data. His data-driven achievements include an award for attaining the largest ethnic group performance gap closure for the 2014–2015 school year.

"Students and teachers simply cannot be their very best when school culture is absent in your building; change the culture, change the achievement," Armstrong says.

Here, he talks about his approach to education.

## **About his data-driven approach to closing the achievement gap**

In order to truly reach all learners, I believe you must have a wide variety of programs to meet all students. An example of that variety at DHMP includes the creation of Mathematics and English Essentials class for all four grade levels. DHMP Essentials classes are designed for those struggling learners who never truly developed foundational skills in English and/or mathematics. By giving these students a true foundation, we have seen amazing growth. In regard to maintaining high standards for all, we are constantly using data to drive instruction, including moving students to areas to ensure they are being challenged.

## **On receiving an award for achieving the largest ethnic group performance gap closure**

We believe any time that you can move the needle as a school community, it should be celebrated. It feels good to know that we are not only moving in the right direction, but also that our underrepresented students are achieving the same success as their counterparts. We are very intentional and use morning meetings, restorative practices, clubs, student incentives, youth court, and student-led conferences to address the social and emotional needs of our students. Lastly, and most importantly, this movement begins with our diverse faculty that is specifically recruited to serve the needs of our students.

## **Advice to principals focused on closing the achievement gap at their school**

Closing the achievement gap begins and ends with school climate and culture. Many administrators jump in and immediately focus on the achievement gap. You simply will not be able to close achievement gaps on a campus that is not conducive to learning. 