Big Picture Learning supports a network of fifty-six public schools located across the United States and a growing number internationally. Founded in 1995, Big Picture has refined and expanded its innovative public school design, which connects high school and college, to include support of urban and rural student populations. The core of the design is creating a learning program for each student, based on his or her academic and career interests and needs and on addressing essential learning standards. Big Picture Learning schools promote learning goals to develop critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, communication, and collaboration.

**PERSONALIZED LEARNING**

The curriculum, learning environment, and use of time during the school day at Big Picture schools are determined based on the student’s individual interests, talents, and needs. Students have the option of taking academic workshops at school or of taking college classes if they are ready for the work and the subject is one they wish to study. Big Picture Learning believes that personalizing education is about doing what’s best for kids—pushing and pulling at the right time, helping them solve problems, and providing the right measures of challenge and support for each student in order to promote growth. Students take responsibility for and ownership of their learning by pursuing their interests and passions in the real world; they develop skills in school-based settings as well as through learning experiences outside of the school building, school day, or the academic year.

**LEARNING IN THE REAL WORLD**

The main component of every student’s education at a Big Picture school is Learning Through Internship/Interest. In this internship with an expert mentor, the student completes an authentic project that uses real-world problems and projects that allow students to explore and discuss these problems in ways that are relevant to them and that benefit the student and the mentor. These internships are the main path to deepening student learning and academic

**DEEPER LEARNING IN ACTION**

DJ’s quandary was two-sided: he toyed with dropping out of school, yet he yearned to go to college. A classmate told him about the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, informally referred to as “the Met” and the first Big Picture Learning school, where “you can study what you want to study.” DJ’s first Met internship was creating street murals and doing silk screening. That’s when he discovered his flair for business. He jumped into the Met’s entrepreneurial program run by a local business person. DJ was tapped to be a CEO of a new product launch—Big Picture Soda. He drew up business plans, hired fellow students, and raised $10,000 in six months, landing Whole Foods and other stores to distribute the new drink. These tasks required DJ to be a creative problem solver, use communication skills to convince others to support the business and product, and collaborate with his employers and funders. The profits from the venture helped support a Dollars-for-Scholars scholarship project. The internship position helped DJ develop content knowledge in English, mathematics, and business, and he enrolled in Howard University where he successfully majored in business.
growth. At one school a student shared his passion for flying and described his internship working at a small airport, learning about all aspects of the aircraft industry. With the aid of his school advisors and workplace mentor, the mathematics and science he learned in the classroom were reinforced and integrated into his work with aircraft on a daily basis. This helped him see the relevance of academics in a career, strengthened his content knowledge, and helped him determine the next steps along his proposed career path.

**AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT**

**Authentic assessment measures students’ ability to solve real-life problems.** For example, while a traditional assessment for a chemistry class might consist only of multiple choice questions that require little more than memorization, an authentic assessment engages students in scientific inquiry and might ask test-takers to propose their solution to helping their community clean up a chemical spill in a local lake. Big Picture Learning uses authentic assessments that ask students to demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills. Their assessment criteria is individualized and fit to each student based on the standards of the student’s project (as gauged by the student’s advisor with input from mentors, parents, and peers). Assessments include public exhibitions (one per quarter or trimester which tracks student growth, quality of work, and academic depth in the learning goals), weekly check-in meetings with advisors, yearly presentation portfolios, and transcripts (which translate the Big Picture Learning design so that colleges can understand the students’ knowledge and skills). Students also reflect upon their learning by keeping journals.

**COLLEGE PREPARATION AND SUPPORT**

By developing challenging individual learning plans, organizing student visits to colleges, educating families about the college application and financial aid processes, and building relationships with local colleges, Big Picture Learning schools cultivate students’ readiness for the challenges of post-high school study. Big Picture Learning school students are required to take college entrance exams and apply to at least one college or postsecondary school program. Many Big Picture Learning students take courses on college campuses as well.

**RESULTS THAT SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES**

Personalizing each student’s learning experience, engaging in authentic assessments, and maintaining a focus on rigorous content results in impressive outcomes. Big Picture Learning reports higher passing rates at its schools than at other schools in the same district. Big Picture Learning also has a higher on-time graduation rate than other schools in same districts. For example the Met Sacramento High School, a Big Picture Learning school, has a rate of 89 percent versus 76 percent for the district overall and the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence, RI has a rate of 81 percent versus 65 percent in the city. A 2012 study of Big Picture Learning alumni conducted by MPR Associates, Inc., found that 74 percent of Big Picture Learning graduates enrolled in college within the first year after graduation, and on average the freshman-to-sophomore persistence rate was 87 percent.