

# Creating College Readiness

*Profiles of 38 Schools That Know How*

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# Introduction

## Defining College Readiness Conceptually and Operationally

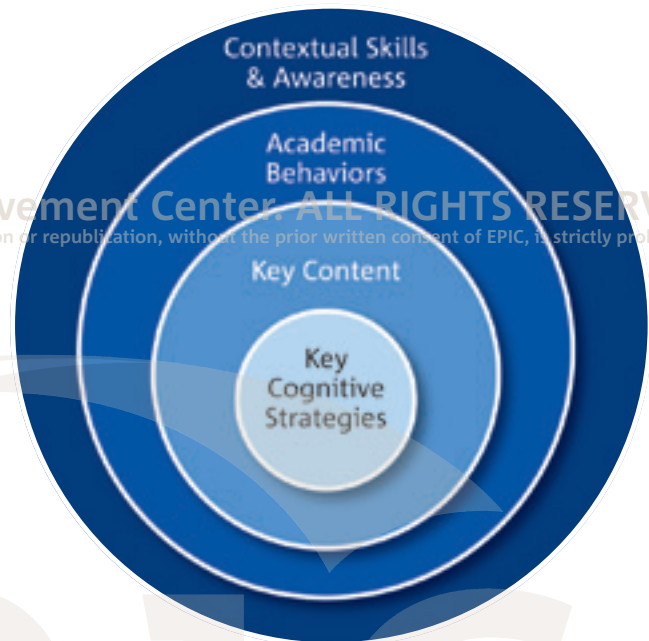
**IN JUNE 2007**, the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) was awarded a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to develop the College Ready School Diagnostic, a web-based diagnostic instrument. The purpose of this tool is to provide individual school profiles and customized recommendations, enabling each institution to make data-driven and systematic improvements to their programming, culture, and structure to improve college readiness for all students.

This work validated and operationalized the conceptual model of college readiness developed by EPIC founder and CEO Dr. David Conley; this model was thoroughly explored in the 2007 publication *Redefining College Readiness* available for download at [www.epiconline.org/publications](http://www.epiconline.org/publications).

The college readiness model (*Figure 1*) is composed of four dimensions.

- 1. KEY COGNITIVE STRATEGIES** describe the ways of thinking that are necessary for college-level work. They include: problem solving, inquisitiveness, precision/accuracy, interpretation, reasoning, research, and intellectual openness
- 2. KEY CONTENT KNOWLEDGE** refers to the need for students to master writing skills, algebraic concepts, key foundational content, and “big ideas” from core subjects in order to be college ready.
- 3. ACADEMIC BEHAVIORS** consist largely of study skills and self-monitoring. Examples include time management, awareness of one’s current level of mastery, and the selection of the learning strategies.

*Figure 1: The College Readiness Model*



**THE COLLEGE READY SCHOOL DIAGNOSTIC** represents an important first step toward ensuring that all students have the opportunity to acquire or develop the knowledge and skills necessary to be ready for college. School Diagnostic data will enable schools to act independently to improve college readiness, and will eventually be used as components of state school improvement processes or accountability reporting programs. Detailed and comprehensive information on a school’s college readiness programs and practices is critical for schools striving to create a college-going culture.

The School Diagnostic is composed of a series of surveys designed for students, teachers, counselors, and administrators. Participants complete a battery of on-line surveys designed to capture a range of performances for each of the four dimensions of college readiness. In addition, some of the surveys also include questions about the school environment.

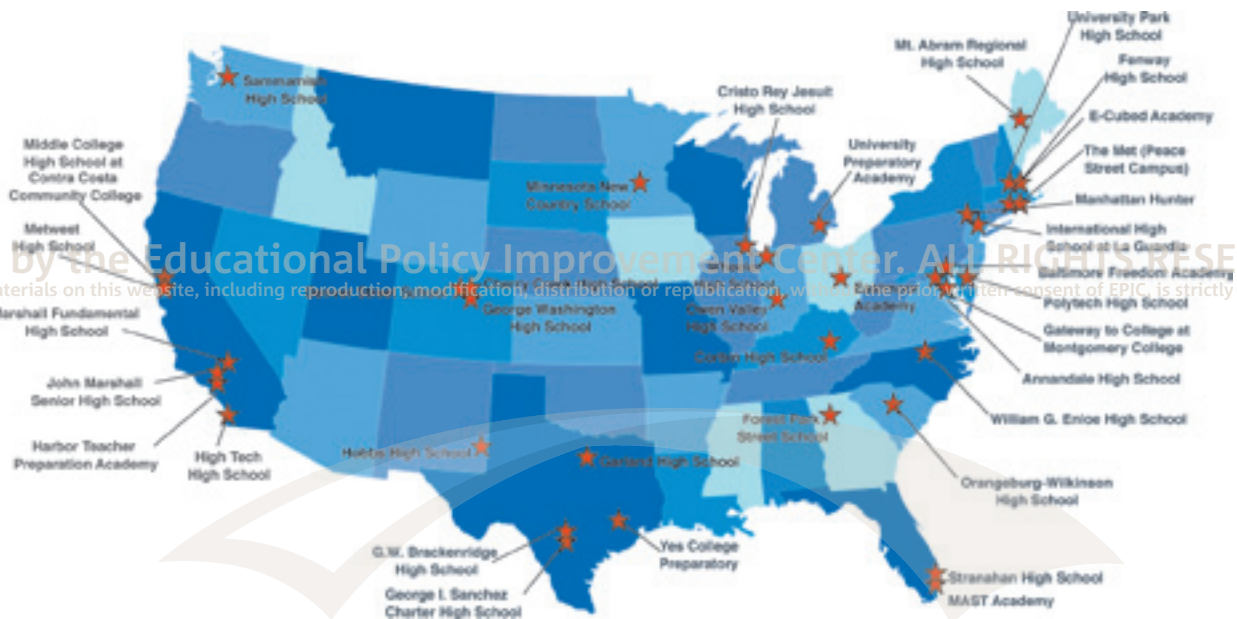
School Diagnostic data empowers schools and districts to act independently to improve college readiness. Once participants have completed their surveys, the School Diagnostic generates a series of reports that evaluate the school on how well it is performing in each dimension of college readiness. Reports allow schools to filter and compare results, internally and with other schools. Each report also includes prioritized recommendations and resources, drawn from the latest research on best practices for postsecondary success. These recommendations help administrators and teachers see where instruction could be made more effective, and how to best target limited resources.

Piloting of Phase I of the School Diagnostic is scheduled to begin in fall of 2009. Schools interested in learning about piloting the diagnostic are encouraged to contact EPIC.

For more information, visit [http://epiconline.org/college\\_ready\\_school\\_diagnostic](http://epiconline.org/college_ready_school_diagnostic).

- 4. CONTEXTUAL SKILLS AND AWARENESS**, or “college knowledge,” refers to the understanding of college admissions processes, college culture, tuition and financial aid, and college-level academic expectations

## Map of Site-Visit Schools



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Studying the programs and practices of actual high schools that have demonstrated success in preparing underrepresented students in higher education was critical to the process of examining this comprehensive model of college readiness. To better understand the specific ways in which schools create college readiness, EPIC selected and visited 38 high schools from throughout the United States that had consistently graduated college-ready students from underrepresented groups.

A two-pronged approach was employed to identify schools for participation in site visits. First, several schools were identified through a comprehensive review of the literature on college readiness. Second, the following organizations, programs, and/or individuals graciously provided nominations of high schools that had demonstrated success in preparing students for success in college:

- Alternative High School Initiative
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)
- Bellevue School District
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Cherry Creek Public Schools
- Coalition of Essential Schools
- College Board
- Cristo Rey Network
- Diploma Plus

- Early College High School Initiative
- Education Trust - West
- EdVisions
- Gateway to College
- High Schools That Work
- Hispas Organized for Political Equality
- Jay Matthews (Washington Post/Newsweek)
- Jobs for the Future
- National Association of Street Schools
- Volunteers of America
- YouthBuild

Nearly 200 schools were identified as candidates for site visits through the literature review and nomination process. EPIC researchers collected extensive information on each school, carefully considering school type, location, the composition of the student body, performance indicators, and, in particular, college readiness programs and practices. These data were then analyzed to prioritize schools for participation in site visits. Schools were purposively selected to represent a range of student demographics, school types, sizes, geographic regions, and locales (i.e. urban, rural, suburban). Researchers also prioritized the inclusion of schools with high proportions of students who would be first generation college attenders.

## Characteristics of the Site-Visit Schools

The schools selected for site visits represented a diverse cross-section of schools to ensure the validity of the College Ready School Diagnostic across a wide range of high school types. (Figures 2 and 3)

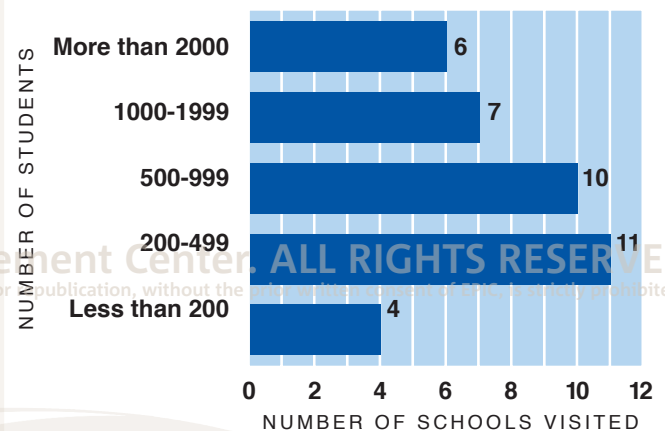
Two to three researchers conducted each site visit over the course of two days. School administrators, department heads, teachers, counselors, students, and parents at each school participated in focus groups and interviews. Researchers completed a minimum of four classroom observations during each visit, with at least one each in English/language arts, math, science, and social studies.

Additional interviews and activities (such as alumni focus groups and observations of advisory periods) were scheduled when recommended by the school. In total, researchers conducted 300 interviews and/or focus groups, 224 classroom observations, and collected more than 640 documents for analysis. School administrators also completed an online survey that collected background information on enrollment, course sequences, and student postsecondary outcomes.

The site-visit schools provided inspiring examples of how schools can succeed in preparing students for postsecondary enrollment and success, regardless of their students' prior educational experiences and personal challenges. For example, Forest Park Street School in Georgia reaches out to disenfranchised students—including many who had dropped out of school—helping them to overcome barriers such as family instability, drug abuse, and teen parenting. By forging close relationships and conveying consistent messages about the importance and attainability to postsecondary opportunities, the school is able to foster college readiness in spite of significant challenges.

In urban areas, where many local districts struggle to increase the rates of high school completion, several of the schools visited have had remarkable success in not only graduating their students, but also sending them on to college. University Preparatory Academy in Detroit, Michigan has delivered on its pledge to graduate at least 90 percent of in-

Figure 2: Sizes of site-visit schools



coming freshmen, and to send at least 90 percent of graduating seniors on to college. In Houston, where most students enter below grade level in math and English, YES Prep has maintained a 100 percent graduation and four-year college acceptance rate. Similarly, at University Park Campus School in Worcester, Massachusetts, most students enter below grade level in multiple subjects, but are fully engaged in a rigorous college preparatory curriculum for all four years of high school; as a result, over 95 percent of graduates attend college.

Schools in small towns and rural areas are innovating and succeeding as well. Minnesota New Country School maintains a 100% college acceptance rate, and has been recognized as one of the top charter schools in the nation. POLYTECH High School in Woodside, Delaware has seamlessly integrated career and technical education with college preparation.

Many of the schools EPIC visited have gained national acclaim for their successes. Stranahan High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida boasts the most African American students passing a single AP exam in the country; this school has been recognized with a College Board Inspiration Award, along with Brackenridge High School in Texas, and Hobbs High School in New Mexico.

The aforementioned examples are a few among the many rich illustrations of how schools promote college readiness each and every day, regardless of their students' prior personal and educational experiences. The following section highlights some of the lessons EPIC learned during the site visits.

**Figure 3: School name, location, and dates of the site visit**

Annandale High School	Annandale, VA	February 28-29, 2008
Baltimore Freedom Academy	Baltimore, MD	February 20-21, 2008
Cherry Creek High School	Greenwood Village, CO	October 11-12, 2007
Corbin High School	Corbin, KY	October 16-17, 2007
Cristo Rey Jesuit High School	Chicago, IL	April 8-9, 2008
Denver Street School	Denver, CO	March 27-28, 2008
E <sup>3</sup> Academy	Providence, RI	April 3-4, 2008
Eastmoor Academy	Columbus, OH	January 28-29, 2008
Fenway High School	Boston, MA	January 15-16, 2008
Forest Park Street School	Forest Park, GA	March 20-21, 2008
G.W. Brackenridge High School	San Antonio, TX	December 3-4, 2007
Garland High School	Garland, TX	March 24-25, 2008
Gateway to College Program	Rockville, MD	April 28-29, 2008
George I. Sanchez Charter School	Houston, TX	April 14-15, 2008
George Washington High School	Denver, CO	February 20-21, 2008
Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy	Wilmington, CA	March 17-18, 2008
High Tech High School	San Diego, CA	December 6-7, 2007
Hobbs High School	Hobbs, NM	February 25-26, 2008
International High School	Long Island City, NY	February 28-29, 2008
John Marshall Senior High School	Los Angeles, CA	November 5-6, 2007
Manhattan Hunter Science High School	New York, NY	March 6-7, 2008
Maritime & Science Technology Academy	Miami, FL	October 22-23, 2007
Marshall Fundamental High School	Pasadena, CA	October 25-26, 2007
Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center	Providence, RI	January 30-31, 2008
MetWest High School	Oakland, CA	March 17-18, 2008
Middle College High School	San Pablo, CA	November 15-16, 2007
Minnesota New Country School	Henderson, MN	April 1-2, 2008
Mt. Abram Regional High School	Salem Township, ME	April 1-2, 2008
Orangeburg-Wilkinson Senior High School	Orangeburg, SC	November 27-28, 2007
Owen Valley Community High School	Spencer, IN	November 12-13, 2007
POLYTECH High School	Woodside, DE	October 1-2, 2007
Sammamish Senior High School	Bellevue, WA	November 8-9, 2007
Stranahan High School	Fort Lauderdale, FL	October 18-19, 2007
University Park Campus School	Worcester, MA	October 9-10, 2007
University Preparatory Academy	Detroit, MI	November 15-16, 2007
Wheeler High School	Valparaiso, IN	February 11-12, 2008
William G. Enloe High School	Raleigh, NC	December 10-11, 2007
YES College Prep Southeast	Houston, TX	October 23-24, 2007



key themes related to how participating schools foster college readiness emerged:

- Creating and maintaining a college-going culture in the school
- Emphasizing key cognitive strategies such as reasoning, problem solving, and research
- Holding high expectations for all students, then providing differing degrees of scaffolding based on student need
- Creating a core academic program that is aligned with and leads to college readiness by the end of 12th grade
- Making the senior year meaningful and challenging, keeping all students fully engaged
- Reducing course selection choice in favor of college-focused offerings, particularly for first-generation college attenders
- Creating assignments and grading policies that more closely approximate college expectations each successive year of high school
- Promoting key self-management skills and providing students feedback on the development of these skills
- Preparing students for the complexity of applying to college and the academic and social differences between high school and college
- Building partnerships with and connections to postsecondary programs and institutions

The profiles in this report highlight some of the ways in which schools have successfully translated aspects of these themes into programs and practices that ensure all students are prepared for enrollment and success in college.

## Structure of This Report

This report provides a profile of each of the 38 site-visit schools. The profiles detail how schools have implemented strategies to promote and advance college readiness. The report is organized into six sections: 1) alternative schools, 2) charter schools, 3) comprehensive schools, 4) early college high schools, 5) magnet schools, and 6) private schools. It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive; in several cases schools could have accurately been assigned to multiple sections. For the purposes of this report, each school was placed in the section that the school and EPIC researchers agreed was the best fit.

Unless otherwise noted in the citations, data in the profiles were collected from and/or provided by the school.

## Lessons Learned from the Site Visits

The learning advances accomplished by this study moved college readiness from the abstract to the concrete, providing comprehensive and tangible examples of what successful student preparation for college encompasses. Prior to conducting these visits, EPIC possessed a highly developed conceptual understanding of college readiness; data from the site visits served to both validate this conceptual model and operationalize the concepts. The participation of schools in this study resulted in a deeper functional understanding of college readiness, which has been essential to the successful development of the College Ready School Diagnostic.

The four-part model of college readiness that formed the conceptual foundation for the College Ready School Diagnostic was expanded and refined throughout the project. In addition, several



# ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

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Forest Park Street School

Gateway to College Program at Montgomery College

The Met (Peace Street Campus)

MetWest High School

epic



photo of MetWest High School in Oakland, California



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# FOREST PARK STREET SCHOOL

*Forest Park, GA*

**FOREST PARK STREET SCHOOL** is an alternative high school program for youth who have either dropped out of the mainstream school system or who are in danger of doing so. The school is nonprofit and accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The program is part of the Street School Network (SSN), a nationwide network of similar schools founded in Denver, Colorado, in the early 1980s with the goal of providing educational outreach to homeless and at-risk youth.<sup>1</sup> In 2006, Forest Park Street School graduated the largest class in SSN history with 65 students.<sup>2</sup>

Five discrete programs comprise the Forest Park Street School, each of which is designed to address the unique educational needs and challenges of approximately 200 total students: Day Program, Independent Study, Credit Recovery, Youth Build, and ACCEL/Dual Credit.<sup>3</sup> Students participate in one of the five programs depending on their circumstances. Forest Park Street School focuses on helping youth overcome the barriers of family instability, drug abuse, teen parenting, or mental health issues, using a variety of strategies to keep them engaged

Forest Park Street School			
Year Established	2001	Enrollment	175
Locale	Large Suburb	Asian	2.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	75.0%	African American	87.5%
Attendance Rate	80.0%	Latino	5.0%
ELL Students	2.5%	White	5.5%

Source: Self report data, Spring 2008

and invested in their educations. They succeed by forging close advisory relationships with students, designing their programs to accommodate circumstances that have kept students from being successful in the past, and conveying consistent messages about the importance and attainability of postsecondary opportunities.

## State and Local Context

Forest Park Street School is located in the town of Forest Park in Clayton County, Georgia. In recent years, Georgia's high school graduation rate has ranked among the very lowest in the nation,<sup>4</sup> hovering



around 58 percent.<sup>5</sup> Clayton County has a 67 percent graduation rate,<sup>6</sup> higher than the state average, but the lowest of all metro Atlanta counties, according to the Forest Park Street School staff. Clayton County's population is approximately 60 percent African American, 30 percent white, and 10 percent Latino.<sup>7</sup> Forest Park Street School students are almost 90 percent African American and primarily come from family backgrounds that reflect the realities of living in a densely populated, low-income suburb. Part of the Forest Park Street School's mission is to address the needs of students who leave school early due to personal circumstances exacerbated by living in a community with higher rates of property crime, violent crime, and school dropout than the surrounding state.<sup>8</sup>

Curriculum development at Forest Park Street School is based on the performance standards of the county public school system, although the school's faculty may make adjustments based on student need. Unlike other regional high schools, Forest Park Street School students are tested upon admittance and every six months thereafter to track their progress and identify areas in which they need to improve. All students in Georgia must pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT),<sup>9</sup> but Forest Park Street School students may choose to participate in a career development program or dual enrollment option at the same time they are studying to pass the test, preparing them for the next steps after high school completion. Upon graduation, many Forest Park Street School students are eligible for either the Hope Scholarship or the Hope Grant, both funding sources available to accomplished Georgia students in need who pursue degree or techni-

cal certificate programs at the state's public institutions.

## Street School Model Recognizes and Addresses Unique Student Challenges

Forest Park Street School is part of a network of over 50 schools nationwide that uses the street school model to re-enfranchise at-risk students<sup>10</sup> and "provide personalized, comprehensive education, a moral code, and tools for self-sufficiency."<sup>11</sup> The SSN has seen a steady increase in the number of

students graduating from the network of schools every year for the past eight years, and it has demonstrated a consistent record of helping students improve their grades and literacy levels.<sup>12</sup> A primary component of the street school model is customizing students' education plans based on individual circumstances; youth who need credit recovery, who have commit-

ments outside of school such as parenting or drug treatment, or who desire to transition to a mainstream educational institution can choose a program that fits their schedule, addresses

their specific goals, and maximizes their opportunity for success.

Forest Park Street School customizes the experiences of its students by offering a choice of five programs. The programs are administratively integrated, and it is possible for students to move from one to another. All programs are housed in a former church facility and staffed by dedicated teachers and counselors. The option most similar to a traditional school experience is the Day Program, consisting of small, regularly-attended classes where students earn credits in various academic and career-oriented subjects. For students who have commitments during school hours, the Independent Study and Credit Recovery Programs allow them to either work independently under the weekly supervision of a coordinator, or attend selected classes to earn the last few credits necessary to get their diplomas or re-enter public high school. Youth interested in actively preparing for college can choose the ACCEL/ Dual Credit program, which assists in earning college credits at Atlanta Technical College or Clayton State University while still completing high school.

**"Our objective is to get the kids to see that education opens the doors for more."**

*– Forest Park Street School guidance counselor*



Finally, the YouthBuild program provides opportunities for graduation or GED completion while simultaneously training students in the construction industry.<sup>13</sup>

Forest Park Street School personalizes student experiences in a second way by assessing and acknowledging the strengths and limitations of their school histories and putting supports in place that address their unique concerns. Remediation is available for students who struggle in any subject; teachers and volunteer tutors contribute their time outside of class to bring students up to speed in key content areas, and students can do additional credit recovery work online if they fail a class. The staff also recognizes that life circumstances can interfere with school and contribute to student failure in a traditional setting; the goal is to work around these circumstances while still setting high performance standards. For example, if a student has a class-time conflict due to employment or another outside appointment, he or she must work with the teacher to find an alternative way to be accountable for the material missed that day. This type of flexible yet proactive planning keeps students engaged in their academic pursuits, and also enhances the contextual skills necessary for self-advocacy and communication with authority figures regarding expectations.

### Advocacy Program Fosters Strong Links to School, Enhancing Likelihood of Successful Outcomes

Another important element of the street school approach is incorporating a “moral code and tools for self sufficiency” into

every program so youth can grow into effective, autonomous adults prepared to pursue college careers. At Forest Park Street School, student advocates advance this goal by meeting with each youth at intake to initiate an ongoing dialog about how to prepare not only for successful program completion, but also for life after high school. Several staff members draw comparisons between advocates and parents and note that without a personal connection at school, many students would not remain motivated to follow through on their academic responsibilities. While internal motivation is the goal, Forest Park Street School teachers and advocates acknowledge that the backgrounds from which many students come did not foster the type of academic behaviors that lead to success in the classroom; the brand of external motivation provided by advocates fills this gap. Forest Park Street School keeps in touch with its students for up to a year or more after they graduate, extending the opportunity for personal accountability into the next phase of a student’s life, whether it be college or the workforce.

### Youth are Actively Supported in Their Postsecondary Planning

Students at Forest Park Street School begin discussing their post-graduation plans from the moment they enter their chosen program. While the school acknowledges that not every student is likely to attend college immediately, one of the school’s primary foci is to send increasing numbers of students directly into secondary education programs. The offer of dual credit opportunities in partnership with Atlanta Technical College and

Clayton State University is one strategy to remove barriers to college attendance. In addition, staff members take students on college tours, host college fairs, and classroom interns from local universities provide familiar links to what might otherwise be an unfamiliar world.

Forest Park Street School also connects present-day decision-making to future planning by requiring students to research careers of interest and present the information to their peers. Approximately 30 percent of students are placed into paid internships, and the Youth-Build program is specifically oriented toward previewing careers in the construction field, putting students on the job in service to Habitat for Humanity. Skills such as budgeting, job hunting, applying for financial aid, and negotiating housing options are built in to many areas of the curriculum as well as into the ongoing conversations that students have with their teachers and advocates. Forest Park Street School recently implemented an SAT preparation class and plans to incorporate more preparatory opportunities as the number of students applying directly to college increases.



Forest Park Street School is a small, non-profit alternative school based on a national model designed to provide graduation opportunities to students who have dropped out of public high school or who are in danger of doing so. Forest Park Street School's customized school experience, strong student advocacy, and emphasis on post-graduation planning all contribute to the success of its diverse and often challenging student population.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> StreetSchool Network. (n.d.). *History of the StreetSchool Network*. Retrieved April 3, 2009, from <http://www.streetschoolnetwork.org/about.asp>

<sup>2</sup> National Association of Street Schools. (2006-2007). *Annual Report*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Forest Park Street School. (n.d.). *Programs*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.fpss.org/Programs,Staff,andStor.asp>

<sup>4</sup> United Health Foundation. (2004). *America's health: State health rankings*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.net/>

[shr2004/components/hsgrad.html](http://shr2004/components/hsgrad.html)

<sup>5</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education. (n.d.). *Understanding high school graduation rates in Georgia*. Retrieved January 4, 2009 from [http://www.all4ed.org/files/Georgia\\_wc.pdf](http://www.all4ed.org/files/Georgia_wc.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Georgia Department of Education. (n.d.). *Governor's Office of Student Achievement system level graduation rate (2004-2006)*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.gadoe.org/DMGetDocument.aspx/System%20Level%20Graduation%20Rates%20-%202004%202005%20and%202006%20Improvement.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6335A38E4BF1804B10D3842921474EDE2A57AC80116C4FB8E&Type=D>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *State and county QuickFacts: Clayton County, Georgia*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13/13063.html>

<sup>8</sup> IDcide. (n.d.). *Forest Park, GA profile*. Retrieved January 4, 2009, from <http://www.idcide.com/citydata/ga/forest-park.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Georgia Department of Education. (n.d.). *Georgia high school graduation tests*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from [http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ci\\_testing.aspx?PageReq=CI\\_TESTING\\_GHSGT](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ci_testing.aspx?PageReq=CI_TESTING_GHSGT)

<sup>10</sup> National Association of Street Schools. (2006-2007). *Annual Report*.

<sup>11</sup> National Association of Street Schools. (n.d.). Retrieved August 31, 2009 from <http://www.streetschoolsnetwork.org/ipack001.asp>

<sup>12</sup> National Association of Street Schools. (n.d.). Retrieved January 4, 2009 from <http://streetschools.com/11stat/11stat.html>

<sup>13</sup> Forest Park Street School. (n.d.). *Programs*. Retrieved December 9, 2008 from <http://www.fpss.org/Programs,Staff,andStor.asp>

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# GATEWAY TO COLLEGE PROGRAM at Montgomery College

Rockville, MD

**GATEWAY TO COLLEGE** in Rockville, Maryland, serves students ages 16 to 20 who have dropped out of Montgomery County Public Schools or who are at risk of leaving school permanently. The program is based on a national model designed to help students overcome social and economic barriers to college success by providing them the opportunity to simultaneously earn high school diplomas and accumulate college credits. Gateway to College operates in partnership with Montgomery College, a community college where students can choose to attend one of the school's three campuses. Gateway to College students belong to a learning cohort of 20 to 25 students who take foundation courses together in preparation for their transition into college-level classes, which fulfill graduation requirements. Since it opened in 2004, attendance at Gateway fluctuates around 93 percent, comparable with the county average.<sup>1</sup> Students can stay in the program until they earn their diplomas and make the full transition to college. With the exception of one, every program graduate last year either stayed on at Montgomery College or transferred to a four-year institution. Gateway to College's success in preparing students for college can be attributed to the involvement of dedicated resource specialists, the integration of high school completion elements into a college setting, and

Gateway to College Program at Montgomery College			
Year Established	2004	Enrollment	238
Locale	Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City	Asian	1.7%
Free/Reduced Meals	N/A	African American	20.0%
Attendance Rate	93.0%	Latino	15.0%
		Multiracial	3.3%
		White	60.0%

Source: Self report data, Spring 2008

a strong emphasis on both key content and academic behaviors.

## State and Local Context

Montgomery County is the most populous jurisdiction in Maryland, with 917,181 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> The county is roughly 61 percent white, 13 percent Asian, 16 percent African American, and 14 percent Latino.<sup>3</sup> Montgomery County has a large foreign-born population (29 percent).<sup>4</sup> The county enjoys a relatively high median income of \$82,284 (slightly higher than the state median income for Maryland, which is estimated

to be the highest in the country).<sup>5</sup>

The Montgomery County Public Schools enroll the largest number of students in Maryland.<sup>6</sup> The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided initial funding to replicate the Gateway to College program at Montgomery College. Today the program is funded primarily by Montgomery County Public Schools, with additional funding coming from Montgomery College and the Montgomery County Council. Students who attend Gateway to College receive a full scholarship that pays for their books and tuition.<sup>7</sup> In order to be accepted, students must read at a 10th-grade level and demonstrate academic skills that indicate they have the potential to succeed in the foundation courses designed to prepare them for their transition to college. They must also undergo an extensive application process including submitting three essays, participating in an information session, an evaluation session, and an interview.<sup>8</sup> Once accepted into the program, Gateway to College students are still expected to fulfill State of Maryland graduation requirements, which include 75 hours of community service learning, and to take the standardized High School Assessment exams.

### Foundation Courses Emphasize Key Content and Academic Skills

When Gateway to College at Montgomery College students begin their program, they become part of a small cohort of 20 to 25 students who take a series of “foundation courses” designed to replicate the college experience. Foundation courses bring students up to speed in reading, writing, and math, and also offer career development and college “survival” skills. Many of the students in the program report belonging to peer groups or families who do not value education, so Gateway to College puts extra emphasis on why certain behaviors are necessary for school success. During the foundation semester, instructors utilize a variety of strategies to break students of the unsuccessful patterns they developed in previous high schools. Two Gateway to College at Montgomery College instructors might schedule exams for the same day, forcing students to manage their time wisely and engage with different skills and content while under pressure. One class may provide a study guide while another may not, discouraging student reliance on predictable instructor behavior and putting the onus on them to be prepared. Utilizing resources like the writing and math labs is required in

some classes, as instructors want to emphasize not only study and self-determination skills, but also to provide every opportunity for students who are behind to enhance their key content knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Administrators note that while their program is based on a model developed at Portland Community College, it has been adapted to meet the needs of their student population. Gateway to College at Montgomery College faculty members are uniquely experienced to work with at-risk youth. They construct their curricula to thoroughly prepare students academically as well as to sharpen their academic instincts. The Lead Curriculum Instructors, for example, spent five months aligning the foundation reading, writing, and math curricula with their partner college’s standards, expanding on the

national model. Gateway to College at Montgomery College instructors have access to the same training and workshops offered to the college faculty to help keep their own curricula challenging and relevant. They

also assign college-level textbooks to raise the bar for student reading and comprehension levels.<sup>10</sup>

### Resource Specialists Provide Contextual Skills and Ongoing Support

Upon being accepted into the Gateway to College at Montgomery College program, each student is assigned a resource specialist who acts as both a counselor and an instructor. This person meets individually with students throughout the program, approves changes to their schedule, connects them with resources, and removes barriers based on their specific life circumstances. Each resource specialist teaches a portion of the non-academic curriculum: a “transition” course to orient students to the college environment, a career development course, and a college success course, all part of the foundation semester. These courses fill in gaps for students with unstable academic backgrounds, increasing not only their “college knowledge” but also solidifying their study and communication skills, and normalizing the use of outside resources like math tutors and writing labs. Resource specialists also communicate with foundation course instructors to coordinate interventions for students who may be struggling.

In addition to supervising and preparing newly admitted students to function academically, resource specialists also undertake to enhance the social and emotional health of their charges.

**“I speak to students as academics and as college students. Education is bigger than a high school diploma; I want to prepare them for what is beyond.”**

*– Gateway to College resource specialist*

The resource specialist team reports that because the average age at Gateway to College at Montgomery College is 16.75 years, a natural disparity in maturity levels exists between their students and the general college population. As a result, resource specialists will often find themselves in the roles of mentors and social skill builders. This can include challenging students to think independently, encouraging them to contemplate the long-term consequences of impulsive actions, and prompting them to read and respond to social cues. Fostering internal motivation is key to this process as well. Many Gateway to College at Montgomery College students do not have parental support or involvement in their schooling and must find it within themselves to remain diligent in their attendance and studies, often while simultaneously juggling jobs and parenting. Past students report that their resource specialists are largely responsible for giving them the confidence they needed to succeed in this area, and that they regard the resource specialists team as “academic parents.”

## Students Complete High School in a College Setting

A key component of the national program after which Gateway to College at Montgomery College is modeled is to motivate struggling students by educating them in a setting that represents a successful academic trajectory. By removing them from an environment in which they were failing, students can re-approach their education with a fresh start, supported by a staff that understands challenges like teen parenting, employment pressures, and chaotic family lives.<sup>11</sup> Guest speakers from Montgomery College present to each cohort during the foundation semester, clearly communicating the college’s expectations regarding students’ commitment, behavior, and motivation levels. After their initial terms,

students take college classes while still working to complete their high school diploma requirements, giving them the benefit of experiencing postsecondary challenges while still having access to an extensive support network. By the time they graduate, students have already begun earning college credits, become familiar with the college environment, and gained the skills and independence necessary to continue successfully on their own.

Students report that attending college classes forces them to abandon sloppy work habits when it quickly becomes clear they will fail without adjusting to higher standards (e.g., typing essays, turning work in on time, being present and respectful in class). Program administrators have noticed that students immediately feel a sense of accomplishment from their status as community college students, and that the enhancement of their self-esteem reinforces the benefits of staying in the program. Gateway to College at Montgomery College also offers two summer sessions, encouraging students to remain engaged in their attendance patterns, continue enhancing their academic skills, and avoid the distractions inherent in a long break from school.

The Gateway to College at Montgomery College program is a successful example of a national model implemented in a manner that specifically meets needs of Montgomery County’s at-risk high school population. The support of resource specialists combined with the college immersion setting significantly elevates the chances of attending college for students overcoming unhealthy social pressures and family challenges. The foundation semester courses ground students not only in the core academic content they may be missing, but also in the academic and social skills necessary to succeed in a rigorous school environment.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Montgomery Public Schools. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved October 23, 2008, from <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census. (2005-07). *Montgomery County, Maryland fact sheet*. Retrieved March 11, 2009, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFF-Facts?\\_event=Search&geo\\_id=&geoContext=&\\_street=&\\_county=montgomery+county&\\_cityTown=montgomery+county](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ACSSAFF-Facts?_event=Search&geo_id=&geoContext=&_street=&_county=montgomery+county&_cityTown=montgomery+county)

&\_state=04000US24&\_zip=&\_lang=en&\_sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2007, August 28). *Household income rises, poverty rate declines, number of uninsured up*. Retrieved October 23, 2008, from [http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income\\_wealth/010583.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/010583.html)

<sup>6</sup> Montgomery Public Schools. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved October 23, 2008, from <http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/>

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at Montgomery College. (n.d.). *Application for admission*. Retrieved October 23, 2008, from [http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/mcmcps/gateway/Gateway\\_application.pdf](http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/mcmcps/gateway/Gateway_application.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Gateway to College Program at Montgomery College. (n.d.). *How to apply*. Retrieved October 23, 2008, from <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/mcmcps/gateway/apply.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Gateway to College Program at Montgomery College. (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2008,

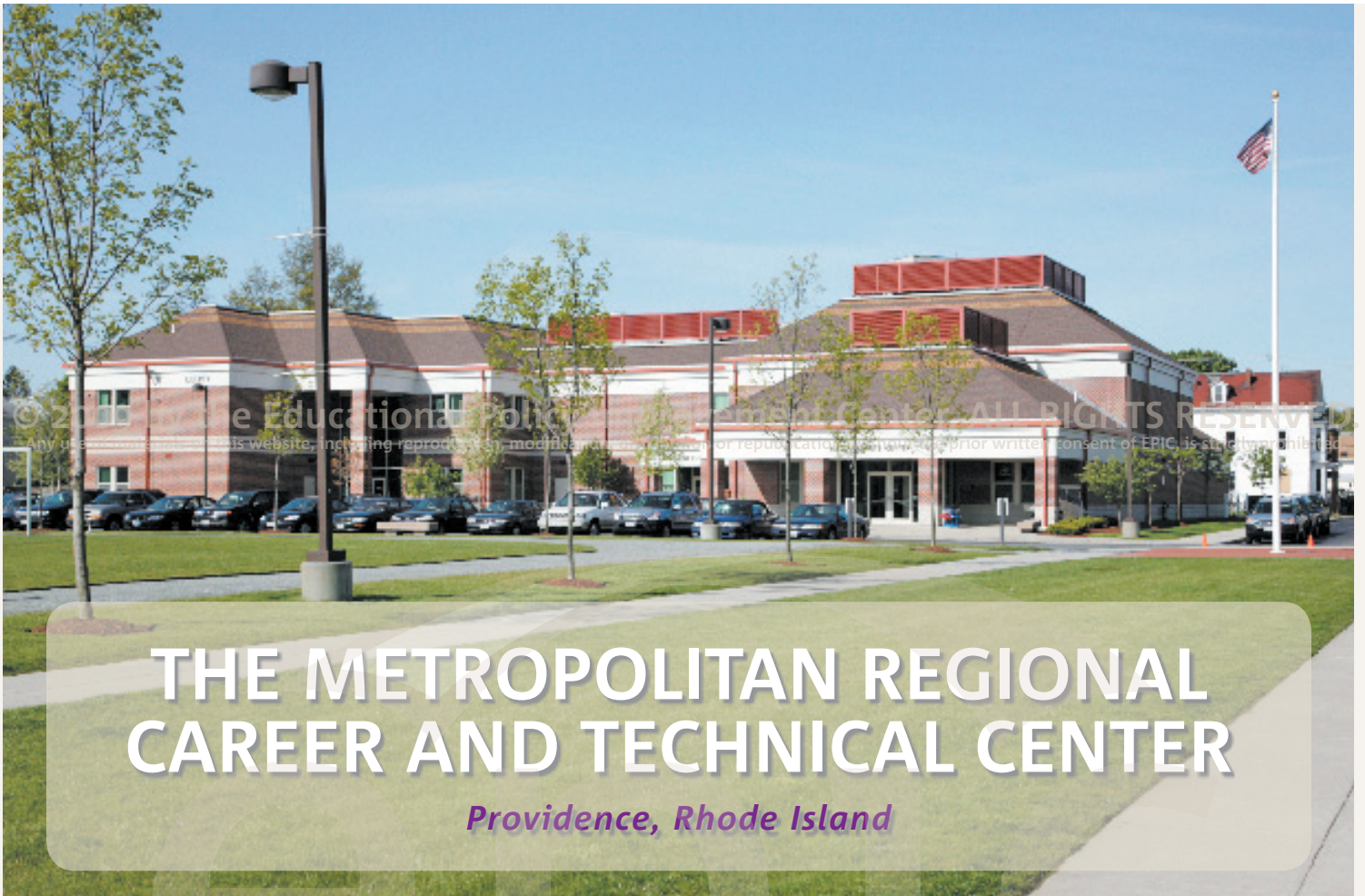
from <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/mcmcps/gateway/index.htm>

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# THE METROPOLITAN REGIONAL CAREER AND TECHNICAL CENTER

*Providence, Rhode Island*

**THE METROPOLITAN REGIONAL CAREER AND TECHNICAL CENTER** (The Met) is a state-funded cluster of six small, non-traditional, internship-based high schools located on three campuses in Providence, Rhode Island.<sup>1</sup> The Met is part of a national network of schools that take a personalized, experience-based approach to education called Big Picture Learning.<sup>2</sup> Students enrolled at The Met do not attend traditional classes, but rather participate in multiple internships throughout high school under the guidance of highly involved academic advisors. These internships are incorporated into an overall learning plan developed each year in conjunction with students' parents. In addition, most Met students attend at least one college class while working toward their diplomas, pursuing personal interests while advancing their contextual knowledge of higher education. The Met, like all Big Picture programs, operates on the philosophy that learning must be based on the interests and aspirations of each student, that curriculum must be relevant to real world scenarios, and that students' abilities must be "authentically measured by the quality of her or his work."<sup>3</sup> These values are evident in the close personal relationships Met students and their families develop with advisors, the intensity of the internship experiences, and the high level of academic accountability demanded of each student through the

The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met)			
Year Established	1996	Asian	1.9%
Locale	Mid-Size Central City	African American	25.9%
Free/Reduced Meals	64.4%	Latino	42.4%
Attendance Rate	92.0%	Native American	1.6%
Enrollment	747	White	28.1%

Source: Self-reported data for 2006-2007 school year

requirement of applied projects and portfolios.

## State and Local Context

Providence is the capital city of Rhode Island with a population of approximately 175,000 residents as of the last census.<sup>4</sup> Densely populated and racially diverse, Providence has seen an especially rapid increase in its Latino population over the last 20 years,<sup>5</sup> and this is reflected in the demographics of The Met which are 42 percent Latino, 28 percent white, 26 percent African American, 2 percent



The Met. Students meet with advisors multiple times each week in a small-group setting to discuss their internship experiences and how to apply what they are learning to the goals of their learning plan. Learning plans are a staple of Big Picture schools and require the investment and participation of not only the student and the advisor, but also of his or her family. All three meet four times per year to

Asian, and 2 percent Native American.<sup>6</sup> The state of Rhode Island changed its graduation requirements in 2008, and several of the changes directly reflect requirements The Met and other Big Picture schools have instituted for years.<sup>7</sup> For example, all Rhode Island students are now required to create a school-supported, individualized learning plan, and to tangibly demonstrate the application of six key academic skills areas, both of which are already staples of scholastic programming at The Met.<sup>8</sup>

In order to graduate, Met students (like all Rhode Island students) must take a series of tests called the New England Common Assessment Program, which measures proficiency in language arts, mathematics, and science.<sup>9</sup> The Met achieved a 94.9 percent graduation rate last year, topping the state average of 89.2 percent. The student attendance rate at The Met is 92 percent, also higher than both the local and state averages.<sup>10</sup> Students wishing to attend Met schools must apply to the district; eligible students are then selected through a lottery system.<sup>11</sup> Seventy-five percent of the students must live in Providence, while the remaining 25 percent may come from anywhere in Rhode Island.<sup>12</sup> Last year the college acceptance rate among Met graduates was 98 percent. Seventy-four percent of recent graduates who actually enrolled in college remained enrolled or ultimately graduated.<sup>13</sup>

**“Our kids can cope with challenges and know they have to overcome weaknesses. That is why our kids are prepared for college.”**

*– Met Advisor*

discuss the student’s goals, make realistic assessments of the skills necessary to reach them, and create a roadmap to ensure the experiential learning thoroughly addresses his or her personalized interests and curriculum. Learning plans must incorporate empirical, quantitative, and social reasoning, communication skills, and enhancement of personal qualities in order to meet the standards of Big Picture learning; advisors at The Met develop the curriculum to meet these standards in conjunction with students,

parents, and internship coordinators. Individual strengths, weaknesses, personal habits, and past successes and failures are taken into account in the development of learning plans. Projects,

papers, presentations, or other demonstrations of skill mastery are built into the plan so that students can exhibit their progress and advisors can evaluate their achievements appropriately. Rather than giving grades, advisors write two-page narratives outlining the successes and setbacks they observed as the students worked toward reaching their benchmarks.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to helping students apply experiential learning to their academic skill set, advisors develop close personal relationships with their students over the course of four years. Students become invested in their advisory relationship, and the two work as a team toward personal as well as educational goals. Advisors assist students in removing barriers to their school success and college acceptance, and act as a sounding board regarding issues outside of school. Many students and parents come to regard the advisor as part of their family.

## Student Advisors Provide Individualized Guidance

Advisors play a key roll in the academic lives of students at



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forcement, drug abuse, community infrastructure, and the psychology of violence.

In addition to providing content information related to various careers, internships equip students with the skills to speak confidently and effectively, to take responsibility and credit for their work, and to achieve in the professional world. During their in-school days, Met students take turns sharing information they've learned on the job to fellow classmates during structured morning presentations called "Pick Me Up"

## Internships Provide Real World Experience

Grounding education in tangible, reality-based experiences is central to the Big Picture philosophy, a program component called Learning Through Interest (LTI). The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center goes to great lengths to coordinate internships that afford an enormous variety of opportunities for its students, and most students participate in at least four different internships throughout their time in high school. Coordinators place students all over the city, working in areas such as healthcare, social services, art, engineering, education, food service, and law. Students report that in addition to teaching them necessary academic content and skills, their internship experiences improve their self-esteem and help them remain invested in school.

Met students do valuable, rigorous work at their internships. For example, the Center on Nonviolence, a non-profit devoted to promoting peace and harm reduction in Providence, relies heavily on the relationships that Met students build with young community members who may be vulnerable to gang recruitment or become victims of gang activity. Interns are vital to building community strength and safety, and witnessing the realities of how violence affects families and neighborhoods provides invaluable insight for students. By working closely with the Institute for the Study and Practice of Nonviolence, Met interns gain a greater understanding of issues related to poverty, law en-

sessions. Pick Me Up sessions provide opportunities to develop public speaking skills, translate experiential learning into descriptive language, and inform other students about internship opportunities at other sites. Students also regularly display internship-related projects or portfolios at family exhibition events. Internships also provide valuable information regarding the realities of various careers, equipping students with practical knowledge that will help them make effective postsecondary plans. From the time they are in 9th grade, Met students are coached on how to behave in a professional environment so they can function successfully in their internships. Met students learn how to create impressive resumes, behave in interviews, speak appropriately to adults, and conduct themselves on a day-to-day basis in the work place.

## Students Demonstrate Applied Learning through Innovative Projects

Students at The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center do not take exams and are not graded on a traditional scale. Instead, each student develops a plan for demonstrating his or her increasing academic ability through applying information in a tangible manner. Examples of applied learning might include organizing and facilitating a workshop, writing a children's book, or creating a photo essay or video documenting a

specific subject area. Projects are typically developed over a three-month period of time. In addition to projects related to their internships, each student is also required to write a 75-page autobiography, an endeavor they may work on for a period of years. Seniors are also required to write a thesis project, reinforcing research and academic writing skills. As of 2008, the state of Rhode Island required students to exhibit their applied work in the form of a digital portfolio order to graduate. Advisors work with college counselors to help “translate” applied learning projects (like portfolios) and narratives into information the schools can use to evaluate students for admission.

Met advisors note that because students are not given a syllabus and a set of regimented assignments, the applied learning model can be especially challenging for young people who have limited self-motivation skills. The staff works hard to help struggling students mature in this area, and also to model the college classroom environment as much as possible to orient future college-goers to a more traditional learning atmosphere.

## School Expects Dual Enrollment and Prioritizes College Preparation

Most students who attend The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center enroll in at least one college class while still in high school. Beginning in 9th grade, advisors train students to write cover letters, resumes, and essays, conduct mock interviews, and generally embed college and work life into the culture and curriculum. Seniors must apply to at least five colleges or post-secondary programs in order to graduate, and staff members frequently take students on school visits to provide an adequate basis for comparison and to demystify college life. The school also provides preparation for the ACT, although staff is very clear they do not “teach to the test.”

In addition to building a culture of college readiness, The Met has also assembled a unique College Transition Team, counselors who pave the way for college success by assisting with applications and financial aid, as well as maintaining contact with students after they launch their college careers.<sup>15</sup> The College Transition team is intended to compensate for any college-readiness deficits the students may have due to attending a non-traditional program. The Met tracks its graduates and incorporates alumni feedback into its programming in an effort to continually prepare its students for post-secondary success. Many former students

reflect the value of their internships experiences when attending Met-sponsored alumni functions, noting that the contextual skills they gained were pivotal to their ability to navigate college life.

The Met’s intensive advisory relationships, real world learning opportunities, applied learning requirements, and college preparation focus make it a high school environment demanding of investment and dedication from its students. Young people with the maturity and self-motivation required to succeed at The Met approach their college careers uniquely equipped with extensive resumes, diverse life experiences, and rigorous intellectual preparation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Met. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2009, from <http://www.themetschool.org/Metcenter/home.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Big Picture Learning. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2009, from <http://www.bigpicture.org/schools/>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2005-07). *Fact sheet: Providence city, Rhode Island*. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

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<sup>6</sup> The Met. (n.d.). *Facts and data*. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from [http://www.themetschool.org/Metcenter/Facts\\_and\\_Data.html](http://www.themetschool.org/Metcenter/Facts_and_Data.html)

<sup>7</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education. (2005). *The Rhode Island high school diploma system*. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from [http://www.ride.ri.gov/HighSchoolReform/DOCS/PDFs/HIGH%20school%20reform/HSDiploma\\_v071405.pdf](http://www.ride.ri.gov/HighSchoolReform/DOCS/PDFs/HIGH%20school%20reform/HSDiploma_v071405.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>11</sup> The Met. (n.d.). *Admissions*. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from <http://www.themetschool.org/Metcenter/Admissions.html>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> The Met. (n.d.). *College transitions program*. Retrieved January 11, 2009, from [http://www.themetschool.org/Metcenter/College\\_Trans.html](http://www.themetschool.org/Metcenter/College_Trans.html)

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# METWEST HIGH SCHOOL

*Oakland, California*

**METWEST HIGH SCHOOL** is one of the Big Picture Company’s oldest schools, and has had a consistent track record of success since opening in 2002. All of the 2007 graduating seniors went to college, and students have consistently scored highly on the California High School Exit Examination in comparison to other schools in the district. Located in Oakland, California, in the ground floor of an Oakland Unified School District administration building, the school serves 133 students. Students are diverse: 30.1 percent African American, 45.9 percent Latino, 13.5 percent Asian, and 6.8 percent white. In addition, 47 percent of students come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. Like at other Big Picture schools, students develop individual learning plans, the curriculum emphasizes projects driven by student interests, and much learning occurs through internships in the community. MetWest has worked diligently to ensure rigor is appropriately sequenced across four years to foster college readiness. Students at the school benefit from the support and accountability the school provides.

## State and Local Context

Oakland is a diverse city with real poverty and crime. As one MetWest High School administrator said, “Every one of these children knows someone who has

MetWest High School Statistics			
Year Established	2002	Enrollment	133
Locale	Large City	Asian	13.5%
Free/Reduced Meals	56.0%	African American	30.1%
Attendance Rate	94.3%	Latino	45.9%
ELL Students	15.0%	White	6.8%
		Multiple/No Response	3.8%

Source: California Dept. of Education 2007-08 Accountability Progress Reporting

been shot and killed. Our children are dying on their way to school ... getting jumped while they wait for the bus.” Not surprisingly, schools in the area contend with a number of challenges. In 2000, the Oakland Unified School District established the New Small School Autonomous Schools policy as a means of addressing issues of overcrowding and under-performance throughout the district.<sup>1</sup> MetWest was among the first of the schools to open as a result of this policy. Today, almost all of the 27 high schools in the district are small (only three are comprehensive) and outnumber the middle schools in the district (19).<sup>2</sup>



## A Scaffolded Curriculum Develops Autonomy

The MetWest High School curriculum, like that of other Big Picture Learning schools, is centered around five learning goals: 1) empirical reasoning, 2) quantitative reasoning, 3) social reasoning, 4) communication, and 5) personal qualities. The majority of content is taught in advisory, with the exception of math, which is taught as a separate course. Each student designs an individual learning plan based on his or her strengths and interests. Integral to these learning plans are the internships that students begin in the 10th grade and then attend twice each week.

MetWest has invested significant effort into the scope and sequence of the curriculum to eliminate any repetition of material across grades. In an effort to increase the level of academic rigor, each advisory is required to assign and collect homework each day, and there is a strong emphasis on reading and writing. The volume and length of writing assignments increase each year, culminating in the senior autobiography assignment, which is 25 to 30 pages in length. Freshmen and sophomores are required to attend school every day, including the days when they do not have advisory. The amount of time students spend at their internship sites increases after the 10th grade. Through the internship program, students are exposed to possible careers, have multiple mentorship opportunities, and learn how their interests materialize in the adult world.

**“By design, we are a school that accesses resources in our community; the role of other programs and adults is a huge part of what makes us able to be successful. We connect our young people with this community and make it meaningful. They feel like a part of a broader community.”**

*– MetWest High School teacher*

The networking and communication skills they develop as a result are instrumental to their ability to successfully advocate for themselves in college.

## Curriculum Teaches Students to Critically Analyze Forms of Oppression

MetWest High School faculty and administrators recognize the impact of the homicide epidemic in the surrounding community on student norms. To address this, the school has endeavored to empower students with an analytical framework for understanding oppression. MetWest students learn about institutionalized, internalized, and interpersonal forms of oppression. This curriculum was developed after several cycles of inquiry and was implemented in the 2007-08 school year. Students now apply this analytical framework to all aspects of their schoolwork. For example, students conduct a power analysis of their internship sites. The anti-oppression framework is intended to empower students to act as agents and to be able to make sense of the violence and poverty they experience in their community. The sense of community and support within the school serves to provide the students with an example of what the world could be like when people truly support one another. Students are consistently given the message that they represent themselves, their families, and their communities, and that this comes with responsibility.

In addition to the anti-oppression curriculum, MetWest has implemented structures to coach students in how to deal appropriately with emotional responses to situations. A five-week mindfulness training teaches students how to manage their feelings and capacity to focus and persevere when feeling frustrated.

## Partnership with Laney College is Structured to Foster Student Success

All MetWest High School students are required to take at least one class at Laney College, a community college located just down the street from the school. On average, 30 percent of MetWest students concurrently enroll at Laney. There they are able to take classes in math, science, and language that are not offered at the high school. California provides a tuition remission, and MetWest pays for textbooks.



MetWest employs a number of strategies to maximize student success at Laney College. Prior to beginning their studies at the college, advisors meet with students to ensure that they are ready to begin postsecondary study. When students first begin their studies at Laney College they

are walked through each step of the process. In their classes at Laney, MetWest students are required to speak with their professors to obtain progress reports and grades. They are also required to sit in one of the first three rows and are held accountable for completing all homework, regardless of whether or not it is collected. Study groups are held at MetWest after school throughout the week for students attending Laney as well. In response to feedback from MetWest students who had demonstrated success in their Laney classes, MetWest teachers now hold all students to a higher level of rigor and no longer accept late or sloppy work.

## Personalization Makes the Difference

MetWest High School works diligently to connect with all of its students. Advisors conduct home visits with incoming students. The school hosts monthly potluck Family Nights to further cultivate connections with students and their families. Over the course of students' four years at the school, advisors develop close relationships with the students in their advisories, often going beyond the role of teacher to act as advocate, mentor, conflict mediator, and counselor. Advisors often take on advocacy and mentoring roles, encouraging their students to challenge themselves, mediating conflicts, and helping to deal with family problems. Advisors endeavor to build a sense of community within each advisory group, and regularly organize retreats that may include activities such as a barbeque at the teacher's home, or a trip to the local climbing gym. All MetWest advisors are trained to ensure their students complete the requirements for admission into the University of California system. Teachers assert that the flexible nature of the school allows them to do what they feel is necessary for the student.

MetWest's ability to personalize the educational experience of each student is particularly effective in providing supports for students

to navigate the transition to college. A full-time college counselor is available to help students as they fulfill the requirement to apply to at least six colleges. MetWest juniors begin the year with a brunch that includes an overview of what they will need to do to prepare for college. Juniors then go through a trial year of filling out college applications to prepare them for the actual process senior year. Each year an overnight event is held at the school for students to work on their personal statements, the "Senior Write-In."

MetWest faculty and administrators note that their students contend with many economic challenges, particularly in covering the college costs not covered by financial aid, such as travel expenses, fees for SAT score reports and college applications, housing deposits, etc. In addition, many MetWest students are immigrants who may not qualify for federal financial aid, though undocumented students are eligible for discounted in-state tuition in California. All students are required to complete an application for federal financial aid, and a FAFSA Night is held for parents. Once students have submitted their FAFSA, the process of applying for scholarships begins. There is a yearly contest between the two senior advisories to see which can apply for more scholarship funding.

The college counselor works to expose students to colleges through various means. Students frequently attend college fairs and visit colleges. During such visits, the college counselor makes every effort to connect MetWest students with first-generation students of color on campus. These connections among students can help to alleviate the anxiety many MetWest students have around college regarding their levels of preparation and sense of belonging. MetWest alumni are also invited back to the school to share their college experiences. One MetWest alum summed up the school saying, "They understand the situations and community we come from and the struggles we have. They encouraged me to come to school and think about the world beyond Oakland."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Oakland Small Schools Foundation. (n.d.). *MetWest High School*. Retrieved April 6, 2009, from <http://www.smallschools-foundation.org/node/100>

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organizing and facilitating the site visit:

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## Special Thanks

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# CHARTER SCHOOLS

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**Baltimore Freedom Academy**

**George I. Sanchez Charter School**

**High Tech High School**

**Minnesota New Country School**

**University Preparatory Academy**

**YES College Preparatory Southeast**



photo of High Tech High School in San Diego, California



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# BALTIMORE FREEDOM ACADEMY

*Baltimore, Maryland*

**BALTIMORE FREEDOM ACADEMY** is a relatively new charter secondary school (established 2003 as a high school) serving a maximum of 700 students, grades 6 through 12 as of September 2008 in Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>1</sup> Over 95 percent of students who attend Baltimore Freedom Academy are African American,<sup>2</sup> and 63 percent of the student body is eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch.<sup>3</sup> Baltimore Freedom Academy students maintain a 90 percent attendance rate.<sup>4</sup> In 2007, the graduation rate at Baltimore Freedom Academy was 96 percent,<sup>5</sup> and 69 percent of those students attended four-year colleges or universities after graduation.<sup>6</sup> 12th-grade courses are taught at the college level while grading at all levels is based on demonstration of subject mastery

Baltimore Freedom Academy			
Year Established	2003	Enrollment	530
Locale	Large City	Asian	0.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	62.6%	African American	98.0%
Attendance Rate	90.2%	Latino	0.3%
ELL Students	0.0%	Native American	0.6%
Dual Enrollment Participation	20.0%	White	1.0%

Source: Self-reported data for 2008-09 school year

rather than on minimum state requirements. Baltimore Freedom Academy’s success in preparing students for college can be attributed to a philosophical and practical emphasis on social justice, agency, and community transformation, intensive contextual skill supports, and a school culture that assumes all students can and should seek postsecondary education.

## State and Local Context

Baltimore has a population of 631,000 and 65 percent of residents are African American.<sup>7</sup> Nineteen percent of Baltimore residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher while 21.5 percent of the population lives below the poverty level.<sup>8</sup> Student eligibility for free or reduced lunch is 66 percent overall within the city of Baltimore and 87 percent within the African American population.<sup>9</sup> Baltimore City offers charter school options to all students through a random lottery process. Baltimore Freedom Academy is one of these schools, having gained its charter status in July 2008.<sup>10</sup> Although considered a public school, Baltimore Freedom Academy’s numerous student support programs require funding beyond what the city school system provides; additional funding is acquired and coordinated through the Baltimore Freedom Academy Foundation.<sup>11</sup> This school is specifically geared toward educating students to become community advocates and agents of social change. Themes of personal responsibility and social justice are woven throughout the curriculum, which is developed around an inquiry-based learning model. Baltimore Freedom Academy does not have academic requirements for admission.<sup>12</sup>

All Maryland students who entered 9th grade in or after 2005 must pass or achieve a total score of 1602 across the High School Assessments to meet graduation requirements.<sup>13</sup> Community service is also a requirement for high school graduation in Maryland;<sup>14</sup> while the state standard is 75 hours of service learning, Baltimore Freedom Academy requires 125 hours.

## School Culture Focuses on Community and Agency

From their first days at the school, Baltimore Freedom Academy students receive strong and consistent messages about the importance of contributing to their community at both the micro and macro levels. The school’s academic mission includes the expectation that students will “immediately participate in transforming their communities,” and service projects are a

mandatory part of the curriculum.<sup>15</sup> By using the health of the community as a lens for students, Baltimore Freedom Academy administrators hope to promote a school culture that is conducive to learning and college preparation; it instills a sense of accomplishment and personal agency.

One of the most notable academic features of Baltimore Freedom Academy is the presence of University of Maryland law students. These graduate-level instructors teach courses introducing students to the structure of the U.S. legal system, social justice issues, and construction of persuasive arguments. Law-based

education is important in Baltimore according to one teacher, because there is such a strong gang and jail culture.<sup>16</sup> Instructors use actual cases to impart both content knowledge about legal issues

and critical thinking skills used to construct logical, evidence-based arguments. Writing, research, and oral presentations are all required in these classes, and students are encouraged to relate the cases they study to broader issues facing their communities, enhancing contextual analysis skills.

Juniors at Baltimore Freedom Academy must fulfill strict public service requirements and complete academic projects related to their experiences. Juniors spend four hours a week working for a nonprofit agency, and they then design their own program based on social issues identified in their communities. These requirements familiarize students with the process of conducting field research, moving between the practical and academic worlds, and joining the concepts of school performance and positive community impact.

The discipline policies at Baltimore Freedom Academy follow a restorative justice model: rather than removing students from the classroom as punishment, faculty issue consequences and follow up with an attempt to find the root of bad behavior and address the cause rather than the “crime.” All forms of discipline are based on helping students develop their character and take responsibility for themselves so that they may return to being a contributing member of the school culture and gain the social skills necessary to be self-monitoring adults. Faculty identify stressors such as poor nutrition and hunger, lack of sleep, conflict at home, and lack of connection to the material as the most common underlying causes of poor behavior.

When students arrive at Baltimore Freedom Academy, they each participate in an intake

**“My first question to students is, ‘Why are you here? You are here for a purpose, and you need to find your gifts.’”**

*– Baltimore Freedom Academy counselor*

interview to assess their psychosocial needs so supports can be put in place to help them succeed. For example, youth (and in some cases their families) can access an on-site mental health counselor and a food pantry.

### Teachers Use Inquiry-Based Instruction and Emphasize Mastery

Teachers at Baltimore Freedom Academy are encouraged not to “give” answers to the questions students ask in class. Rather, they are trained to respond by asking the students a different question, or enlisting other students to help fill in the blanks. Instead of focusing on right or wrong answers, teachers prompt the class to discuss the subject matter from a variety of perspectives, dissecting information, looking for patterns, and generalizing through description. After conducting this “exploration” process and orienting the class to the concept in broader terms, teachers can then “back fill” with details. By training students to approach new information with curiosity and a skill set of interpretive and analytical tools, students develop key cognitive skills that will benefit them in a college environment.

Baltimore Freedom Academy constructed its assessment model based on mastery rather than on a straight points system. Students are evaluated on their ability to explain concepts to their peers rather than on the reiteration of memorized facts. While teachers may come to Baltimore Freedom Academy accustomed to more traditional grading scales, many report that drawing a distinction between completing the assigned work and actually mastering the material helps students “adopt the mindset of a learner.” Some teachers acknowledge this method makes it hard for students to recognize that they are actually learning. Because they are solving problems themselves through the prompts and questions of the teacher, they are engaging at a much higher conceptual level than they are used to. Students who struggle with mastery can strive for improvement by retaking tests or rewriting projects to improve their scores, and are encouraged to attend Coach Classes to get extra help in any subject.

Academic subjects at Baltimore Freedom Academy are often illustrated using real-world examples that encourage students to see the practical applications of their efforts at school. Math teachers are trained using the national Core-Plus instructional model in grades 9 through 12 and Connected Math in grades 6 through 8, which seek to integrate core mathematical concepts and emphasizes developing good mathematical “habits of mind” that can



be applied in realistic settings.<sup>17</sup> A social studies class required students to research the differences between historically white and historically African American colleges and debate the relative merits of each.

Students participate in a six-week extended school year during the summer designed to “bring them up to speed” and prepare them for the rigors of high school. Subjects include activities like learning how to play chess, a game that requires patience, strategy, and understanding of cause-and-effect relationships extending into the future. The emphasis on reasoning and conceptual mastery helps students become better decision-makers in every area of their lives, and, according to one Baltimore Freedom Academy teacher, “if they can learn to make proper decisions, everything else will fall into place.”

### College is an Expectation

For students at Baltimore Freedom Academy, attending college is treated as an assumption and an opportunity to which all students are entitled. Beginning in the 6th grade, Baltimore Freedom Academy students are given instruction and guidance on gaining admission to

and succeeding in college. This preparation is based in the philosophy that transformation of the community and social advocacy requires ranging skill levels and careers.

Teachers at Baltimore Freedom Academy maintain a consistent focus on reading and writing across content areas and vocabulary development, regardless of subject matter, and new words are reviewed at the beginning and end of each lesson. One teacher noted that a single year of an activity like debate (which is required) can provide the equivalent of a three-year gain in reading skills. Baltimore Freedom Academy chooses to base their language usage standards on national standards rather than those set by the state-mandated High School Assessment, which teachers feel are too low to provide adequate college preparation.

Seniors at Baltimore Freedom Academy can choose to take the Accuplacer test, which allows any student with a score of 90 or higher to enroll in classes at the local community college free of charge. All students are required to visit at least three colleges prior to graduation (making at least one overnight trip) and may sit in on law classes at the University of Maryland (which also provides instructors to the school). Baltimore Freedom Academy also requires that all seniors apply to at least three four-year colleges or universities. A College Access Specialist from the local College Bound Foundation helps facilitate this process, arranging tours, assisting with essays and financial aid forms, and generally supporting students at every stage of their application process. One student reported that the College Access Specialist “chased me down the hall to make sure that I turned in my FAFSA,” and parents note that the specialist will call them at home to discuss scholarship opportunities and remind them of deadlines.

Baltimore Freedom Academy is supported by a foundation that promotes a philosophy of community transformation and high academic achievement. Teachers utilize methods designed to develop key cognitive strategies, strong academic behaviors, and robust contextual awareness.

## Notes

Unless otherwise noted below, data were collected during site visit February 20-21, 2008.

<sup>1</sup> Baltimore Freedom Academy. (n.d.). *Welcome to BFA*. Retrieved September 16, 2008, from <http://www.baltimore-freedomacademy.org/students/index.php>

<sup>2</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (2008). *Baltimore Freedom Academy report card: Demographics*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us/Demographics.aspx?K=300423&WDATA=school#enrollment>

<sup>3</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (2008). *Baltimore Freedom Academy report card: Students receiving special services*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us/statDisplay.aspx?PV=36IH30I0423I3INI6I5I1I2I1I1I1I1I3>

<sup>4</sup> Baltimore Freedom Academy. (n.d.). *Welcome to BFA*. Retrieved September 16, 2008, from <http://www.baltimore-freedomacademy.org/students/index.php>

<sup>5</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (2008). *Baltimore Freedom Academy report card: Demographics*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us/Demographics.aspx?K=300423&WDATA=school#enrollment>

<sup>6</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (2008). *Baltimore Freedom Academy report card: 2007 high school program completion*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us/StatDisplay.aspx?PV=38I12I30I0423I3INI6I13I1I2I1I1I1I1I3>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2007). *State and county QuickFacts: Baltimore city, Maryland*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24510.html>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Characteristics of the 100 largest public elementary and secondary school districts in the United States 1999-2000*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from [http://nces.ed.gov/pubsub2001/100\\_largest/table09.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/pubsub2001/100_largest/table09.asp)

<sup>10</sup> Baltimore City Public Schools. (n.d.). *Charter, innovation, and transformation schools*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from [http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/School\\_Info/Charter\\_Schools.asp#freedom](http://www.bcps.k12.md.us/School_Info/Charter_Schools.asp#freedom)

<sup>11</sup> Baltimore Freedom Academy. (n.d.). *Support*. Retrieved September 16, 2008, from <http://www.baltimorefreedomacademy.org/support/index.php>

<sup>12</sup> Baltimore Freedom Academy. (n.d.). *Admissions*. Retrieved September 18, 2008, from <http://www.baltimore-freedomacademy.org/admissions/index.php>

<sup>13</sup> Maryland State Department of Education. (2008). *Maryland state report card: Assessments*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from <http://www.msp.msde.state.md.us/Assessments.aspx?K=99AAAA&WDATA=state>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Baltimore Freedom Academy. (n.d.). Retrieved September 18, 2008 from <http://www.baltimore-freedomacademy.org/>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Western Michigan University. (n.d.). *Core-Plus Mathematics*. Retrieved September 18, 2008 from <http://www.wmich.edu/cpmp/>

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# GEORGE I. SANCHEZ CHARTER SCHOOL

*Houston, Texas*



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**GEORGE I. SANCHEZ CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL** is a well-established academic program operated by the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans (AAMA), serving at-risk students in Houston, Texas. In their mission statement, the AAMA explains that the organization is “committed to advancing the lives of at-risk and disadvantaged youth and families through an array of innovative programs of excellence in the areas of Education, Health and Human Services, and Community Development.” George I. Sanchez students are overwhelmingly Latino, and many are also first generation families contending with challenges such as parenting at a young age, resisting gang culture, and navigating the school system, all while still learning English. The faculty and staff have designed their programs to meet the needs of this vulnerable population and demonstrate their commitment to all areas of student life far beyond the level offered at a traditional public high school. The school operates year-round to maximize students’ opportunities for credit recovery and supplementary learning. George I. Sanchez students not only have the chance to experience high school success, but many are eligible for dual enrollment and can earn free community college credits or even complete an associate’s degree prior to graduation. The combination of intensive social support, early exposure to college culture,

George I. Sanchez Charter School			
Year Established	1973	Enrollment	492
Locale	Large City	Latino	97.4%
Free/Reduced Meals	72.3%	African American	2.0%
Attendance Rate	90.0%	White	0.6%
ELL Students	38.0%	Native American	0.1%

Source: Self report data, 2007-2008

and academic life tailored to meet the unique needs of the student population create a learning environment in which students can overcome circumstances that might otherwise prevent them from graduating and pursuing college careers.

## State and Local Context

George I. Sanchez Charter School serves students in Houston, an east Texas city of almost two million residents.<sup>1</sup> While the school is attended almost entirely by Latino students, the surrounding area is fairly evenly demographically divided between white, African American, and Latino inhabitants, with all other ethnicities comprising 16.5 percent of the urban population.<sup>2</sup> Teachers and administrators at George I. Sanchez draw not only an ethnic, but a socio-economic distinction between

their students and the general high school population in Houston. Over 80 percent of students at George I. Sanchez are classified as “at-risk” by AAMA standards, and 38 percent as struggling with English proficiency.<sup>3</sup> Despite these risks, George I. Sanchez students achieve an 82 percent graduation rate.<sup>4</sup>

George I. Sanchez receives its funding from the AAMA and the State of Texas, meaning it operates under and reports directly to the Texas Education Agency rather than the Houston Independent School District.<sup>5</sup> The school utilizes a regionally developed curriculum called C-SCOPE that teachers adapt based on the needs of their students. George I. Sanchez also administers the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), a standardized test that students statewide must pass in order to graduate. At George I. Sanchez, those who take and pass the TAKS prior to graduation become eligible for dual enrollment at Houston Community College, an opportunity that comes with enormous financial incentive, as students do not have to pay for college credits as long as they remain simultaneously enrolled in high school. George I. Sanchez is part of the Early College High School Initiative in partnership with the National Council of La Raza.

### School Provides Social Support Services, Removing Barriers to Education

Students and teachers alike at George I. Sanchez Charter School emphasize that young people who attend the school do not have the option of floating anonymously through their educational experiences. The school has a strong adult presence, with a low teacher-to-student ratio, involved administrative staff, and visible security guards who get to know the youth and develop supportive relationships with them. It is not uncommon for George I. Sanchez staff to visit students in their homes as a means of assessing their personal circumstances, engaging their families, and nurturing a relationship with the youth that makes them feel that their education matters. The school provides one-on-one counseling to students, runs a daycare for parenting teens, and even provides parenting classes and in-home tutors for young parents whose babies are under six months of age. Students who need extra assistance outside of school hours are provided transport on weekends and during the summer session to ensure



they have access to every possible credit-recovery opportunity.

While the school puts an enormous effort into making sure the students at George I. Sanchez can succeed, they also hold students to high standards of dress and behavior. Young people note that while the school

used to have a reputation for being a place for “bad kids,” it is now considered a desirable alternative that students who struggle elsewhere want to attend, in part because there is a sense of ownership and

pride fostered within the school community. Although attendance remains a consistent challenge within George I. Sanchez, the administration is moving toward a model where regularly-attending students are housed in a different building (currently being constructed) so that they can remain focused and move forward at a more rapid pace than their peers who need extra assistance due to truancy issues.

### Students Benefit from Early College Program and a Culture of Postsecondary Expectations

Each grade level at George I. Sanchez Charter School adopts the name of an Ivy League school in an effort to incorporate college aspirations into the structure of school life. Counselors also begin talking to young people about preparing for college entrance from the day they enroll in school. However, attempts to make college seem possible at George I. Sanchez go well beyond using rhetorical strategies. Students planning on attending George I. Sanchez are encouraged to begin trying to pass the TAKS as early as middle school

**“First and foremost is a college-bound culture. We know that the jobs of the future require technology and critical thinking.”**

*– George I. Sanchez principal*

so they can take advantage of the early college opportunity through Houston Community College (HCC) immediately upon entering 9th grade. This may involve attending classes at HCC, or earning college credit through classes taken at George I. Sanchez. Those who pass the TAKS early enough can feasibly complete an entire associate's degree within the four years they spend in high school; some even stay an additional fifth year in order to take advantage of the tuition waiver.

Through this partnership with Houston Community College, George I. Sanchez is also able to offer all students a college readiness course that focuses on the contextual knowledge and skills young people need to transition successfully to a postsecondary environment. Seniors are provided a detailed, month-by-month checklist to help them organize their college application processes, a process the school follows very closely for each student. In cases where a student's family is unsupportive of their child's post-graduate plans or participation in the early college program, staff is often able to provide the background the student needs to see college opportunities as a positive and important next step.

## Academic Life is Tailored to Meet the Needs of the Population

Although George I. Sanchez Charter School uses a curriculum developed at the district level, teachers do not hesitate to take longer than prescribed length of time, or to build on skills that will better equip students to pass the TAKS. This approach is in keeping with the school's and the AAMA's philosophy that their students can excel if their circumstances are identified and addressed appropriately. One of the biggest academic challenges facing George I. Sanchez students is English proficiency, which the staff confronts on multiple levels. One is the scheduling of classes using the block system so that young people who need the most help are put in the smallest classes and assigned to teachers who are the most skilled at working with English Language Learners. Others include an extensive after school and weekend tutoring program and a summer-long academy, offered both for those learning English and for those who need to work toward credit recovery.

In an effort to keep students moving forward and meeting their goals, George I. Sanchez teachers assess students formally and informally every three to six weeks. This allows both parties to identify problem areas and address them intensively rather than allowing the

student to move through the school year missing vital information. Reading and writing are emphasized in every class because literacy and vocabulary are problem areas that can be improved

at the same time students are absorbing new key content. The use of ungraded, in-class essays also forces students to practice writing and gives teachers a sense of whether or not students are improving and understanding the material. All classes try to use and familiarize students with current technology and encourage them to get used to discussing academic subjects, noting that many don't receive this kind of stimulation in their home environments. By building a level of comfort with technology and an orientation to peer-based intellectual exchange, George I. Sanchez removes an important barrier to college success: feelings of non-belonging.

George I. Sanchez meets the needs of a population of Houston students who might otherwise be at risk for dropping or failing out of school. By keeping the school small and really getting to know its students, the staff is able to provide a social safety net, maximize opportunities for college exposure, and construct programs in a way that can help the largest number of young people. The school's longevity and excellent reputation in the community are a testimony to the diligence and creativity of both the teachers and administrators.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.) *Houston city, Texas, 2005-07 American Community Survey 3-year estimates*. Retrieved April 6, 2009, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>2</sup> Houston-online. (n.d.). Retrieved January 22, 2009 from <http://www.houston-online.com/government/>

<sup>3</sup> Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans. (n.d.). *George I. Sanchez Charter High School, Houston*. Retrieved January 22, 2009, from <http://www.aamainc.us/en/cms/22/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Houston Independent School District. (n.d.). *What is a charter school?* Retrieved January 22,



2009, from <http://www.houstonisd.org/portal/site/AltCharter/menuitem.d4d277be99f81821-5709cbd5e041f76a/?vgnnextoid=5b5254e0351c3110VgnVCM1000028147fa6RCRD&vgnnextchannel=5f81210fa27ee010VgnVCM1000028147fa6RCRD>

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# HIGH TECH HIGH SCHOOL

*San Diego, California*

**THE GOAL OF HIGH TECH HIGH SCHOOL** is to prepare a diverse student body, including underserved students, for postsecondary success—to have everyone ready for college, or prepared for meaningful work, and to be productive citizens. The school was launched by a coalition of San Diego business leaders and educators that has since evolved into a private nonprofit organization, High Tech High Learning. Today, High Tech High Learning has a growing portfolio of innovative charter schools spanning grades K through 12 and oversees the development and operation of all the facilities.<sup>1</sup> The original High Tech High opened in September 2000 in a newly renovated 38,500 square foot facility at the former Naval Training Center in San Diego (Point Loma), California. Since then, High Tech High Learning has renovated buildings for five additional schools at the same location, creating a “village” of three high schools, two middle schools, and an elementary school. Students are self-selected and are driven to be at High Tech and go to college. The graduation rate for the 99 seniors in the class of 2007 was 100 percent. Of these 99 students, 100 percent were accepted to a postsecondary institution and 99 percent were college-bound following graduation from high school.

High Tech High makes no distinction between college preparatory and technical education. High Tech’s success in preparing its students for success in college can be attributed to the integrated, project- and inquiry-based curriculum, which strongly fosters in students the

High Tech High School			
Year Established	2000	Enrollment	532
Locale	Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City	Asian	10.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	26.0%	African American	11.0%
Attendance Rate	98.0%	Latino	32.0%
ELL Students	2.0%	Native American	1.0%
		White	41.0%

Source: Self report data for 2008-9

academic behaviors (e.g., self monitoring, self awareness, time management) and key cognitive strategies (e.g., reasoning, problem solving) necessary for the rest of their lives.

## State and Local Context

High Tech High School is a charter school within the San Diego Unified School District, a district that serves over 135,000 students.<sup>2</sup> The San Diego Unified School District offers a variety of educational options for school attendance within the district. Parents who would like to have their child attend a school other than their school of residence must apply through the Open Enrollment, Magnet, Voluntary Enrollment Exchange Program (VEEP), or at the

charter school of their choice.<sup>3</sup> Admission to High Tech is conducted through a lottery that students apply to enter, and the school utilizes San Diego County census data to ensure an equal representation of students from across the county. San Diego County has a population of 2,846,292; of this total, 69.5 percent identify as white, 29.9 percent as Latino, 10.2 percent as Asian, and 5.2 percent as African American.<sup>4</sup>

The State of California has both content standards and curriculum frameworks, neither of which is aligned with college readiness standards. Starting with the class of 2006, all public school students have been required to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) to earn a high school diploma. The purpose of the CAHSEE is to make sure students who graduate from high school can demonstrate competency in English language arts and mathematics.

## School Culture and Atmosphere are Open and Inclusive

High Tech High School teachers and administrators have created a feeling of a small school within a small school. The adults know the students, the students know all of the adults and both enjoy more of a working relationship as opposed to a teacher/student relationship. This informality and lack of intimidation is apparent in the hallways and classrooms, and in the large numbers of students who elect to remain on campus after school to work on projects and visit with teachers.

The spaces within High Tech High are designed to be accessible and quite non-institutional. The high ceilings, comfortable furniture, interior and exterior windows, glass-walled classrooms, informal meeting areas, gallery spaces, teaching clusters, shared teacher offices, and outdoor learning areas allow High Tech High to feel more like an innovative workplace than a school. The facilities support key elements of High Tech High's hands-on philosophy: team teaching, integrated curriculum, project-based learning, community-based internships, and frequent student presentations.<sup>5</sup> As one teacher commented, "There's nowhere to hide here."

## Academic Internships and Mentorships Enrich Student Learning

The goals of High Tech High School's Academic Internship program are to provide

students with workplace skills through project-based learning in a real world environment. Additionally, the program is designed to provide local organizations with a well-supported intern. All High Tech High students are required to have an academic internship to graduate. These internships last one semester, and students work two afternoons per week.<sup>6</sup> Students receive a grade for successfully completing their internship, along with related coursework. Students are required to put together a project surrounding their internship, write journals, and communicate with their employers, mentors, and the school internship coordinator.

Through an internship, each student is paired with a mentor who understands and supports High Tech High and its philosophies. A project is planned for the student. Some projects last an entire semester; others

are short projects that give the student an opportunity to work on several things throughout the semester. High Tech High students work on projects that range from event and marketing support projects, web design projects, recruitment and retention

projects with HR departments, networking, software, and hardware support, and public relations support positions, all of which include presentations in public forums. Additionally, mentors include interns in various meetings and events, a valuable way for students to learn about how business is conducted.

## Building a College Going Culture from Day One

Students begin to learn the language of college from their first day on campus. The college-going culture is strong at High Tech High School, and it is assumed that everyone will go. High Tech High provides a wide array of programs and services to support the students throughout their four years and get them ready for college. Parents, teachers, and students agree that High Tech High also prepares young people for life after college.

High Tech High has a college counselor whose sole purpose is to help the students get into college and to find the right fit for every student. Financial aid is a serious issue for many of the students, so the counselor helps them navigate the system. He understands how to work with the large number of first-generation college students and how to talk to their parents about college. A Latino family support group further facilitates family

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**“High Tech High has an ethos of going to college. Everyone pushes that agenda, creating a culture that permeates all the different interactions and activities that the students encounter.”**

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*– High Tech High School administrator*

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involvement in students' learning and college plans.

High Tech High's advisory program is another way in which the school builds and maintains a college culture. Each advisory consists of one teacher and 15 students in each of the four grade levels. Through weekly meetings and activities throughout the year, all grade levels participate in the college search and application process. Each year, advisory groups visit colleges that were selected by the students. Students are exposed to a variety of colleges over the years, and by the time a student leaves High Tech High, he/she has visited as many as a dozen college campuses.

Graduation requirements at High Tech High allow students to enter the UC system with no credits lacking, eliminating one of the impediments to college success. One hundred percent of High Tech High students meet the UC/CSU A-G requirements compared to only 37 percent statewide. High Tech High requires four years of science, four years of math, and four years of humanities, as well as engineering and design in various

forms to meet the requirements for UC schools.

## A Strong Emphasis on Academic Behaviors

Strong connections between students and teachers are encouraged at High Tech High School. Students are encouraged to call teachers at home, invite them for coffee, and visit them before and after school. Because of the high teacher-to-student ratio and an atmosphere that requires and fosters regular interactions with adults (e.g., small advisory groups, collaborative projects, internship program), students begin to feel at ease communicating with teachers and mentors, and develop close relationships with them as a result. Students who graduate from High Tech High are comfortable approaching their postsecondary professors after class, seeking out their assistance during office hours, and seeing them as people with whom they can do research.

Self-awareness, self-control, and self-monitoring are academic skills that are carefully developed over the four years. For example, students—not parents—are expected to take the lead on college research and applications, with plenty of support from faculty and counselors at High Tech High. Independent research projects, study groups, and time management are part of the fabric of the entire curriculum over four years, with increasing expectations as students progress.

Additionally, active learning—taking responsibility for one's own learning—is an integral part of the culture at High Tech and is manifest in the project-based curriculum. This curriculum is designed to foster independent work, self motivation, and problem solving, and is the main medium for student learning. The majority of class time is spent developing and working on projects, and only a small amount of time is spent on lectures or textbook learning. Students are expected to “figure things out” on their own, or with their peers through the collaborative project work. The teacher is seen as a facilitator of learning, not someone who “spoon feeds” information, and is seen as the last person from whom to seek assistance, not the first. Teachers assess student work by milestones throughout a project, not just the end product.

Another focus of High Tech High is building strong academic behaviors such as professional skills and career explorations by linking students with the outside world. All students are required to complete an internship (as described earlier), and administrators strongly feel that “school to work is better college prep than college prep.” The school builds other academic

behaviors, such as collaborative and leadership skills, by linking students with each other; students are not separated according to ability level. For example, those who work better with their minds work in collaboration with those who work better with their hands. Those for whom math concepts come easily work with those who struggle.

## Curriculum Philosophy Fuses Technical and Academic Education

High Tech High School is an inquiry-based liberal arts school where the lines between “technical” and “academic” are deliberately blurred. Knowledge is not separated into disciplines; subjects are taught in tandem to show their interrelationship. For example, a language arts and social science block, or an engineering and math block, are taught by two teachers who assign projects that require the integration of both subjects. The foundation of the curriculum is inquisitiveness—asking questions, finding out the answers, and solving problems. The students address issues as they are found in the real world—in teams, studying questions and themes that cut across academic disciplines. This requires teachers to collaborate in the development of a coherent curriculum and program. All teachers arrive one hour before the students arrive for team meetings, study group meetings, or faculty meetings, which are professional development oriented.

Teachers have significant discretion in what they cover in their classrooms. In a given curriculum unit, students have the experience of pursuing one important question or theme rather than taking six separate courses.<sup>7</sup> Teachers consult extensively with each other and with state curriculum standards and decide what content to teach within the discipline and what content is most relevant to the students’ lives, developing project ideas that reflect their passions and interests. Teachers favor depth over breadth; they are more interested in having students learn a select topic in-depth, and are not concerned about students being exposed to everything that may be on the state tests. In addition, teachers are less concerned with students remembering specific content as they are with students learning academic skills that can be applied to any life situation.

Teachers undergo extensive training in order to participate in this non-traditional, collaborative learning environment. This kind of teaching model does not work for every teacher. Returning teachers undergo 8 days of rigorous and intensive workshops and training before each school year; new teachers undergo 12 days. Teachers must be passionate, motivated, and willing to work in teams

to develop an integrated curriculum. In other words, they must embody the characteristics that High Tech wants to instill in its students.

## Technological Proficiency is a Key Goal

Technological proficiency is one of the main key contents and skills addressed at High Tech School, as the name implies. Students use computers in every classroom for doing research, taking notes, completing assignments, and managing projects. Very few books are used in class. Students also utilize a wide variety of technological resources (AutoCAD, Excel, Word, various graphic design software).

Teachers and students create and maintain digital portfolios, which reflect their personalities and passions. Teacher portfolios are used by students to get information about assignments and projects, requiring the student to regularly practice a variety of academic skills: self advocacy, independence, self motivation, and discipline. They may contain a syllabus, assignments, project details, calendar, interesting links, resources, blogs, exemplary student work samples, teacher biography, and advisory information. Student portfolios must be continually updated over the four years and contain assignments, internship information, résumé, and biographies.

## Notes

Unless otherwise noted below, data contained in this profiles were collected during the site visit December 6-7, 2007.

<sup>1</sup> High Tech High School. (n.d.). *About High Tech High*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://www.hightechhigh.org/about/>

<sup>2</sup> San Diego Unified School District. (n.d.). *About the district*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://www.sandi.net/about/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> San Diego Unified School District. (n.d.). *Our schools*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://www.sandi.net/indices/schools.htm>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2005-07). *San Diego city, California fact sheet*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

<sup>5</sup> High Tech High. (n.d.). *HTH facilities*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://www.hightechhigh.org/about/facilities.php>

<sup>6</sup> High Tech High. (n.d.). *Internships*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from [http://www.hightechhigh.org/High Tech High/internships/index.php](http://www.hightechhigh.org/High%20Tech%20High/internships/index.php)

<sup>7</sup> High Tech High. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions: What is curriculum integration?* Retrieved July 30, 2008, from [http://www.hightechhigh.org/faq.php - What\\_is\\_curriculum\\_integration](http://www.hightechhigh.org/faq.php-What_is_curriculum_integration)

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# MINNESOTA NEW COUNTRY SCHOOL

*Henderson, Minnesota*



**MINNESOTA NEW COUNTRY SCHOOL** (MNCS), which opened in 1994, is a public charter school in Henderson, Minnesota that became the prototype for the EdVisions educational model. The EdVisions educational model relies on project-based learning in small, democratic learning communities.<sup>1</sup> Given its focus on small learning communities, MNCS has a student enrollment of only 109 students, and this enrollment count includes students in grades 6 through 12. Ninety percent of the students who attend MNCS are white, and 32 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Between the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years, the special education population grew from 28 percent to 39 percent, and the school staff is working to accommodate and support this growing subpopulation of students. MNCS has an overall attendance rate of 94 percent, and 90 percent of their graduates apply to two-year and four-year colleges and universities. The college acceptance rate for graduates is 100 percent. Furthermore, in 2006, the U.S. Department of Education recognized MNCS as one of the top eight charter schools in the nation.<sup>2</sup> The school's success at preparing students for college, and life after high school in general, can be attributed to the project-based learning model, integration of technology into the student-driven curriculum, meaningful staff-student relationships, and a focus on helping students develop a sense of responsibility for

Minnesota New Country School			
Year Established	1994	Enrollment	109
Locale	Rural, outside CBSA	Asian	2.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	32.0%	African American	2.0%
Attendance Rate	94.0%	Latino	6.0%
ELL Students	0.0%	White	90.0%

Source: Self-reported data for 2006-2007

their learning process.

## State and Local Context

In 1991, the state of Minnesota was one of the first states to create legislated “public charter schools,”<sup>3</sup> which are independent public schools that are allowed to establish different and innovative learning environments and employ unconventional teaching methodologies.<sup>4</sup> Legislated public charter schools in the state of Minnesota operate under a charter from the local school board or state, and they are exempt from most state and local educational laws. However, in order to renew their charter, schools must demonstrate that students are



learning the agreed-upon educational skills.<sup>5</sup> Currently, in order for MNCS students to earn their diplomas, they must demonstrate proficiency in all required Minnesota state academic standards.

Minnesota New Country School opened its doors just three years after the Minnesota state legislature created public charter schools, and although the designers of MNCS experienced initial resistance to the establishment of a charter school in rural Henderson, the educational model utilized at MNCS became the launching point for the EdVisions Schools. EdVisions Schools require the implementation of two unique organizational components: (1) a student-driven, project-based learning model and (2) a democratically-governed environment that provides opportunities for teacher ownership in decisions made about the school. Since 2000, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has provided EdVisions Schools with the resources to establish 40 schools in rural, suburban, and urban environments, and existing schools are also contracting with EdVisions for assistance in implementing the EdVisions Model. While the EdVisions Model is unconventional, research demonstrates that students in EdVisions schools are reaching academic achievement levels commensurate to or exceeding those of their peers in traditional education environments.<sup>6</sup>

## Project-Based Learning Model Helps Students Become Ready for College and Life After High School

Project-based learning “is based upon the idea that students will be most engaged in the learning process when they have a personal interest in what they are learning.”<sup>7</sup> Instead of using a teacher-driven model for curriculum organization and delivery, project-based learning relies upon student interests and requires that students pursue those interests in the form of proposed and approved projects. Therefore, direct teacher-driven instruction takes place only in the subject of mathematics. Although direct instruction is limited, MNCS students, like all other students in the state of Minnesota, are required to earn 10 credits per year in order to receive their high school diploma. Students earn the majority of these credits by proposing projects at a “proposal team” meeting and subsequently completing those projects. During the meeting, students propose an idea for a project that includes the amount of credit they think they should receive, the state standard(s) the project addresses, and the rubric by which the project will be evaluated. Students revise their proposed projects based on proposal team feedback until the proposal team approves the project.

**“We want students to be prepared to handle critical assessment in postsecondary education. We want to prepare them for critical analysis of their work and to be able to work to other people’s expectations.”**

*– New Country School teacher-advisor*

Generally, students receive one credit for every 100 hours they spend on a project. However, the proposal team evaluates student projects on both quantity and quality, and therefore, some students may spend 150 hours on a project and receive only one credit. Students

are required to log all of the time they spend on each project, and at its completion, receive the appropriate amount of credit rather than a grade. Additionally, all MNCS seniors are required to complete an advanced project of their choice, which requires a minimum of 300 hours of logged time, multiple senior proposal team meetings, and a 25-minute presentation in a community venue.

The project-based learning model emphasizes inquisitiveness, intellectual openness, analysis, and the interpretation of multiple types of information. Additionally, all students are required to make two project-related presentations each year, and they are also required to incorporate a minimum of three outside sources in their projects. One of those sources must be an interview, and students are required to appropriately reference their sources. Furthermore, in order to successfully engage in project-based learning, students must learn to manage their time, create “to do lists,” request help

when needed, and persist through difficulty. All of these skills and behaviors are necessary for success in the college environment and life after high school.

## Integration of Technology Prepares Students for 21st Century Living and Learning

All students at Minnesota New Country School have their own computer workstation—which they are allowed to personalize—enabled with Internet access. This allows students to conduct research for their projects at a self-directed pace, and individual computers also simulate the 21st century work environment. The integration of technology into the educational environment at MNCS is foundational to their success at preparing students to be college-ready. Students at MNCS, with or without computer and Internet access at home, develop their research skills and explore potential project ideas through the use of their school computers.

## Advisory Groups Facilitate Students' Learning and Development

At Minnesota New Country School, student engagement in project-based learning takes place within the structure of advisory groups. Each teacher-advisor has 15-17 students assigned to his or her group, the purpose of which is to help students make a plan for each of the seven blocks that constitute the academic year. Additionally, the advisory relationship provides support for student development of self-directed learning skills and offers students a way in which to progress through the tasks required to complete each individual project. Through the advisory group students develop self-awareness, self-control, time management skills, and are given the opportunity to work on their communication with adults and peers. If students find that their advisory group is not working for them, they may request to be moved to another advisory group.

## Students Develop a Sense of Responsibility for Their Learning Process and Personal Choices

In order for Minnesota New Country School students to be successful within the project-based learning model, they are required to take responsibility for their learning process. This requirement is simply built into the student-driven process. In addition to taking responsibility for their academic learning process, two practices at MNCS help students develop a sense of responsibility in the area of their

personal choices and conduct. First, all activities at MNCS are coordinated and managed by the staff and students, which means there is no additional office or custodial support. Therefore, staff and students do all of the cleaning in the school, and they make and pass all rules in the school's congress. Due to the fact that staff and students have equal ownership in the school, there are few student behavior or vandalism problems.

Second, if there is a problem with misconduct, the necessary individuals participate in a "justice circle." A justice circle involves the student and the necessary staff members; the student who demonstrated misconduct has part ownership in determining the consequences of their actions. Through helping to determine their own consequences for misconduct, students learn to take responsibility for their personal choices within the small learning community environment. One of the teacher-advisors at MNCS stated that, "Responsibility is big. I'm big on the idea that you make choices and need to follow through on these to reach your goals. You may have to do things you don't want to do to attain goals. You have to take responsibility for where you end up in life." The concept of taking responsibility for learning and personal choices is a cornerstone of the educational practice at MNCS.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> EdVisions Schools. (n.d.). Retrieved June 17, 2008, from <http://www.edvisions.com/>
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Charter high schools: Closing the achievement gap*. Retrieved June 17, 2008, from [http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charterhs/report\\_pg18.html#mncs](http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charterhs/report_pg18.html#mncs)
- <sup>3</sup> Minnesota Legislative Reference Library. (n.d.). *Resources on Minnesota issues: Charter schools*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/issues/charter.asp>
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Charter high schools: Closing the achievement gap*. Retrieved June 17, 2008, from [http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charterhs/report\\_pg18.html#mncs](http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charterhs/report_pg18.html#mncs)
- <sup>5</sup> Minnesota Legislative Reference Library. (n.d.). *Resources on Minnesota issues: Charter*

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<sup>6</sup> EdVisions Schools. (n.d.). Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://www.edvisions.com/>

<sup>7</sup> Minnesota New Country School. (n.d.). *Our mission: Exploring the world through project-based learning*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://www.newcountryschool.com/>

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# UNIVERSITY PREP ACADEMY

## Detroit, Michigan



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**UNIVERSITY PREP ACADEMY (UPA)**, formed in 2003, is a small charter school in Detroit, Michigan and is part of the Big Picture Learning's network of schools. As a result, UPA is structured around key characteristics, or "distinguishers,"<sup>1</sup> such as individualized learning plans, a project-driven curriculum, and community involvement, which feed the school's success. The school sets itself apart by tackling Detroit's dismal high school dropout rate. The school's mission is "to prove that urban children can succeed in college through personalized learning and relentless commitment to their success."<sup>2</sup> Almost all students who graduate from UPA go to college, and many are the first in their family to attend.

The school's charter is contingent upon the UPA "90/90" pledge: a commitment to graduate 90 percent of its 9th-grade students, and to send 90 percent of these graduates on to college. In June 2007, the first UPA graduating class boasted a 95 percent graduation rate, and 91 percent went on to pursue postsecondary education. Administrators note that the name "University Prep" is descriptive of the school's environment. By the time students are in 7th grade, they understand they are headed for college. One parent states that UPA is an "emerging best practice model" where "success is the norm, and not the exception."

University Prep Academy			
Year Established	2003	Enrollment	512
Locale	Large Central City	Asian	0.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	65.0%	African American	99.8%
Attendance Rate	92.0%	Latino	0.0%
ELL Students	0.0%	Native American	0.0%
AP/IB Course Participation	N/A	Multiracial	0.2%
		White	0.0%

Source: Self-report data for 2006-07 school year

In the name of college readiness, the school has also implemented goals to maintain an average ACT score of 18 or higher and see that 70 percent of their students will successfully complete a bachelor's degree program in six years. Everything the school does is aimed toward helping students develop the cognitive skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary endeavors.

### State and Local Context

According to the U.S. Census, Detroit is the poorest





city in America, with fully one-third of its residents and nearly half of its children living below the official federal poverty level.<sup>3</sup> The population of Detroit is approximately 822,397 and 83 percent of the population is African American.<sup>4</sup> The city crime index is over three times the national average.<sup>5</sup> Detroit’s graduation rate ranks lowest in the nation among the largest school districts.<sup>6</sup> Only 11 percent of the city’s population of people 25 and older hold a bachelor’s degree.<sup>7</sup>

UPA’s population is just over 500 students. All but one student in the 2007-2008 school year were African American. Sixty-six percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. UPA accepts students through an application and public lottery system. Demand for admission to the school has been high; there were over 2000 applications in 2007 for just over 100 openings.

Administrators report that UPA is operating on less money per student than public school districts. Regardless, UPA has developed partnerships with several Michigan universities and community colleges. Many UPA students take classes at Henry Ford Community College, while others are enrolled at Wayne State Uni-

versity.<sup>8</sup> About half of the students at UPA have been guaranteed admission and scholarships to Wayne State University, Grand Valley State University, or Henry Ford Community College.<sup>9</sup>

## Students Benefit from Personalized, One-on-One Instruction

Like other Big Picture Learning schools, each student at UPA is placed in an advisory. Each advisory group is composed of a cohort of 16 students and one teacher who stay together for all four years. Almost all of a student’s learning takes place in this group that functions like a support group as well as a class, ensuring that no student falls through the cracks. Because of this intense relational environment, advisors and peers are able to find out quickly if students have struggles that need to be addressed, and can incorporate strategies and tools to respond quickly to any given situation. Parents, teachers, administrators, and students alike equate advisories to families.

Each student has an individualized student learning plan crafted according to skill level, interests/passions, and learning style. UPA is interested in deeply engaging each student. The school feels that in order to graduate 90 percent of students it is imperative to deal with issues of motivation and not solely academics. Teachers encourage students to identify their strengths and define themselves around those strengths. One of the advisors describes the process in this way: “I ask what they like to do. If you ask what their passion is, they won’t know. They have to tell me two things that they actually like to do (when they are not at school). We

want it to be interest-based, not career-based.”

Students work with adult mentors (i.e., advisors, parents, family members, community leaders), meeting every trimester to present the previous trimester’s work through

a public exhibition and portfolio, and to discuss and further develop their learning plans. In addition, advisors write detailed quarterly narratives describing how learning is progressing for each student and what needs to be improved. All learning plans are linked to the Big Picture Learning’s five learning goals, which are:

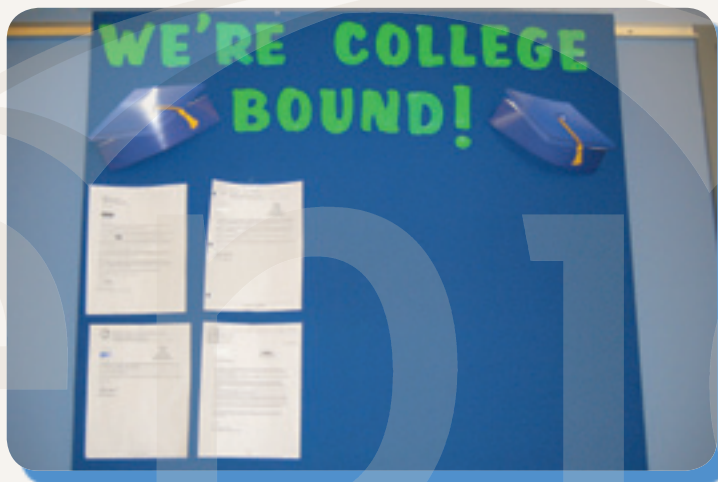
- Empirical Reasoning
- Communication
- Personal Qualities
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Social Reasoning

**“I’d probably be a thug and would probably have fallen into negative stuff. This school has had a real big impact on me.”**

*– University Preparatory Academy student, on how things might have been at a different school*



UPA adopts the philosophy that people understand better by doing. With the exception of math and science, there are no subject specific classes and very few textbooks. Students focus on cross-curricular projects around their interests, and learn to independently seek out information to develop these projects. Every project needs to have math and science components and students are assessed on the school's learning goals. Administrators feel that the cognitive strategies students develop as part of this process are invaluable and essential for college success.



The very first project students engage in is called "Who Am I?" which forces students to think about their passions, and how these might relate to their future plans. Student learning plans are developed from this project at the beginning of their 9th-grade year. Throughout their high school career, students engage in several projects focused on self-awareness and reflection upon one's life and personal history, such as a 75 to 100-page senior autobiography project. Parents feel this is very important to address the internalized deficits and low self-esteem that many students have developed over the years.

## What's In A Name? University Prep Lives Its Name.

College is marketed to every student at UPA, whether in 9th or 12th grade. The entire curriculum is college prep and college

preparatory activities are integrated in to student advisories. Students focus on admission to college beginning in 9th grade, and in 11th or 12th grade, they begin to focus on exactly what they will study.

Administrators and faculty continually look for ways to integrate college readiness skills into advisories on a daily basis, and the school offers several

special programs designed to further strengthen a student's focus on college readiness. One example is a school summit held each trimester that focuses on a specific topic related to college readiness, such as social or behavioral norms of someone going to college. The overarching idea is to get students to view everything in terms of college, projecting their real graduation year as being four years after they finish high school. UPA students are always aware of their performance on college admissions tests, and strive to increase their scores by taking some form of the ACT every year.

The school pays for some students to enroll at Henry Ford Community College in order to jump-start their college careers. For students taking advantage of this program, an additional college success course is required, which further enforces some of the academic behaviors students need to know in order to be successful. Additionally, the school offers college campus experiences during the summers.

The school's culture has obvious benefits, bolstering the morale and self-confidence of every student. In 2007, the 9th-grade class declared itself "Detroit's Greatest Hope" and has pledged to come back after



college to use what they learned to help transform and build up the city as business people, teachers, leaders, and politicians. As you walk the halls of UPA, you see “contracts” that these students have signed related to being “Detroit’s Greatest Hope.”

## Internships Facilitate Learning Through Doing

UPA has two Learning Through Internship (LTI) coordinators who match all students with college-educated mentors in professional settings. Unless enrolled at the community college as part of the dual enrollment program, or involved in honors classes, every student in grades 9 through 12 is required to be off campus and involved in their internship two days per week.

Students apply for internships by submitting a resume and cover letter, and interviewing for the job. Internships are focused around interests and allow students to get a feel for what a certain career might look like. Students described many different internship opportunities they have explored including nursing, law, education, accounting, automotive, arts, IT, non-profit, food service, real estate, and public relations. As part of their exhibitions each trimester, students talk about their internships and present projects, such as essays or research papers, related to what they are learning through doing.

## College, Not School, Counselors

UPA employs two full-time college success counselors for their high school student body. They work with advisors, students, parents, and mentors to help students apply to and succeed in college. One counselor is responsible for tracking alumni, visiting them at college, supporting and encouraging them, and collecting data on their progress so that the school can continually improve its college preparation program-

ing. Her objective is also to help students be successful once they are in college. She

exemplifies the UPA creed of “whatever it takes,” intervening as necessary to assist alumni with transfers and class changes.

The second college success counselor focuses on college applications and financial aid, as well as dual enrollment programs. Each student has a College Team that consists of the student, the counselor, a parent, an advisor, and sometimes the founder of UPA. This team is formed in a student’s junior year and begins by going the learning plan and scheduling a college visit. In the 12th grade there are two meetings to talk about the application process, as well as a FAFSA meeting during which the school invites a representative from the University of Michigan financial aid office. In January, there is an additional financial aid workshop where parents can complete the FAFSA in the computer lab. Finally, individual meetings are established to help decipher financial aid award letters.

Administrators, counselors, and parents alike describe a well-structured and intense parent education program. Parents describe being hand-held through the college application process and feel very well supported by the counselors. Counselors work with one student and one parent at a time to ensure success.

## Notes

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SCHOOLS/806050356

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Alumni Wall of Honor



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# YES COLLEGE PREPARATORY Southeast Campus

*Houston, Texas*

**YES STANDS FOR “YOUTH ENGAGED IN SERVICE”** and the YES Prep Southeast Campus, established in 1998, was the first of the YES Prep Public Schools to open.<sup>1</sup> Today YES Prep Southeast is known for its extended instructional time, thriving college preparatory atmosphere, and for making *Newsweek’s* list of top 100 high schools in 2006 and 2007.<sup>2</sup> Of the 720 students who attend YES Prep Southeast, over 98 percent are from minority backgrounds and 79 percent qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Although most students enter YES Prep Southeast at least one grade level behind in math and English, the graduation rate is 100 percent and for the past eight years, four-year colleges accepted 100 percent of YES Prep Southeast graduating seniors. YES Prep Southeast’s success at preparing students for college can be attributed to a distinctive school structure and environment, promotion of college attendance and subsequent success, the development of self-monitoring and awareness skills, and extensive teacher collaboration and development.

## State and Local Context

In 1995, the Texas Legislature authorized the establishment of a new type of public school when it approved the creation of charter schools in the state. The Texas Education Code authorized the use of four different types of charter schools, with most schools operating as open-enrollment

YES Prep Public Schools			
Year Established	1998	Enrollment	720
Locale	Large Central City	Asian	0.1%
Free/Reduced Meals	79.8%	African American	1.1%
Attendance Rate	98.0%	Latino	90.3%
ELL Students	0.0%	Native American	> 0.1%
AP Participation	100.0%*	White	> 0.1%
		Multiracial	6.9%

Source: Self-report data for YES Prep Public Schools, 2006-2007  
\*100% of 11th and 12th-grade students.

charter schools.<sup>3</sup> YES Prep Public Schools is an open-enrollment public charter school system serving grades 6 through 12 in Houston, Texas. YES College Preparatory School became an open-enrollment state charter school for middle and high school students in 1998 and graduated its first class of seniors in 2001. YES moved from a modular site to the permanent site in southeast Houston in 2001 and subsequently opened four additional locations in Houston. In 2008, YES College Preparatory Schools changed its name to YES Prep Public Schools and now serves 2,600 students in grades 6 through 12 in the Houston area.

Houston is a city rich with diversity, but one that also

has a higher percentage of families living below the poverty level than the U.S. average (21 percent versus 13 percent). Of the city's 2.2 million inhabitants, more than one-quarter are foreign-born, and nearly half (45 percent) speak a language other than English at home. Forty percent of the Houston population is Latino, and the YES Prep Southeast attracts many Latino students, resulting in a student population that is 90 percent Latino. Eighty percent of YES students are categorized as economically disadvantaged, and 88 percent are first-generation college bound.

YES Prep Public Schools are free and have an open lottery for students living within a five-mile radius. If space is available, the lottery is open to a wider area, and currently YES Prep Public Schools serve students from 80 zip codes within the Houston area.

YES Prep Public Schools recently opened a new campus within Lee High School, in the Houston Independent School District. This is an innovative collaboration, allowing parents and students to take advantage of a choice between the two school options within one central location while still enjoying the facilities of a larger campus.<sup>4</sup> The future vision for YES schools is to become the Houston public school system that prepares the most low-income students to graduate from college.

## School Structure Increases Instructional Time

All of the YES Prep Public Schools have a unique school structure with an extended nine-hour school day. In addition to longer hours, students attend mandatory Saturday school once per month. These Saturday sessions typically include service projects, outside speakers, and teambuilding, rather than the normal classes. YES Prep Southeast also requires students to take part in three weeks of summer school, various summer opportunities, and college research trips.<sup>5</sup> Students are expected to participate monthly in community service activities and log hundreds of hours over their seven years at the school. In addition to the extended school day and various community service obligations, students complete an average of two hours of homework per night.

In order to graduate from YES Prep Southeast, each student must be accepted to a four-year college. This

has resulted in 100 percent of the graduating classes over the past four years being accepted to a four-year college. Ninety percent of alumni have either graduated from or are enrolled in a two-year or four-year college.

## School Culture Promotes College Attendance and Success

Creating a college-going culture begins as soon as students set foot on campus in 6th grade. Every grade, including middle school, embarks on trips to college campuses multiple times a year. On average, each student will have visited up to 20 college campuses by the time they graduate from YES Prep Southeast. By the time students are in 9th grade, the school has already begun to send home college-related information. Students also have the opportunity to participate in week-long college research trips.

Throughout YES Prep, there are ever-present visual reminders to foster a college-going culture. College banners hang in every classroom, along with motivational slogans spurring students along in their journey. The school motto, "Whatever it takes!" is present visually and is commonly heard in conversations around campus. The

school has ingrained in students that they are all capable of going to college and giving back to their community.

Through the development of partnerships with several postsecondary institutions, YES students have access to preference in admissions and financial aid if they choose to attend one of the partner schools. The school tries to encourage students to take advantage of these partnerships in order to have the most financially viable options to attend college.

The school requires seniors to take a Senior Seminar class that meets daily and helps students prepare college applications, financial aid forms, resumes, and personal statements, ensuring students are aware of how to apply to college. To facilitate the development of non-academic skills necessary to be successful in college, seniors receive a *Transition to College Handbook* containing information regarding effective time management, course selection, how to get along with roommates, balancing academics and social activities, personal finance, and stress management. The document also offers statistics

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**"If you are going here, you are going to college. If you think that you are not going to college, than our job is to convince you that you are because it is non-negotiable for us. You get to choose where you go, you get to choose what you're going to major in, but you are here because you are going to go to school."**

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– YES Prep director

on college retention, placing emphasis on Latino college enrollment data. The handbook touches on a few academic issues, but primarily aims to help with adapting to college culture and creating self-management skills.

Faculty advisors meet monthly with each 9th-, 10th-, and 11th-grade student. Faculty members are also on-call, carrying cell phones that students may call to reach them at any time, including nights and weekends. Once students become seniors, they meet daily with their college counselors to discuss college applications and career choices. The college counseling department was modeled after those of elite college prep schools. Three college counselors are employed full time at YES Prep Southeast campus: this allows for a ratio of about one counselor for every 25-30 seniors. The school offers an open house for parents to meet with college counselors so parents can receive financial aid forms and information on how to proceed with the application process. The school also communicates with parents through interpreters during meetings and sends letters home in Spanish and English.

## Self-monitoring and Awareness are Emphasized

A common thread among both middle and high school grades at YES Prep Southeast is the importance of the development of self-monitoring and awareness skills. Students are given ample opportunities to reflect on their past struggles and achievements, as well as to plan for their future. All students are required to keep journals to record and reflect on their thoughts and ideas. Students engage in weekly goal setting and are required to monitor their progress toward meeting these goals.

Students are taught the importance of being aware of their goals and academic progress in order to be successful beyond their years at YES Prep. Within the framework of the curriculum, students are educated about the relevance of their grade point average (GPA) early on. Students are given information regarding how GPA relates to college admission, and how to monitor their own GPA.

As students near graduation, there are more structured and cumulative self-actualization activities emphasized within the curriculum. For example, seniors are required to participate in an Ethics Seminar that focuses on key cognitive strategies. Students must analyze and find evidence within previous work samples that show skills such as writing clarity, supporting evidence, and evidence of interpretation and analysis. Students are told to not only focus on positive examples, but also to include those that were negative.

## Professional Development is Rigorous and Ongoing

Teachers engage in a significant amount of professional development and training throughout their years at YES Prep. All teachers are required to do at least 30 hours of professional development per year, and new teachers have much more rigorous requirements. Departments meet weekly to plan assessments and also reflect on student work. Weekly meetings also occur between teachers of the same grade level to discuss students with whom they are particularly concerned. Teachers meet weekly to engage in shared planning to align assignments across subjects. There are also additional opportunities for teachers to collaborate across the multiple YES Prep campuses. In addition, there are opportunities for teachers to observe classes at other schools as a way to promote awareness of larger instructional trends.

YES Prep makes multiple tools available for teachers, such as instructional coaches, training, and mentors. The school has created an instructional handbook with information regarding effective teaching and classroom management strategies. Teachers receive a rubric that helps them to understand classroom management, school culture, assessments, planning, and evaluation.

New teachers engage in teacher improvement plans and meet weekly with an instructional coach and mentor in addition to attending a one-week summer training session. New teachers also have assignments and keep portfolios for the first two years of teaching at the school. These assignments cover topics such as brain-based learning, formative assessment, and classroom management.

## Notes

Unless otherwise noted below, data in this profile were collected during the site visit October 23-24, 2007.

<sup>1</sup> YES Prep Public Schools. (n.d.). About YES. Retrieved April 2, 2009, from <http://www.yesprep.org/about/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *Newsweek*. (2007). The top of the class: The complete list of the 1,300 top U.S. high schools. Retrieved April 2, 2009, from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/39380?q=2007/rank/1/>

<sup>3</sup> Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). Texas charter schools. Retrieved April 2, 2008, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/charter/>

<sup>4</sup> Guidry News. (2007, April 6). Successful charter school would open a campus at

HISD's Lee High School. <http://www.guidrynews.com/story.aspx?id=1000001592>

<sup>5</sup> YES Prep Public Schools. (n.d.). About YES. Retrieved April 2, 2009, from <http://www.yesprep.org/about/>

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# COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOLS

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Annandale High School

Cherry Creek High School

Corbin High School

E<sup>3</sup> Academy High School

G.W. Brackenridge High School

George Washington High School

Hobbs High School

John Marshall Senior High School

Marshall Fundamental High School

Mt. Abram Regional High School

Orangeburg-Wilkinson Senior High School

Owen Valley Community High School

Sammamish Senior High School

University Park Campus School

Wheeler High School



photo from Owen Valley High School in Spencer, Indiana

# ANNANDALE HIGH SCHOOL

*Annandale, Virginia*

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**ANNANDALE HIGH SCHOOL** is a comprehensive public school serving 2,565 students in northern Virginia. The Annandale student population is a diverse mix of Asian, African American, white, and Latino students. More than a third of students were born in or are citizens of another country (representing a total of 76 foreign countries and 52 languages). Fifty-five percent of students speak a language other than English at home, and 49 percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

Annandale boasts a 95 percent graduation rate, and 91 percent of graduates attend either four-year or two-year colleges after graduation. Although Annandale offers several AP courses, the school primarily utilizes an International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum to prepare students for postsecondary success. The school offers eight pre-IB courses and 24 IB courses. In 2006-07, 40 percent of 11th- and 12th-grade students successfully passed an IB course. Annandale's success in preparing students for college can be attributed to a combination of programs and practices that hold all students to high standards, while providing necessary support and scaffolding for students who need assistance reaching their potential.

Annandale High School			
Year Established	1954	Enrollment	2,380
Locale	Urban Fringe of Large City	Asian	22.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	40.0%	African American	14.7%
ELL Students	15.0%	Latino	28.0%
Attendance Rate	95.0%	Other	3.0%
AP/IB Participation	18.5%	White	31.0%

Source: Self-reported data for 2006-07 school year

## State and Local Context

Annandale High School is located in Annandale, a Virginia suburb of Washington, DC. The high school's diversity in terms of national origin and native language is reflected in the city's population as well. More than 34 percent of residents were born in a foreign country and 40.4 percent speak a language other than English at home.<sup>1</sup> Annandale High School is one of 24 high schools in the Fairfax County school district. Fairfax County is home to more than one million residents and



is the thirteenth largest school district in the nation.<sup>2</sup> Fifty-nine percent of the county’s population has earned a bachelor’s or advanced degree, a proportion that is well above the national average of 27 percent. The average household income in Fairfax is nearly twice the national average and the school district spends an average of \$2,389 more per student each year than the state average.<sup>3</sup>

Fairfax County Schools align curriculum, instruction, and assessment with the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs).<sup>4</sup> However, the SOLs are not yet aligned to college readiness standards, thereby leaving a gap between high school and college knowledge and skill standards. The state requires every student to earn a minimum of 22 credits in order to graduate. Students must demonstrate proficiency on end-of-course exams in order to earn many of these credits.<sup>5</sup>

### All Students are Held to High Expectations

Annandale teachers and staff agree that their goal is to help all students maximize their potential. One practice that Annandale High School employs to improve college preparation for all students is to offer open enrollment in challenging classes. International Baccalaureate (IB) courses are open to all students, including English Language Learners. Students can attain an IB diploma by taking all required courses, or they can select individual IB courses. In partnership with the two feeder middle schools, Annandale offers the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IBMYP) to all students in grades 6 through 10. This holistic course of study is designed to prepare students for success in college preparatory IB courses in 11th and 12th grades.

In order to ensure that teachers hold consistently high expectations for students, most teachers are assigned to teach more than one level of a course. For example, a teacher might teach IB, honors, and general education classes. The purpose of this is to prevent assigning the most experienced or best teachers exclusively to a particular group of students. Teachers also note that this practice helps them understand the challenges that students face and the best way to scaffold instruction to help prepare students for higher-order thinking. In some departments, teachers review student work samples from different grade levels in order to align their instruction vertically.



Students who are under-prepared for college preparatory courses at Annandale receive specialized instruction in reading or math in which students are held to the same educational standards as all other students. However, teachers in these courses employ materials and instructional methods that engage students by drawing on their background skills and knowledge.

### Students Have Access to a Strong System of Supports

Support systems provide safety nets for students who may require additional assistance or motivation. Annandale High School employs 12 counselors in addition to a Career Center Specialist. These counselors work collaboratively with each other, the administration, and with teachers even attending parent-teacher conferences. This collaboration allows the school to determine the best way to address student

**“Many of our kids don’t aspire to go to college when they come into this high school. Encouraging students to go to college is like motivating a small sports team to beat a bigger one”**

*– Annandale assistant principal*

challenges and support each student. One student noted that, “Counselors must have secret files on us, because they seem to know about all of our skills and interests.” This support extends to information on the college application process. Eleventh and 12th-grade students are pulled out of required classes once a year to attend assemblies where they learn about different aspects of the college and financial aid application processes in small groups.

Academic support is also widely available for all students. The school schedules an hour between the end of instructional hours and the beginning of extracurricular activities. Most teachers remain in their classrooms during this time and strongly

encourage students, especially struggling students, to seek assistance. Some of the coaches also offer study halls. This reinforces the principal's message that the first priority at Annandale is instruction.

One of the unique student support programs offered at Annandale is the Student Achievement Model (SAM). SAM is a small learning community within the school that offers smaller class sizes, extended learning opportunities (such as state assessment boot camp and enrichment activities), and nearby counseling support. Students must apply to participate, and the program focuses upon students who have not yet lived up to their learning potential. These students take their core courses within this learning community from teachers who volunteer to teach one or two of these mixed-ability classes. SAM students visit college campuses, take career assessments, participate in SAT preparation, and receive help selecting courses that will prepare them for college.<sup>6</sup> With the support of the SAM program, many participating students take IB courses and are very successful in college and beyond.

Annandale also offers a variety of programs to educate parents about the value of education and the opportunities for students beyond high school. Part-time parent liaisons speak a total of 10 different languages and are available to facilitate communication. In the evenings, the school offers a free transitional school for parents of Annandale students who wish to learn English. An immigrant parent support group meets monthly at the school. Translators for parents who do not speak English are present at parent events in an effort to help all parents better support their children's education.

## Middle School and College Partnerships Facilitate Smooth Transitions

To improve the transition into high school, Annandale High School works closely with feeder middle schools, ensuring that students enter high school prepared to learn college readiness knowledge and skills. The IBMYP program requires vertical alignment of knowledge and skills between middle school and high school. In addition to the IBMYP curriculum, counselors at Annandale also visit the two middle schools and meet with staff to identify students who will require additional reading instruction at Annandale.<sup>7</sup> These students are then enrolled in a 9th grade Developing Literacies course to help students become proficient readers. Career exploration and discussion of high school diploma options also begin in middle school and continue at Annandale. The collaborative relationship between the middle schools

and the high school has improved students' preparation for a college preparatory curriculum.

Several partnerships between Annandale and postsecondary programs aim to improve the transition between high school and college. Most notably, Annandale participates in a regional program called Pathway to the Baccalaureate that provides support for students between the local high schools, a local community college, and four-year institutions. The support includes early placement testing, priority college course registration, and assistance with college applications, scholarships, and counseling in high school and in college. This program primarily targets first-generation or at-risk students who are interested in college.<sup>8</sup> Annandale also participates in a district program called the College Partnership Program. This program is available to first-generation students who apply and participate in visits to college campuses and events with college and career speakers. It also includes academic counseling and support services for participating students. Finally, a part-time financial aid officer facilitates the financial aid application process by helping students to complete the paperwork and meet financial aid deadlines. These programs provide critical support for the students who need it most as they transition from high school to college.<sup>9</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Annandale CDP, Virginia fact sheet*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>2</sup> Fairfax County Public Schools. (n.d.). *Statistics*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from <http://www.fcps.edu/statis.html>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Annandale CDP, Virginia fact sheet*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Department of Education. (n.d.). *Standards of learning currently in effect for Virginia public schools*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Superintendent/Sols/home.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Department of Education. (n.d.). *Virginia graduation requirements*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/2plus4in2004/dip-standard.shtml>

<sup>6</sup> Annandale High School. (n.d.). *Student Achievement Model*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from <http://www.fcps.edu/AnnandaleHS/SAM/index.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Annandale High School. (n.d.). *International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from <http://www.fcps.edu/AnnandaleHS/MYP/index.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Northern Virginia Community College. (n.d.). *Pathway to the Baccalaureate Program*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from <http://www.nvcc.edu/home/khilker/Pathway%20Program.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Fairfax County Public Schools College Partnership Program. (n.d.). *Program overview*. Retrieved March 25, 2009, from <http://www.fcps.edu/ss/Student-Services/CollegePartnership/colpart2.htm>

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# CHERRY CREEK HIGH SCHOOL

*Greenwood Village, Colorado*

**CHERRY CREEK HIGH SCHOOL** is a comprehensive public high school serving over 3,700 students in Greenwood Village, Colorado.<sup>1</sup> The school has a long-standing reputation for successfully preparing students for college success. At Cherry Creek, graduation and college attendance are the norm, which is evidenced by the 95 percent graduation rate<sup>2</sup> and the 95 percent college enrollment rate.<sup>3</sup> Students are strongly encouraged to take at least one of the 29 AP classes offered, and 87 percent of students who take AP exams earn a passing score.<sup>4</sup> Participation rates in the SAT and ACT exams are also high, with approximately 70 percent and 94 percent of seniors participating in each exam respectively.<sup>5</sup> Eighty-five percent of students at the school are white, and approximately 5 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.<sup>6</sup> Cherry Creek’s success in preparing its students for enrollment and success in college can be attributed to a school culture that embeds a college focus at every level, and specific instructional, administrative, and counseling practices that promote college readiness.

Cherry Creek High School			
Year Established	1955	Enrollment	3,791
Locale	Urban Fringe of a Large City	Asian	6.4%
Free/Reduced Meals	5.1%	African American	3.4%
Attendance Rate <sup>1</sup>	93.2%	Latino	5.0%
AP/IB Participation	24.0%	Native American	0.3%
		White	84.9%

Source: CCD data, 2006-07 school year. <sup>1</sup> Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). *School accountability report 2007-08 school year: Cherry Creek High School* Retrieved March 6, 2009, from reportcard.cde.state.co.us/reportcard/pdf/2008\_0130\_1570\_H.pdf

## State and Local Context

Greenwood Village is an affluent suburb of Denver where 72 percent of the population has earned a bachelor’s or



advanced degree, and most people are employed in management/professional occupations (64 percent).<sup>7</sup> The local school district's goal is for all students to be prepared to succeed in higher education, regardless of whether they choose to continue their education immediately after high school.<sup>8</sup> The local school district's curriculum standards were developed in collaboration with Cherry Creek High School and are aligned to college readiness standards. There has been pressure in recent years to realign district curriculum standards with Colorado's achievement test, which has met resistance from both the district and Cherry Creek High School, as the test is not aligned to college readiness standards.

As in many other parts of the United States, Greenwood Village has experienced significant demographic changes that have impacted school enrollment. Between 2000 and 2006, both the foreign-born and Latino populations in Arapahoe County increased more than 50 percent. During this same time period, the percentage of families living in poverty doubled.<sup>9</sup> Cherry Creek High School is a school of choice that accepts students from outside the school boundary, and given the recent demographic changes, the school is challenged to

develop and implement strategies that prepare increasing numbers of minority, low-income, and ELA students for college.

## School Culture Revolves Around College Preparation from Day One

Students, teachers, and administrators agree: at Cherry Creek it is not a question of whether students

will go to college, but where. In order to graduate, students must apply and be accepted to college. Beginning their freshman year, students are on a college preparatory track. Special attention is given to freshman schedules, and a freshman transition program and seminar program

ensure students experience a successful transition into the high school learning environment and have the opportunity to meet with a counselor early to develop their four-year course plan.

Students find that expectations are universally high and that there is no tolerance for failure. The Cherry Creek mission states, "Excellence is not merely a goal at Cherry Creek High School; it is the standard." The minimum goal for students is to take biology, chemistry, and physics, and all are encouraged to take as rigor-

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**"A college going culture has to be very planned and it requires a lot of time to get there. I think you can lose it in a second. So you have to pay attention to it every single day. But I think it is possible and can be implemented in every school."**

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*— Cherry Creek counselor*



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ous a schedule as possible each and every semester. Additionally, throughout their high school careers, students are required to take at least four core subjects each term, and the principal personally reviews each senior's schedule for rigor. Students who make the honor roll are recognized for their achievement with an academic letter for their letter jacket.

### Development of Key Cognitive Strategies and Academic Behaviors is a Key Goal

A primary goal of the school is for students to become independent thinkers, and there is a marked focus on helping students develop the skills they will need to become mature decision makers. The open campus provides students with a level of freedom that simulates college life and also provides students with ample opportunities to make good decisions independently. Student schedules include free periods for study, research, and extra teacher contact.

The district and school have extensively promoted the use of key cognitive strategies in every classroom and with every teacher. Teachers and administrators alike have a solid understanding of the kind of thinking skills students will need to succeed in college and share in a college preparatory vision. Core subject department heads align curricula with ACT and College Board requirements, and classes across subjects focus on reading, writing, thinking skills, and oral presentations.

Cherry Creek's curriculum places a particularly strong emphasis on research. The required 10th-grade research paper is designed to develop content knowledge and engage students in key cognitive strategies and the development of the academic behaviors necessary for college success. Ninth- and 10th-grade students use the Cornell note taking system. All students are issued a planner, which includes timekeepers, in order to help students learn time management,

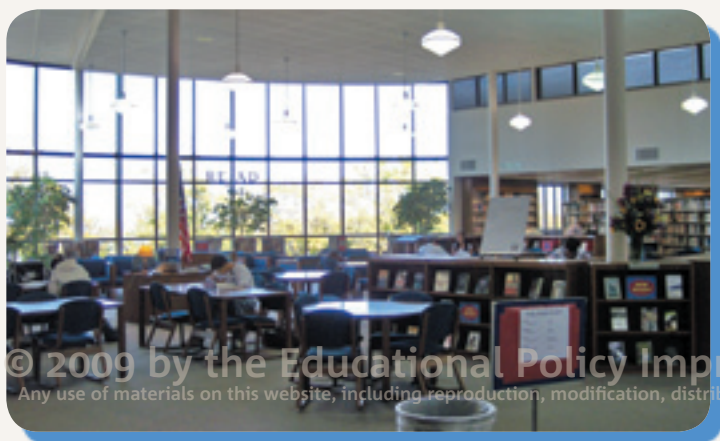
self-monitoring, and responsibility for oneself.

Students who are struggling or need additional help are expected to initiate accessing the extensive support resources on their own. Students who are having difficulty with writing and research take a social science research course their sophomore year. Additionally, Cherry Creek offers an AP summer program that is designed to assist underperforming students in becoming more proficient in the skills necessary for college success.

### School Campus Resembles a College

Cherry Creek's college preparatory culture is apparent throughout the physical configuration of the school. A large main building is the literal and figurative center of campus, and it closely resembles a university student union. Here, students (and parents) can visit the post-graduate center, see a counselor and obtain information about applying to college, study in the library (which has ample room for study groups), or purchase books, snacks, and school apparel in the bookstore modeled after that of a university. In these ways, the school's design and atmosphere parallel that of a small liberal arts college, and students conduct themselves accordingly.

The school resembles a university in a number of other ways as well. Many of the systems in place have been modeled after university practices. The freshman orientation program is continuously revised with input from alumni and their parents so as to more closely parallel college student orientations. Beginning their sophomore year, students choose their own classes and teachers. The online system students use to register mimics that of a university registration system, and the guide students follow to register outlines exactly what colleges look for in a pre-collegiate curriculum.



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## Administrators Set a Tone of Professionalism and Evaluation

Cherry Creek’s college-going culture is embedded in every programming decision, instructional practice, and component of building design, and much of this can be attributed to the school administrators who require all teachers and counselors to support and adhere to a college readiness vision. The same high expectations that apply to students also apply to teachers, many of whom hold advanced degrees (80 percent have earned a master’s degree, nine possess doctoral degrees). Teachers are hired with the understanding that they have one year to demonstrate their ability to adhere and commit to the vision of the school. At three months, they are evaluated and subsequently groomed and mentored for further service, or told to prepare to move on. Teachers at Cherry Creek are also learners with a genuine love of school and learning. Teachers are duty-free, meaning no teachers have bus or lunch duties. This ensures that they can be available to meet with students during free periods. Those who teach AP classes teach regular classes as well, as a means of integrating the college preparatory instructors at all levels.

Cherry Creek administrators have cultivated a culture of self-evaluation: “Every teacher is evaluated here. Students are evaluated and teachers are evaluated.” Administrators conduct regular classroom walkthroughs in order to collect data to monitor the use of instructional strategies that promote the learning and use of key cognitive strategies. Data are shared individually with teachers, and in aggregated form school-wide, in order to improve instructional practices.

## Counselors Provide Continuity and Contextual Skills

Students are assigned a counselor who remains their counselor throughout their four years of

high school. Counselors are charged with ensuring that their advisees receive college readiness, preparation, and application messages consistently and early on in their high school careers. Students meet with their counselors at least once each year to review their four-year course plan, and seniors have mandatory conferences with their counselors to address issues related to the college application process. Additionally, alumni are encouraged to return and share their college experiences with other students.

In addition to the one-on-one counseling with students, Cherry Creek counselors organize assemblies for students to provide information on course selection and the college application process. Counselors are in regular contact with teachers to encourage integration of college knowledge into their daily lesson plans. Five-minute college knowledge lessons are sent to teachers via email, and all teachers are asked to spend a small amount of time each day discussing a college readiness issue.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cherry Creek High School. (n.d.). *Quick facts*. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from [http://www.cchs.ccsd.k12.co.us/about\\_creek/at\\_a\\_glance.html](http://www.cchs.ccsd.k12.co.us/about_creek/at_a_glance.html)

<sup>2</sup> Cherry Creek School District. (n.d.). *Cherry Creek Schools 2007-08 high school profiles: School introduction*. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from [http://www.ccsd.k12.co.us/documents/provider/1120607Profile\\_CCH.pdf](http://www.ccsd.k12.co.us/documents/provider/1120607Profile_CCH.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Cherry Creek High School. (n.d.). *Quick facts*. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from [http://www.cchs.ccsd.k12.co.us/about\\_creek/at\\_a\\_glance.html](http://www.cchs.ccsd.k12.co.us/about_creek/at_a_glance.html)

<sup>4</sup> Cherry Creek High School. (n.d.). *Quick facts*. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from [http://www.cchs.ccsd.k12.co.us/about\\_creek/at\\_a\\_glance.html](http://www.cchs.ccsd.k12.co.us/about_creek/at_a_glance.html)

<sup>5</sup> Cherry Creek High School. (n.d.). *2008-2009 school profile*. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from [http://www.cchs.ccsd.k12.co.us/about\\_creek/reports/profile.pdf](http://www.cchs.ccsd.k12.co.us/about_creek/reports/profile.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Cherry Creek School District. (n.d.). *Cherry Creek Schools 2007-08 high school profiles: School introduction*. Retrieved May 14, 2008 from [http://www.ccsd.k12.co.us/documents/provider/1120607Profile\\_CCH.pdf](http://www.ccsd.k12.co.us/documents/provider/1120607Profile_CCH.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Greenwood Village city, Colorado fact sheet*. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>8</sup> Cherry Creek School District. (2007). *Getting to know us*. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from <http://www.ccsd.k12.co.us/documents/provider/292GettingToKnowUs.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Greenwood Village city, Colorado fact sheet*. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

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# CORBIN HIGH SCHOOL

*Corbin, Kentucky*

## RECOGNIZED IN 2006 AS A MODEL SCHOOL,<sup>1</sup>

Corbin High School is a comprehensive public high school located in rural southeastern Kentucky. As a member of the High Schools That Work network, the school's curriculum is aligned with state and national standards and geared towards linking academic content with real-world experience. Working closely with advisors, students choose an academic track that leads to either a standard or comprehensive diploma, both of which exceed state graduation requirements. Students also research and choose a concentration to maintain personal interest in their coursework throughout all four years. Every student develops an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) to monitor academic progress, explore career options, build their résumé, and apply to postsecondary institutions across the state. The school serves more than 700 students from three counties surrounding the city of Corbin; 98 percent of the study body is white, and 43.3 percent is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.<sup>2</sup> Corbin High School has an overall graduation rate of 99.3 percent, and 84 percent of its graduates enroll in postsecond-

Corbin High School			
Year Established	1903	Enrollment	727
Locale	Small Town	Asian	0.9%
Free/Reduced Meals	43.3%	African American	0.5%
Attendance Rate <sup>1</sup>	93%	Latino	0.2%
ELL Students	< 1%	Native American	0.2%
AP/IB Participation	14.4%	White	97.7%

Source: Self report data, Spring 2008

ary institutions.<sup>3</sup> The school describes a 100 percent successful transition rate beyond high school, with those who do not go directly to college pursuing military and/or workplace opportunities. The school's success in motivating students to succeed in high school and beyond can be attributed to its collaborative culture, high expectations,



tailored academic and career support services, and commitment to connecting academic knowledge to the real world.

### State and Local Context

Corbin High School is a focal point for the local community. Students often remain on campus after school

to complete homework, conduct research, or engage in various projects or activities.<sup>4</sup> The library and media center lie at the heart of the school; this building includes meeting space for distance learning and tutoring programs, a radio station, a TV production room, a video-conferencing room, a small-group performance area, and the Redhound Café.<sup>5</sup> Other on-campus businesses include a bank and a printing press. In addition to offering students valuable real world work experience, these programs and entrepreneurial efforts generate additional income to buy necessary supplies and provide services to community members. The school has extended hours to accommodate the many extracurricular activities.

Since Corbin is the only high school in the area, its administration and staff collaborate with all other public schools in the district and the local colleges. The Director of Financial Aid at Cumberland College conducts a workshop at Corbin to help students understand financial aid applications and awards. Counselors from Corbin travel to middle school campuses each spring to conduct high school orientations. Middle school students also engage in career exploration activities before they transition into high school, including a 12-week introductory course on careers at the Corbin Area Technology Center.<sup>6</sup> The high school maintains formal relationships with institutions of higher education that allow students to enroll in numerous courses at the Technology Center and one course at Eastern Kentucky University, which opened a satellite campus in Corbin in 2004.

The district's drive to develop college- and career-ready

students is directly related to the local history and economic climate. Home to approximately 10,000 people, the city of Corbin was built around a major railroad company, which played a central role in the area's economy until the late 20th century. The decline of the rail industry, a loss of manufacturing jobs, and the transition to a retail- and service-based economy has reduced local job opportunities, particularly for young people. Sixty-three percent of the working adults are employed in management/professional services or the service industry, and only 18 percent have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income in the city of Corbin is 34 percent below the state median household income.<sup>7</sup> Twenty-six percent of Corbin's population lives below the poverty line, compared to 15.8 percent across the state of Kentucky.<sup>8</sup>

Recognizing the need to provide an education that enables students to compete locally and internationally, Corbin became a member of High Schools That Work (HSTW) in 1999. Coordinated by the Southern Region Education Board, this national school improvement initiative revolves around the idea that most students can

master rigorous academic and career/technical studies if school leaders and teachers create an environment that motivates students to make the effort to succeed.<sup>9</sup> To accomplish this goal, the

**“Corbin challenges students to be their best and offers links between real life experiences and academics.”**

*– Corbin High School parent*

school “hooks” students on learning by providing numerous structured activities that link academic and real world experience. The three measures used to assess student achievement—ACT scores, the HSTW assessment, and Kentucky core content tests—all indicate that student performance has significantly increased.<sup>10</sup> Nearly a decade after implementing HSTW principles and practices, the Corbin community is confident that they can continue this positive trend by keeping students connected to their interests and providing the academic rigor, contextual skills, and real world knowledge necessary to succeed in high school, college, and on the job.

### Freshman Center Provides Strong Foundation for High School and Beyond

All incoming 9th-grade students attend classes in the Freshman Center located in a separate wing of the school. This helps them acclimate to the block schedule and to higher academic expectations while receiving additional support during their first year of high school. With smaller classes, teachers develop connections





with new students and are able to carefully assess student proficiency levels, particularly in mathematics and reading. Every 9th-grade student completes a full year of mathematics by taking either Algebra I or, if they completed that course in the 8th grade, an honors mathematics course.<sup>11</sup> Specialists visit the Freshman Center to assist students who need additional help with reading skills.<sup>12</sup> A daily advising period and school-issued planners help students cultivate important study and time management skills. This self-contained environment encourages a smoother transition into high school and helps students enter the 10th grade at the same level, which improves confidence and reduces the likelihood that they will slip through the cracks, fail courses, or drop out.<sup>13</sup> As one student admitted, “You don’t really appreciate the Freshman Center while you’re in it, but then once you’re a sophomore, you realize how much it really helps you manage the rest of high school.”

### Students Remain Connected Through Advisors and “Hooks”

As part of their integration into the larger school community, sophomores are assigned an advisor for their remaining three years at Corbin. Advisory periods are scheduled for 30 minutes every Wednesday. In addition to supplying important news and information, advisors act as special contacts so that every student has at least one adult at the school they feel connected to. They are also responsible for helping students select schedules and submit them to the guidance counselors for final approval. Finally, advisors assist students in developing their Individual Learning Plans (ILP).

Sponsored by the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority,<sup>14</sup> the Individual Learning Plan is a statewide, online instrument that stores student career survey results, grades, and test scores. It also provides students with

links to important college preparation and job information. Student profiles are submitted as college applications to state institutions of higher education. At Corbin, students use this tool to help identify specific areas of interest. They also select a career major to “hook” them into learning that includes at least four elective courses in one of 13 concentrations, such as information technology, human services, communications, science and mathematics, or transportation. Most elective courses immerse students in real world activities, such as developing community radio programs, producing television programs for the local TV station, writing for the school paper, or working with local businesses to design and produce printed material.

Seniors are encouraged to complete a research project in which they explore three career fields and spend nine weeks job shadowing adults in these positions. Through written reports and oral presentations, students describe skills and training needed to be successful in the positions. One student interested in psychology shadowed two resident health care professionals at an in-patient mental health clinic in addition to conducting research on mental health services. Because of this experience, she was able to participate in junior-level clinical activities during her freshman year in college. Linking academics, personal interests, and real world experience through these types of activities helps students develop key cognitive strategies, such as inquisitiveness and research skills. It also promotes multitasking skills and builds confidence through self-monitoring and reflection, all necessary traits and behaviors needed to succeed in college, advanced training, and the job market.

### Collaboration Promotes Investment

Teachers at Corbin collaborate across content areas to provide students with an academically rigorous and meaningful experience in every classroom. All Freshman Center teachers share a daily prep period to discuss important topics or meet with parents of students who need extra support. Teachers in other departments come together at least two times a week to discuss student performance and best practices. When assessment data indicates significant improvement in a particular class, the teacher presents his or her instructional strategies and work samples. Similarly, when students struggle with specific material, teachers collaborate to help their students draw connections between subjects; this has worked particularly well for the math and science departments. Teachers observe other teachers and discuss feedback with their peers to strengthen instructional strategies across the school.



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Corbin’s collaborative approach is driven and supported by the school’s culture and its ability to cultivate broad-based support for change. Every idea is evaluated on how well it embodies the school’s mission to help students be the best they can be. Teachers and students are given the autonomy to suggest and test ideas based on their observations and experience. For example, a few individual teachers were the first to try a common prep period. Based on their success, the idea was implemented at the Freshman Center and then across other departments. This grassroots approach means new ideas can be discussed, implemented, and “scaled up” as they gain support from the broader community. This continually reinforces a collaborative culture and enhances the school’s ability to meet its mission.

## High Expectations Guide Assessment and Classroom Practices

Everyone at Corbin High School holds high expectations. “Corbin is a leader in high graduation requirements—the teachers feel it, the students feel it. The expectation is clear.” This is demonstrated and reinforced through regular assessments and classroom practices. The state of Kentucky requires all sophomores to take the PLAN test, and all students must develop a portfolio of specific writing samples that are scored by trained evaluators; teachers and students work together to select, improve, and preliminarily score pieces for the portfolio. The school requires common assessments every nine weeks and at the end of each semester to confirm that all students are receiving the same material. These assessments are limited to 25 multiple-choice questions and focus on evaluating

student depth of knowledge. The principal reviews the assessments to compare frequency of missed items, as well as student performance in honors and standard courses. Ongoing assessments help to keep both teachers and students focused and to identify important areas in need of improvement.

All courses at Corbin emphasize the importance of strong reading, writing, and oral presentation skills, and students receive rubrics detailing how they will be evaluated on specific activities and assignments. Teachers assign incomplete grades instead of “zeros” to ensure that all assignments are completed. Sub-standard student work is returned with feedback for resubmission. Students are strongly encouraged to spend the end of each class period organizing and rewriting

their notes, and receive examples of high quality notes from previous students to demonstrate the desired standard. Students with strong note-taking skills are also paired with those who need to develop this skill further. These classroom practices set and maintain clear expectations that help students gain valuable knowledge and skills, as well as take ownership of their learning.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Corbin High School. (2006-07). *Corbin High School Profile*. Retrieved August 20, 2008, from <http://www.corbinhighschool.org/schoolprofile.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2005, October). *Best Practices for Implementing HSTW and MMGW*. Atlanta, GA.

<sup>5</sup> Corbin Independent School District. (n.d.). Retrieved August 20, 2008, from [www.corbin-schools.org](http://www.corbin-schools.org)

<sup>6</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2005, October). *Best Practices for Implementing HSTW and MMGW*. Atlanta, GA.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2007). *High Schools that Work: An Enhanced Design to Get All Students to Standards*. Retrieved August 20, 2008, from [www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)

<sup>10</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2005, October). *Best Practices for Implementing HSTW and MMGW*. Atlanta, GA.

<sup>11</sup> Bottoms, Gene. (2007). *Treat All Students Like the “Best” Students*. *Educational Leadership*, 64(7), 30-37.

<sup>12</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2005, October). *Best Practices for Implementing HSTW and MMGW*. Atlanta, GA.


<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Individual Learning Plan Login. (n.d.). Retrieved August 22, 2008, from <http://www.career-cruising.com/ILP/Default.aspx>

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E<sup>3</sup> ACADEMY

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# E<sup>3</sup> ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL

*Providence, Rhode Island*

**E<sup>3</sup> ACADEMY** (pronounced E-Cubed) in Providence, Rhode Island is committed to “Educational Excellence through Empowerment.” Student accountability is the cornerstone of this philosophy, placing the responsibility for excellence in academics and behavior upon the students, but with strong supportive structures in place. E<sup>3</sup> Academy’s caring and devoted teachers and administrators are critical to and an integral part of the success of the school. On the 2007-8 Rhode Island state assessment, students at E<sup>3</sup> Academy did significantly better than students at 10 of the 11 other schools in their district on the English portion.<sup>1</sup> Teachers go to great lengths to help students navigate academic and non-academic problems. As one student stated, “The school bends over backwards to get us into college.” E<sup>3</sup> serves a poor urban population and faces many challenges as it strives to meet its goals and mission, yet the staff have high expectations for the students, both academically and socially, and strive to ensure that every student feels cared for by at least one adult at the school.

## State and Local Context

In 2004, the Providence Public School District transitioned from four large high schools to a portfolio of 13 smaller schools, including two “alternative” schools, one of which was E<sup>3</sup> Academy. Total enrollment at E<sup>3</sup> for the 2007-2008 school year was 362 students. The 2007-08 cohort of seniors, 49 students in all, was the first group to go through a full four years at E<sup>3</sup>.

Providence has a large immigrant population and one of

E <sup>3</sup> Academy High School			
Year Established	2004	Enrollment	362
Locale	Mid-size City	Asian	3.3%
Free/Reduced Meals	74.6%	African American	29.8%
ELL Students	0.0%	Latino	51.7%
Attendance Rate	84.6%	Multiracial	0.0%
AP/IB Participation	N/A	White	14.4%

Source: Self report data for 2006-07 school year

the highest rates of poverty in the nation, with 24 percent of families living below the poverty line in 2000, up from 18 percent in 1990.<sup>2</sup> According to the 2000 census, the rate of children under the age of 18 living below the poverty line is even higher at 40 percent.<sup>3</sup> Providence has the fifth-highest rate of property crime per 100,000 inhabitants in the country.<sup>4</sup> In addition, while 65 percent of the population over 25 has a high school diploma or higher, more than a third of the overall population lacks a high school diploma (or equivalent).<sup>5</sup>

The Providence Public School District serves over 6,000 high school students, 92 percent of whom qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. The student population is predominantly Latino (approximately 60 percent), and 22 percent

African-American, 12 percent white, and 6 percent Asian. Student achievement on the state assessment, the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), is weak in the district, particularly in mathematics; in 2007 at 11th grade, 45 percent of students were at or above grade level in reading, 26 percent in writing, and only 9 percent in math.<sup>6</sup> The district has had three superintendents in the past seven years.

E<sup>3</sup> serves a racially diverse student population: approximately 30 percent are African-American, 3 percent are Asian, 52 percent are Latino, and 14 percent are white. Almost 75 percent of its students are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program. The school does not serve any English language learners. In 2007, E<sup>3</sup> met all state testing targets, failing only to meet the target graduation rate of 75.3 percent. At 73.7 percent, E<sup>3</sup>'s rate was quite close to the target.

**“We all have the same goal – that students be successful at whatever they choose; our hope is that they go to college, but whatever they do, that they be successful.”**

– E<sup>3</sup> Academy teacher

## High Expectations and Student-Centered Learning are at the Heart of the School’s Mission

E<sup>3</sup> Academy’s website states the school’s mission as follows:

*The mission of E<sup>3</sup> Academy is to create a vibrant student-centered community that will eliminate all barriers to learning, thus capitalizing upon the academic, social, and civic potentials of all learners.*

In an interview, E<sup>3</sup>'s principal stated two shared goals: 1) to create post-secondary opportunities and remove barriers to such opportunities by having an underlying belief that all students can learn if barriers are removed, and 2) to have high expectations of students, i.e., to believe that all students can achieve at a high levels if challenged with appropriate academic content.

The principal reported that typically half of 9th-grade students arrive at E<sup>3</sup> several levels below grade level in reading and that the majority come in several levels below their grade level in mathematics.

E<sup>3</sup> Academy differs from other Providence high schools in a number of ways. While it is not a charter school, it does have *site-based status*, which means that the school can opt out of school board policies and can make changes without going through a lengthy district process. This has allowed E<sup>3</sup> to focus on core courses (90-minute blocks each day), and to eliminate most electives so that teachers have the opportunity

to delve deeper into core content areas.

Students also convene four days a week for 30 minutes and once a week for 90 minutes in *advisories*: groups of 18-22 students from the same grade level who meet with the same teacher every day. Like most Providence public high schools, E<sup>3</sup> serves a very poor urban population. Advisories create a smaller community within the school and ensure that each student feels cared for by at least one school staff member. Advisories also provide a space for activities centered around self-awareness and anger management. There is emphasis on building students’ social and emotional competencies. As one school administrator noted, “These kids who come to E<sup>3</sup> are

doing something great by just coming to school each day,” so it is important for them to know that school staff care about them.

E<sup>3</sup> remains subject to the district’s hiring procedures, meaning the

school can only hire from the district pool and is subject to district layoffs. Because many E<sup>3</sup> teachers are relatively new teachers, many have been laid off each spring as the district deals with budgetary issues. Typically these teachers are rehired in time for the start of school in the fall, yet these yearly layoffs affect overall teacher morale. Teachers who have been at E<sup>3</sup> from the outset noted that it takes a couple of years for a new teacher to become accustomed to the E<sup>3</sup> model.

## Diploma Plus Model Informs Educational Program Design

E<sup>3</sup> is a Diploma Plus school, one of ten such schools in New England. Diploma Plus small schools (generally around 250 students) have designed their entire educational program around the Diploma Plus model, which was developed by the Commonwealth Corporation. The model provides a rigorous alternative for at-risk students in urban centers who are poor or for whom English is not their first language.

Administrators believe that all students can achieve at high levels if challenged with appropriate academic content. This is especially true with the Diploma Plus Model in which students must demonstrate proficiency through a digital portfolio of work, which is required to advance to the next grade.

Schools implement all three phases of the program model—the Foundation Phase, the Presentation Phase and the Plus Phase—and all students at the school participate in all phases.<sup>7</sup> The timeline for the

three phases is as follows:

- End of sophomore year: students create a portfolio to advance to the Presentation Phase
- End of junior year: students defend their portfolio to advance to the Plus Phase (The Plus Phase defense committee consists of Plus Phase teachers, administrators, parents, community members, two students, and sometimes a central administration staffer)
- End of senior year: students must present a Senior Defense to graduate

## A Focus on the Future is Prominent Across all Grades

Even before senior year, every 10th- and 11th-grade student at E<sup>3</sup> takes the PSAT (covered by a fee waiver for all students), and every junior is encouraged to take the SAT in spring and again in the fall of senior year. The school holds SAT registration days, and SAT registration is also covered in advisories. In addition, E<sup>3</sup> staff take 9th- and 10th-grade students on a day trip to a local college or university so that they can get a sense of what higher education environments are like and can talk to an admissions representative about the admissions process. The school guidance counselor noted the value of having an admissions representative address the students; she said that while students talk to her about college plans, an admissions representative is “like God” to them.

During the senior year, however, E<sup>3</sup> kicks the college admissions processes into high gear. Students themselves acknowledged that the school “bends over backwards” to get them into college. In the summer before senior year starts, school staff members take students on an overnight trip to eight Mid-Atlantic colleges and on day trips to several New England schools. During the fall of senior year, the school’s guidance counselor walks students through the application process, including working on essays (also addressed in advisories) and filling out financial aid forms. The school hosts a parent’s night to discuss the admissions process and financial aid; many parents are unaware that financial aid is available. One parent noted that the guidance counselor is a fanatic about finding out where E<sup>3</sup> students can go to college for free.

The school offers a College Writing course modeled after a course at a nearby university as well. It’s equivalent to a one-semester writing course. The school also has an advisor from Brown University who helps students with college essays as part of the Cook Foundation Partnership and

the National College Advising Corps. There is also a scholarship essay writing contest.

The guidance counselor noted that she frequently has to go to great lengths to get students into her office to guide them through the admissions process, but that the results are often spread throughout the school. Once one friend tells another, one sibling completes the process successfully, or a parent realizes that there are opportunities for financial aid, word spreads.

E<sup>3</sup> includes college admissions in its morning announcements and there are at least two bulletin boards in the school – one in the entryway, one in the Social Studies classroom – where admissions letters are posted. A teacher noted that these bulletin boards are “a key motivational tool.”

These bulletin boards, along with the other activities mentioned in this section, are part of the social and emotional support and guidance provided to the students by the administrators. These administrators provide a framework in which students can take ownership for the learning and for their social and emotional issues—a key to getting them ready for life after high school.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth Corporation. (n.d.). *Programs and services: Diploma Plus*. Retrieved April 8, 2009 from <http://commcorp.org/diplomaplus/outcomes.html>

<sup>2</sup> Providence Plan. (n.d.). *Economics*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from <http://provplan.org/Matriarch/MultiPiecePage.asp?PageID=57&PageName=InfoDataEconomics>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Profile of selected economic characteristics, Providence city, Rhode Island*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=16000US4459000&-qr\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U\\_DP3&-ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U&-\\_lang=en&-\\_sse=on](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=16000US4459000&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U_DP3&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U&-_lang=en&-_sse=on) <http://local.provplan.org/profiles/ricenprofiles/1604459000.pdf>

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Profile of selected social characteristics, Providence city, Rhode Island*. Retrieved April 8, 2009,

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<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth Corporation. (n.d.). *Programs and services: Diploma Plus*. Retrieved December 23, 2008, from <http://www.commcorp.org/diplomaplus/schools.html>

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# G.W. BRACKENRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

*San Antonio, Texas*

**G.W. BRACKENRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL** is a comprehensive urban public high school that serves more than 1,850 students in San Antonio, Texas. In 2007, the school received the College Board’s Inspiration Award in recognition of improving its academic environment and helping traditionally underserved students achieve equitable access to higher education. That same year, graduating seniors collectively earned \$10 million in scholarships and grant money to apply toward postsecondary expenses. Brackenridge is structured as four “schools within a school” to personalize the learning experience. Incoming 9th-grade students are required to take a Freshman Prep course that focuses on study skills, goal setting, and career exploration. The PSAT/NMSQT® and PLAN tests are administered to students in the 9th and 10th grades. Test data are used to build individual academic plans and to develop a master schedule that reflects an aligned college preparatory curriculum. Students also join one of four career academies to structure their electives around a particular area of interest, cultivate real world experience, and earn professional certification. Ninety percent of students have been identified as economically disadvantaged, and 72 percent as at-risk.<sup>1</sup> Nine out of 10 Brackenridge students are Latino, and 97 percent of all students are from minor-

G.W. Brackenridge High School			
Year Established	1919	Enrollment	1,860
Locale	Large Central City	Asian	0.3%
Economically Disadvantaged	83.2%	African American	6.6%
Attendance Rate	91.7%	Latino	89.5%
ELL Students	6.0%	Native American	0.2%
AP/IB Test Participation	35.9%	White	3.4%

Source: Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2007-08

ity backgrounds. The attendance rate at Brackenridge is 95 percent. The graduation rate is 85.9 percent, and 70 percent of seniors are accepted to colleges and universities.<sup>2</sup> G.W. Brackenridge High School’s success in preparing students for college and the workforce can be attributed to its collective focus on academic behaviors and character building, collaborative partnerships, and comprehensive student support systems.

## State and Local Context

During the 1998-1999 academic year the San Antonio Independent School district initiated a year-long com-

munity study on how to combat high dropout rates and low academic achievement.<sup>3</sup> The study's recommendation was to develop a network of smaller schools within each school, or "Comunidades Pequeñas, Pero Mejores."<sup>4</sup> In 2001, G.W. Brackenridge High School was one of three schools in the district to receive a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education to reorganize into Smaller Learning Communities. At Brackenridge, each of the four communities consists of students across grades 9 through 12, an assigned group of core area teachers, a counselor, an instructional coordinator, and an academic dean. Students are randomly assigned to a community as incoming freshmen, and remain in the same community all four years. Core courses are offered in each Smaller Learning Community; electives are shared across communities. This structure provides more opportunities for students to build stronger and longer-lasting relationships. Teachers are able to monitor students more closely and create tailored support strategies to improve student study skills, time management skills, and self-management. The personalized learning environment has increased students' sense of acceptance and connection to high school, particularly during their freshman and sophomore years. School and district officials continue to evaluate the long-term impact of the Smaller Learning Communities on academic achievement.

Beyond high school, economic and cultural challenges significantly impact Brackenridge students' awareness of and interest in college. The local community's median household income is 40 percent lower than the rest of San Antonio.<sup>5</sup> Fifty-six percent of the local adult population has obtained a high school diploma, while only 7.5 percent of adults have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>6</sup> Since the vast majority of students come from low-income households, many of them work to support themselves and their families. With limited first-hand college experience, economic pressures, and close-knit families, parents or guardians often do not understand the long-term value of college, are intimidated by the cost of higher education, or do not want their children to leave home.



**“We teach our students how to problem solve, convey their thoughts orally and in writing, and truly understand the word ‘collaboration.’ These are the skills they need to be successful in college and the 21st century job market.”**

*– G.W. Brackenridge High School principal*

Administrators, teachers, and staff at G.W. Brackenridge agree that continued outreach on the importance of college readiness and enrollment is needed. The principal urges everyone to focus on opportunities to improve equity and access to higher education rather than the barriers to success.

“Just because you are poor or live with your grandma doesn't mean you shouldn't take AP classes and go to college. It is our duty to help these kids truly understand that they are contributing members of a global society.”

### Students Learn Academic Behaviors and Character Development

Incoming 9th-grade students are required to take a prep course that focuses on study skills, goal setting, career exploration, and character development. Freshman prep teachers at Brackenridge assert that their primary goal is to help students acclimate to high school and build strong relationships so that they will advance to the 10th grade. This is accomplished by providing a structured, goal-orientated learning environment in which students develop and practice new skills, such as keeping a calendar, using planners, taking notes, and developing technology skills. Students also research and develop a personalized ten-year plan to explore education and career aspirations; this plan helps to inform which electives each student will take throughout his or her high school career.<sup>7</sup> To help

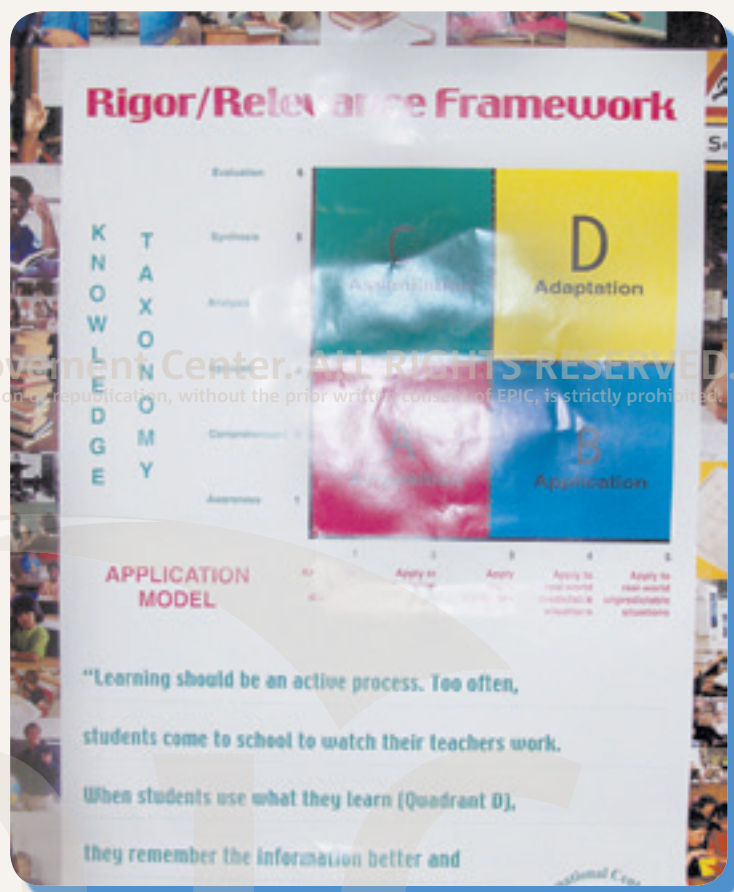
keep track of information and assignments, freshman prep students receive a course syllabus and manual as well as their own binder, to which they add documents on academic behaviors and contextual skills throughout the year, including Cornell note taking worksheets, career survey results, web resources, and SAT information.

Freshman prep students are consistently reminded about the relevance of character development at school and in the workplace; professional development accounts for 20 percent of their final grade. Students are expected to uphold the school's dress code as well as display trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship in the classroom and the community.<sup>8</sup> As the principal explains, "Character education is not at the forefront of every class, but it is embedded in our mission and in our expectations for students. Freshman prep provides a bridge that connects character development to the curriculum. At least at one point during the day, every freshman is going to talk about his or her personal development during the next four years and life after high school." Teaching academic skills and behaviors in combination with character development helps Brackenridge freshmen develop self-monitoring skills, motivates them to succeed, and provides a strong foundation for making good choices in high school and beyond.

## Vertical Partnerships Provide College Experiences

To enhance rigor and relevance, G.W. Brackenridge maintains formal relationships with outside organizations and institutions of higher education. As part of its college preparatory curriculum, Brackenridge offers 18 Advanced Placement courses. Any student can enroll in pre-AP and AP courses, although some underclassmen need to submit recommendations; seniors are admitted unconditionally to most AP courses for which they have fulfilled the appropriate pre-requisites.

The Brackenridge English Department recently collaborated with the University of Texas at Austin as part of the Students Partnering for Undergraduate Rhetoric Success (SPURS) program. In partnership with a lower-division college writing class, 11th-grade AP English Language and Composition students learned about rhetorical theory and analysis and then wrote extended rhetorical analysis and researched argument essays.<sup>9</sup> Their work was peer reviewed by college students, and final drafts were submitted to the university instructor for assessment and additional feedback.<sup>10</sup> Students communicated with their counterparts via email, blogs, and discussions



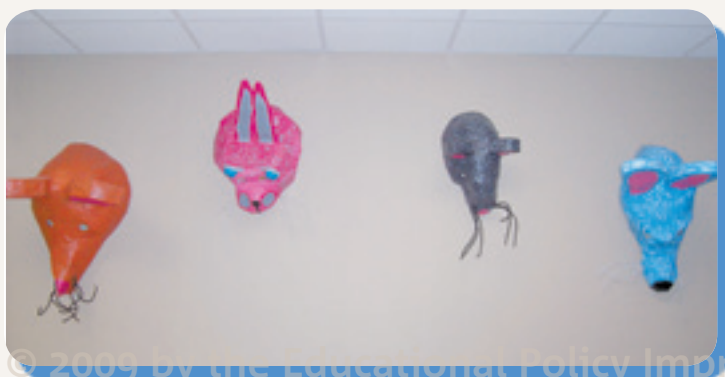
forums, and traveled to University of Texas at Austin for a campus visit.<sup>11</sup> The AP English teacher indicated that the program was very beneficial for students in developing their research and writing skills, and it helped her align the pace and focus of the AP course with its college equivalent.

Chem-Bridge is another collaborative program in which students can earn three hours of college chemistry credit from the University of Texas at Austin while simultaneously earning high school credit for an advanced science course. Brackenridge students use a college-level text to complete assignments, in addition to downloading online lectures and coursework. While most work is conducted online, students also have the opportunity to visit the campus and the College of Natural Science.<sup>12</sup> The success of these programs has sparked discussions on how similar partnerships in other departments would be very helpful in guiding the college preparatory curriculum and giving students direct college experience.

## Workforce Connections Expose Students to Careers

Through their Freshman prep course and individual consultation with guidance counselors, students select elective courses from one of four career academies: Health and Human Services; Business and Market-





ing; Art, Communication, and Media; and Industrial Engineering. The Career and Technical Education (CTE) department houses the majority of electives. The department's goal is to help students connect academic knowledge with advanced skills through real world and on-the-job training. Some of the top programs include computer technology, graphic arts, cosmetology, building trades, and marketing. Cosmetology is one of the most popular programs because students can graduate high school with a diploma and professional cosmetology certification.

Juniors and seniors are encouraged to engage in internships or paid work. The CTE department head facilitates internships with local employers. Each employer must complete a training contract that includes specific learning outcomes based on the position. Students generally work a minimum of 15 hours per week, and the department head conducts site visits to see how each student is doing on the job. These opportunities encourage inquisitiveness about college and career options and cultivate important professional skills such as time management, self-sufficiency, and self-advocacy.

## Guidance Counseling Program and Go Center Support Student Success

The main lobby of Brackenridge is decorated with a chain of acceptance letters from colleges and universities around the country. This symbolizes the pride that the school takes in helping its students succeed in life after high school. In addition to counselors working with students in each smaller learning community, the counseling department produces a variety of college-related materials, including a bulletin that contains information on college visits to campus and scholarship opportunities. The school hosts two college nights each year where students and parents can learn about all aspects of the college application process; letters containing information about these and other events are sent home with students in both English and Spanish. All students receive a comprehensive

college preparation handbook at the beginning of their junior year that contains information and worksheets related to academic performance, postsecondary planning, the workforce, the military, career planning, and financial management. Students are also encouraged to visit the Go Center to research colleges and training programs or complete online applications; a trained technician is available to help students in their college and job search process, and all materials at the center are printed in both English and Spanish. Additional support comes from Project Stay, a nonprofit organization that provides information and resources about college placement and financial aid. A Project Stay representative visits the high school to hold one-on-one consultations with students throughout the school year. The combined effort of students and staff to develop a postsecondary plan is evident through more than \$22 million in scholarships and grants awarded to Brackenridge seniors over the past two years.<sup>13</sup> Through such efforts, an increasing number of students, and their parents, are learning the value of college, as well as developing the practical skills to meet their goals after high school.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> G.W. Brackenridge High School. (2007). *G.W. Brackenridge High School*. San Antonio, TX.

<sup>2</sup> College Board. (2007). *The College Board Recognizes America's Most Improved High Schools*. Retrieved November 30, 2007, from <http://www.collegeboard.com/press/releases/155799.html>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *SLC school information: Details and narrative profile for Brackenridge High School*. Retrieved November 30, 2007, from <http://slcprogram.ed.gov/cgi-bin/mysql/slcawards.cgi?!=showschool&sr=351>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.) *Zip Code Tabulation Area 78210*. Retrieved September 1, 2008, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2000). *Zip Code Tabulation Area 78210*. Retrieved September 1, 2008, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>7</sup> Brackenridge High School. (2007). *Freshman Skills for High School Success Student Manual and Course Syllabus*. San Antonio, TX.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Students Partnering for Undergraduate Rhetoric Success. (2006). *Bridging the Gap from High School to College*. Retrieved August 28, 2008, from <http://www.utexas.edu/vp/csr/ocr/SPURS/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Texas High School Project. (n.d.). *ChemBridge – University of Texas, Austin*. Retrieved September 1, 2008, from <http://www.thsp.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=274785&pageId=735661>

<sup>13</sup> College Board. (2007). *The College Board recognizes America's most improved high schools*. Retrieved November 30, 2007, from <http://www.collegeboard.com/press/releases/155799.html>

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Linda Marsh, *Principal*  
Marina Groenewald and Katie Cadigan, *EPIC Staff Members*



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# GEORGE WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

*Denver, Colorado*

**GEORGE WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL** is an urban comprehensive high school in Denver, Colorado, known for its highly ranked International Baccalaureate (IB) Program<sup>1</sup> and for making *Newsweek's* list of top 100 high schools in 2003, 2004, and 2005.<sup>2</sup> Seventy-two percent of the more than 1,600 students who attend George Washington are from minority backgrounds, and 47 percent of the student body qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The graduation rate is 87 percent, and approximately 33 percent of the students attending George Washington are enrolled in the IB Program or participate in one or more of the 10 available Advanced Placement courses. This school's success at preparing students for college can be attributed to innovative professional development and teacher collaboration practices, supplemental academic programs, and a focus on building students' contextual skills and awareness.

## State and Local Context

George Washington High School is located within the Denver Public Schools (DPS) school district, which serves a student

George Washington High School			
Year Established	1960	Enrollment	1,614
Locale	Large Central City	Asian	4.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	47.0%	African American	46.0%
Attendance Rate	95.0%	Latino	21.0%
ELL Students	3.0%	Native American	0.3%
AP Participation	8.6%	White	28.0%
IB Participation	24.8%		

Source: Self-reported data, 2006-07 school year

population of more than 73,000.<sup>3</sup> Based on local demographic statistics, minority student groups are overrepresented in the DPS district. While approximately 70 percent Denver residents are white, in contrast nearly 80 percent of the students enrolled in DPS are from minority backgrounds. Additionally, 65 percent of DPS students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 20 percent of enrolled students are identified as English Language Learners.<sup>5</sup>

Consistent with the Colorado Department of Education’s systemic assessment requirements, freshmen and sophomores at George Washington take the appropriate grade level state assessment.<sup>6</sup> However, teachers at George Washington expressed concern over the reality that the sophomore state assessment covers standards that students often do not learn until their junior and senior years in high school. Although there is an expressed lack of alignment between what is taught and what is tested on the sophomore state assessment, the Colorado Department of Education began a process of reviewing and revising the K-12 academic content standards in order to establish their alignment with 21st century skills and college and career readiness in early 2008.

### Innovative Professional Development and Collaboration Practices Improve Instruction and Student Performance

At George Washington High School, there is an overarching focus on improving instruction and student performance through teacher and administrator professional development and collaboration practices. The foundation for these practices is an established Professional Learning Community, which provides an opportunity for all George Washington teachers and administrators to meet every Thursday morning to discuss issues related to instruction and student achievement. During Professional Learning Community meetings, teachers and staff review progress and issues related to the following three professional development and teacher collaboration practices: 1) data teams, 2) learning walks, and 3) peer visitations.

Data teams include three to four people who teach similar subjects, and these teams meet for two hours each month. The purpose of the teams is to look at George Washington student performance data and student work samples in order to innovatively address areas for student performance and teacher instructional improvement. In addition to data teams, all teachers and administrators participate in learning walks. This professional development and collaboration practice involves having two to five teachers and one administrator visit George Washington classrooms on a rotating monthly schedule. The purpose of a learning walk is to observe instructional practices and then improve those practices based on feedback received and dialogue exchanged during the Professional Learning Commu-



nity meetings. Furthermore, all teachers are expected to complete a peer visitation once a month. Peer visitations involve observing another teacher’s classroom and providing that teacher with feedback on his or her instructional practice.

### Supplemental Academic Programs Help Students Achieve Success

When students are unable to successfully complete required coursework, and are therefore unable to obtain the requisite credits necessary for graduation, George Washington High School provides students with an after school credit make-up program. DPS provides the funding resources to operate the program on school grounds. Although students pay a fee upfront in order to participate in the after school credit make-up program, this fee is returned to students upon successful completion of the requisite credits. Teachers and administrators at George Washington have found that the fee deposit provides an incentive for students to attend the program after school and complete the necessary work.

This program has helped students meet graduation requirements in this nontraditional format in part because the program is standards-based. At the beginning of the program students take a pre-test, which provides teachers with diagnostic feedback that allows for targeted individual instruction. This means that students must demonstrate attained proficiency in a specified set of relevant subject standards, rather than complete a specific number of assignments.

In addition to the after school credit make-up program, George Washington also operates a writing lab. The writing lab is directed and staffed by a former English teacher, who is paid out of special funds.

**“All students are supposed to take a curriculum that is aligned with admission to a four-year college.”**

*– George Washington counselor*

The writing lab is available to all George Washington students, and both teachers and guidance counselors send students to the writing lab for assistance with academic coursework and college application essays.

## Students Benefit from Notable International Baccalaureate Program

In 1985, George Washington became the first high school in the state of Colorado to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma program,<sup>7</sup> and currently George Washington's IB program is the highest ranked IB program in the state.<sup>8</sup> There are 425 students enrolled in the IB program at George Washington, and the program maintains a 90 percent diploma rate.<sup>9</sup> To be accepted into the program students must engage in a rigorous application process, which requires that students participate in an interview and provide letters of recommendation from their former teachers.<sup>10</sup> The IB program has external support from parents of enrolled students, and this helped the program secure a full-time college guidance counselor designated to work specifically with IB students. As a service to the wider student population at George Washington, the IB counselor opens his college information meetings to all interested students and parents.

## Programs Build Contextual Skills and Awareness

George Washington High School offers two specific programs and engages in two school-wide practices that are designed to assist students in developing their contextual skills and awareness. First, through funding provided by the Denver Scholarship Fund, the school has created the Future Center. The Future Center has a location at the school, and it provides students with a full-time college guidance counselor and access to resources that help students learn about various postsecondary opportunities and complete college application essays. The principal believes that the Future Center sends a message to the school community that preparing students for college and life after high school are the most important elements of George Washington's mission.

In addition to The Future Center, George Washington has two Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) courses, and approximately 50-60 students are enrolled. This program has helped the school community learn about what is necessary for student success in the college environment. The AVID courses have been so successful at preparing students for college that the administration is working to implement AVID principles school-wide.

Although The Future Center and the AVID courses have been instrumental in helping prepare students for a successful transition into postsecondary opportunities, George Washington engages in two school-wide practices that are also important in building contextual skills and awareness. First, the guidance counselors at George Washington have a practice of visiting freshmen classrooms in order to provide students with information about what they will need to do during high school in order to be ready for college. Counselors indicate that they focus specifically on helping students understand the importance of taking responsibility for themselves.

In addition to helping students develop contextual skills and awareness, George Washington counselors strive to help parents develop their understanding in this area as well. In part, the counselors accomplish this by utilizing an automatic phone messaging system that lets parents know when college information materials have been sent home with students. It is clear that George Washington counselors have a commitment to helping both students and their families develop their contextual skills and awareness.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> George Washington High School. (n.d.). *GWHS summary*. Retrieved May 16, 2008, from <http://gwhs.dpsk12.org/about.php?id=2>

<sup>2</sup> George Washington High School. (n.d.). *History of GW*. Retrieved May 16, 2008, from <http://gwhs.dpsk12.org/about.php>

<sup>3</sup> Denver Public Schools. (n.d.). *Facts and figures*. Retrieved May 16, 2008, from <http://www.dpsk12.org/aboutdps/facts/>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2005-07). *Denver city, Colorado fact sheet*. Retrieved May 16, 2008 from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>5</sup> Denver Public Schools. (n.d.). *Facts and figures*. Retrieved May 16, 2008, from <http://www.dpsk12.org/aboutdps/facts/>

<sup>6</sup> Colorado Department of Education. (n.d.). *CSAP assessment frameworks*. Retrieved June 4, 2008, from [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/csap/csap\\_frameworks.html](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/documents/csap/csap_frameworks.html)

<sup>7</sup> George Washington High School International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. (n.d.). *Program background*. Retrieved May 16, 2008 from [http://www.georgeib.com/ib\\_background.html](http://www.georgeib.com/ib_background.html)

<sup>8</sup> George Washington High School. (n.d.). *GWHS summary*. Retrieved May 16, 2008, from <http://gwhs.dpsk12.org/about.php?id=2>

<sup>9</sup> George Washington High School International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. (n.d.). *Program background*. Retrieved May 16, 2008 from [http://www.georgeib.com/ib\\_bacground.html](http://www.georgeib.com/ib_bacground.html)

<sup>10</sup> George Washington High School International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. (n.d.). *Apply to joins GW's IB program*. Retrieved May 16, 2008, from [http://www.georgeib.com/ib\\_apply.html](http://www.georgeib.com/ib_apply.html)

## Special Thanks

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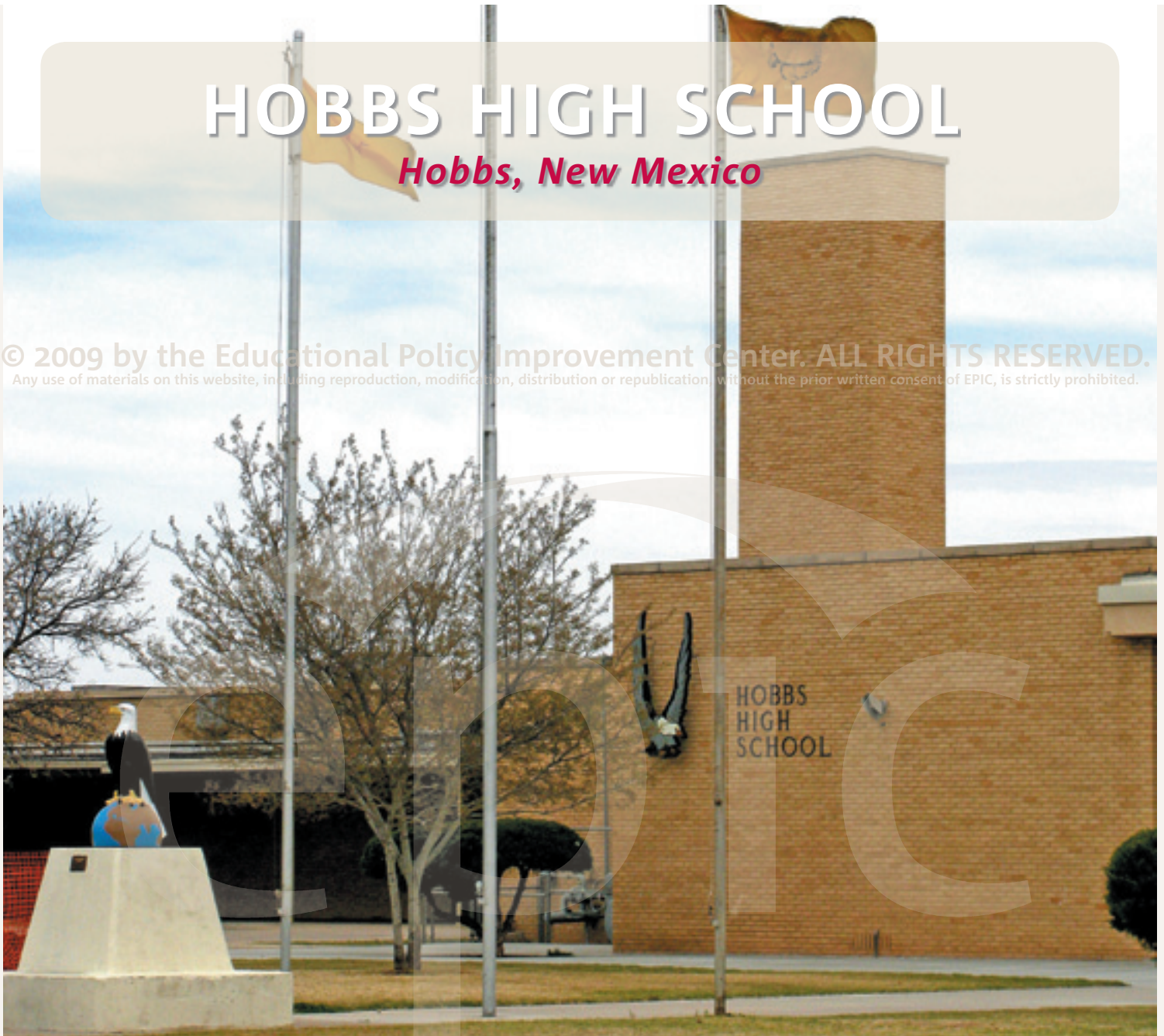
Steve Goldstein, *Principal*  
Jennifer Woolf, *Assistant Principal*

Kathryn Rooney and Carla Bowers, *EPIC Staff Members*

# HOBBS HIGH SCHOOL

*Hobbs, New Mexico*

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**HOBBS HIGH SCHOOL** is a comprehensive high school in Hobbs, New Mexico, known for its open AP program for receiving the College Board’s 2006 Inspiration Award,<sup>1</sup> and for making *Newsweek’s* list of top high schools in 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008.<sup>2</sup> Hobbs High School served 1,591 students in grades 10 through 12 in 2008, with approximately 62 percent from a minority background and over 40 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. The graduation rate for Hobbs in 2007 was 91.3 percent. Approximately 66 percent of the students were enrolled in AP classes during the 2007-08 school year. This school’s success at preparing students for college can be attributed to having a notable AP program, a counseling program geared toward college knowledge, the accessibility of dual enrollment opportunities, and a school culture

Hobbs High School			
Year Established	1933	Enrollment	1,591
Locale	Large Town	Asian	0.9%
Free/Reduced Meals	42.0%	African American	8.0%
Attendance Rate	90.0%	Latino	52.0%
ELL Students	11.3%	Native American	1.3%
AP Participation	66.0%	White	37.8%

Source: Self-report data for 2006-2007

centered around potential for achievement.



## State and Local Context

Hobbs, New Mexico, has a population of 28,657 and has been referred to as the oil capital of New Mexico.<sup>3</sup> Of the Hobbs population, only 12.6 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher (the national average is 27 percent).<sup>4</sup> About 13 percent of Hobbs families currently live below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup> Due to economic decline related to the oil and gas industry in the 1980s and 1990s, median household income has decreased substantially. This downturn changed the demographics in Hobbs, resulting in a greater proportion of immigrants and economically disadvantaged students than in previous years.<sup>6</sup>

Hobbs Municipal School District serves 7,661 students and consists of 20 total schools with two junior highs, one freshmen-only campus, one traditional high school, and one alternative school. There are 471.6 classroom teachers (FTE), with a student/teacher ratio of 16.2. In the district there are over 1,626 English Language Learner (ELL) students, which is 21 percent of the overall student population.<sup>7</sup> The district believes in preparing students for AP prior to high school and mandates pre-AP courses in junior high schools.

The state of New Mexico has been very proactive in recent years with efforts to improve

the educational system in multiple areas. Recently, New Mexico's High School Redesign (2007) increased graduation requirements and alignment between K-12 and higher education through taskforce initiatives. During the 2006-2007 school year, New Mexico had over 60,000 students in ELL programs statewide and invested \$49 million in state and federal funds for bilingual, ELL, and immigrant programs.<sup>8</sup>

The New Mexico Lottery has a very unique proposition for students attending college through the Lottery Success Scholarship: tuition is covered for students who attend college at an eligible New Mexico postsecondary school, provided they maintain at least a 2.5 GPA and stay enrolled full-time.<sup>9</sup> The scholarship is only available to those who have graduated from a New Mexico public or private school or have obtained a New Mexico GED. The scholarship can be renewed for eight consecutive semesters following the first semester of enrollment.<sup>10</sup> Since 1996, over 48,000 New Mexico students have taken advantage of the lottery scholarship opportunity.<sup>11</sup>

## Open AP Program is Focused on Building Academic Behaviors and Contextual Skills

Hobbs Municipal School District mandates that junior high schools offer a pre-AP curriculum starting in 7th grade in order to prepare students for high school AP courses. All students are encouraged to take AP classes, even if they are not initially planning on going to college. Teachers and administrators note that the high school does not participate

in any gatekeeping, and students are eligible for AP courses regardless of their prior preparation or participation in pre-AP courses.

Hobbs High School's teaching philosophy is to focus on the students' potential rather than past performance. With a participation rate of 55 percent and 22 courses (as of the 2004-2005 school year), Hobbs has the largest AP program in the state. The College Board credits Hobbs' AP program as the main reason the school received the 2006 Inspiration Award as one of America's Most Improved High Schools. The College Board commended Hobbs for raising the bar by opening AP enrollment to every student.<sup>12</sup> While most high schools allow only certain students to take part in the AP programs offered, Hobbs believes in allowing all interested students to do so.

---

**“We want to make sure that every one of our students is competitive in a global society.”**

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– *Hobbs administrator*



In addition to having open enrollment, school staff members actively encourage AP participation. They personally call parents to recruit students to enroll in AP courses. AP Potential is used to target such recruitment efforts. The school also strongly encourages all students to take an AP course during their junior year. At Hobbs, the honors classes are called pre-AP courses in order to encourage AP enrollment.

Hobbs is structured so that there are department heads and AP lead teachers. The AP leads are responsible for aligning the curriculum vertically and ensuring that classes meet necessary requirements in both the pre-AP courses in junior high and the AP courses offered at the high school level. AP teachers also teach non-AP classes, which helps to ensure that every student benefits from teachers who have received AP training.

The administration at Hobbs is very student-focused and has financial priorities that reflect this sentiment. Students at Hobbs can earn bonus money for taking an AP exam and earning a passing score. For a score of three, four, or five, the student earns \$100, \$200, or \$300, respectively. Students who take multiple AP exams and earn three or more scores of five receive a laptop computer. Teachers and counselors can also receive incentive money. They receive a stipend for teaching AP and will receive bonus money depending on how many students receive a score of three or better on each exam.

### Collaboration Provides Opportunity for Dual Enrollment

In order for students to experience educational oppor-

tunities in a college environment, Hobbs High School has established a collaborative relationship with New Mexico Junior College, a comprehensive state-run community college located approximately five miles from the high school. Through dual enrollment, students are exposed to environmental characteristics exclusive to taking courses on a college campus.

Hobbs students are offered the opportunity to enroll in courses at New Mexico Junior College, with tuition paid by the school district. The dual enrollment opportunity also reflects the administration's financial priorities and student-centered focus. The school pays for textbooks used in dual enrollment courses, and transportation to and from the campus is provided. In order to make the courses as accessible as possible, one group of students is bused out in the morning and another at lunchtime. In the 2007-2008 school year, about 200 students took advantage of the concurrent enrollment courses offered. Students participating in the experience spend about half of the school day at Hobbs High School and the other half at New Mexico Junior College. This opportunity enables students to not only experience college-level courses, but the college campus environment as well.

### Strong Vocational Program Emphasizes Leadership and Professional Skills

Hobbs High School offers 39 vocational courses that provide an opportunity for students to build professional skills in a variety of trades. Students in vocational classes experience both

hands-on and classroom instruction. The construction trades building located on campus contains two classrooms and an impressive space set up for students to gain practical experience in a variety of areas, such as plumbing, masonry, blueprint-making, and welding. Hobbs also has a technology lab where students have the opportunity to engage in 16 different types of technical/lab skills, such as digital photography, vinyl sign making, and embroidery. Critical thinking and problem solving skills are heavily emphasized in the vocational courses, and several modules use math skills in multiple capacities while giving students opportunities to experience real-world application. Advanced level classes are offered at New Mexico Junior College and can be taken for college credit.

The vocational program has strong partnerships with local businesses and community organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and United Way. Students have helped build seven homes for Habitat for Humanity, with the district spending \$18,000 annually on materials for the homes. The relationship with local businesses allows students to gain added experience with hands-on applications of the skills that they have learned. This relationship also allows for fundraising opportunities. A partnership with Home Depot includes a contract for students to complete garage door installations, raising money that benefits the vocational program. The program also raises money by selling storage units that students have built.

## Counseling Program Geared Toward College Knowledge

Counselors provide continuity for students, as they do not rotate each year with each class of students. Instead, counselors stay the same throughout each student's high school experience. The counselors at Hobbs High School refer to each year as having its own particular counseling focus. The 10th-grade year is referred to as being focused on adjustment, 11th grade is focused on assessment and yearly progress reports, and 12th grade is focused on college preparation.

Counselors at Hobbs provide a great deal of information and assistance regarding the college application process, and emphasize the importance of scholarships. Counselors put together a "Counselor's Corner" newsletter that also appears in the local newspaper to help parents stay informed as well. The newsletter gives information regarding upcoming testing, scholarship opportunities, and local college programs. Counselors also provide a list of scholarships and their associated

deadlines and give students a "Scholarship Request Form" to expedite the process.

Counselors also provide a monthly task list to seniors with items such as what to research when looking at colleges, detailed FAFSA information, assessment information, and other related tasks. This especially helps first-generation college-attenders and those who have not been exposed to the college culture to understand how things work regarding applying and preparing for college. In addition to monthly task lists, the counseling department publishes a senior year calendar that provides a monthly guide to events, pertinent websites, and task information all on a practical one-page document. The calendar is very user-friendly and helps students organize their year upfront with as much information ahead of time as possible.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> College Board. (2006, April 27).

*The College Board recognizes America's most improved high schools 2006 Inspiration Awards honors schools in New Mexico, Texas, and Virginia.* Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.collegeboard.com/press/releases/51560.html>

<sup>2</sup> Newsweek. (2008). *The top of the class.* Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.newsweek.com/highschools/?q=2008/lunch/1&s=hobbs>

<sup>3</sup> Hobbs Public Library. (n.d.). *Hobbs & Lea County.* Retrieved July 10, 2008, from <http://www.hobbspubliclibrary.org/hobbs.html>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2005-2007). *Hobbs city, New Mexico fact sheet.* Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.factfinder.census.gov>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> College Board. (2006, April 27). *The College Board recognizes America's most improved high schools 2006 Inspiration Awards honors schools in New Mexico, Texas, and Virginia.* Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.collegeboard.com/press/releases/51560.html>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *CCD public school district data for the 2006-2007 school year: Hobbs Municipal Schools.* Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/district-search/>

<sup>8</sup> New Mexico Public Education Department. (2008). *Accomplishments for 2007-2008.* Retrieved

July 7, 2008, from <http://sde.state.nm.us/Sec.of.Ed/DrGarcia.html>

<sup>9</sup> New Mexico Lottery. (n.d.). *Legislative lottery scholarships.* Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.nmlottery.com/scholarships.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <http://fin.hed.state.nm.us/content.asp?CustComKey=194781&CategoryKey=196392&pn=Page&DomName=fin.hed.state.nm.us>

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<sup>12</sup> College Board. (2006, April 27). *The College Board recognizes America's most improved high schools 2006 Inspiration Awards honors schools in New Mexico, Texas, and Virginia.* Retrieved April 9, 2009, from <http://www.collegeboard.com/press/releases/51560.html>

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# JOHN MARSHALL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

*Los Angeles, California*

**JOHN MARSHALL HIGH SCHOOL** is a large public high school located in a residential neighborhood of Los Angeles, California. The building is a historic landmark and the most photographed school in the country, facts that instill John Marshall students with a sense of pride. The school supports an economically and racially diverse student population, and its staff makes a concerted effort to include parents—especially those who are recent immigrants—in the school experience of their children. The school population is roughly comparable to the larger school district, which is 73 percent Latino, 9 percent white, 12 percent African American, 6 percent Asian, and less than 1 percent Native American or Pacific Islander.<sup>2</sup>

John Marshall operates year-round. Students are assigned to different “tracks” depending on their zip codes, and the tracks are staggered so that only two groups of students attend school at the same time. Certain tracks house specific programs that unite a cohort of students throughout high school. John Marshall also offers a very competitive magnet program for gifted and high ability students.<sup>3</sup> Students at John Marshall excel in part because their goals are identified and supported both socially and academically, they experience significant levels of contextual exposure to college life, and because teachers conduct classes with a strong emphasis on key cognitive strategies, enhancing their opportunities for post-graduation success. These qualities made John Marshall a 2005 College Board Inspiration Award honorable mention school.

John Marshall Senior High School			
Year Established	1931	Asian	7.2%
Locale	Large Central City	African American	2.2%
Free/Reduced Meals	73%	Filipino	9.3%
Attendance Rate <sup>1</sup>	88%	Latino	68.1%
ELL Students	24%	Native American	0.2%
AP Participation	7.2%	White	11.6%
Enrollment	4,414	Multiple or No Response	1.2%

Source: California Dept. of Education 2007-08 Accountability Progress Report

## State and Local Context

John Marshall High School serves approximately 4000 students<sup>4</sup> within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).<sup>5</sup> The neighborhood surrounding the building is distinct from many urban high schools in Los Angeles, and staff report that the student body has fewer behavioral issues as a result of the more residential setting, as well as the prestige of attending classes in a famous historic landmark. School officials note that many of their Latino students are among the first or second generation of their families to live in the U.S., and this poses unique challenges when trying to engage their parents. It

also means that 21 percent of the district's high school population consists of English Language Learners,<sup>6</sup> adding an additional dimension to the school's emphasis on literacy and writing.

The LAUSD served almost 700,000 students and employed over 33,000 certified teachers in 2007-2008. Its jurisdiction includes 61 high schools, and 181 schools in the district operate year-round.<sup>7</sup> Graduation rates at John Marshall tend to be comparable or slightly higher than the district rates, hovering around 70 percent.<sup>8,9</sup> As of 2006, all California high school students were required to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) and take a minimum number of courses in required subjects.<sup>10</sup> The number of courses fluctuates depending on whether students are working toward graduation only or toward entrance into the University of California (UC) system, a goal that necessitates completion of a set of requirements called the "A-G" subjects. A-G subjects are 15 year-long subjects, seven of which students need to take for at least two years each.<sup>11</sup> LAUSD is moving toward mandating that all incoming students meet UC entrance requirements beginning in 2012, both in terms of test scores and A-G subjects.

## School Provides Individualized Support Based on Student Skills, Goals, and Needs

Students at John Marshall High School develop close relationships with their counselors from the time they enter 9th grade. All students in the school district formulate a graduation plan in middle school, and this plan is revisited upon high school entrance so that every youth is very clear about what it will take to not only graduate, but to prepare for post-graduate life and meet his or her career goals. In 10th grade, counselors meet with all students and their parents to do a mid-high school assessment and review of their plans to ensure young people are staying on track and meeting their goals, and to adjust the plan to accommodate new goals and interests. Counselors attempt to meet with all parents at least once a year, and some even do outreach into the community to reach parents who do not actively engage the school.

John Marshall freshmen receive day planners when they begin school, and they are also required to



take a Life Skills class that provides them with mentors and assistance in developing academic behaviors. Mentors often maintain contact after the Life Skills class is over and provide role modeling as well as peer support to newer students as they move through their high school experience. Certain John Marshall students are part of a cohort that participates in the GEAR UP program, a federally-funded opportunity for students to

**"I think kids really appreciate it when teachers set the bar high and challenge them because they know the teachers are invested in them. It's amazing when you put the bar up there how many students reach it."**

*— John Marshall Senior High School teacher*

maintain a relationship with a single counselor from middle school all the way through high school, gaining extra assistance through social support and therapy, parental consultation, and guidance with college entrance procedures.

These varying types of personal connections with concerned adults or older youth benefit young people who might otherwise lack the confidence or contextual abilities to navigate a very large high school, or to pursue college after graduation.

## College Preparation is Part of School Culture

In order to graduate, John Marshall students are strongly encouraged to meet the minimum requirements for admittance into the UC system. This goal dovetails with many other mechanisms the school already has in place for building college preparedness into every student's experience. For example, every John Marshall student takes the PSAT during their freshman, sophomore, and junior years to prepare them for the SAT and to prompt them to begin thinking about college. The

school offers visitation field trips (day and weekend) to local universities, hosts college representatives from across the nation, and provides access to an advisor who specializes in helping complete FAFSA forms, obtaining transcripts, procuring letters of recommendation, and writing entrance essays.

John Marshall maintains a close working relationship with the local UC schools and leans on those institutions to help develop contextual “college knowledge” in its student population. A group from UCLA comes in on a weekly basis to support and tutor students interested in going to UCLA and other colleges. Workshops focus on college admissions and requirements, standardized testing issues, and financial planning. Parents are also taught how to read report cards and keep track of how their child is progressing in school. John Marshall is also trying to establish a relationship with LA Community College to develop a program for those who want to earn transferable credits. All programs are free and available to all students.

### Small Learning Communities Provide Cross-Contextual Education

Parents, young people, and teachers all note that students who attend John Marshall High School are generally held to very high standards in every area of their high school lives, regardless of which track they pursue. One challenging option students can choose is belonging to a Small Learning Community (SLC), an interdisciplinary program offered in ten different subjects ranging from environmental studies to social justice to technology and design. In an SLC, teachers who typically teach different subjects collaborate on lesson plans to offer an education that spans disciplines and conceptual levels, approaching the subject matter from a variety of angles and providing students with a more holistic and thought-provoking educational experience. John Marshall has developed this model over the last 12 years, and SLCs have recently been implemented throughout the Los Angeles Unified School District. Teachers note that SLCs help students improve verbal communication, writing, and confidence, and provide contextual knowledge at a level of sophistication that more traditional learning environments fail to provide.

### AP Classes Available and Encouraged

John Marshall High School ranks third in the country for number of AP tests administered. AP teachers focus an enormous amount of energy into building the skills students need to read, comprehend, and communicate in an essay format. By pushing students to read and study at

the higher levels demanded by AP curricula, the John Marshall staff supports young people in developing their critical thinking skills and intellectual inquisitiveness. Any student can enroll in an AP class at John Marshall, meaning that even if a youth isn’t a traditional “honors” student, he or she can still benefit from this extra degree of rigor and stimulation. John Marshall offers AP tutoring on a year-round basis so all tracks can access the services.

John Marshall High School is unusual on a number of levels, not the least of which is the building itself and its physical surroundings. Although it is a large, urban public high school, the smaller student groupings within the three scheduling tracks of the school provide young people with a stable cohort and access to peer and adult support, maximizing their chances for success. John Marshall keeps college in the forefront of students’ minds, and uses innovative teaching techniques to help its graduates leave with contextual and content knowledge, as well as well-developed key cognitive strategies.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Self reported data from school, March 24, 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Los Angeles Unified School District. (n.d.). *2008-09 enrollment*. Retrieved January 21, 2009, from [http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/bulletins/5\\_yr\\_review.html](http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/bulletins/5_yr_review.html)
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- <sup>11</sup> University of California. (n.d.). *Subject requirements*. Retrieved February 4, 2009, from [http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergrad\\_adm/paths\\_to\\_adm/freshman/subject\\_reqs.html](http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergrad_adm/paths_to_adm/freshman/subject_reqs.html)

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# MARSHALL FUNDAMENTAL SECONDARY SCHOOL

*Pasadena, California*

**MARSHALL FUNDAMENTAL SECONDARY SCHOOL** is a permit school that serves grades six through 12, with a high proportion of underprivileged and minority students. At Marshall Fundamental there were 1,805 students enrolled in the 2007-08 school year. Approximately 65 percent of students were eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch—higher than the average for the district. Marshall Fundamental has a graduation rate of 97 percent. Of the 2008 graduating seniors, 94 percent went on to enroll at a postsecondary institution, with 56 percent going on to attend at four-year college or university, and 38 percent attending a community college.

The school’s comprehensive curriculum emphasizes the teaching of knowledge and skills that students need in order to be successful in postsecondary education. The basic curriculum exceeds the minimum entrance requirements of all major universities and military institutions. Students have the opportunity to get a head start on their future through myriad Advanced Placement classes. Marshall Fundamental offers more Advanced Placement classes than any other secondary school in Pasadena. In addition, nearby Pasadena City College offers concurrent enrollment to students and Advanced Placement courses, which count directly toward college credit.

Rated in the top 4 percent of public high schools nationally, and ranked 113 of the 739 schools billed as the “best high schools in America” (*News-*

Marshall Fundamental Secondary School			
Year Established	1973	Asian	3.1%
Locale	Mid-size Central City	African American	18.2%
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	65.0%	Filipino or Pacific Islander	1.8%
Attendance Rate	97.9%	Latino	56.7%
ELL Students	11.0%	Native American	0.3%
AP/IB Participation	44.0%	White	19.3%
Enrollment	1,805	Multiple or No Response	0.7%

Source: 2007-08 School Accountability Report Card<sup>1</sup>

*week* 2003 Challenge Index), Marshall Fundamental is determined to continue to raise the bar of excellence in education for all of its students.<sup>2</sup> The school was one of three schools in the nation to receive a College Board Inspiration Award in 2003. This prestigious award is given by the College Board in recognition of a school’s success in broadening students’ access to college.

## State and Local Context

Marshall Fundamental is one of five high schools in the Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD), which also includes three middle schools and 24 elementary schools, serving approximately 20,000 students. About

22 percent of district students are English Language Learners.<sup>3</sup> Marshall Fundamental accepts students by application from the entire PUSD attendance area, which includes Pasadena, Altadena, Sierra Madre, and the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County.<sup>4</sup> Since 1973, when it was re-opened as a “fundamental school,” Marshall Fundamental has maintained an unwavering commitment to providing students with a firm, wide-ranging academic foundation on which to build a successful future. Pasadena is located just 15 minutes from downtown Los Angeles at the base of the San Gabriel Mountains. Its population is approximately 54 percent white, 33 percent Latino, and 13 percent African American.<sup>5</sup>

The State of California has both content standards and curriculum frameworks, neither of which is aligned with college readiness standards. Starting with the class of 2006, all public school students have been required to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) to earn a high school diploma.

The CAHSEE is given to all current 10th-grade students. Those who do not pass the exam have opportunities in 11th and 12th grades to retake the

part(s) not passed. The purpose of the CAHSEE is to make sure students who graduate from high school can demonstrate competency in English language arts and mathematics.<sup>6</sup>

### Scaffolded Instruction in Key Content Knowledge and Skill Development Begins Early

There are six levels of courses in grades 6 through 12: intervention, strategic, benchmark, AP Prep, Honors, and AP. In grades 6 through 8, all levels except AP are available to students; beginning in 9th grade, all levels are available. Intervention, which emphasizes problem-solving skills, is the lowest level course that the school offers and is available in English and Algebra in the 6th, 7th, 8th, and for some in the 9th grade. It phases out at 10th grade, as students are generally ready for more rigorous courses. In 10th grade, all levels except intervention and strategic are available. Since Marshall Fundamental enrolls most of their students before 9th grade, most of their students are taking benchmark courses by 9th grade.



Ninth- and 10th-grade students must have a B or better to advance to the next math class. Having students at Marshall Fundamental beginning with their 6th-grade year allows for an integrated approach; there is less of a disconnect between middle school and high school and greater opportunity to get students ready for college. If students arrive at Marshall Fundamental in 6th grade and they are in the lowest level (intervention)

courses, they still have the potential to be part of the AP program because the administration and teachers have more grade levels to help students build their skills and become college ready. Middle school students who are ready to progress are allowed to take high school courses; a number of 8th-grade students take biology and French, for example. There is an AP Prep program in the middle school grades; teachers and administrators can start moving students toward college readiness early in their secondary career.

**“Many students will be first-generation college students, and we have seven years to undo their doubts and fears.”**

*– Marshall Fundamental administrator*

In the ACE program at Marshall Fundamental, students can take an additional class in Architecture and Engineering. The class meets two times per month for six hours for the entire

academic year. At the end of the program, students receive \$1000 toward their college education. Once in the program, students can stay as long as they want. All students who complete this program have been admitted to college and are enrolled in an architecture or engineering program.

### College-Going Culture and Academic Rigor are Accessible to All Students

The administrators have built a culture in which “it’s cool to be into academics.” Administrators and teachers want students to know that everyone can achieve, and that college is an attainable goal. Teachers are expected to contribute to a culture of belonging and to push and challenge the students. This culture holds true across the six levels of instruction offered at the school—hiring the right teachers is an important aspect of maintaining this culture.

Administrative decisions, programming, and practices are designed around the 3 Rs: rigor, relevance, and relationship. Providing stu-

dents with a rigorous academic program is the primary mission of the high school. Relevance refers to the importance of what students are learning for their lives today and their lives after high school. Relationships refer to the relationships students build with teachers, administrators, and counselors.

The AP Program at Marshall Fundamental is unique. It is built around “access and equity” and has a very liberal enrollment policy, dispelling the notion that only the highest achieving students can take these classes. Sixteen AP courses are offered at Marshall Fundamental.<sup>7</sup> The demographics of these classes mirror the demographics of the school as a whole. Of Latinos taking AP, 40 percent took an AP exam other than or in addition to the Spanish language AP exam.

Although Marshall Fundamental has a strong intervention program at the lower academic level and a strong AP program for the higher level, administrators are tackling the issue of how to take care of the middle 40 percent in order to provide them with the tools for success after high school. Teachers work closely with students in AP classes without the traditional AP-level skills or skill building. As AP enrollment has become accessible to more students at Marshall Fundamental; the percentage of students admitted to and enrolling at a UC or CSU institution has increased.

## Community Organizations and Postsecondary Institutions Provide Important Support

Marshall Fundamental has a number of partnerships with local colleges and community organizations that provide additional resources and opportunities to the students. The school partners with Puente (sponsored by the University of California) and Upward Bound (sponsored by Cal State Los Angeles) to help prepare minority students for college. Puente is an academic preparation program that serves a small number of Latino students. The program includes academic counseling, a writing component, and a mentoring program. Within the math component of Upward Bound, students (9th grade and up) can stay for four weeks at Cal State Los Angeles during the summer and take math courses from college professors. This program runs throughout the year as well (with bus transportation provided to the students), and the program has study hall three days each week. Upward Bound has a senior seminar as well, and within the senior seminar, a college professor comes to the high school and goes through the application process with students.

Upward Bound students can receive fee waivers on their college applications.

Pasadena City College (PCC) offers dual enrollment courses at Marshall Fundamental. Through these courses students can earn both high school and college credits. PCC also sponsors the Computer Careers Academy, which prepares students for college and/or careers in computers. This school-within-a-school targets at-risk students, serves grades 10 through 12, and is located on the Marshall Fundamental campus. It is a three-year program for 120 students taught by five teachers. The Academy is a partnership between PCC, the California Department of Education, several private companies, and several governmental workforce and occupational programs. PCC also offers a college preparation class for all students at the high school, taught by college counselors, that focuses on skills and strategies for college success.

In addition, Marshall Fundamental has a partnership with California State University Los Angeles. A student participating in the partnership may earn up to one year of university/college credits in addition to a high school diploma. A component of the partnership is a summer school program on the University campus for Marshall Fundamental students.<sup>8</sup>

The SAT Preparation Program, which operates during the summer, targets minority students and is paid for by a professional women’s organization in the Pasadena community. The fee is \$50 for students, but if students attend all class sessions, they receive a \$25 refund. The program enrolls 35 students each summer.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Marshall Fundamental Secondary School. (2007). *2007-2008 school accountability report card*. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from [www.pusd.us/docs/sarc/0708/en/marshall.pdf](http://www.pusd.us/docs/sarc/0708/en/marshall.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> John Marshall Fundamental Secondary School. (n.d.). *College preparation*. Retrieved August 6, 2008, from [http://www.marshallfundamental.org/college\\_preparation.jsp?rn=4543303](http://www.marshallfundamental.org/college_preparation.jsp?rn=4543303)

<sup>3</sup> Pasadena Unified School District. (n.d.) *2006-07 district profile*. Retrieved August 6, 2008, from [http://www.pusd.us/docs/district\\_profile\\_0607.pdf](http://www.pusd.us/docs/district_profile_0607.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> John Marshall Fundamental Secondary School. (2007). *2007-2008 school accountability report card*. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from [www.pusd.us/docs/sarc/0708/en/marshall.pdf](http://www.pusd.us/docs/sarc/0708/en/marshall.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2005-07). *Pasadena city, California fact sheet*. Retrieved August

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<sup>6</sup> California Department of Education. (n.d.). *CAHSEE program overview*. Retrieved August 6, 2008, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/overview.asp>

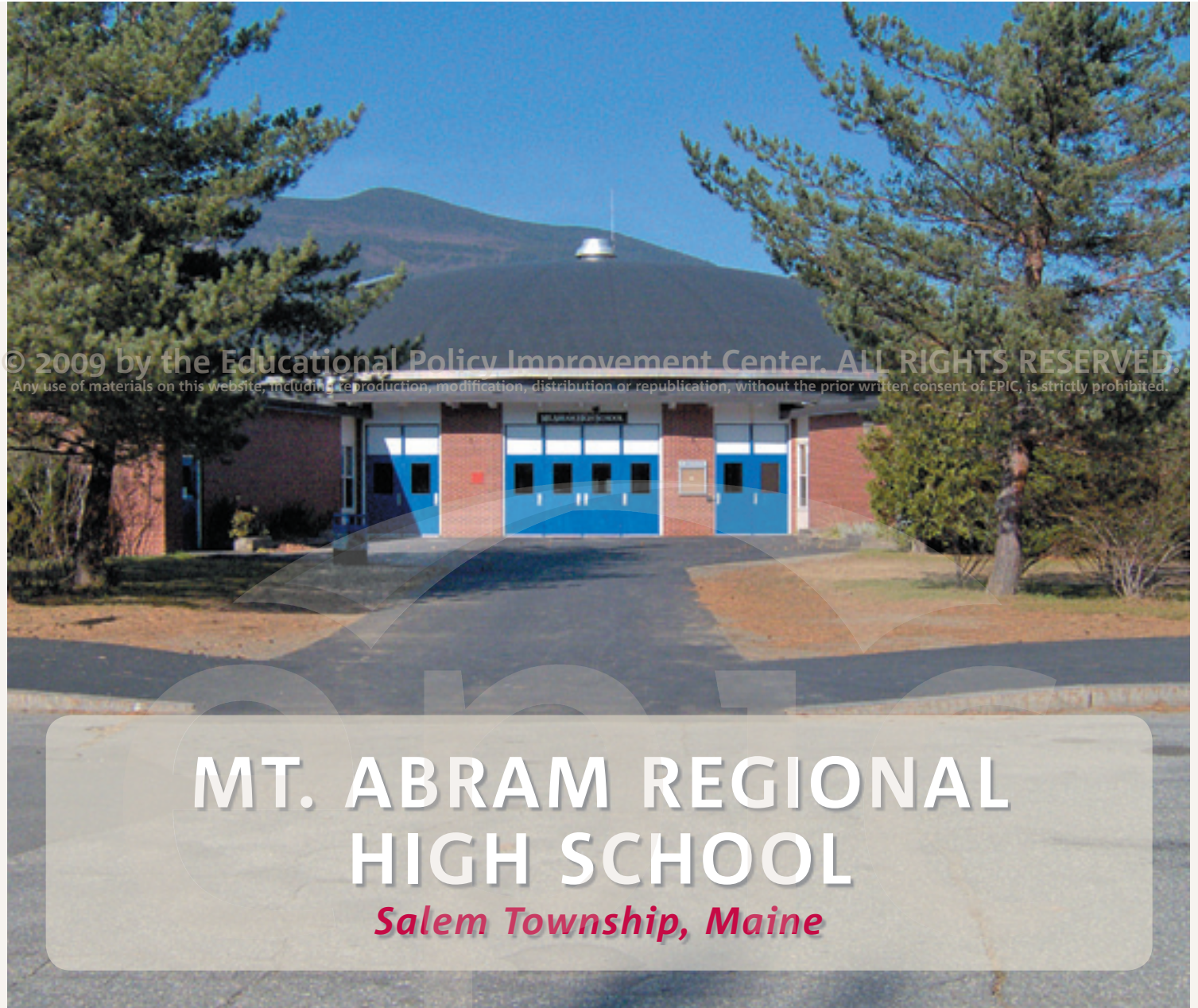
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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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# MT. ABRAM REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

*Salem Township, Maine*

**MT. ABRAM REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL** is a comprehensive high school and community education center located in the rural mountains of western Maine. In 2002 it was one of ten schools across the nation selected to participate in the Great Maine Schools Project, a five-year initiative to create models of excellence for high school education reform.<sup>1</sup> The school's one-to-one program provides all 316 students with personal laptops to develop technology literacy and foster connections to the school and broader community. Student achievement is assessed through universal rubrics aligned with the Maine Learning Results, which students incorporate into research and self-assessment projects throughout their high school careers. All students are required to take the PSAT and SAT in their sophomore and junior years, as well as complete 40 hours of community service by the time they graduate. Ninety-six percent of the Mt. Abram student body is white, and just over half of students receive free or re-

Mt. Abram Regional High School			
Year Established	1969	Enrollment	316
Locale	Rural,* outside CBSA	Asian	0.3%
Free/Reduced Meals	55.1%	African American	0.6%
Attendance Rate	92.0%	Latino	1.0%
ELL Students	0.0%	Native American	1.6%
AP/IB Participation	7.0%	White	96.5%

Source: Self-report data for 2006-2007 \*Rural, but draws students from a large central city. The school maintains an attendance rate of 92 percent, and the overall graduation rate is 94 percent. Approximately 84 percent of the graduating class of 2008

was accepted into either a two-year or four-year institution. The school's success in preparing students for postsecondary education and training can be attributed to personalized learning, technology literacy, participatory assessment, and community outreach regarding college readiness.

## State and Local Context

Mt. Abram Regional High School is the only high school in the Maine School Administrative District 58 and northern Franklin County. It serves a network of 11 towns and unincorporated townships spanning 600 square miles and totaling approximately 5,000 people.<sup>2</sup> The median household income in the area is between \$28,000 and \$30,570, 22 percent below the state household median income.<sup>3</sup> Seventy-four percent of adults in northern Franklin County graduated from high school, and 13 percent have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 86 percent and 23 percent, respectively, across the State of

Maine.<sup>4</sup> The declining logging industry and loss of traditional jobs during the region's transition to a service-based economy have created economic hardship and a need for additional education and job training programs.<sup>5</sup>

Physical distance, the historical absence of a college-going culture, and rising costs of college and job training have been identified as key barriers to pursuing educational opportunities.

Numerous communities across Maine face similar scenarios and barriers. In 1996, the Maine Department of Education established the Commission on Secondary Education to identify strengths and weaknesses in Maine's secondary schools and develop a new strategy to enhance student aspirations and achievement.<sup>6</sup> The outcome of the task force was *Promising Futures: a Call to Improve Learning in Maine's Secondary Schools*, a report that led to the creation of the Great Maine Schools Project (GMSP) in 2002. Administered by the Mitchell Institute and funded through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the initiative provided resources to ten schools over a five-year period to incorporate core practices from *Promising Futures*.<sup>7</sup> As one of the ten schools participating in the project, Mt. Abram has aligned their mission and curriculum around key academic expectations and the Maine Learning Results,

enhanced personalized learning through student support services like the Mountain Time

Advisory program, increased early college (dual enrollment) programs, and incorporated adult educational opportunities on school grounds. Distance learning at Mt. Abram has increased by 370 percent. Twenty-two students are enrolled in at least one of the six Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and students are encouraged to take other AP courses as independent study for additional rigor. Central Maine Community College offers three classes on site. Students and adults also have access to free online and regular courses for credit at the University of Maine-Farmington and the Foster Regional Technical Center. Finally, increased structured internship, apprenticeship, and job shadowing opportunities immerse students in the community and provide them with valuable real-world experience.

Since implementing these changes, acceptance rates to two-year and four-year institutions have risen to above 80 percent the past three out of four years.<sup>8</sup> Parents and community members are taking a greater interest in

college and career readiness courses, activities, and events. The administration and staff at Mt. Abram High School are hopeful that the school will continue to cultivate a district-wide learning community and help students and parents obtain

the skills necessary to succeed in college, training programs, and the workplace.

**"The school gives us a lot of freedom and a sense of personal responsibility for our future. When we do not meet expectations, we learn from it, and we bounce right back up".**

— Mt. Abram Regional High School student

## Student Learning is Personalized

In line with core practices from *Promising Futures*, Mt. Abram Regional High School's mission and curriculum focus on personalized student learning. This involves providing students and parents with clearly stated learning standards, providing learner-centered classroom instruction, making flexible decisions around individual learners, and engaging students through a personal learning plan.<sup>9</sup> Each student at Mt. Abram starts his or her personal learning plan (PLP) at the beginning of 9th grade and develops its content over four years. The purpose of the plan is to help students set and modify goals based on future aspirations and collect evidence that demonstrates how their goals are being achieved. PLPs are reviewed each fall during student-led conferences when students reflect on and assess what they've learned as well as discuss academic goals and needs with teachers, advisors, and parents. They also present a standards-based career/life portfolio that integrates technology, showcases academic and personal achievements, and, by the time students reach their



senior year, outlines a specific postsecondary plan.<sup>10</sup> The principal personally reviews and responds to every portfolio to support individual students as well as to ensure that academic expectations are being met.

Classroom teachers and Mountain Time Advisors support the PLP process. Teachers help students select appropriate examples of coursework for their portfolios. Each student is assigned to one Mountain Time Advisor to provide continuity across all four years; the school maintains an approximate 16:1 ratio of students to advisors. Advisors are charged with building supportive relationships with students and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning. To this end, they engage in discussions on academic performance and facilitate student progress on PLPs. They also support students in developing study skills, preparing for standardized tests, writing college admission essays, and filling out applications for college and financial aid. Mountain Time is scheduled into the school day as a 30-minute period following the common lunch period. The PLP process and Mountain Time work together to promote personalized learning as well as cultivate important academic behaviors and contextual skills, such as self-monitoring and advocacy, awareness of academic expectations, encouragement to apply to college, and understanding the college application process.

### Technology is an Essential Component of Curriculum and Culture

Now in its fifth year, the one-to-one student laptop program provides every student and teacher at Mt. Abram Regional High School with an Apple iBook laptop. Students and parents attend meetings about the program's rules and regulations and must pay insurance based on a sliding scale if students wish to bring their computers home. As one parent described, "The computers serve as a geographic and economic equalizer." In addition to sending and receiving important news and information via email, students, teachers, and parents have access to PowerSchool and First Class, Internet-based information and communication systems that capture student performance data and facilitate online communication. The school's focus on technology has also fostered proficiency in operating computer hardware and software. A student center, partially staffed by students, and supplementary technology website help everyone troubleshoot and learn new applications.<sup>11</sup> Teachers across departments incorporate email, blogging, and electronic calendars into their classrooms, as well as online resources and word processing, data management, and multimedia applications into student assignments. For example, using NoteStar, teachers and students collaboratively set up



research projects with topics and sub-topics; students then use the program to collect and organize their notes and prepare their bibliography page. Finally, the one-to-one program has opened up numerous opportunities for distance learning, such as online courses, virtual field trips, and video conferencing, all of which were previously considered out of reach. The prevalence of technology across the school connects the community and enables students and adults to develop strong research skills, problem-solving skills, and specialized technical knowledge that will enhance their ability to succeed in college and on the job.

### Participatory Assessment Programs Promote Self-Reflection

At Mt. Abram Regional High School, universal rubrics in writing, speaking, problem solving, and the research process guide assessment of student progress in meeting academic expectations; reading is assessed using a variety of literacy techniques.<sup>12</sup> Additional content area-specific and activity-specific rubrics have been developed at the department level. A variety of assessment tools are used across the school, including traditional tests and quizzes as well as web-based tasks and performance-based assessments, such as the College Board's Accuplacer, which is used to determine student placement in reading and math. Teachers and Mountain Time Advisors review the universal and content area-specific rubrics with students as an essential component of their personal learning plans and student-led conferences. These student-driven activities culminate with the Senior Exit Exhibition, a required yearlong project in which each student demonstrates mastery of academic expectations by tackling an essential question of interest tied to his or her personal goals. In order to graduate, students must design

and follow a specific plan to research, analyze, and develop a written solution to their essential question, which they must present at a community event in the late spring. The exit project synthesizes and evaluates all academic expectations as well as cultivates numerous key cognitive strategies, including problem solving skills, research skills, interpretation skills, presentation skills, and precision skills.

Teachers at Mt. Abram also participate in self-reflective evaluation. Professional Learning Teams (PLT) were introduced as part of the Great Maine Schools Project to promote collaboration and a reflective approach to improving instruction across departments; past projects include conducting research on and discussing differentiation in the classroom and how to improve student literacy across content areas. The school also completes formal evaluations based on district-wide protocol that incorporates state standards. Less formally, the principal performs regular classroom observations using a hand-held device so that data and feedback can be downloaded into the system for immediate discussion with the teacher; more than 630 observations have been conducted in the last ten months using this efficient method, which means Mt. Abram's 26 teachers receive frequent feedback on their teaching and potential areas of improvement. Self-reflective evaluation and assessment across populations reinforces high expectations and elevates the overall quality of teaching and learning to better prepare students for college and life after high school.

## Community Outreach Targets College Readiness

Mt. Abram Regional High School's college counseling staff and administration work to build bridges among students, parents, and community members through comprehensive student support and special events related to postsecondary education opportunities and college readiness. All incoming 9th-grade students attend a summer orientation to learn about Mt. Abram's academic and social expectations and the personal learning plan process. Freshmen also attend a career fair to begin thinking about future goals and aspirations. Students are encouraged to begin visiting colleges in their sophomore year. They must take the PSAT and the SAT during sophomore and junior years. In addition to finalizing their personal learning plan and completing their exit project, seniors are expected to follow a post-secondary plan timeline and complete college application checklists. Approximately 20 students participate in Touch the Future, an elective course that focuses specifically on preparing for life after high

school through completing college applications, visiting schools, filling out the FAFSA, and developing time management skills.

Once a year, the school offers a public workshop titled Transitioning to Life After High School, which includes numerous presentations by staff and alumni on the skills needed to succeed in college, the differences between high school and college, how to manage the college application and financial aid processes, tips on leaving home, and financial management. All students attend this workshop, and all parents are strongly encouraged to attend. In addition, college representatives and local community members visit the school and give presentations to students throughout the school year. The career center organizes and travels to multiple informational meetings every fall in towns throughout the district to inform parents about college and financial aid applications; dinner is served as an extra incentive to attend. The comprehensive college counseling program has proved effective in cultivating a stronger understanding of and approval for higher education throughout the community as well as helping students and parents develop concrete skills to manage the transition from high school to college, training programs, and the work force.

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# ORANGEBURG-WILKINSON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

*Orangeburg, South Carolina*

**ORANGEBURG-WILKINSON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL** is a public high school serving 1,700 students in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Most of the students attending Orangeburg-Wilkinson are African American, and the majority of the student body is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In 2007, Orangeburg-Wilkinson had a 75 percent graduation rate, (12 percent higher than the state average)<sup>3</sup> and 82 percent of students passed the High School Assessment Program (HSAP) standardized exam<sup>4</sup> (5 percent higher than the state average for 2007).<sup>5</sup> In 2006, Orangeburg-Wilkinson was a Palmetto Gold-winning school,<sup>6</sup> an award based on the absolute and improvement ratings assigned to a school on its yearly report card.<sup>7</sup> Juniors and seniors at Orangeburg-Wilkinson who wish to pursue their education from an integrated, global perspective can apply to participate in the International Baccalaureate program. In addition, over 300 students are enrolled in honors and Advanced Placement courses covering subjects from chemistry to Spanish.<sup>8</sup> The school also works in concert with the Consolidated School District Five Technology Center, a nearby facility that delivers a curriculum primarily developed around skills related to technology and computer competency.<sup>9</sup>

## Orangeburg-Wilkinson Senior High School

Locale	Small Town	Enrollment	1,757
Attendance Rate <sup>1</sup>	91.4%	Asian	1.3%
Free/Reduced Meals	78.6%	African American	94.4%
AP Participation <sup>2</sup>	10.6%	Latino	0.3%
		White	4.0%

Source: CCD Public school data 2006-07 school year

Orangeburg-Wilkinson High School's success in preparing students for college can be attributed to high levels of parental involvement, an emphasis on proficiency in all state standardized content areas, and a school culture that encourages personal responsibility and achievement.

## State and Local Context

Orangeburg is a small town with a population of approxi-

**“Our strength comes from our unity and how we work together.”**

*– Orangeburg-Wilkinson counselor*

mately 12,500 residents. The town is the county seat for Orangeburg County, which has an African American population of 62 percent.<sup>11</sup> Average household income in Orangeburg is \$18,777 a year<sup>12</sup> and 21 percent of residents countywide live below the poverty line.<sup>13</sup> Orangeburg County encompasses three school districts (numbers three, four, and five), which include a total of eight high schools. In addition, there are four secondary educational institutions in Orangeburg: Claflin University, South Carolina State University, Southern Methodist College (all four-year) and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College (two-year).

All students in South Carolina must pass the HSAP exam in order to graduate. Those who maintain a 3.0 grade point average (or graduate in the top 30 percent of their class), and score above an 1100 on the SAT (or 24 on the ACT) are eligible to receive the LIFE (Legislative Incentives for Future Excellence) Scholarship, a \$5,000 yearly award to students attending college in South Carolina.<sup>14</sup> Orangeburg-Wilkinson, like many other schools in South Carolina, is focused on helping its students achieve the standardized test scores necessary to graduate and to fulfill funding requirements. The positive outcome of this is a high level of transparency in learning expectations; standards are clear and communicated to students across the school. This transparency also standardizes teaching across courses, meaning that student opportunity to learn is more consistent because teachers are teaching the same content.

### Support Programs Maximize Opportunities to Achieve

Administrators at Orangeburg-Wilkinson report that one of their primary strategies for helping youth become invested in school is cultivating an environment where the opportunity to succeed is maximized from day one. South Carolina GEAR UP, for example, is a federally funded program



administered at the state level that promotes academic excellence and college awareness. Orangeburg-Wilkinson recently implemented GEAR UP as a part of the freshman class experience (called Freshman Academy) in order to provide the earliest possible instruction in study skills and goal-setting discussions that include college as a realistic option.<sup>15</sup> In addition to Freshman Academy, a variety of other academic

assistance opportunities are available at Orangeburg-Wilkinson to help facilitate high levels of achievement. Students can participate in in-school or after-school tutoring and mentoring programs, SAT/ACT preparation, and Upward Bound academic instruction projects in a variety of subjects. Those who fail classes have access to credit recovery software (called PLATO) to help them achieve successful outcomes by retaking courses online at their own pace.

Teachers and administrators at Orangeburg-Wilkinson hold their students to high standards of appearance and behavior as a strategy to prompt them to take responsibility for themselves and treat school as a serious mission. These standards are enforced by an attentive staff who provide intensive levels of supervision. Classroom observations by the principal are frequent occurrences, teachers stand outside their doors between classes to discourage loitering, and tardiness is treated as a major offense. Students are required

to dress appropriately for school, including wearing ID badges and tucking in their shirts. The school website even features a “character trait of the month” to encourage students to think about how their behavior impacts the rest of the community.<sup>16</sup> These small adjustments to school culture, administrators report, garner noticeable results in the achievement levels of students, and encourage students to reinforce successful behavior in each other. One alumna of Orangeburg-Wilkinson noted that social pressure to succeed was a primary influence on her experience.

## Teachers Foster Academic Behaviors, Especially Writing

At Orangeburg-Wilkinson, standards for South Carolina schools are visibly displayed in every classroom, and it is not uncommon to use HSAP preparation materials as part of a lesson plan. For example, the academic behaviors taught in an English class might be related to reading comprehension, vocabulary, word usage in sentences, sentence structure, organization, and clarity, all necessary skills for passing the HSAP, as well as for college readiness. Students in a variety of subjects are asked to do in-class writing assignments, summarizing main points of a lecture or a reading, or providing a personal response to a specific topic. Teachers also encourage peer-editing using the HSAP rubric so students can improve their own skills by learning how to constructively critique others and how to take criticism. Alumni reflect that they feel they were well prepared in writing when they left for college.

Academic behaviors are a primary focus in math and science classes as well. Although the curriculum is developed at the district level, teachers have the freedom to decide how they want to instruct, choosing classroom activities that train students in time management, priority setting, note-taking, sound study habits, listening skills, and problem solving. As one teacher noted, “If they can get those, they can get the rest.” Teachers also make every effort to link subject matter to real-world situations, increasing the likelihood that students will be able to apply concepts they learn in class to problems they may encounter in other contexts, either on standardized tests or in day-to-day life.



## Students Have Many Opportunities to do College-Level Work

Ninth-grade students at Orangeburg-Wilkinson discuss college and career goals with their guidance counselors in the fall, and plan four years worth of classes that will maximize their options after graduation. Because there are four colleges in or near the

community of Orangeburg, these plans may include accessing college-level programming while still in high school. Students who earn a B average or higher have dual enrollment opportunities that allow them to pursue subjects beyond those the school can offer (often tuition-free), enhancing their academic knowledge and contextual skills. Local universities like Claflin and South Carolina State also offer professional development programs, such as the Teacher Cadet Partnership that mentors seniors interested in careers related to education, or the Health Careers Opportunities program aimed at 9th-grade students. These programs encourage students to focus on their postsecondary and college readiness goals.

In addition to dual enrollment and professional development options, Orangeburg-Wilkinson offers specialized programming geared toward college preparation: the honors and Advanced Placement programs and the International Baccalaure-





ate (IB) program. Honors classes are taught at a more advanced level than general education classes, emphasizing key cognitive strategies like interpretation and analysis. Orangeburg-Wilkinson currently offers honors classes in English, algebra, geometry, pre-calculus, biology, chemistry, physical science, physics, American government, world history, economics, French, and Spanish. Advanced Placement classes are designed for students who want to study one or two subject areas intensively in preparation for an AP exam. These classes

tend to be small, and availability is subject to student interest.

The IB program is only offered to juniors and seniors at Orangeburg-Wilkinson. Students take classes in each of six core areas of study (two languages, mathematics, experimental sciences, individuals and societies, and arts and electives) as well as a Theory of Knowledge course. They also participate in 150 hours of “creativity, action, and service” activities to diversify their educational experience. Students who wish to enroll in the IB program must take prerequisite classes as early as the 8th grade to prepare them intellectually for the rigors of the classroom experience. The IB program is designed to nurture global perspectives and highly developed critical thinking skills, characteristics that benefit students in a college environment.

Orangeburg-Wilkinson negotiates the needs of a diverse student body. The school has found ways to accommodate students at a variety of academic levels through its use of innovative programming. In addition, students at Orangeburg-Wilkinson are held to high personal and academic standards, taught key academic skills needed for success, and offered opportunities to learn at the college level on and off campus.

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# OWEN VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

*Spencer, Indiana*

**OWEN VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL (OVHS)** is a small, rural high school serving almost 1,000 students in Spencer, Indiana. Ninety-seven percent of students at OVHS are white, and over one-quarter qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. As part of the High Schools That Work network, OVHS has committed to adopting programs and practices that prepare students for further education and as a result, has been identified as a Center for Excellence in secondary education by both High Schools That Work and the U.S. Department of Education. The school has succeeded in holding students to higher curriculum and graduation standards than the state requires. Students are challenged to think about their future through an innovative academy structure that directs their curricular choices toward a specific career path. Projects like the Patriot Expo, a comprehensive senior project, and structured college credit opportunities help students develop strong academic and cognitive skills throughout their high school career.

## State and Local Context

Spencer is in Owen County, a rural area of Indiana. Spencer is approximately 19 miles from Bloomington and 55 miles from Indianapolis. OVHS is the only high school in the entire county (385 square miles), a con-

Owen Valley High School			
Year Established	1970	Enrollment	979
Locale	Rural, Inside CBSA	Asian	0.2%
Free/Reduced Meals	29.6%	African American	0.3%
Attendance Rate	95.4%	Latino	0.4%
ELL Students	0.0%	Native American	0.5%
Dual Enrollment Participation	37.0%	Multiracial	1.1%
		White	97.4%

Source: Self-reported data for 2007-08

solidation of what was formerly three schools. Many students travel long distances to and from school, making after or before school opportunities difficult.

In Spencer, only 9 percent of the population has earned a bachelor's or advanced degree, and most people are employed in private, non-farming occupations, the majority of which

are in manufacturing (25 percent).<sup>1</sup> The largest employers in Spencer are Boston Scientific and the Cook Group, both of which are manufacturers of medical and health care products. Nearby colleges include Indiana University, University of Indianapolis, Purdue University, and Indiana State University, as well as Ivy Tech Community College. Purdue University is 84 miles away. OVHS has developed partnerships with each of these colleges and businesses.

Teachers and administrators acknowledge many challenges in creating a college-going culture including: a high percentage of low-income students, low levels of parent involvement and support, the long distances many students travel to get to school, and a high number of students who must work to support themselves and their families.

## A New American High School that Works

OVHS participates in High Schools That Work, the largest and oldest of the Southern Regional Education Board's school improvement initiatives designed to prepare students for careers and further education by improving curriculum and instruction in high schools and middle grades. The High Schools That Work model advocates a blend of quality vocational-technical studies with traditional college-preparatory studies through whole-school reform.<sup>2</sup> OVHS teachers have identified HSTW as valuable for the professional development opportunities available to teachers during summer programs.

HSTW has consistently identified OVHS over the past several years for its outstanding practices. Among the programs identified as outstanding are the teacher advisor system, dual enrollment program, and freshman academy,<sup>3</sup> as well as a forensics science course.<sup>4</sup> In 2002, OVHS was identified as one of only 59 schools nationally and one of only four HSTW sites to be selected as a New American High School (NAHS) by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education.<sup>5</sup> Based on written applications and exhaustive site visits, NAHS sites are identified as centers of excellence in secondary education.

## "College" Counselors Support Student Success

Students at OVHS work with school counselors on primary



ly one thing: goals for their future. Counselors, and particularly the senior counselor, are major supporters of student success, driving them toward college and career goals. Counselors help students develop a plan, work with them to choose the strongest academy and class schedules that will support their plan, and help them with college and scholarship applications. Student

feedback indicates that counselors are highly effective at getting students to think about college and motivating them to get there.

Counselors disseminate college information a variety of ways including senior seminars, senior

meetings, junior conferences, open houses, newsletters, financial aid nights, and structured days dedicated to community service, college visits, and job shadowing.

## Learning Academies Have a Postsecondary Focus

OVHS structures grades 10 through 12 into four distinct learning academies. Students choose one academy at the end of their freshman year and this choice determines which academic path a student will follow for the

**"She [referring to the senior guidance counselor] won't let you sleep until it's done. She knows everyone, stops students in the hall to check in. She is good at pushing."**

*— Owen Valley High School student*



rest of their high school career.

Freshman students prepare to select an academy through the STARS freshman academy, which assists new students with the transition from middle to high school. As part of this experience, faculty and staff work together to produce a positive, supportive environment within the STARS academy, with the goal of helping more students to succeed in college-prep academic courses in high school and prepare for challenging postsecondary education, careers, and lifelong learning.

The four learning academies are:

- Engineering, Manufacturing, Industrial Technology, Science (EMITS)
- Life Sciences
- Performing Arts, Visual Arts, and Communication (PAVAC)
- Humanities, Education, Law, and Protective Services (HELPS)

Each learning academy allows a student to focus on a specific strand or “major,” which dictates their electives and helps prepare them for a specific postsecondary education and career. Additionally, community support is sought for each academy through businesses and higher education partners that provide internships, guest speakers, real-world experiences, and college credits, as well as further information on career options and requirements.

As part of each learning academy, students are assigned an academy advisor, who stays with him or her throughout their high school career, and meets with them weekly. An advisor’s role is to keep track of grades and help keep students oriented toward specific goals, which include postsecondary education.

## Senior Year is Enriched With Independent Project

*“Recent research has called for more cooperative efforts among students, staff members, parents, and the community, and indicates that we must train students for life-long learning. The Patriot Expo does all that and more. It requires students to begin making their own decisions and treats all students—from remedial to advanced—as capable of achieving something great on their own.”*

– Excerpt from the Patriot Expo Handbook

During a time where many high schools in the country allow seniors to scale back their workloads, OVHS requires that each student complete a senior project, the Patriot Expo, as a requirement for graduation. The Patriot Expo is a five-phase program. Students are required to: 1) submit a proposal, 2) write a research



paper on a topic of their interest, 3) create a product with the help of a mentor, 4) create a portfolio of the entire process, and 5) present a multimedia presentation to a board of teachers and community members for judging.

Administrators and teachers alike feel that the senior project not only reinforces the importance of senior year, but also provides an opportunity to involve parents and the community in the school and in each student’s success. Students express great pride in their individual projects and identify their project mentors as one significant source of information about college. One student noted her mentor had helped her to better understand her career options; many senior projects are focused toward students’ interests and future career paths.

## Community Partnerships Foster Student Success

OVHS utilizes its affiliations with local colleges and universities in many ways that create opportunities for students to learn contextual skills, academic behaviors, and key content knowledge in preparation for college and their career. One example of this is a dual credit program offered to upper classmen in partnership with Ivy Tech Community College. Students can earn up to 15 college credits for free through this offering during their junior and senior years.

OVHS students have access to several dual credit courses through Indiana University. Among the courses available are: 1) elementary composition, 2) literary interpretation, 3) calculus, 4) American history I and II, 5) principles of chemistry, 6) experimental chemistry, and 7) physics.

Most students who take advantage of the dual credit offering are participants of a separate program called Area 30 Career Center, which provides half-day

career and technical education programs for juniors and seniors. These two-year sequenced career and technical education programs are offered as high school electives. Through this program, students have the opportunity to earn college credits while developing higher-level skills and abilities. These career and technical education programs prepare students for careers by teaching core technical proficiencies, employability skills, and job seeking skills, while integrating academic standards. Some examples of the programs offered through Area 30 are:

- 3-D Computer Animation and Visualization
- Allied Health
- Computer Systems Networking
- Culinary Arts
- Education and Early Childhood Careers
- Law Enforcement
- Nursing
- Teacher Education
- Veterinary Technology
- Web Design

## Teachers Maintain High Expectations

A good example of the school's efforts to create an environment that nourishes college and career readiness came through one teacher's support of a student proposal to raise goats. Students identified a large Middle East population in the area and proposed that sales of goat meat could benefit the school's Future Farmers of America (FFA) program.

Encouraged by their teacher, students organized a visit to a current goat farm where they gathered data on costs, then put together a proposal in an effort to secure a grant. Their grant efforts were unsuccessful, so with teacher support, they approached the school board with a business plan and secured a loan.

The goat farm is now integrated into the agricultural science curriculum. Every year, current students in



agriculture classes organize a structure for the farm including production, marketing, purchasing, monitoring, and improvements. Other science classes are involved as well, examining effects on watersheds and soil. Profits from the goat farm are utilized to send FFA students to leadership conferences. The farm expects to make \$3-4,000 per year while the loan is being repaid, and more than \$7,000 after that.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> STATS Indiana. (n.d.). *Owen County in depth profile*. Retrieved April 10, 2009, from <http://www.stats.indiana.edu/profiles/pr18119.html>

<sup>2</sup> Kaufman, Philip, et al. (2000). *'High Schools That Work' and whole school reform: Raising academic achievement of vocational completers through the reform of school practice*.

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*Research in Vocational and Adult Education*. Retrieved March 6, 2009, from <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED438418>

<sup>3</sup> Southern Regional Education Board. (2006). *Raising achievement and graduation rates: Schools pave the way to the future for all students*. Retrieved April 10, 2009, from [http://209.85.173.132/u/SREB?q=cache:Wyn6f\\_w8cuEJ:www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2006Pubs/](http://209.85.173.132/u/SREB?q=cache:Wyn6f_w8cuEJ:www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2006Pubs/)

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Bottoms, Gene. (2002). *Quality career/technical education is the key to success (High Schools That Work)*. Retrieved April 10, 2009, from [http://209.85.173.132/u/SREB?q=cache:V\\_mofhcpevAJ:www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/newsletters/02V02\\_2002UpdateNewsletter.pdf+owen+valley&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=4&gl=us&ie=UTF-8](http://209.85.173.132/u/SREB?q=cache:V_mofhcpevAJ:www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/newsletters/02V02_2002UpdateNewsletter.pdf+owen+valley&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=4&gl=us&ie=UTF-8)

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# SAMMAMISH SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

*Bellevue, Washington*

**SAMMAMISH SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL** is a comprehensive public high school that serves 1,200 students in Bellevue, Washington.<sup>1</sup> The school’s mission is to prepare all students for the rigors of college.<sup>2</sup> This goal is supported by an aligned college preparatory curriculum and a policy that strongly encourages every student to take at least one advanced course before graduating from high school. Opportunities and expectations related to advanced coursework are first introduced before students begin their freshman year, and students who enroll in any of the eighteen Advanced Placement (AP) courses are required to take the AP exam or equivalent. The graduation rate at Sammamish is 91 percent,<sup>3</sup> and approximately 85 percent of graduates matriculate to either a two-year or four-year college or university. Twenty-five percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.<sup>4</sup> Thirty-two percent of students speak a first language other than English, and minority students represent approximately 40 percent of the student body.<sup>5</sup> The school’s success in preparing students for the rigor of college and advanced training can be attributed to its college preparatory curriculum and culture, comprehensive support services, and integrated counseling guidance program.

Sammamish Senior High School			
Year Established	1959	Multi-Ethnic	5.0%
Locale	Mid-size Central City	Asian or Pacific Islander	19.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	25.2%	African American	4.0%
Enrollment	1,030	Latino	12.0%
Transitional Bilingual	9.4%	White	57.0%

Source: 2007-08 data from Bellevue School District and OSPI Washington State Report Card, 2007-08.

## State and Local Context

All schools in the Bellevue School District share the mission to provide each student with a rigorous college preparatory education that includes at least one AP course. To this end, the district began its transition to a standardized curriculum nearly 10 years ago. Under the leadership of the superintendent, the

curriculum development team has worked in partnership with outside experts, district officials, and teachers to design the common K-12 curriculum. This curriculum includes appropriate conceptual knowledge and specific content knowledge at each grade level, and is anchored to AP and International Baccalaureate courses at the high school level to create a default college preparatory track for all students.<sup>6</sup> Periodic assessment of the curriculum is conducted at intervals throughout each semester, and also tied to the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) administered each spring. Curriculum coaches work directly with teachers on an ongoing basis to implement and evaluate the curriculum in their classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to take an active role in making improvements and additions to the curriculum through an online system known as the Curriculum Web.

The district also maintains relationships with the local community and technical colleges through programs such as the Northeast Vocational Area Cooperative (NEVAC), College in the High School, and College Credit and Careers Network, in which students experience college-level course-

work and real world environments while earning dual credit. These specific opportunities, along with the numerous Career and Technical Education courses and the unique Arts Magnet Program at Sammamish, attract

students who seek advanced training or certification as well as those who have competing demands outside of school, a reality for a growing number of students.

Changes in the district's student population reflect broader shifts in the social fabric. Only 10 miles east of Seattle, Bellevue was once considered an affluent suburb, but it has steadily grown into an established city of nearly 120,000 people.<sup>7</sup> Between 2000 and 2006, the general population increased by 10 percent, while the foreign-born and Asian populations grew by 38 percent and 39 percent, respectively.<sup>8</sup> The city's median household income is 58 percent higher than the national median household income, and 60 percent of adults have earned a bachelor's or advanced degree.<sup>9</sup>

Demographic shifts and the transition to a standardized college preparatory curriculum have generated challenges and opportunities for schools throughout the district in terms of providing better support to English Language Learners (ELL) as well as low-income, transfer, and special

education students<sup>10</sup> in order to prepare all students for the rigors of college and life beyond high school.

## Building a College Preparatory Culture is a Shared Responsibility

Building a strong culture around the standardized college preparatory curriculum is a shared responsibility at Sammamish. Since adopting the policy for students to take at least one AP course, registration for AP exams has increased by as much as 60 percent, and approximately 95 percent of students who enroll in an AP course take the AP exam. The remaining five percent is comprised of students who do not complete the AP course and those who opt to take an alternative, district issued test modeled after the AP exam. Although not encouraged since it does not offer the same potential benefits, the mock AP exam remains an option for students with extenuating circumstances or who resist taking the test despite individual consultations with guidance counselors and administrators. To remove financial barriers, the school offers a scholarship program for

students who can't afford the AP exam registration fee; all students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches automatically receive a scholarship.

School administrators estimate that the AP exam policy has a 75 percent overall approval rating with students,

parents, and teachers, and believe it will take up to three years before it is completely integrated into the school culture. Administrators, department heads, guidance counselors, and AP teachers work collaboratively to raise awareness about the ultimate value of a rigorous curriculum: advanced coursework in English, math, science, and history leads to more options in life after high school. Working from this foundation, the expectation and consistent message to students is, "Taking AP courses is what we do here."

This message is reinforced in numerous ways. Administrators regularly meet with struggling students and their parents to discuss what employers and colleges in the 21st century demand and how advanced coursework cultivates such knowledge and skills. During many of these meetings, they provide a graphic of the academic plan so that both students and parents can better understand how AP courses relate to the student's four-year schedule and getting into college. This has proven to be most helpful for parents who did not attend college, as well as the parents of ELL students. School

**"Our curriculum pushes students to become self-sufficient learners who are able to ask and answer tough questions, identify barriers, and seek out support in order to succeed."**

*— Sammamish Senior High School principal*



staff also seek tailored solutions to remove barriers for individual students. The principal described one scenario in which she and an ELL student moved through five different options to keep the student enrolled in a AP history course, including individual tutoring with the assistant principal, additional group work to increase interaction with English-speaking students, a new schedule to accommodate work and school demands, and a school laptop to complete assignments at home. Ultimately the student transferred to the regular history class, but continued to audit the AP course in order to receive the college-level experience. The principal shared this case study with all teachers during a professional development workshop to demonstrate the importance of working with students to identify and reduce roadblocks. As a result, teachers have increased communication with students, and more students check out laptops and calculators over the weekend to complete their work.

While they are resource intensive, such collaborative efforts are steadily building trust, understanding, and support throughout the community. One parent commented, “I was initially hesitant, but now I believe that taking multiple AP courses taught my son to be more comfortable with struggling over coursework and to

seek help—two skills that will enable him to manage even more challenging situations in college and throughout life.”

## Key Cognitive Strategies and Academic Behaviors are Reinforced Across Numerous Content Areas

Supported by the college preparatory core curriculum and emerging culture, teachers at Sammamish understand the school’s mission as well as specific higher-level thinking and college readiness skills. The department chairs meet regularly to review student performance and best practices across content areas; teachers in each department meet to discuss the delivery of the standardized curriculum and how to reduce student barriers in the classroom. Stronger teachers act as mentors in and across departments to better cultivate and maintain a rigorous and consistent environment in all of the core courses.

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) program at Sammamish contains two levels: exploratory and preparatory. Both levels incorporate project-based learning that builds on the standardized core curriculum. Students must document their projects at each stage in the development process using a template. If their projects do not meet industry standards, students must revise and resubmit their work. This approach requires students to incorporate and improve their writing skills, problem solving skills, reasoning skills, and precision skills, and it promotes a deeper understanding of the connection between academic knowledge and the working world. It also cultivates time management skills, presentation skills, and a sense of persistence in students.

Available as a service elective, leadership classes engage students in school government and community improvement projects. Coursework also includes required research papers on social issues such as citizenship and writing a business plan. Students currently enrolled in the course indicate that it compliments their academic work by teaching them to think “philosophically,” cultivate interpersonal skills, and solve difficult real-life problems collaboratively. The AVID program (a college readiness curriculum that focuses on writing, inquiry, collaboration, reading, note taking, and time management skills), also conducts a leadership seminar for students enrolled in the program.

The opportunity to develop and practice key cognitive strategies and academic behaviors in different courses and contexts builds student proficiency and confidence in the skills necessary for college success.

## Comprehensive Support Services Encourage Self-sufficiency and Transparency

To promote self-sufficiency and simulate a college environment, students at Sammamish are encouraged to seek out assistance from a variety of resources. During Tutorial, a 30-minute period four days a week, all teachers are required to be available for consultation. Students can choose how to use this time and whether to ask for assistance, making it similar to office hours on a college campus.

Students who struggle with their coursework are expected to request individual tutoring, join study groups, or participate in Totem Reach, a peer-to-peer workshop in which students receive community service credits for assisting other students with math and science coursework. A teacher has been appointed .50 FTE to direct Totem Reach so that students with specific needs can be strategically matched with appropriate tutors.

Students, parents, and district staff also have access to the Curriculum Web, a comprehensive online portal that supplements and enhances the standardized curriculum. This virtual center enables teachers to share information, suggest best practices, and provide feedback on the common lesson plans in each content area and grade level. Students and parents are able to stay connected by viewing the curriculum, grades, and important news and resources. Teachers, administrators, and curriculum coaches can analyze student and school data in real time through the District Data Analyzer and respond appropriately. This technology promotes transparency and proactive conversations about course content, assessment, student support services, and professional development. While specific modules are currently being used across the district, the Curriculum Web will be fully launched during the 2008-2009 academic year.<sup>11</sup>

## College and Guidance Counseling are Integrated

The four guidance counselors and support staff at Sammamish Senior High School play a key role in helping students understand college readiness, develop an academic plan, prepare and register for the PSAT/SAT and AP exams, research career options, and apply to colleges or technical schools. As part of the district-wide counseling guidance curriculum, students are first introduced to the concept of college readiness in the 8th grade when counselors visit feeder middle schools each spring. Once enrolled, all freshmen participate in orientation during fall

semester, which includes study strategies like using a school-issued planner as well as information on available resources (e.g., how to set appointments with the counselors).

Generally, counselors recommend that most students start taking AP courses their sophomore year. Tenth-grade students also receive a complete assessment of their academic performance as they begin to create their academic and college plan. Juniors and seniors receive additional resources and are required to meet with counselors in small groups to ensure they are completing the curriculum and achieving their goals.

In addition to individual guidance counseling, the counseling staff collaborate with teachers to ensure students are registering for AP exams and other standardized tests. They also track the development of college application essays and letters of recommendation. Further, the counseling office organizes and participates in numerous school and district-wide college readiness events throughout the year, including a two-day college readiness conference, classroom presentations, parent open houses, financial aid workshops, and college visitations. Translated mailings, materials, and events are produced for ELL students and parents.

The guidance counseling center, centrally located near the main office, offers a comfortable communal space and resources for students, including computers on which to conduct research, and fill out online college and scholarship applications.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bellevue School District. (n.d.). *Sammamish High School*.

Retrieved August 5, 2008, from <http://www.bsd405.org/Default.aspx?tabid=131>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bellevue School District. (2008, July 28). *Bellevue School District general information*.

Retrieved August 7, 2008, from <http://www.bsd405.org/Default.aspx?tabid=52>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Bellevue city, Washington fact sheet*. Retrieved August 6, 2008, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Bellevue School District. (n.d.). *Sammamish High School*.

Retrieved August 5, 2008, from <http://www.bsd405.org/Default.aspx?tabid=131>

<sup>11</sup> Bellevue School District. (2008, August 6). *Curriculum information*. Retrieved August 7, 2008, from <http://www.bsd405.org/Default.aspx?tabid=58>

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# UNIVERSITY PARK CAMPUS SCHOOL

*Worcester, Massachusetts*

**SINCE UNIVERSITY PARK CAMPUS SCHOOL OPENED** in 1997, it has shown that urban students can thrive in a small school with a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, regardless of their previous educational preparation. The school is in the poorest section of Worcester, Massachusetts, with a student body that reflects the surrounding community. Seventy-eight percent of the 231 students receive free or reduced-price lunch, and 64 percent speak English as a second language. The majority of the students are students of color (approximately 68 percent), and among the white students, many are recent arrivals from Eastern Europe learning English. University Park admits students through a lottery that accepts entries from students within a one-mile radius of the campus. When students enter 7th grade at University Park, they are typically significantly behind grade level, but six years later graduate well prepared to succeed in college.

Operating with the same per-pupil budget as other high schools in the district, University Park has earned national recognition for ranking first among urban schools serving low-income students on state-mandated English and math graduation exams, and ranks in the top quartile of all schools in the state overall.<sup>1</sup> Student dropout and mobility rates are nearly zero, as are suspension and expulsion rates. Over 95 percent of graduates have

University Park Campus School			
Year Established	1997	Enrollment	231
Locale	Large Central City	Asian	19.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	77.9%	African American	7.4%
Attendance Rate	95.0%	Latino	40.3%
ELL Students	64.0%	Native American	0.0%
AP Participation	61.0%*	White	32.5%
		Multiracial	0.9%

Source: Self-reported data for Fall 2008. \*Percent of juniors and seniors.

attended college (80 percent going to four-year institutions).<sup>2</sup> University Park's success with a student population with which many other schools have failed can be attributed to its mutually beneficial partnership with neighboring Clark University, a rigorous, data-driven college preparatory curriculum, and a culture of commitment to each student's success at every level.

## State and Local Context

Worcester, located 45 miles west of Boston, is an im-

portant manufacturing, insurance, and transportation center, and is the second-largest city in New England. The total population is estimated at 173,966, is predominantly white (78.5 percent), 9 percent African American, and 17.7 percent Latino. The demographics of students in Worcester Public Schools (WPS) more closely parallel those of the University Park; WPS students are 39 percent white, 16.6 percent African American, 7.9 percent Asian, and 36.4 percent Latino.<sup>3</sup> In 2008, Worcester Public Schools received a moderate AYP performance rating in English/language arts and a low AYP performance rating in mathematics.<sup>4</sup> African American, special education, low income, and Latino student subgroups in the district did not make AYP.

The largest employer in the area is University of Massachusetts Medical School, which is one of 13 colleges and universities in the greater Worcester area. Massachusetts has endeavored to strengthen the connections between higher education and K-12 institutions in the state, as evidenced by the Massachusetts School-to-College Reports. Drawing from a database linking K-12 and higher education statistics, these reports provide data on graduates of Massachusetts public high schools who go on to attend a public college or university in Massachusetts. The first School-to-College Reports were released in 2008, providing information on 2005 high school graduates.

The University Park School-to-College Report indicated that 60 percent of 2005 graduates enrolled in a Massachusetts public college or university; this figure was nearly double the state average. The percentage of University Park students requiring remedial coursework in college was lower than that of the district, most notably in writing, for which only 6 percent of University Park students required a remedial course, compared with the state and district averages of 15 and 19 percent respectively.

### How it All Began: Clark University's Enlightened Self Interest

Clark University, a small private university, has contributed in various ways to reverse the social and economic decline of the areas around its campus. Previous revitalization initiatives focused on the rehabilitation of abandoned and burned out buildings, spurring business development,

and increasing public safety. A 1995 HUD grant for \$2.4 million aimed to reverse the social and economic decline of the neighborhood and provided the funds for creating a neighborhood school with close ties to the university. Donna Rodrigues, a resident of the neighborhood and a veteran teacher in the local district who had recently completed a Master of Education at Harvard, was brought on as the school's planner and principal. Equipped with knowledge of the most recent research on effective schools and almost 30 years experience teaching locally, Rodrigues hired three veteran teachers and set about developing an untracked academic program that would prepare all students for college.

### The Academic Program: Closes the Gaps and Gets Students College Ready in Six Years

University Park Campus School's initial focus is on literacy and getting all students up to grade level, so that they can succeed in the rigorous 9th- through

12th-grade honors class curriculum. Teachers are expected to differentiate their instruction for students at all levels and encourage students to develop the ability to engage in self-directed problem solving. Scaffolded instruction builds on and celebrates

student successes, gradually requiring students to become more independent. The instructional strategies used to scaffold learning are made explicit in the 11th and 12th grades so that students will be able to deliberately employ these strategies at the college level. English Language Learners and special education students are in all the same classes as their peers; the school uses a full immersion model with no pull-out classes.

Group work is particularly emphasized at University Park, which dually functions to maximize student engagement and promote a culture of commitment to everyone's success. Writing and critical reading are also integrated throughout the curriculum, and teachers provide students with multiple opportunities to practice a variety of writing styles and techniques. Daily homework sessions before and after school provide additional opportunities for tutoring.

### Seventh and 8th Grades Bring Students up to Grade Level

Students are usually at least two grade levels behind

**"We'd seen a host of reasons why students with these challenges don't succeed. The expectations inform the curriculum. I'm sick of hearing outside of UPCS that students can't succeed."**

*— UPCS administrator*





when they enter University Park in 7th grade. To address these gaps there is an intense focus on literacy and developing critical thinking skills in the 7th and 8th grades. Regardless of their literacy level, students are asked to show and explain critical thinking and problem solving; students conduct literary analyses using picture books as their texts when necessary. Instruction in higher order thinking skills ensures students develop an intrinsic motivation to learn and study. Teachers also often loop with students in 7th and 8th grade, remaining with the same cohort of students for two years in order to maximize efficiency and personalization in instruction.

### High School Years Focus on College Prep

University Park students are in a rigorous program consisting of all honors classes from 9th grade on. The college preparatory curriculum is vertically aligned with college standards for all grades and subjects. Classes are semester-long and small, usually 22 students at most, and are taught in 90-minute instructional periods. The rigid core curriculum consists of classes in English, math, history, science, and a foreign language for all students, including English Language Learners and Special Education students. Few electives are offered on campus, but many students take additional classes at Clark University, for which the tuition is waived. AP classes are open to all students; it is assumed that the AP instructional level and format is good for all students.

As students approach graduation, the school structure provides assistance in navigating the college application process. Junior and senior seminars focus on the college selection and application process, ensuring that students understand the necessary steps to apply

to college and receive assistance with writing college essays, college and financial aid applications, with teachers closely monitoring the process.

### Senior Year is Modeled After College

The University Park senior year is carefully structured to parallel college. In addition to the semester-long 90-minute courses and seminars, senior classes meet two or three times each week and are larger so as to more closely approximate the college experience. During the senior year, greater weight is assigned to midterms, exams, and papers, and the homework load is heavier. Class syllabi mimic college syllabi, and the pedagogy emphasizes note-taking and self-management. The first cohort of University Park graduates struggled with study skills in college, and the school has since increased its emphasis on teaching study skills, including time management.

### Close Ties with Higher Education Institutions are More than Symbolic

The partnership between University Park and Clark University benefits both institutions in distinct ways. As a result of the relationship with Clark, University Park students feel like a part of the college community early on, which is particularly meaningful to students who will be the first in their families to attend college and have little firsthand knowledge of the college experience to draw from. Clark has not only achieved the initial goal of improving the neighborhood surrounding its campus, but has also benefited from the contributions of University Park teachers and students to the university.

University Park students enjoy several tangible and immediate benefits as a result of the school's association with Clark. The school's physical proximity to the Clark campus affords students with opportunities to use the Clark library, lab, and gymnasium, and to interact with Clark students and faculty. In grades 7 through 10, University Park students participate in mini-seminars with Clark faculty to introduce them to college courses. Students are further connected to Clark in the 10th grade, when each student is assigned an undergraduate mentor to introduce them to college life and expectations.

University Park juniors and seniors have the opportunity to take classes at Clark and earn college credit; about half of them do so each year. Those who do not take classes at Clark audit an entry-level class at Clark for four weeks and are required to visit their professor's office hours to learn how to work with professors.

Each year, four to five Univer-



University Park graduates continue their education at Clark, where they benefit from the free tuition provided to University Park students who qualify for admission. Clark enrolls incoming students from University Park in a required pre-college summer transition program, ACES, which provides targeted support to cohorts of potentially at-risk students from University Park and other schools. Clark also has a designated full-time advisor for University Park students transitioning to Clark.

A particularly important feature of the University Park partnership with Clark is the pipeline that has been created from the Clark's Jacob Hiatt Center for Urban Education. Masters students from the program teach at University Park and are targeted for hiring; the majority of the teachers at University Park studied at Clark. There are very clear expectations of University Park teachers: they are expected to be committed to the college-going mission of the school, passionate about teaching and invested in improving the lives of their students. In short, the expectations are high for teachers, just as they are for students. The relationship with Clark facilitates ongoing mentoring of younger colleagues by veteran teachers and recruitment of teachers who will continue to further the mission of the school.

Several veteran University Park teachers teach classes in Clark's program. University Park teachers can take up to

five classes toward their master's degree in the program tuition-free (this represents half the required coursework for the degree). Clark faculty collaborate with University Park faculty on the school's curriculum team as well.

The benefits to Clark have been substantial as well. Not only has the initial goal of improving the campus neighborhood been achieved (people say that today there is a real sense of community in the neighborhood) but the school has also gained recognition nationally as a leader in university-community partnerships, and is able to increase the diversity of its student population.

### The School Culture: No One is Allowed to Fail

The University Park culture is articulated through four core values: 1) pursuit of excellence, 2) passion for learning, 3) persistence until success, and 4) support for others. The culture is described as one of excitement, engagement, and support. This culture was deliberately crafted and nurtured from the school's inception to ensure alignment between the school's mission and daily procedures. Clear expectations and specific organizational practices foster and maintain the culture that explains much of what makes University Park uniquely successful.

### The Culture is Transparent and Expectations are Clear

University Park's college-bound culture is made clear to students and their parents from the beginning. Prospective students are required to attend information sessions before entering the lottery, where they learn that University Park students can expect to have two hours of homework per night, and that there is zero tolerance for street talk, swearing, fighting, or disrespect. Incoming 7th-grade students are inculcated to the school's norms during the month-long August Academy that introduces students to the school.

### Support Systems Foster Student Leadership

Great effort is invested to make University Park a nurturing environment for all students, many of whom initially struggle with a lack of self-confidence. Stu-

dents feel valued and are included in decision-making, including hiring decisions and development of school policies. For example, the first cohort of University Park developed many of the school's basic norms, such as no bullying or making fun of other students. Student involvement in decision-making is reflective of the non-hierarchical nature of the school's structure and culture. The non-hierarchical structure of the school is further evidenced through the role of teachers in school leadership. Important decisions are made collectively; a recent example is the restructuring of the senior year that involved all teachers.

### Teachers Believe in the Students and the Mission

University Park teachers expect their students to go to college, are emotionally committed to their pupils, and take the time to closely monitor their progress. This translates to going beyond teaching to act as mentors and advisors on academic and personal issues. It is not unusual for teachers to help students and their parents with housing, health care, babysitting, taxes, and the like. Connecting with students and their families in such ways promotes stronger ties between the school and parents and demonstrates to parents that their children are valued, which in turn fosters increased parental involvement.

### Teachers Commit to Continuously Improving as Teachers

Just as students are carefully prepared to be successful college students, teachers are carefully molded to be instructional leaders. Faculty mentoring of student teachers is strong, and as teachers master their practice they become professional developers.

Collaboration among teachers integrates instruction across grades and subjects, and serves as a model to students as well. All teachers continually support one another and strive to improve their instruction. An open-door teacher observation policy is used for both formal and informal observation of classes. Teachers are encouraged to spend their non-teaching time in the back of a colleague's classroom and to both solicit and provide feedback to one another. Classes are also observed more formally in rounds that follow the medical model: teachers convene prior to the class to discuss the day's objectives, observe as a group, and later debrief together. A teacher training binder is maintained with descriptions of strategies teachers can use to meet student goals; this better serves as an example of how professional develop-

ment is embedded in the school.

University Park is vigilant in its use of student data to inform instruction. There is an ongoing formative assessment record kept for each student, and teachers come together each week to collectively analyze student data (state test scores, results from the computer-based added interim assessment system, student work, and alumni data). Teachers analyze student data in the context of the latest education research and make adjustments to instruction accordingly. The school maintains close ties to its alumni; a recent alumni survey netted an 87 percent response rate, and provided valuable data on these students' postsecondary experiences.

University Park provides a powerful example of how all students thrive in a school that is carefully designed to meet students exactly where they are, providing the necessary academic and social supports to foster deep thinking within a carefully focused curriculum. Its partnership with Clark University demonstrates the multifaceted potential for partnerships between high schools and colleges, and how such connections richly benefit both institutions. Finally, the school shows that, while a visionary leader may be the catalyst for change, effective school leadership can be developed internally and successfully sustained over time.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> University Park Campus School. 2007. *The school with a promise*. Academic year residency training, September 16-19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2007. *American FactFinder: Worcester city, Massachusetts*. Retrieved June 15, 2009, from <http://factfinder.census.gov>

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*UPCS school design: Partnership with Clark University*. Retrieved June 11, 2009, from <http://www.upcsinstitute.org/UPCSDesign/University%20Partnership.html>

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# WHEELER HIGH SCHOOL

*Valparaiso, Indiana*



**WHEELER HIGH SCHOOL** serves students in Union Township, a community on the outskirts of Valparaiso, Indiana that features many benefits of rural life while also existing as a satellite community to the metropolis of Chicago, Illinois. The school operates on a trimester schedule, and students attend classes on the “block” system, studying fewer subjects intensively for a shorter period of time rather than many subjects over the course of the entire year. Teachers and residents of rural Valparaiso alike characterize Wheeler High as central to community life in the area. Student activities provided through the school are a primary source of recreation for local young people, and many families are involved in sports and other clubs through their children. Wheeler High enjoys a harmonious school culture with minor behavioral problems and an active, engaged student body. Wheeler High students experience a high level of college preparedness due to the dedication of the teaching staff, a well-developed internship program and other contextual learning opportunities, and a close-knit school culture that values each student and nurtures effective learning.

## State and Local Context

Wheeler High School has a relatively small student population, with approximately

### Wheeler High School

Year Established	1895	Enrollment	565
Locale	Rural, Inside CBSA	Asian	1.8%
Free/Reduced Meals	9.7%	African American	1.1%
Attendance Rate	95.4%	Latino	5.1%
ELL Students	0.0%	Native American	1.1%
AP Participation	9.4%	White	87.3%
		Multiracial	3.7%

Source: Self-report data for 2006-2007

600 young people comprising all four grades. It is part of the Union Township School Corporation, a unified network of four schools (two elementary schools, one middle school, one high school), all operating within the same rural district.<sup>1</sup> Union Township Middle School shares a campus with Wheeler High, and although the buildings are distinct, the two schools share some facilities, such as the gymnasium. Wheeler High’s demographics reflect those of the surrounding area, with a student body composition that is almost 90 percent white, 5 percent Latino, 1 percent African American, and 4 percent multiracial, Asian or Native American.<sup>2</sup>



Less than 10 percent of the student body qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch.<sup>3</sup> Students throughout the corporation perform very well on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP), surpassing the state averages in both English and math every year since 2001.<sup>4</sup> All four schools have also achieved Adequate Yearly Progress goals every year within the same time period.<sup>5</sup> Wheeler High had a graduation rate of 88.6 percent in 2008,<sup>6</sup> and the student attendance rate is consistently 95 percent or above.<sup>7</sup> Test scores in nearby Valparaiso Community Schools are similarly high compared to the state averages, with comparable attendance and graduation rates.<sup>8</sup>

As of 2006, Indiana students could earn four types of diplomas: General, Core 40, Core 40 with Academic Honors, or Core 40 with Technical Honors.<sup>9</sup> Core 40 diplomas are awarded to students who have taken a requisite number of credits (totaling 40) in a variety of subjects determined by the state to maximize educational breadth and college readiness. Beginning with the freshman class of 2007, all students must complete a Core 40 diploma to graduate unless their parents initiate an opt-out procedure that allows their child to graduate with a General diploma instead. Students must also complete a Core 40 diploma in order to attend a four-year state school in Indiana or to receive state financial aid to attend any four-year college.<sup>10</sup>

**“Wheeler is very good at providing opportunities to students. Kids feel at ease here because this is the community.”**

*– Wheeler High School parent*

## Teaching Staff Exhibits Dedication and Innovation

Parents of Wheeler High School students report that the dedication of the teaching staff is a key component to the school’s success. Teachers make themselves available to students during non-school hours and during their planning periods to help those who need extra attention, taking individual interest in each student to keep anyone from falling through the cracks. Progress reports

are provided to parents every two to four weeks so that any problems can be caught early and monitored carefully for improvement. In addition to being invested, Wheeler High teachers are also innovative in

their strategies to keep the curricula aligned within the school and on a logical trajectory throughout the grade levels. Teachers vary the grade levels and classes they teach each year as a way to stay freshly engaged with the subject matter and to ensure a logical continuum of content learning within their departments. Each department also practices curriculum mapping, a process of communication between teaching staff to reduce gaps and redundancies and to make sure all sections of the same course are covering the same material. Communication amongst the entire staff is highly valued and emphasized at Wheeler High, a fact that shows in the effective interactions it has with students.

## Internship and Contextual Learning Opportunities Keep Students Focused on their Futures

Students at Wheeler High are prompted to begin thinking about colleges and careers as soon as they enter the school. All freshmen are required to take a career class to help them explore a variety of options and envision the steps they need to take to chart a successful academic path toward realizing their career goals. Sophomore students participate in “Career Cruising,” an assessment that analyzes what young people like to do and suggests careers to fit their talents and interests. Using the results, the school helps them to build a beginning resume and to research colleges that offer programs in their field.

Wheeler High also coordinates a very successful internship program for seniors as well as community service opportunities for those who wish to pursue an honors diploma. Senior interns spend half the school day working at local off-site businesses where they learn about working life, professional conduct, appropriate dress, and speaking with a variety of adults on subjects related to their field(s) of interest. On Wednesdays, internship participants gather in the classroom where they develop resumes, work on the contextual links between college and professional life, and listen to guest speakers from colleges and the community. The adult who runs the internship program is a former administrator who works on a semi-volunteer basis and believes passionately in the importance of bridging the gap between school and the real world. The community service option provides similar in-roads to the local non-profit sector, allowing students to explore service-oriented careers while they give back to the community and complete a portion of their graduation requirement. Youth who are motivated to get a jump on their college lives can also arrange to take dual credit courses at Purdue University.

## School Culture Supports Achievement and College Attendance

All freshmen and sophomores at Wheeler High School read and discuss the book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* as part of their daily resource class. Being proactive about success is a value instilled early in the learning community at Wheeler High, and the resource class is often a venue for pushing students in this direction. College information is disseminated in this setting, and young people can also get help with the application process if they need additional support.

Because the school is so small, each student’s plans and aspirations are known to the staff

and to other students, a fact that strengthens the support network and encourages them to persevere in reaching their goals. Staff, students, and parents alike identify the guidance counselor as a key figure in the establishment of high expectations at Wheeler High. She encourages young people to take the most challenging classes and communicates regularly with families about their child’s college readiness and strategies for keeping him or her on a productive trajectory. Parents can learn about applying for financial aid through the school, attend presentations from the College Board, and even participate in school planning discussions to develop effective policies and programming. The prevalence of positive messages about accountability and achievement creates a normative atmosphere of school success and eventual college attendance at Wheeler High.

Wheeler High is a small, rural school with a positive, active school culture and a committed teaching staff who go out of their way to make learning fun and beneficial. Utilizing real-world opportunities and early interventions that open the doors to post-secondary life, Wheeler High has developed an effective approach to college readiness that benefits a large percentage of its small student body.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Union Township School Corporation. (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2009, from <http://www.union.k12.in.us/UTSC/UTSC%20web%20page/corpinde.html>

<sup>2</sup> Indiana Department of Education. (n.d.). School snapshot, Wheeler High School, 6841. Retrieved January 27, 2009, from <http://mustang.doe.state.in.us/SEARCH/snapshot.cfm?schl=6841>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Indiana Department of Education. (n.d.). *Corporation snapshot, Union Township School Corp #6530*. Retrieved January 27, 2009, from <http://mustang.doe.state.in.us/SEARCH/snapshot.cfm?corp=6530>

<sup>5</sup> Indiana Department of Education. (n.d.). *AYP summary report 2007 - Union Township School Corp #6530*. Retrieved January 27, 2009 from <http://mustang.doe.state.in.us/AP/buttoncorp.cfm?corp=6530&year=2007>

<sup>6</sup> Indiana Department of Education. (n.d.). *Corporation snapshot, Union Township School Corp #6530*. Retrieved January

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Indiana Department of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2009, from <http://newdew4.doe.state.in.us/SCHLSTATS/APRPT/6560.pdf>

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<sup>10</sup> Indiana State Board of Education. (2006). *Frequently asked questions regarding Indiana’s new high school course and credit requirements*. Retrieved January 27, 2009, from <http://www.doe.state.in.us/core40/docs/faq.pdf>

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# EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

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Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy

International High School at LaGuardia Community College

Manhattan Hunter Science High School

Middle College High School at Contra Costa Community College





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# HARBOR TEACHER PREPARATION ACADEMY

*Wilmington, California*

**HARBOR TEACHER PREPARATION ACADEMY** (or Harbor Teacher Prep) is an early college high school located on the campus of Los Angeles Harbor College in the Wilmington neighborhood of Los Angeles. It was the first early college program to be established in the nation and continues to serve a population of largely minority students who are interested in pursuing careers in teaching, education, and other professions that require a college degree.<sup>2</sup> Harbor Teacher Prep was named a No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School in 2008 by the Department of Education, having met federal standards of Adequate Yearly Progress the three years preceding.<sup>3</sup> The school screens 8th-grade applicants and admits students who are committed to pursuing both their Associate of Arts degree and their high school diploma simultaneously. Harbor Teacher Prep is part of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), but demographically the school is quite different than the district population. In comparison to LAUSD, which is 73 percent Latino, 9 percent white, 12 percent African American, 6 percent Asian, and less than 1 percent Native American or Pacific Islander, Harbor Teacher Prep has a greater proportion of African American students and fewer Latino students.<sup>4</sup>

The first two years at Harbor Teacher Prep are spent addressing standards set by

Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy			
Year Established	2002	Asian	5.5%
Locale	Large City	African American	25.5%
Free/Reduced Meals <sup>1</sup>	66.7%	Filipino	9.1%
Attendance Rate	98.2%	Pacific Islander	0.6%
ELL Students	not reported	Latino	50.6%
AP/IB Participation	5.7%	Multiple or No Response	1.2%
Enrollment	330	Native American	0.6%
		White	7.0%

Source: Los Angeles Unified School District 2007-08 School Accountability Report Card

the state of California as well as preparing students intellectually and academically to attend college classes at Harbor College and beyond. Planning for four-year college is the norm at Harbor Teacher Prep, and the staff realizes that they must prepare students with both content and contextual knowledge. The school employs the AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination), an instructional system designed to close achievement gaps and accelerate the learning of average students to the point of four-year college



readiness.<sup>5</sup> During their junior and senior years, students can take up to 11 college credits per semester free of charge while continuing to work toward their high school graduation requirements. Harbor Teacher Prep students succeed because they are part of an intentional academic community that is collectively focused on the same goal. They commit to rigorous coursework, and their progress and setbacks are closely monitored by both staff and their parents, who hold them accountable for every assignment. Harbor Teacher Prep also emphasizes writing and demands that students exercise and develop this necessary skill in every academic area.

## State and Local Context

Wilmington lies adjacent to the Port of Los Angeles; the local economy is strongly linked to the shipping industry and the export of locally-manufactured products.<sup>6</sup> There is a long history of union activity in Wilmington and a sense of working-class pride in the community.<sup>7</sup> Harbor Teacher Prep is physically located near an industrial area of Wilmington, although its proximity to Harbor College makes up for the less than ideal setting.<sup>8</sup>

Many Harbor Teacher Prep students come from families who live and work nearby in Wilmington, although some travel from other parts of the LAUSD.

Harbor Teacher Prep has achieved a 100 percent graduation rate the last several years in a row, and scored well beyond the California average in every category of academic proficiency measured.<sup>9</sup> In 2008, 100 percent of seniors passed the required California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) and passed every category included in the Adequate Yearly Progress index.<sup>10</sup> Many students who attend Harbor Teacher Prep come from economically disadvantaged families with almost 65 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch.<sup>11</sup> While the families may be generally poor, they tend to be highly involved in and supportive of their children's academic lives, according to school staff.

## Students are Collectively Motivated Around the Goal of College Attendance

While still attending 8th grade, each Harbor Teacher Prep prospective student is required to confirm that they want to attend the dual credit high school. All incoming students are considered to be college-bound and will apply to a four-year college prior to receiving his/

her diploma. Because every student is working toward the same goal, the school is able to create a unified culture in which academic rigor and achievement are the norm. Schoolmates develop relationships that resemble family ties, and older students tutor and mentor younger students. Every teacher conducts a weekly advisory group comprised of 25 students of different grade levels who move through their time at Harbor Teacher Prep as a cohort. Students facilitate the weekly meetings, using the opportunity to build community and learn informally from their peers.

Although they are actively working toward a degree from their first day on campus, Harbor Teacher Prep students are also directly engaged in preparing themselves for university admissions a weekly basis, starting in 11th grade. Requesting information, arranging college visits, preparing personal statements, studying for entrance exams, and exploring financial aid are all built-in processes.

Attending four-year schools is the norm, and students are not only academically prepared, but also contextually coached toward transferring at the end of their time at Harbor Teacher Prep.

**“The moment the 9th-graders step inside the school, they are going to college. The environment molds the culture, and the culture molds the students.”**

*– Harbor Teacher Prep teacher*

## Rigorous Coursework and the AVID Program Empower Students to Overcome Academic Deficits

Harbor Teacher Prep utilizes AVID, a system designed “to prepare students in the academic middle for four-year college eligibility” by focusing on “acceleration instead of remediation.”<sup>12</sup> AVID believes that goal-oriented students who are willing to work hard can overcome their academic deficits with the right degree of consistent, contextual skill and academic behavioral instruction. The system believes in motivating students to meet their full potential by providing them intellectually-enriching activities and experiences, fostering critical thinking skills, and training young people to take responsibility for their own organization and study habits.<sup>13</sup> Harbor Teacher Prep adheres to these principles of the AVID program, taking students on field trips, exposing them to various cultural experiences, and devoting a full class period per day to the academic skills necessary to help students close their performance gaps. AVID specifically uses the WICR method, an approach that prioritizes writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to utilizing the AVID system, Harbor Teacher Prep

requires its students to read outside of class at volumes comparable to the college classes they eventually take at Harbor College and beyond. Harbor Teacher Prep teachers consult with Harbor College instructors on a regular basis to make sure the preparation they provide is adequate to sufficiently acclimate students. While the workload is a shock to many students, such high expectations ultimately position them to succeed in high-intensity courses. The school also trains students to take notes in lengthy lecture classes, allowing them to remain focused and able to select key points to record and revisit when they study between classes. Research skills are also a high priority, with teachers in both science and social studies courses requiring students to independently explore new topics using appropriate academic research techniques for papers and projects.

## Academic Writing is Strongly Emphasized

Harbor Teacher Prep has chosen to prioritize writing in their curriculum, challenging students to explore the kinds of writing necessary to succeed in a college environment. Students write research papers in almost every subject and practice expository writing based on the feedback teachers got from college English departments about the skills being emphasized in their classes. Students are also intensively trained on how to write an effective personal statement for their college applications. Writing workshops devoted to personal statements begin in the 11th-grade AVID classes. While writing may be a deficit for many students when they enter school, Harbor Teacher Prep focuses on providing students the tools they need to write clearly and convincingly, and to adopt a methodical approach to writing that takes some anxiety out of the process.<sup>15</sup>

## Students are Held Highly Accountable for Their Grades and Schoolwork

Harbor Teacher Prep students who do not meet competency levels in their subjects or who score below a C on a test or assignment may be required to attend Assignment Workshop, an intervention offered three days a week after school. This program is designed as a short-term solution to problems that arise in the course of the term. Parents are informed of any and all missed or failed assignments by phone and also on a parent website. In addition to Assignment Workshop, the school has a Mandatory Tutoring Program, a longer-term solution required for students who receive an unfavorable report card. Students assigned to Mandatory Tutoring are expected to attend for at least five weeks, until their next set of grades

shows they have earned at least a C average. The two programs are scheduled at different times so students can attend both, if necessary.<sup>16</sup>

Harbor Teacher Prep is a ground-breaking early college program housed within the campus of Harbor College. The school has consistently scored well on all standardized measures and graduates a large percentage of its students with both high school diplomas and Associate of Arts degrees. Harbor Teacher Prep helps its students succeed by cultivating a school culture in which every student is moving toward four-year college, utilizing rigorous academic training methods, training their students to write well, and holding them accountable for school performance.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2006-07). CCD public school data 2006-07 school year. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from [http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school\\_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=harbor+teacher&State=06&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=-1&HiGrade=1&ID=062271010844](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=harbor+teacher&State=06&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=-1&HiGrade=1&ID=062271010844)

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<sup>4</sup> Los Angeles Unified School District. (n.d.). *LAUSD 5-year demographics*. Retrieved January 21, 2009, from [http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/bulletins/5\\_yr\\_review.html](http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/bulletins/5_yr_review.html)

<sup>5</sup> AVID. (n.d.). *AVID 101*. Retrieved January 26, 2009 from <http://www.avidonline.org/info/?tabid=1&ID=549>

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<sup>10</sup> California Department of Education. (2008). *Adequate yearly progress (AYP) report*. Retrieved January 28, 2009, from <http://ayp.cde.ca.gov/reports/AcntRp2008/2008APRSchAYPOverview.aspx?allcds=19647330102921&df=2>

<sup>11</sup> Public School Review. (n.d.). *Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy*. Retrieved January 28, 2009, from [http://www.public-schoolreview.com/school\\_ov/school\\_id/95015](http://www.public-schoolreview.com/school_ov/school_id/95015)

<sup>12</sup> AVID. (n.d.). *AVID 101*. Retrieved January 26, 2009 from <http://www.avidonline.org/info/?tabid=1&ID=549>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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# INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL at Laguardia Community College

*Long Island City, New York*

**THE INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL (IHS)** at LaGuardia Community College, established in 1985, is part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools and the Middle College National Consortium. The school is housed in the basement of LaGuardia Community College in Long Island City, New York. The school was created through a partnership between the city's Board of Education and the City University of New York System (CUNY).<sup>1</sup> IHS recently incorporated an early college program, for which it receives funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The school's mission is to provide a quality education for students from immigrant families. To be eligible for admission, students must have immigrated to the United States within the past four years and have scored below average on their English language battery tests. IHS stands out due to the program's impressive results with English Language Learners, early college high school program, and dedicated counseling department.

IHS is truly an international community, with students representing 63 countries and 40 native languages. IHS serves a low-income population, with 76.3 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch.

International High School Statistics			
<b>Year Established</b>	1985	<b>Enrollment</b>	472
<b>Receiving ESL Services</b>	74.6%	<b>Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</b>	35.2%
<b>Locale</b>	Large City	<b>African American</b>	2.8%
<b>Poverty Rate</b>	76.3%	<b>Latino</b>	47.9%
<b>Attendance Rate</b>	93.5%	<b>White</b>	14.2%

Source: CEP School Demographics and Accountability Snapshot 2007-08

Ninety percent of IHS graduates go on to attend a two- or four-year college. The 93.5 percent attendance rate speaks to the success of the school's efforts to create a welcoming and comfortable learning environment for students.

## State and Local Context

The University of the State of New York and the State Education Department pride themselves

on being the most complete, interconnected system of educational services in the United States. The Board of Regents, a 16 member elected board, serves the state for five-year terms. The Board is charged with setting the educational policy for the state and also selects a Commissioner of Education to head the State Education Department.<sup>3</sup> New York Schools requires that students pass Regents Exams in five core academic areas to earn a regular high school diploma. IHS students have been exempted from all but the English/language arts exam, and instead complete a portfolio, which includes seven projects. A unique offering of the state is in-state tuition rates for undocumented immigrant students at all New York State schools. In most states, these students would not qualify for in-state tuition rates, and in other states would not be eligible to attend state schools at all.

## Curriculum is Focused on English Language Learners

The school's approach to English Language Learners focuses on language immersion. Faculty make a concerted effort to develop English language skills throughout all courses, not just in English courses. Student and faculty at IHS are organized into six interdisciplinary clusters: American Dream, Connections, Inquiry and Action, Origins, Growth, and Structures, Projects and Adventures in New York City, and World Around Us. These thematically-based, interdisciplinary programs provide the framework for student cohorts that progress together and benefit from being advised by the same group of faculty and the same counselor from one year to the next.

After detecting a need for it, IHS created a program called SIFE (Students with Interrupted Formal Education). SIFE offers smaller class sizes and additional support for students who not have been continually engaged in education in their home country. Approximately 10 percent of the student population goes through the SIFE program, which is focused on literacy and also offers students a mentoring relationship with a teacher.

## Portfolio Project is Required for Graduation

A graduation requirement for IHS students is certification by a panel of four to five adults, including faculty, staff, and other rep-



**“I feel like there’s a mission there, also, helping kids who would not be able to go to college if they couldn’t get a free year of college and a fifth year here and get the support that we give them.”**

*– IHS counselor*

representatives from the educational community through a two-hour portfolio presentation process. A faculty mentor, who oversees the assemblage of the student portfolio, sponsors each student. Students work on their portfolios throughout their high school experience, and include pieces that evidence their proficiency in all core subject areas, as well their native language and the arts. Each portfolio includes: 1) a literary essay, 2) a math project, 3) a science experiment, 4) a research paper, 5) a native language project, 6) a creative piece, and 7) a self-reflection statement. Student feedback on the portfolio experience seems to be very positive overall. One student reported that the research skills learned and practiced with the portfolio are especially valuable to carry over into college courses.

## Many Students Graduate with College Credits

IHS began as a pilot early college high school site in 2002, and officially became an early college high school at the start of the 2006-07 school year. To remain an early college high school, the state mandates that the school keep 50 percent or more students for a fifth year. Last year, 58 percent stayed for a fifth year and the administration expects that that number will grow. All IHS students have the opportunity to take college courses for both high school and college credits. The fifth year



option gives students the opportunity to graduate from high school with an associate's degree.

Students enrolled in the early college program attend early college seminars daily during their lunch period. These seminars cover basic cognitive and study skills to help students

succeed in college level courses, such as thinking skills, comparing and contrasting, and oral expression. These students benefit from having a LaGuardia Community College student I.D., which allows them to check out library books and access other LaGuardia College facilities and services. They are also provided free textbooks for college classes. Funding of college courses comes from CUNY. LaGuardia is reimbursed from CUNY central for the classes IHS students take.

IHS strives towards a goal of 70 percent of students graduating with 24 or more college credits. Of the 93 graduates from the 2006-07 school year, 60 students graduated with more than 12 college credits, and 38 students graduated with more than 24 credits. Among the 93 2006-07 graduates, 10 graduated with an associate degree from LaGuardia Community College.

## Counseling Department Goes Above and Beyond

The IHS Counseling Department is comprised of six team-based counselors, and one part-time early college advisor to serve the senior teams. The counseling teams decide amongst themselves how to divvy up the counseling and advising responsibilities. Another part-time counselor from the community college helps the

students in their fifth year.

The counseling staff at IHS has responsibilities to students above and beyond those of a typical counseling department. As one counselor stated, "It's incredibly laborious, we do what middle class parents would do with their kids." The department hosts meetings for parents and students to learn more about financial aid processes and options, addressing the specific needs of international students and their families. For example, each year an immigration lawyer is available to speak with students and their families about citizenship and how it impacts the financial aid and college admission processes. Another unique feature of the IHS Counseling Department is its commitment to serving alumni. The counselors reported that it is common for IHS alumni to contact the school both to share their success after graduation and to continue seeking advice related to postsecondary pursuits.

IHS counselors carry caseloads of 75-90 students and are able to get to know each on a personal level. Counselors stress contextual skills, such as the financial aid and admissions

processes and registering for college classes. They encourage students to be proactive and build confidence in dealing with a college system that is completely foreign to many of them. The department also runs weekly Junior and Senior Seminars. In these seminars, the school emphasizes teaching students to be proactive and to advocate for themselves. Students learn concrete skills for dealing with college ad-

missions offices, registrars, financial aid offices, and are able to engage in career exploration.

**"The international network of schools becomes not just philosophy, but also a pedagogy, with mixed language and ability groups. We really focus on group work and interaction that's project-based, work where the linguistic aspect comes part and parcel with the class work. Through the interaction the kids have with each other, implicit language instruction is a part of the content-based instruction."**

*— IHS administrator*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gates Foundation. (2004). *Creating a portfolio of great high schools*. Seattle, Washington: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

<sup>2</sup> New York State Education Department. (n.d.). *About the New York State Education Department*. Retrieved August, 7, 2008, from <http://usny.nysed.gov/aboutusny.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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Lee Pan, *Principal*

Mary Martinez-Wenzl and Katie Cadigan, *EPIC Staff Members*



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# MANHATTAN HUNTER SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL

*New York City, New York*

**MANHATTAN HUNTER SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL**, which opened in 2003 in partnership with Hunter College,<sup>1</sup> is an early college high school in New York City known for its science-focused and college preparatory curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Eighty-seven percent of the 406 students who attend Manhattan Hunter are from minority backgrounds, and more than half of the student body is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Furthermore, approximately 80 percent of students admitted to Manhattan Hunter scored at or below grade level on their 8th-grade state math and reading assessments.<sup>3</sup> The graduation rate for the first class of seniors to earn their diplomas at Manhattan Hunter (class of 2007) was 100 percent. Additionally, Manhattan Hunter has a 95 percent attendance rate, and 100 percent of the class of 2007 took the SAT. Of the 77 seniors who graduated in 2007, 100 percent of them were accepted and intended to enroll in a college or a university. Approximately 87 percent of the seniors planned to attend a four-year institution, and approximately 53 percent intended to remain in the state of New York.<sup>4</sup> This school's evident success at preparing students for college can be attributed to a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, unique academic support programs, intensive guidance counseling practices, and a focus on helping students

Manhattan Hunter Science High School Statistics			
Year Established	2003	Asian	25.9%
Locale	Large city	African American	21.6%
Free/Reduced Meals	69.0%	Latino	36.2%
Attendance Rate	95.0%	Multiracial	1.7%
ELL Students	2.5%	Native American	0.1%
Enrollment	406	White	13.3%

Source: Self-reported data for 2006-2007

develop a sense of responsibility for their learning process.

## State and Local Context

New York City Public Schools are located within the five boroughs of New York City (Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, Staten Island),<sup>5</sup> and students have a choice in which of the more than 600 high school programs they attend. To assist students and parents in learning about the more than 600 high school program options, the Department of Education conducts work-



shops and fairs.<sup>6</sup> To gain entrance to one of the high school programs, a student must be a resident of one of the five New York City boroughs, meet 8th- or 9th-grade promotional standards, and complete an application by the deadline.<sup>7</sup> Equity and choice are the cornerstone principles of the admissions process, and students are allowed to rank up to 12 different programs on their high school application.<sup>8</sup>

In the admissions process, Manhattan Hunter Science High School specifically seeks applicants across the five boroughs who have not necessarily excelled in middle school but have an interest in studying science in high school.<sup>9</sup> Hunter College, their early college partner institution, “has a distinguished reputation for nurturing talented minority scientists and meeting the challenge of providing high-quality science education in the 21st century.”<sup>10</sup> Hunter College, located in Manhattan just a short distance from Manhattan Hunter Science High School, is one of the oldest public institutions in the country. With a student enrollment of 21,000 undergraduate and graduate students, it is the largest college in the City University of New York (CUNY) system.<sup>11</sup>

### A Rigorous College Preparatory Curriculum Facilitates a Successful Transition into Higher Education

All Manhattan Hunter Science High School students participate in the same college preparatory curriculum; therefore all students meet both the requirements of a rigorous high school academic program and develop the academic skills and behaviors necessary for

success in the collegiate environment.<sup>12</sup> The specific programmatic components that form the foundation for the college preparatory program of study are: 1) an integrated curriculum, 2) dual credit courses, and 3) the early college year on the Hunter College campus.

The curriculum at Manhattan Hunter is integrated in that the academic content of the courses offered at the high school was developed through the joint efforts of Hunter College faculty and Manhattan Hunter teachers. In this way, students are provided with the opportunity to learn the state standards necessary for performing well on the required New York Regents exams, as well as prepare for entry-level college coursework. The principal indicated that one of the school-wide goals at Manhattan Hunter is to have all students graduate with an Advanced Regents Diploma, which means that students pass a larger number of New York Regents exams at a higher level than many New York City high school graduates.

In addition to an integrated curriculum, Manhattan Hunter assists students in transitioning successfully into higher education through dual credit courses. Dual credit courses are taught on the Manhattan Hunter campus, and upon successful completion of these

courses, students earn both high school and college credit. All students enroll in dual-credit courses at Manhattan Hunter, and students may start taking these courses as early as their

sophomore year. There are no prerequisites for dual credit courses.

One of the interim goals at Manhattan Hunter is to ensure that all students have accumulated enough high school credits to spend the entirety of their senior year taking courses at Hunter College. Students take entry-level college math and science courses taught by Hunter College faculty, and they also take English and social studies courses on the Hunter College campus, although these courses are taught by Manhattan Hunter teachers. In the process of transitioning to the senior year on the Hunter College campus, students work with Manhattan Hunter teachers who serve as advisors, and students are also required to work in study groups. Furthermore, students are encouraged to use Hunter College’s academic support services, including an early college high school liaison. The senior year was designed to be a year of transition, where students can learn to be successful college students through the process of making mistakes in

**“As a whole school, our mission is to get students into college and to keep them there.”**

*– Manhattan Hunter teacher*



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their schedules. These three academic support programs promote student achievement, and they are built into the structure of the school day.

### Intensive Guidance Counseling Practices Build Contextual Skills and Awareness

The four Manhattan Hunter Science High School Guidance counselors, and school-wide guidance counseling practices, are very important to the administration at Manhattan Hunter, and they are a large component of the school's success at preparing students for college. Specifically, Manhattan Hunter

a somewhat controlled environment. Through the early college program and dual credit courses, students may earn a maximum of 22 college credits before graduating from high school.

### Unique Academic Support Programs Promote Student Achievement

Manhattan Hunter Science High School administrators and teachers work to provide endless academic support to students. In order to reach this goal, three programs have been implemented: 1) Homework Room, 2) Lunch and Learn, and 3) Spotlight on Success. The Homework Room is an after school program staffed by the administrators that allows students to work on their homework before they go home. This optional program directly supports students who find it difficult, for various reasons, to complete their homework once they leave the school building. Additionally, students can choose to participate in Lunch and Learn, a tutoring program that takes place during the lunch period. All students at Manhattan Hunter have the same lunch period, and teachers are expected to be in their classrooms to provide additional academic support to students who are struggling in their coursework, as well as to students who self-select to participate. The Lunch and Learn period is considered teachers' duty period. Lastly, Spotlight on Success is an enrichment program that runs for 45 minutes on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each week. This optional tutoring program takes place at the end of the day, during an additional eighth period.

Although students who are selected for this program are not required to participate, it is printed on

relies on one guidance counseling program and four guidance counseling practices to assist students in developing their contextual skills and awareness. The guidance counseling program at Manhattan Hunter is a required junior advisory class. In this class, all students receive free SAT preparation and learn about the college application, financial aid, and acceptance processes. Through this class, students are also offered access to a Kaplan SAT preparation course that takes place after the eighth period Spotlight on Success on the Manhattan Hunter campus. While there is a \$100 fee for this additional course, it is made more accessible to students by providing the opportunity on the high school campus.

In addition to the required junior advisory course, there are four guidance counseling practices that help students develop their contextual skills and awareness: 1) a required e-mail account, 2) assistance with college applications, 3) assistance with financial aid applications, and 4) parental support. First, students who enroll at Manhattan Hunter are required to open a new e-mail account that demonstrates professionalism. All students have a Gmail account that adheres to the following format: lastname.firstname@gmail.com. The school's guidance counselors, administrators, and teachers will not communicate with seniors using any other email account; this helps prevent students from using an inappropriate e-mail address during the college application and admissions process.

While the required Gmail account assists students with appropriate electronic communication, the guidance counselors also practice providing students with



detailed information about, and assistance with, the college application and financial aid processes. In regard to the college application process, guidance counselors assist students in choosing three different types of schools: safe schools, match schools, and reach schools. Students receive help with their college application essays, and sometimes the guidance counselors mail the applications directly from the school for the student. Additionally, they provide students with a letter to put in their application that describes Manhattan Hunter Science High School. Students also receive intensive assistance with the financial aid process. Guidance counselors often have students bring their parents' tax information to school in order to ensure that the form is filled out correctly. When students receive acceptance letters, the guidance counselors then help students understand what kind of financial aid they will receive at that particular school.

In addition to helping students understand, and successfully complete, the college application and financial aid processes from start to finish, the guidance counselors at Manhattan Hunter have a practice of making themselves available to assist parents with this process as well. Parents are able to use the computers in the guidance counseling office to perform college searches based on websites that the counselors provide, and the counselors are also readily available to take phone calls from parents. These outreach efforts demonstrate Manhattan Hunter's commitment to helping students, and parents, build their contextual skills and awareness.

## Students Develop a Sense of Responsibility for Their Learning Process

The Manhattan Hunter Science High School teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors are committed to helping students develop a sense of responsibility for their learning process and personal choices. This commitment is evident across the curriculum and throughout the schools' programs and practices. It is another way in which this school assists students in becoming college-ready. Specifically, students are taught to ask for help. They are encouraged to "shop around" for a teacher that explains concepts in a way that the student is able to understand, and the school emphasizes self-advocacy when students are struggling. The school staff teaches students that asking for help is necessary both in high school and in the collegiate learning environment.

Lastly, students are taught to be accountable to the syllabus both in high school and in college, and they are encouraged to take personal responsibility for turning in their assignments on time. One Manhattan Hunter student stated that, "Responsibility is the most important thing. If you are responsible and take your work seriously, you have everything ahead of you. Appreciate everything you have and don't take anything for granted. Appreciate your education; many people around the world don't have it."

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Manhattan Hunter Science High School. (n.d.). *School profile*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/D278FAF9-657A-493B-932C-D9DA-50083BAE/24891/SchoolProfile20072008.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> New York City Department of Education. (n.d.). *Manhattan/Hunter Science High School*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolPortals/03/M541/AboutUs/Overview/Our+Mission.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Manhattan Hunter Science High School. (n.d.). *School profile*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/D278FAF9-657A-493B-932C-D9DA-50083BAE/24891/SchoolProfile20072008.pdf>

50083BAE/24891/SchoolProfile20072008.pdf

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> New York City Department of Education. (n.d.). *Borough enrollment and committee on special education (CSE) locations*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/NewStudents/BEO+Contact+Information.htm>

<sup>6</sup> New York City Department of Education. (n.d.). *Admissions process*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/Admissions/default.htm>

<sup>7</sup> New York City Department of Education. (n.d.). *How the high school admissions process works*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/Admissions/Admissions+Process.htm>

<sup>8</sup> New York City Department of Education. (n.d.). *Admissions process*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/Admissions/default.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Manhattan Hunter Science High School. (n.d.). *School profile*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/D278FAF9-657A-493B-932C-D9DA-50083BAE/24891/SchoolProfile20072008.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Hunter College. (2003). *Hunter College and New York City Department of Education officially open brand new small, collaborative science public high school*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/news/newsreleases/2003/sciencehs.shtml>

<sup>11</sup> Hunter College. (n.d.). *About Hunter: An urban leader in affordable higher education*.

Retrieved June 12, 2008 from <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/abouthunter/index.shtml>

<sup>12</sup> Manhattan Hunter Science High School. (n.d.). *School profile*. Retrieved June 12, 2008, from <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/D278FAF9-657A-493B-932C-D9DA-50083BAE/24891/SchoolProfile20072008.pdf>

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# MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

## At Contra Costa Community College

*San Pablo, California*

**MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL** at Contra Costa College is an Early College High School that serves approximately 300 students in San Pablo, California. Fully integrated into the college campus, the school offers students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma while taking college courses and receiving college credit through concurrent enrollment.<sup>1</sup> Middle College High School seeks a diverse community of at-risk students with high potential, and all students undergo a competitive application process. Accepted students receive substantial financial aid and support, such as tuition waivers for college courses, free textbooks, tutoring services, and access to the college library, laboratory, theater, and athletic facilities. Ninth-grade students participate in an extensive orientation on campus and receive a comprehensive five-year educational plan that meets all California state requirements and enables them to graduate high school with an associate's degree or up to 60 transferable college credits. Every student is required to complete a community-based senior project that involves a research paper and formal presentation. Students must also complete a two-semester internship to gain job skills and explore potential career paths. The attendance rate at

Middle College High School at Contra Costa Community College			
Year Established	1989	Asian	20.2%
Locale	Urban Fringe of Large City	African American	23.1%
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	22.0%	Filipino	5.2%
Attendance Rate	98.0%	Pacific Islander	0.7%
English Learners	2.0%	Latino	39.3%
Enrollment	308	Multiple or No Response	0.3%
		White	11.4%

Source: West Contra Costa Unified School District 2007-08 School Accountability Report Card

Middle College High School is 98 percent, and the graduation rate is 100 percent. Most fifth-year students transfer to a four-year college or university. The school serves a high population (almost 90 percent) of students from minority backgrounds. Middle College High School's success in helping students meet the standards of a traditional high school while earning



college credit can be attributed to its integration into the college campus, comprehensive support systems, and collaborative effort to remove student barriers.

## State and Local Context

Middle College High School opened in 1989 as a community initiative between the West Contra Costa Unified School District and Contra Costa College. As

a member of the Middle College National Consortium, the high school follows the Middle College-Early College model and receives funding and support to provide underperforming and underserved youth with access to college.<sup>2</sup> It also adheres to the state of California's A-G subject area requirements, or a specific pattern of study across subject areas to ensure that high school graduates have the necessary content knowledge, critical thinking, and study skills to participate fully in first-year courses at state universities.<sup>3</sup>

Administrators from Middle College High School and Contra Costa College agree that the relationship is overwhelmingly positive and mutually beneficial. The college provides classrooms, administrative space, and facilities to the high school free of charge. High school students bolster enrollment at the college and offer a high level of service through volunteer and internship opportunities. The partnership has also allowed both institutions to compete for grant funding that they would not qualify for separately.

With more than 7,200 students, the large, well-manicured campus of Contra Costa College is a valued part of the local community. The cities of San Pablo and Richmond, just northwest of Berkeley, have tradi-

tionally attracted lower-income populations and immigrants because of the relatively low cost of living and numerous employment opportunities in the shipyards, manufacturing plants, and agriculture industry. Administrators report that economic hardship, violence, and crime in San Pablo and Richmond have risen in recent years, directly affecting staff, students, and their families. Many of the Middle College High School and Contra Costa College administration and staff grew up in the area and are passionate about helping students succeed as means to strengthen the broader community. Both schools are committed to maintaining a safe and integrated campus as demonstrated by on-campus safety workshops as well as service learning programs that connect community members with high school and college students outside of the classroom.

Administrators on both sides are aware of other challenges, including continually working to enhance support services for incoming 9th-grade students as they transition from middle school to a college environment. They also acknowledge that some outreach is still needed among the few college professors who do

not believe high school students are capable of college-level work or belong on a college campus. The Dean of Student Services at Contra Costa College suggested that students are the ones who break down these barriers, "The students are what turn the skeptical teach-

ers. Teachers see that [Middle College High School] students really want to succeed. It's amazing."

## Location Impacts Student Motivation and Success

Students at Middle College High School are largely treated like college students and consider themselves members of the campus community.<sup>4</sup> The physical layout of the college campus and constant exposure to college students and faculty reinforce this culture. The administrative offices for both institutions are located at the center of campus. Middle College High School has two permanent high school classrooms; all other classes are dispersed throughout college buildings. This means Middle College High School students share classrooms and all facilities with college students, including the library, financial aid services, career counseling, college tutoring, clubs and

**"The collaboration we have with the college helps students understand and experience what colleges expect. This pushes them to rise to the challenge and gives them confidence to meet expectations."**

*– Middle College High School teacher*

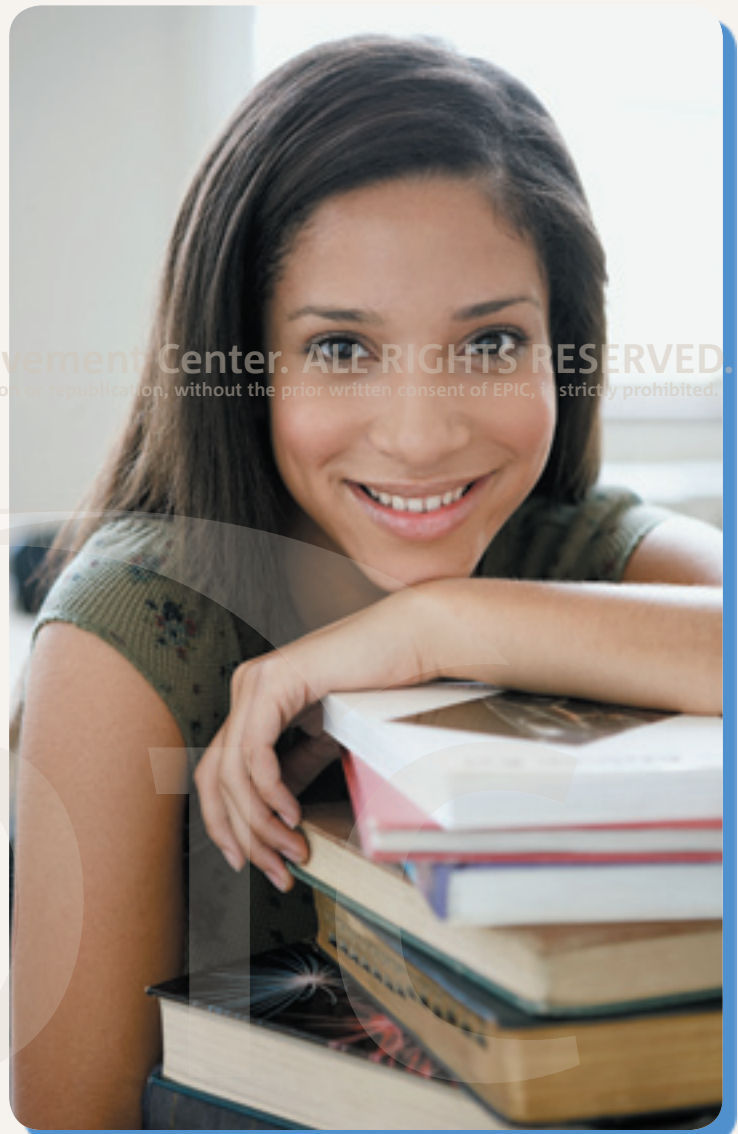
activities, and study areas. One student indicated that libraries at the local traditional high schools are not nearly as comprehensive; having access to a college library has, she believes, significantly improved her research skills and the quality of her writing assignments.

Beyond the physical environment, exposure to college courses beginning in 9th grade fosters important academic behaviors, such as self-awareness, self-monitoring, and time management skills. To be successful, students must learn how to stay focused during long group discussions, manage their time to complete fewer but more challenging assignments, and approach college professors to discuss coursework. As a Middle College High School English teacher explained, “When our students go into college classes, they are not high school students anymore. Oftentimes, the professors don’t know which students are in high school. [Middle College High School students] constantly travel back and forth from high school to college and must learn how to juggle this transition.” This “learning by doing” approach means that by their sophomore year, Middle College High School students can easily navigate the college campus and student services, such as registering for their own classes or seeking tutoring services. By senior year, students know how the college environment operates and are more confident in their ability to transition to a larger, four-year institution.

### Application Process and Required Curriculum Provide Structured Road Map

Last year Middle College High School received over 400 applications for 90 spaces. An internal committee reviews all applications, paying close attention to previous courses, grades, and state test scores to identify proficient, advanced, and high basic students. Each admitted applicant must be at grade level in reading to manage college-level textbooks. The committee also looks for evidence of independent and self-motivated learners. Administrators indicated that applicants largely self-select; most do not feel like they fit inside the traditional high school environment. The application process helps to ensure a diverse student body that is ready to take on the challenge of a college-level curriculum.

Outside of electives, all Middle College High School students take the same curriculum as part of the five-year educational plan, provided to freshmen at the beginning of the year to ensure that each student meets California’s A-G subject area requirements. Ninth-grade students take four high school classes and two college classes.



College courses in 9th grade are predominantly taken in a cohort of high school peers. Writing and research skills are particularly emphasized across content areas during this time, and students in all grade levels indicated that this has proven essential to their success in college coursework. This structure helps to acclimate students to college courses and brings all students up to the same level of basic skills by the end of the freshman year. Every sophomore takes four college courses and meets with a counselor to discuss future electives that match their long-term aspirations. Juniors and seniors have more autonomy over choosing their electives and must also incorporate their senior project and internships into their required college course load. Students who are unable to complete their associate’s degree in four years can continue their studies for a fifth year. Approximately 50 percent of students complete their AA in five years. The difficulty level and expectation steadily increases each year to mirror the rigor of a four-year college or university.

## Support Services Build a Strong Foundation and Promote Accountability

Middle College High School's comprehensive orientation process is absolutely essential in helping middle school students successfully transition to a college environment. Orientation begins the first few days of class when parents and students attend presentations on campus to learn about and discuss school goals and expectations. Students receive a handbook and planner at this time. Parents are asked to play an integral role in their children's education and are expected to attend scheduled conferences, particularly during freshman year. Both students and families agree to uphold the school's guidelines through a contract. The Middle College High School principal and dean of student services at Contra Costa College reinforce expectations throughout the school year via classroom visits.

All freshmen are assigned the same schedule, which includes training on using the library to conduct research, a keyboarding class that introduces students to Internet research, and a counseling class that develops study skills (such as using a planner and tracking assignments), as well as contextual skills like career exploration and understanding the differences between high school and college. In addition, all students attend daily Early College (EC) seminars. For freshman, these seminars focus on how to register for classes, review syllabi and prepare for class beforehand, conduct self-tests, complete self-assessments, and read college-level texts. Later on, EC seminars become tutoring sessions for college level courses, particularly math and science. Students work in small groups with a teacher and tutors or high performing peers; tutors are often trained college students. The seminars largely enable students to progress at their own pace within their group and learn independently. Beyond EC seminars, all students have access to an online tutoring service with extended hours. Students who struggle with coursework are required to attend study hall four times a week for two hours. If students are not able to improve their academic standing over time despite participation in support programs, they are asked to return to their school of residence, but may reapply to Middle College High School after one semester of continual enrollment and academic excellence. These policies and support systems work together to develop important academic behaviors,

promote individual accountability, and foster collective success in meeting Middle

College High School academic standards and expectations.

## Collaboration Minimizes Barriers Between High School and College

Teachers at Middle College High School and Contra Costa College push students to rise to the challenge of succeeding in a college environment. They also collaborate to remove potential and existing barriers between the two schools. Most high school teachers work directly with college professors to identify struggling students and develop strategies to address the few behavioral issues that may arise. Middle College High School math teachers monitor grades of students taking college math courses so that they can provide additional support during EC seminars. Teachers also regularly sit in on college courses to stay current on content as well as student performance. This also helps high school teachers align coursework with college classes to push students by teaching at a higher level. Difficult college courses have been co-taught by a high school teacher so that Middle College High School students can receive additional support. At the same time, teachers recognize the need for students to find their own way and take responsibility for their own learning. As a social studies teacher explains, "Students need to learn how to adapt in different situations. If they get different directions in another class on how to take notes, for example, they should follow the directions that the teacher gives. What is important is that they know how to acquire new skills and apply new skills in multiple contexts." Through collaboration, teachers collectively serve as mentors and academic counselors who help Middle College High School students cultivate important key cognitive strategies and academic behaviors necessary for college success.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Middle College High School. (n.d.). Retrieved September 3, 2008, from <http://www.contra-costa.edu/mchs>

<sup>2</sup> Middle College National Consortium. (n.d.) *Our Mission*. Retrieved September 3, 2008, from <http://www.mcmc.us/aboutus.htm>

<sup>3</sup> University of California. (n.d.) *"A-g" subject area requirements*. Retrieved September 4, 2008, from <http://www.ucop.edu/a-gGuide/ag/a-g/welcome.html>

<sup>4</sup> Middle College National Consortium. (2007). *Design Principles*. Retrieved September 3,

2008, from [http://www.mcmc.us/membership\\_becoming.htm](http://www.mcmc.us/membership_becoming.htm)

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# MAGNET SCHOOLS

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**Garland High School**

**Maritime & Science Technology Academy (MAST Academy)**

**Stranahan High School**

**William G. Enloe High School**

**Eastmoor Academy**

**Fenway High School**

**POLYTECH High School**



photo of POLYTECH High School in Woodside, Delaware

# GARLAND HIGH SCHOOL

*Garland, Texas*

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**GARLAND HIGH SCHOOL** is a public high school located in Garland, Texas, with a student population of over 2,400. More than 67 percent of students are from minority backgrounds, and nearly 45 percent qualify for the free or reduced lunch program.<sup>1</sup> Garland High School celebrates a 93.8 percent graduation rate and has been selected as one of *Newsweek's* top U.S. high schools for five out of the past six years, peaking at 178 in 2005.<sup>2</sup> Garland's success can be attributed to their focus on key cognitive skills and college content, opportunities provided to Latino students to encourage college attendance, teacher collaboration, and developing academic behaviors and professional skills.

## State and Local Context

Located 15 miles northeast of downtown Dallas, Garland is a large suburb on the urban fringe of a large city.<sup>3</sup> As of 2007, Garland had a population of more than 230,832 residents, with 28.4 percent born outside of the United States.<sup>4</sup> Garland High School is the Gifted and Talented magnet in the school district and, as such, offers the International Baccalaureate program (IB), the Advanced Placement program (AP), and the Performing Arts Endorsement.<sup>5</sup> Students can enter the Gifted and Talented program in elementary or middle school by complet-

Garland High School Statistics			
Year Established	1898	Enrollment	2,464
Locale	Urban Fringe of a Large City	Asian	5.6%
Free/Reduced Meals	44.9%	African American	17.5%
Attendance Rate	94.3%	Latino	44.3%
ELL Students	11.6%	Native American	0.4%
AP Participation	26.3%	White	32.2%
IP Participation	27.8%		

Source: Self-reported data 2007-08

ing a formal application and receiving standardized achievement test scores in the 90th percentile in both reading and math.<sup>6</sup> Both the AP and IB programs have a strong presence at Garland High School.

Garland Independent School District (GISD) has an open Freedom of Choice enrollment policy. In most school districts, enrollment is determined by location of the student's residence; in this school district parents can choose the school their child attends with very few restrictions. Although the normal busing zone creates



some limitations, GISD boasts that only two to three percent of students do not receive their first choice school.<sup>7</sup>

The Texas Legislature passed the Texas Success Initiative in 2003 to replace the Texas Academic Skills Program. The Texas Success Initiative is designed to measure competency in reading, writing, and mathematics, and to provide developmental studies in areas of identified deficiencies. In compliance with the Texas Success Initiative, students must take an approved placement test prior to enrolling in any Texas public college or university unless they have received an exemption or waiver. A student who enrolls without test scores may be subject to remediation.<sup>8</sup>

Texas is among a handful of states that have passed state legislation regarding dual enrollment. Dual enrollment reflects one of the steps Texas has taken to play an active role in pushing improvements in public education.<sup>9</sup> Students may pay tuition and fees for dual enrollment, but in many cases it can be very low cost or even free. Enrollment in dual courses overall in Texas has grown from 11,921 in 1999 to 64,910 in 2007.<sup>10</sup>

## Curriculum Focuses on Key Cognitive Strategies and College Content

Garland High School enables students to prepare for the rigors and demands of postsecondary educational institutions by focusing on the development of key cognitive strategies throughout the curriculum. There is a common belief that the school instills a desire to learn within their students by creating lessons that will nurture and encourage passion, excitement, and curiosity.

In order to cultivate interpretation skills, Garland High School requires all juniors and seniors to complete a critical analysis paper. Students read a novel of their choice (selected from a list) and interpret critical viewpoints, using examples that support their point of view. Teachers place a noteworthy emphasis on learning to write, analyzing data or documents, constructing an argument, and drawing appropriate conclusions based on research. The Language Arts department promotes precision and accuracy skills by requiring students to undertake independent writing assignments where multiple drafts and revisions are expected in order to receive credit for the assignment.

Reasoning skills are specifically emphasized in certain math and science courses at Garland High School. In



the Algebra II Honors class, students are involved in class discussions where they describe their processes and solutions and defend their answers. In science courses, students write lab reports that include measurements, observations, data, analysis, and conclusions.

## Opportunities are Provided to Latino Students to Encourage College Attendance

Garland High School provides multiple opportunities targeted toward assisting the ELL student population. In addition to the traditional college fair each year, the school holds a Hispanic job and college fair. Also, visits to college campuses are coordinated so that a Spanish translator accompanies students. To accommodate the student population that has Spanish-speaking parents, the school arranges for inter-

preters to be present at all college and financial aid information nights. While targeted primarily to ELL students, a voluntary Saturday session of classes is offered for all students who need help passing the state assessment. The students who attend Saturday sessions are also taken to the local community college admissions office to receive assistance with college-related paperwork.

## Teachers Collaborate to Align the Curriculum

Both Garland High School and Garland Independent School District offer opportunities for teacher collaboration and vertical alignment. The school district provides district-wide professional learning communities to assist teachers in collaborating.

Content-specific meetings take place where all teachers within the same subject meet once a

**“We do teach content, definitely, but we also teach the skills on what you’re going to have to do to be successful.”**

*– Garland High School department chair*



week to share what they are teaching and their respective approaches. These meetings facilitate co-planning amongst the teachers within content areas. In addition, IB teachers have common planning meetings after school that meet by subject and grade-level areas.

The IB social studies department also facilitates vertical alignment. They have expectations that begin with every 9th-grade student being able to write a thesis and introductory paragraph. Starting in 10th grade, students learn to analyze documents and write a thesis based on those documents. For 11th grade, students are expected to start writing analysis papers, followed by 12th-grade students, who are expected to demonstrate in-depth analysis.

## Students Develop Academic Behaviors and Professional Skills

Garland High School incorporates a variety of methods to facilitate the development of academic behaviors and professional skills. In many courses, collaboration and self-awareness skills are taught along with an array of test taking strategies.

Students in their freshman year are required to take a leadership course that teaches fundamental academic behaviors. Included in this course are resources and information on organization, time management, note taking, how to read a textbook, study skills, test-taking strategies, and how to request help when needed. In this course, students are encouraged to use a planner and organize color-coded notes in a three-ring binder. Students are also taught how to create a study plan, apply reading and study techniques, and understand their individual learning style.

Garland High School has an online grade book available to students and parents that enables grade checking and progress tracking. Parents can also get involved via Garland Independent

School District's online Parent Communication Center. Using this website, parents can select Garland High School and select the teacher and appropriate course to find more information on their student's classes.<sup>11</sup> Syllabi are also available to students and parents so that students and parents can see due dates for various assignments and then plan accordingly.

Garland High School also offers career exploration opportunities and methods for students to develop professional skills. The vocational program offers career and technical classes for interested students. The program requires that students fill out an application, participate in interviews, and receive parental approval. Through the vocational program, students are given opportunities to work, job shadow, or participate in internships.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *CCD public school data 2006-07 school year, Garland H S*. Retrieved June 27, 2008, from [http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school\\_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=garland+&State=48&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=-1&HiGrade=-1&ID=482034002024](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=garland+&State=48&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=-1&HiGrade=-1&ID=482034002024)

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *CCD public school data 2006-07 school year, Garland H S*. Retrieved June 27, 2008, from [http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school\\_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=garland+&State=48&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=-1&HiGrade=-1&ID=482034002024](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_detail.asp?Search=1&InstName=garland+&State=48&SchoolType=1&SchoolType=2&SchoolType=3&SchoolType=4&SpecificSchlTypes=all&IncGrade=-1&LoGrade=-1&HiGrade=-1&ID=482034002024)

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<sup>5</sup> Garland High School. (2007). *School spirit & history*. Retrieved June 26, 2008, from <http://garland.ccscct.com/page.cfm?p=56>

<sup>6</sup> Garland ISD. (2006). *Gifted and talented*. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from [http://www.garlandisd.net/departments/gifted\\_tal-](http://www.garlandisd.net/departments/gifted_tal-)

[ented/index.asp](#)

<sup>7</sup> Garland ISD. (2006). *About GISD*. Retrieved July 10, 2008, from <http://www.garlandisd.net/about/index.asp>

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# MARITIME AND SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY (MAST) ACADEMY

*Miami, Florida*

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## MARITIME AND SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY

(MAST) Academy is a public magnet school in Miami, Florida that combines college preparatory coursework for all students with maritime studies. The school boasts attendance, graduation, and college enrollment rates of nearly 100 percent and has been recognized multiple times nationally and regionally for academic excellence. More than 44 percent of the school's 550 students enrolled in at least one of the 21 Advanced Placement courses offered at the school in 2007. Performance on college admissions tests is well above the state average. MAST Academy also has a demographically diverse student body; nearly half of enrolled students are Latino, roughly one-quarter are white, and one-fifth are African American. The school's success in preparing students for enrollment and success in college can be attributed to the cohesion resulting from its small size, the universally high expectations for students and faculty, and the beneficial community partnerships that have been cultivated since the school's inception.

## State and Local Context

MAST Academy was established in 1991 and is located in a former aquatics museum on Virginia Key, a barrier island just across a causeway from Miami. It is one of 107 high schools within the Miami-Dade School Dis-

## Maritime and Science Technology Academy

Year Established	1991	Enrollment	550
Locale	Rural*, Inside CBSA	Asian	5.1%
Free/Reduced Meals	30.0%	African American	18.0%
Attendance Rate	97.3%	Latino	46.2%
ELL Students	0.0%	Native American	0.9%
AP Participation	44.4%	Multiracial	2.5%
		White	27.3%

Source: Self-report data for 2006-2007  
\*Rural, but draws students from a large central city.

trict and enrolls students in grades 9 through 12. The school evolved from the Inner-City Marine Program, developed in response to the Miami race riots in 1980 to expose minority youth to South Florida's marine environment and industries.

Today the school attracts students from across the entire district, many of whom commute long distances to attend. MAST tends to draw a lower percentage of Latino and



economically disadvantaged students than the district as a whole.<sup>1</sup> The school aims to counter this by accepting an equal number of students from each neighborhood. Students who apply to MAST are evaluated on their academic performance and potential as well.

All public school students in Florida must pass the

Grade 10 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in order to graduate from high school.<sup>2</sup> The FCAT is based on Florida's Sunshine State Standards, which are not aligned to college readiness.<sup>3</sup> Florida's 47 percent postsecondary participation rate is below the national average.<sup>4</sup> In an effort to encourage college enrollment and persis-

tence, the state of Florida offers state college scholarships to students who meet particular academic criteria. The largest of these, the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship, covers 100 percent of

tuition and fees, and contributes \$375 per year towards college-related expenses for students who meet the requirements.<sup>5</sup> Ninety percent of MAST graduates in 2007 qualified for a Bright Futures Scholarship. MAST also requires students to earn 29 credits for graduation, which is five more than the district requires.

## Small School Size Promotes Cohesion and a Sense of Community

The small size of the school helps to ensure students receive sufficient attention and that no students fall through the cracks. All incoming 9th-grade students at MAST participate in a four-week summer orientation where they receive instruction in math, technology skills, research skills, get to know their peers, and learn about the school's high expectations. The goals are to help all students reach similar levels of competence before they begin the school year and to ease the transition to the school. Each 9th-grade

student is also paired with a 12th-grade student to introduce them to MAST and to answer questions.

The school size affords school staff members with the opportunity to easily identify students who are struggling and could benefit from additional support. Tutoring is widely available, and students are encouraged to seek out their teachers for assistance at any time. Some students even call their teachers over the summer for advice on course selection. Teachers and staff work closely with students (particularly in the 9th grade) to help them deal with the stress of the challenging coursework.

The MAST college advisor visits classes at least once a year to discuss how to prepare for college and helps all students register for both Bright Futures and financial aid. Students are strongly encouraged to seek out the college advisor and their English teachers. There is so much personal support for students at the school; in fact both teachers and students indicate that more independence and less hand-holding may better prepare them for college. Nonetheless, this personal attention is essential for monitoring student progress, supporting struggling students, and assisting all students with the college and financial aid application processes.

**"It's a high-level learning environment with the expectation that everyone who comes through the doors is going to move onto another level of academics."**

*— MAST parent*

Most departments set aside common planning time for teachers to collaborate within and across departments. The math and science departments are located next to each other in the

school, and English, social studies, foreign language, art, and music are similarly clustered. The common planning time, small number of teachers, and the proximal locations of the departments have allowed teachers to scaffold instruction from year to year and across the departments. For example, the school is considering asking science teachers to recommend reading material for the English teachers to use to improve reading skills.

## Teachers Have High Expectations for Everyone

MAST Academy teachers and staff hold all students to extremely high standards. The 9th-grade non-college preparatory curriculum has been phased out entirely; all 9th-grade students now take college preparatory courses. A rigorous educational program continues throughout the four years of high school. In 10th and 11th grades, students are expected to write substantial research papers in MLA format.



The goal articulated by all teachers and staff is to prepare students for college. Teachers are expected to rely on district and state standards only to the degree that they contribute to college preparation, and to then supplement them with college knowledge and skills. Professional development at MAST helps teachers understand such knowledge and skills, and how to teach them in the classroom.

In order to ensure that expectations are universally high, teachers meet regularly to observe each other's classrooms and review student work samples.

In addition, the school uses several practices to increase in enrollment in the most challenging classes. MAST holds a registration fair where students and parents can come to learn about an array of courses. The school implemented this fair after an alumnus told them about a similar practice at Harvard. The school uses AP Potential to identify students who are likely to succeed in AP courses and might not otherwise have enrolled. School administrators and teachers believe that all students should be exposed to the most challenging material possible, even if they fail. However, they discuss the importance of being there to help students to recover if they do fail.

All 9th-grade students are required to take the PSAT, and the school receives some financial assistance from the district to offset costs for students who need it. Another school requirement is for all students to complete 75 hours of community service. These community service hours help ensure that all students qualify for



the Florida Bright Futures scholarship program.

## External Partnerships and Internships Benefit School and Students

MAST Academy utilizes the local business community, as well as alumni, to inform its programs and practices. The school relies on an involved advisory council composed of prominent local businessmen and women and community leaders, including executives of Royal Caribbean. These community members help to guide the curriculum to prepare students for college and careers beyond college. In addition, the school actively seeks teachers with experience in the marine industries who can integrate their knowledge into classroom instruction. Many students take advantage of MAST's commu-

nity connections to participate in internships for credit. MAST employs an internship coordinator to ensure that students are placed into meaningful internships experiences.

Many teachers at MAST attend the annual alumni college forum, where alumni return to talk to current students about their college experiences. At one forum, teachers learned that reading from a textbook and lecture

were important for success in college courses. As a result, teachers dedicated class time to note-taking instruction.

### Notes

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# STRANAHAN HIGH SCHOOL

*Ft. Lauderdale, Florida*

**STRANAHAN HIGH SCHOOL** is a comprehensive high school in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, known for its medical science and engineering magnet programs. Eighty-eight percent of the 1,800 students are from minority backgrounds, and approximately 64 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The graduation rate is 68 percent, and for many students, high school graduation in and of itself is a significant accomplishment. Among Stranahan graduates, 85 percent go on to enroll in two- or four-year colleges. In 2007, Stranahan received the College Board's Inspiration Award for being one of the country's most improved high schools.<sup>2</sup> The school's success can be attributed to increases in student AP participation, small learning communities and the programs they offer, and a school-wide commitment to personalized and collaborative instruction.

## State and Local Context

Stranahan High School is located within Broward County and is part of the sixth largest school district in the nation, Broward School Dis-

Stranahan High School			
Year Established	1957	Enrollment	1806
Locale	Mid-size Central City	Asian	3.3%
Free/Reduced Meals <sup>1</sup>	69.0%	African American	64.6%
Attendance Rate	93.6%	Latino	19.3%
ELL Students	8.5%	Native American	0.1%
AP Participation	23.6%	Multiracial	2.0%
		White	10.7%

Source: Self-reported data for 2006-2007

trict.<sup>3</sup> Broward County has a population of more than 1.7 million people,<sup>4</sup> and Broward School District serves more than 270,000 students.<sup>5</sup> While approximately 30 percent of the county population has a minority background,<sup>6</sup> the school district has a 60 percent minority student population. Students from minority backgrounds are over-represented in the Broward School District, as well as at Stranahan High School.



Stranahan has contended with continued modifications to the Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), which is the State of Florida's standardized test that 10th grade students must pass in order

to earn a high school diploma. The school has had the challenge of preparing students who have very limited reading ability for this exam. Teachers' ability to teach key cognitive strategies is constrained by the pressure to focus on preparing students to pass the FCAT. One teacher remarked that as FCAT scores have gone up, SAT scores have gone down. Students at the very lowest levels are often unable to take advantage of the electives and programs at Stranahan that hold the potential to renew their interest in learning, as these students' schedules are filled with mandatory remedial classes.

### AP Participation and Performance are Notable

Students at all grade levels are encouraged to challenge themselves with AP classes, and in 2007, 25 percent of Stranahan High School's student body took an AP exam. Many freshmen at Stranahan take AP Human Geography, and while most do not pass the exam (last year the passage rate was 11%), they are nonetheless exposed to the rigor of an AP course early on. Students who perform well on the PSAT, which all students are required to take, and on other standardized tests are actively recruited to enroll in AP courses. Stranahan currently has the largest percentage of African American students taking and passing a single AP exam (AP Psychology) nationwide.

### Small Learning Communities Provide Exposure

Exposure is a theme that runs throughout Stranahan High School's programs. Freshmen at Stranahan spend their first year in the Community, Career Research, Exploration, and Successful Transition (CREST) Academy. Here the transition from middle school to high school is eased by their placement into cohorts with a shared set of core teachers. After a year of exploring possible courses of study, students choose a major, as is required of all high school students in Florida, and are subsequently placed in one of four small learning communities for the remainder for their high school career.

Stranahan began a school-wide transition to small learning communities after receiving a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2005. The communities for 10th- through 12th-grade students are dedicated to business and human services, the arts, technology and engineering, and health-related careers. Learning communities emphasize exposing students to careers and opportunities through school-based career learning, internships, and dual enrollment classes. During high school, some students find that the major they chose was not for them, but they are closer to finding a focus than they might have been had they not had the opportunity to explore a career and study area substantively. Each learning community has a board of directors comprised of community stakeholders, including a designated position for a representative from a postsecondary institution, and has the ability to attract financial and social capital to support the academy.

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**“We have a lot of kids right on the edge of college readiness, and that’s what is going to make a difference, a personal connection; otherwise they will fall through the cracks.”**

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*– Stranahan High School teacher*

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### Medical Science, Engineering, and Teaching Programs Provide Opportunities

Approximately 40 percent of the Stranahan High School student population is in one of the school's magnet

programs in engineering and medical science, which are housed within the engineering and health-related careers learning communities. Stranahan's magnet programs accept applications from college-bound students who have good attendance and conduct records and who have demonstrated solid academic preparation (as evidenced by their standardized test scores and GPA). The magnet programs draw students from throughout the Broward School District, and the school district provides transportation at no cost. Magnet curricula are presently being rewritten with input from postsecondary institutions.

In addition to its magnet programs, Stranahan participates in Broward County's Urban Teacher Academy Program (UTAP). The UTAP Program is designed to prepare high school students for careers in education and provides extensive field experience, shadowing, and mentoring assistance. Qualified high school graduates receive the Broward Teacher Fellowship, a full tuition scholarship to local partner colleges, and are guaranteed a job with Broward County Public Schools upon graduation.



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## Faculty, Staff, and Administration Collaborate and Personalize

Stranahan High School recognizes that many of its students come from families that have had limited educational and economic opportunities, and that students rely on the school to help them prepare for enrollment and success in college. Teachers and staff endeavor to personalize instruction for all students, and walk students through college testing and college applications. Whether students need help filling out the application or revising an essay, support is readily available to them and their parents.

Just as teachers work to personalize their instruction with individual students, they collaborate with one another across subject areas to help students develop the key cognitive strategies and academic behaviors that are essential for success in college. One English teacher's class motto is, "The more I link, the better I think, the smarter I become," and his students are cheered on as they identify links across disciplines. The administration encourages such collaboration, as well as other forms of creative instruction and risk-taking.

Stranahan's professional development modules are facilitated by Stranahan teachers, and they are widely praised by the

teachers, who appreciate the opportunity to choose their modules, the continuity that comes from focusing on one topic throughout the year, and the accessibility (both physical and personal) of trainers who are also colleagues.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Florida Department of Education. (n.d.). *Stranahan High School Accountability Report Card, 2007-08*. Retrieved March 11, 2009, from <http://school-grades.fldoe.org/>

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2005-07). *Broward County, Florida fact sheet*. Retrieved and calculated May 14, 2008 from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

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# WILLIAM G. ENLOE HIGH SCHOOL

*Raleigh, North Carolina*

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**WILLIAM G. ENLOE HIGH SCHOOL** is a public magnet high school located in Raleigh, North Carolina, and serves 2,583 students in grades 9 through 12. Also known as the William G. Enloe Gifted and Talented International Baccalaureate Center for the Humanities, Sciences, and the Arts, Enloe is the gifted and talented magnet school in the Wake County Public School System.<sup>1</sup> The Enloe “gifted and talented” label is different than schools that are identified as academically gifted magnet schools. Gifted and talented is not limited to students who have been state-tested and require differentiated education services.<sup>2</sup> In this context, gifted and talented means that Enloe is able to offer a wider range of instruction than other schools in Wake County, and includes extensive elective programs, honors courses, IB, and AP programs.

The school’s mission is to create an environment that is supportive, collaborative, and intellectually stimulating to prepare students to engage in a variety of facets in a global community.<sup>3</sup> Enloe has a graduation rate of 88 percent and approximately 93 percent of graduates in 2007 planned to attend either a two-year or four-year college or university. Minority students represent approximately 52 percent of the student body, with nearly 34 percent African American students.

Enloe has recently gained fame for receiving the Dr. Ronald Simpson Award for top magnet school in the

Enloe High School			
Year Established	1962	Enrollment	2,495
Locale	Large Central City	Asian	12.5%
Free/Reduced Meals	17.9%	African American	33.7%
Attendance Rate	96.0%	Latino	2.5%
ELL Students	0.0%	Native American	0.1%
AP Participation	Unknown	White	48.3%
		Multiracial	2.9%

Source: Self-report data for 2006-2007

nation in the year 2000 and being ranked in *Newsweek’s* top 100 high schools for the past five years (2003-2008).<sup>4</sup> Enloe offers 27 Advanced Placement (AP) courses; these are taught concurrently with the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. Enloe’s success in preparing students for college can be attributed to a combination of programs and practices that facilitate high expectations for all students, rigorous academics, necessary support systems, and teacher collaboration.

## State and Local Context

William G. Enloe High School is located in a residential community near the state government complex. In addition to traditional high schools, the Wake County Public School System offers four magnet school programs, with admissions conducted using a random computerized process that takes into account transportation patterns, sibling attendance, capacity, diversity, and status of the applicant.<sup>5</sup> Each magnet school program offers innovative learning opportunities including Montessori, year-round programs, and creative arts and sciences.<sup>6</sup>

Raleigh has a population of 374,320 and has a higher educational attainment rate than the state average. Nearly 88 percent of the population in Raleigh has graduated from high school, and 27 percent have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 82 percent and 24.8 percent respectively for the state of North Carolina.<sup>7</sup> Enloe's student population is a diverse mix of African American, white, Asian, and Latino students.

The state of North Carolina uses a three-track system that students must choose from early in their freshman year.<sup>8</sup> The tracks include career prep, college tech prep, and college/university prep. The career prep track aims to prepare students for entry-level careers and admission to community college and covers only the minimum graduation requirements.

The college tech prep track is designed for students that aim to attend community college and focus on technical fields of study. The college/university prep track is geared for students that plan to attend a college or university; the requirements meet the minimum course requirements for admission to University of North Carolina institutions.

## Multiple Support Systems are Available to Students

William G. Enloe High School offers several support systems that are vital to helping students persevere. For example, students are placed with the same homeroom teacher throughout their tenure at Enloe. Each year, the homeroom teacher acts as an advisor and monitors each student's progress.

In addition, there are formal and informal tutoring programs and

courses that are designed specifically for students that are in need of extra help.

Ninth-grade students who are struggling academically are required by their teachers to receive tutoring after school hours in the After School Assistance Program (AAP). AAP is offered most days of the week. The program is held on campus and is facilitated by instructors. Instructors assign students to AAP through a software program utilized by faculty, and parents can also request their student's participation. AAP tutoring is available in courses such as algebra, introductory mathematics, civics & economics, biology, earth science, English, and geometry.

In addition to the AAP program and tutoring, students who are struggling in the Algebra I course are required to take two periods per day of algebra rather than one. Enloe provides an environment that fosters support for students who are behind the grade level in their reading skills by offering a course that focuses on basic reading skills.

**“We need to remember that students don’t know what they’re going to do for the rest of their lives. There is an expectation here that students will go to college. We need to remember that these are children and we need to put a structure in place through syllabi, scoring rubrics, or a willingness to help that will help support students as they move beyond high school.”**

*– Enloe science teacher*

## Teachers Collaborate Across Subjects and Grades

William G. Enloe High School provides multiple opportunities for teachers to collaborate with each other and participate in professional development. Teachers communicate with colleagues that teach classes during the year prior to ensure

vertical alignment. Many teachers also teach multiple course levels of a subject, a practice which facilitates consistent expectations across classes. Once a week, teachers meet in groups during a common planning period to discuss curriculum and to encourage open lines of communication.

Professional Learning Communities are utilized enthusiastically and are organized by either grade level and/or subject. These groups range in size from three to seven teachers and meet on a weekly basis. Curriculum and available data are examined in order to create goals, identify essential skills, share best practices information, and improve areas that need improvement. In addition to the use of Professional Learning Communities, Enloe utilizes AP and IB training. Many teachers go through AP/IB training regardless of whether or not they are currently teaching those classes.



Teachers also collaborate within the classroom environment. Enloe offers integrated AP courses in subjects such as English and history that are, at times, team-taught by a pair of teachers. For example, AP English and AP History incorporate reading selections that match the relative historical time period being presented. In courses of this nature, the subjects are tied together by a familiar theme and help to show realistic application of subject matter. Content is enhanced by teachers working together to create lessons that are reinforced through the use of common curriculum.

## Writing Skills are Emphasized Across Curriculum

In addition to traditionally writing-focused courses such as English, William G. Enloe High School students are exposed to writing in all classes. From their first year of at Enloe, students are introduced to various forms of writing, both formal and informal. In each grade writing is emphasized, with the rigors increasing heavily in grades 11 and 12. Classes that traditionally do not incorporate writing, such as dance, require students to write journal reflections and create formal responses to dance performances. Other examples of writing integration at Enloe include math teachers requiring students to read, analyze, and formulate written responses to math articles. Students in math classes also are required to explain their processes and solutions in writing in addition to numerical mathematical solutions. Science classes also have required lab write-ups to interpret the results of experiments. These examples show the importance of writing across subjects at Enloe, as students are taught how to revise and rewrite in order to improve their skills and to ensure students are ready for postsecondary writing.

## Expectations are High

William G. Enloe High School believes in teaching at a high level in order to bring students up to their potential and raise the bar as to what is expected. Instruction is integrated with the aim of increasing student confidence levels and giving students an opportunity to contribute. Group projects with components consisting of varying ability levels give all students the chance to be involved in unique ways and often call for more diverse deliverables, such as artistic products. The opportunity to contribute in such ways can build confidence and self-esteem that encourages students to take on more difficult challenges. Another example of integration is the way that Enloe offers their AP and IB courses. Students enrolled in either AP or IB courses are exposed to both programs because the AP and IB curriculum is taught concurrently.

Students who perform well in courses are recommended for more challenging courses by teachers. Students can also choose their classes and take challenging courses even if they are not initially recommended to do so. Once registered, students are not allowed to drop a class for an easier one once they are enrolled (unless it was a registration error) without an on-site conference with the teacher and a parent. The culture at Enloe establishes an expectation among students, parents, and teachers that students will perform at a high level and move on to postsecondary opportunities following graduation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Enloe High School. (n.d.). School profile. Retrieved August 31, 2008, from <http://enloehs.wcpss.net/info/enloeprofile.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Enloe High School. (n.d.). Mission and vision. Retrieved August 31, 2008, from <http://www.wcpss.net/faqs/51.html>

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<sup>4</sup> Newsweek. (2008). The top of the class. Retrieved on August 31, 2008, from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/39380/?q=2008/rank/1/>

<sup>5</sup> Wake County Public School System. (n.d.). How is a student selected for a magnet school? Retrieved on August 31, 2008, from <http://www.wcpss.net/faqs/96.html>

<sup>6</sup> Wake County Public School System. (n.d.). School Directory: Enloe High. Retrieved on August 31, 2008, from <http://www.wcpss.net/school-directory/412.html>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2005-07). Raleigh city and North Carolina fact sheets. Retrieved on August 31, 2008, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

<sup>8</sup> WRAL. (2007, June 7). Graduation requirements changing for North Carolina high school students. Retrieved on August 31, 2008, from <http://www.wral.com/news/local/story/1482382/>

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# EASTMOOR ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL

*Columbus, Ohio*

**EASTMOOR ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL** is an alternative public school serving 776 students in Columbus, Ohio. The school was established in 1999 as a college preparatory magnet program to serve students in grades 9 through 12. Admission to Eastmoor is conducted through a lottery system.<sup>2</sup> The graduation rate for Eastmoor students is 95.4 percent.

Eastmoor is part of the Columbus City Public School District and considers itself a cooperative professional learning academy. The school's mission is to prepare students for success in college and beyond.<sup>3</sup> Eastmoor offers nine AP courses and notes that all students are enrolled in courses that fulfill district requirements to receive a certificate in college preparation in addition to a diploma of graduation.<sup>4</sup> Eastmoor's success in preparing students for college can be attributed to programs and practices that promote high academic expectations for all students, innovative leadership, curriculum alignment and scaffolding, and a unique discipline model.

## State and Local Context

The city of Columbus has a population of 718,477 and as of 2006 reported a 23 percent poverty rate for families with children

Eastmoor Academy High School			
Year Established	1999	Enrollment	776
Locale	Large Central City	Asian	0.7%
Free/Reduced Meals <sup>1</sup>	58.3%	African American	91.2%
Attendance Rate	93.9%	Latino	2.2%
ELL Students	0.2%	Native American	0.1%
AP/IB Course Participation	9.0%	Multiracial	0.2%
		White	5.3%

Source: CCD Public school data 2006-2007 school year

under 18 years old, which is 8 percent higher than the rate for these families nationwide.<sup>5</sup> In Columbus, 86.3 percent of residents over the age of 25 have graduated from high school, and 30.6 percent have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, which is slightly higher than the overall U.S. population educational attainment of 84.1 percent and 27 percent, respectively.<sup>6</sup> The Columbus metropolitan population is largely Caucasian (almost 65 percent) and African American (almost 28 percent). Conversely, within the Columbus City School

District, the student population is 61.4 percent African American, 28.3 percent Caucasian, 5.2 percent Latino, and 1.9 percent Asian students.<sup>7</sup>

The graduation rates among urban and suburban schools in Columbus show a staggering contrast. Graduation rates for the 2003-04 school year show an urban-suburban gap of 42 percentage points. Although suburban high schools in Columbus had a graduation rate of 82.9 percent, urban high schools had a mere 40.9 percent graduation rate during the same time period. (This study and looked only at students that graduated on time.<sup>8</sup>)

The Columbus City Public School District aligns curriculum, instruction, and assessment with the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT).

The OGT was established in 2001 to create alignment and accountability within Ohio Schools and consists of sections in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. The OGT is aligned with Ohio content

standards, and students must take and pass the OGT in order to graduate from a public high school in Ohio. Some exceptions can be made in order to receive a diploma without passing every section of the OGT, however, if students meet certain requirements.<sup>9</sup>

### High Academic Expectations are Consistently Articulated at all Levels and Reinforced Among Peer Groups

Eastmoor Academy High School has set the bar high for its students with expectations that are understandable and expressed at all levels. Prior to enrollment, students are told that they will be expected to pursue postsecondary education. The expectation that all students will attend and graduate from a four-year college is merely the minimal expectation, however. Students are also expected to pursue graduate education and become leaders at the local, state, and federal levels. Teachers and administrators are driven to make the possibility of obtaining a college degree a reality for all students. Students are steadily reminded that mediocrity is not acceptable and that the highest level of achievement is expected throughout their tenure at Eastmoor and beyond.

The attitude of the faculty at Eastmoor fosters a culture of support among peers by bringing a significant amount of recognition to outstanding students. Pictures of students who have received scholarships are

displayed proudly in the hallways, and their peers take note of their achievements. Many students acquire a tremendous amount of scholarship money, with some students accruing amounts exceeding \$1 million for their postsecondary and graduate educations. Peers are quick to point out these achievements and are very encouraging of each other's quest for success.

### Curriculum is Aligned and Scaffolded

The school aligns the curriculum with testing standards for the OGT and has more freedom to deviate from the district curriculum due to its classification as an alternative school. The school believes that the curriculum standards set forth by the state and district are minimal,

and the overall goal is to create students ready to succeed in college. Eastmoor Academy High School's expectations exceed those created at the district level and show an emphasis on preparing students to be successful in college

through a rigorous college preparatory program.

Department chairs meet weekly and have significant responsibility for planning curriculum. Curriculum planning works across content areas, as writing is an integral part of instruction in math and science in addition to English. Department chairs are also predominately responsible for the planning, organizing, and implementation of professional development opportunities. Teachers also use state testing information to set annual goals and analyze student assessment data to assist with planning activities.

Within the departments, scaffolding is also included in planning. When students enter as freshmen, they receive more reminders and tend to have more assignments that are shorter in length. As students move through grades, paper lengths increase over time, and students are expected to become more self-directed. By senior year, projects have grown considerably in length, and students are expected to use course syllabi for assignments and due dates rather than relying on reminders from teachers.

The administration at Eastmoor is supportive of teachers and has delegated a significant portion of the leadership responsibilities to them, removing much of the top-down leadership model traditionally used in schools. The administrators purposefully removed *administrivia*, the tiresome details that must be

**“We expect big things. It is constantly reiterated by each and every one of us that that’s the goal. We expect nothing less; you will be attending somebody’s college.”**

– Eastmoor Academy administrator

taken care of, from staff meetings to create more time for teacher-directed activities. Among staff, there is a dedication to collegiality that creates a cohesive environment. Significant responsibilities are often handled by staff other than administrators, even in regards to curriculum development and planning. Strong leadership exists among teachers, and administrators are willing to support and encourage opportunities for teachers to take risks and grow professionally.

### Unique Discipline Model Focuses on Academics

Behavior issues are always tied to academics at Eastmoor Academy High School, with the student's academic record used as a means to facilitate a plan to motivate the student. The discipline model focuses on academics and holding students accountable for meeting the academic standards of the school. If a student has to report to the principal's office for a disciplinary issue, his or her grades will be reviewed and the conversation will address academics, even when dealing with behavioral problems. There is a common belief that if the underlying issue is resolved concerning academics, then behavioral issues will be reduced.

An intervention assistance team comprised of teachers, counselors, and parents is occasionally formed to assist students that are struggling or experiencing behavioral issues. The formation of an intervention team can be initiated through a counselor, teacher, or even a parent. Meetings are then arranged to find out the source of the issue and to look into the student's academic standing. If there is a behavior issue, the focus is not on the behavior itself, but rather on the student's academic performance. The belief among staff is that students who exhibit behavior issues need to be refocused academically.

### Students Benefit from Strong Support Systems

There is a strong foundation in place at Eastmoor Academy High School to help students who are at-risk or struggling academically. Within the school, there are tutoring and intervention programs available to students and specific classes aimed at particular at-risk students. All departments within the school offer tutoring to students twice a week after school. Tutors can also be arranged to help students in need of assistance with passing the state assessment. In addition to tutoring, teachers at Eastmoor all share a common prep period prior to the start of the school day that students can use to pose questions and receive help as well.



Eastmoor attracts students from throughout Columbus, and students can feel pulled between their urban neighborhood environment and the college preparatory school environment. Many students live in neighborhoods where being seen with books or school-related objects can draw negative attention from peers involved in gang culture, and there can be tremendous pressure to assimilate to the neighborhood culture. To help students who were struggling academically, the school created an English class that is specifically geared toward at-risk students and acknowledges the unique challenges facing that student population. This helps to give students with such experiences a targeted approach to learning that enables them to participate in an atmosphere more conducive to their specific needs.

### Close Relationship with Local Nonprofit Organization Supports College Knowledge

Eastmoor Academy High School utilizes a local nonprofit organization to enhance the knowledge of students and parents regarding higher education opportunities, such as financial aid and scholarship application information. Dave Thomas, the late founder and CEO of Wendy's, founded the organization I KNOW I CAN to encourage students in the Columbus City School District to pursue higher education opportunities. The organization sends volunteers to Eastmoor to conduct

financial aid workshops and provide students with information regarding college planning.

Eastmoor provides an office space for I KNOW I CAN volunteers to be on campus once a week, with plans of adding more on-site volunteers in the future. In addition to college planning information, the organization provides an opportunity for students who meet qualifications to obtain \$100 to \$1200 grants to help bridge the gap between college costs and available resources. There is also a retention program in place with part-time staff at 13 Ohio colleges to help students with their transition from high school to college. Eastmoor's affiliation with this program provides another way for students to receive information on college planning and links to support once they have graduated from high school.

## Parent Liaisons Bridge the Gap Between the School and Families

To increase parental involvement, Eastmoor Academy High School has two parent liaisons that help bridge the gap between the administration and parents. Parent liaisons are hired to work 10 hours per week as consultants and are paid through district funds. Liaisons serve multiple purposes, but their main function is to circulate information between the principal and parents. They also support teachers and administration and consistently put in up to 40 hours per week without extra compensation. The liaisons help to keep communication lines open by fielding questions and providing information linking parents, teachers, and administrators.

## Gentlemen's Club Builds Cultural Capital

A unique program aptly named the Principal's Gentlemen's Club provides meaningful mentorship and skill development for high achieving young men at Eastmoor Academy High School. The principal handpicks several male students to join the club where they will have the opportunity to participate throughout their academic tenure at Eastmoor. The club is limited to 12 students, with three students from each grade level. The students are selected on the basis of teacher recommendations and must be performing at a high level academically. The group members currently maintain an average of a 3.58 grade point average, well above the minimum 3.0 required to participate.

The goal of the club is to help students learn essential skills such as leadership, networking, and etiquette while enhancing their social and political development. In essence, these students are building cultural capital and

serving as role models to their peers. These students attend regular meetings that focus on a different theme each month, such as financial and investment planning or career planning. They also attend community events and are offered unique opportunities, such as having the chance to take their mothers out to a dinner provided by a local upscale restaurant.

The group provides an environment in which they receive positive reinforcement for their academic achievements. In some of the urban neighborhoods where students live, they may be stigmatized for their academic focus. In their neighborhood environment, upward mobility and educational attainment may not be welcomed, and students worry about the possibility of being "jumped" for carrying books. This club gives these students an outlet where being motivated to learn social and political skills is looked upon in a respected and positive light by faculty and peers.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2006-07). *CCD public school data 2006-07 school year: Eastmoor Academy*. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from [http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school\\_detail.asp?Search=1&SchoolID=390438002560&ID=390438002560](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/school_detail.asp?Search=1&SchoolID=390438002560&ID=390438002560)

<sup>2</sup> Columbus City Schools. (n.d.). *School choice/lottery information: Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from [http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/applications/FAQ.nsf/\(deadline\)?openview](http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/applications/FAQ.nsf/(deadline)?openview)

<sup>3</sup> Eastmoor Academy. (n.d.). *Eastmoor information*. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from [http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/eastmoor/adm\\_info.html](http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/eastmoor/adm_info.html)

<sup>4</sup> Columbus City Schools. (n.d.). *Eastmoor Academy high school profile*. Retrieved March 2, 2009, from [http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/website.nsf/\(ccs\\_pages\)/Schools\\_HS\\_Profiles?opendocument](http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/website.nsf/(ccs_pages)/Schools_HS_Profiles?opendocument)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2006). *Selected economic characteristics: United States*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=01000US&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_DP3&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_-&-lang=en&-caller=geoselect&-redoLog=false&-format=](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_DP3&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_-&-lang=en&-caller=geoselect&-redoLog=false&-format=)

<sup>6</sup> US Census Bureau. (2006). *Educational attainment: Columbus city, Ohio*. Retrieved July 31, 2008, from

[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=16000US3918000&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_S2301&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_-&-redoLog=false](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=16000US3918000&-qr_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_S2301&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_-&-redoLog=false)

<sup>7</sup> Columbus City Schools. (2008). *Facts about CCS: Student demographics*. Retrieved on April 7, 2009, from [http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/website.nsf/\(ccs\\_pages\)/About\\_CCS?opendocument](http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us/website.nsf/(ccs_pages)/About_CCS?opendocument)

<sup>8</sup> Toppo, Greg. (2008). *'Crisis' graduation gap found between cities, suburbs*. *USA Today*. Retrieved on April 7, 2009, from [http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2008-04-01-cities-suburbs-graduation\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2008-04-01-cities-suburbs-graduation_N.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Ohio Department of Education. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions about Ohio Graduation Tests*. Retrieved on April 7, 2009, from <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=216&ContentID=4904&Content=52065>

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# FENWAY HIGH SCHOOL

*Boston, Massachusetts*

**FENWAY HIGH SCHOOL** was originally established in 1983 as a separate academic program for 90 disengaged students within an already existing urban high school in Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup> It became a Boston Public Schools (BPS) Pilot School in 1994,<sup>2</sup> based on the defining principles of the Pilot School educational model: personalization of the academic learning environment.<sup>3</sup> Fenway has a small student enrollment of approximately 280 students, including grades 9 through 12. Eighty-two percent of the students who attend Fenway are from minority backgrounds, more than 50 percent of Fenway students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 29 percent of all enrolled students have a documented disability. Fenway High School has an attendance rate of 95.5 percent, an overall graduation rate of 96 percent, and approximately 89 percent of all Fenway graduates apply to, and subsequently enroll in, two- or four-year colleges and universities. In 2003, Fenway High School was recognized as one of the nine highest performing Massachusetts urban schools by MassINC, and in 2004, the American Library Association selected Fenway as the recipient of the National School Library Media Award.<sup>4</sup> The school's success at preparing students for college, and life after high school generally, can be attributed to

Fenway High School			
Year Established	1983	Asian	2.1%
Locale	Large Central City	African American	42.4%
Free/Reduced Meals	63.0%	Latino	41.0%
Attendance Rate	95.5%	Other	0.7%
Enrollment	290	White	13.8%

Source: Self-reported data for 2008-09 school year

programs and practices that facilitate the development of learning communities and personal relationships between students and teachers, a meaningful and challenging college preparatory curriculum and advanced assessment process for all students, and close and active collaborations with a local four-year college and other community partners.

## State and Local Context

In 1993, the Massachusetts legislature passed the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Education Reform Act, which authorized the establishment of charter schools. The Act indicated that groups desiring to receive a charter from the Massachusetts State Board



of Education would have to complete a rigorous application process and demonstrate positive student academic achievement results within five years or potentially lose their charter.<sup>5</sup> Following the 1994 passage of the Education Reform Act, Fenway High School applied for one of the first state charters, and the state board granted the charter. However, instead of accepting the charter from the state, Fenway decided to assume a leadership role in urban educational reform efforts in the city of Boston, and to that end, Fenway High School collaborated with the Boston Public Schools (BPS) District and the Boston Teacher’s Union (BTU) to create the Pilot School model.<sup>6</sup>

Both BPS and BTU agreed that in order for public Pilot Schools to be more innovative, they should be free of certain constraints. Therefore, Pilot Schools exercise much more flexibility over district policies and mandates, and Pilot School governing boards have more authority than school councils. Specifically, Pilot Schools have autonomy over their budgets, staffing, governance, curriculum, assessments, and school calendar, as these characteristics are important in meeting the unique needs of students in urban environments. There are currently 21 Pilot Schools within BPS, and they serve students that are representative of the larger BPS student population. While Pilot Schools have the same per-pupil resources as other public high schools in Boston, compared to district averages, Pilot Schools have smaller class sizes, smaller teacher-student ratios, longer instructional periods, a nurturing school culture, and a practice of requiring students to demonstrate competency or mastery, rather than course completion, in order to graduate. Furthermore, Pilot Schools generally have extensive waiting lists, low suspension rates, and high college entrance rates.<sup>7</sup>

### Small Learning Communities Facilitate the Development of College-and Life-Readiness Behaviors and Skills

Fenway High School was founded on the principle that all students can learn when they feel safe and have opportunities to develop close personal relationships with their teachers.<sup>8</sup> As a Pilot School, Fenway still adheres to this founding principle, and therefore the school has implemented three programs that create small learning communities where students can develop college- and life-readiness behaviors and skills: 1) Freshman Orientation at Thompson Island, 2) The House System, and 3) Advisory Groups.



In order to help freshmen begin to develop a safe learning community and their capacity for working in groups (a skill necessary for college success and life in general), Fenway staff provides them with the opportunity to take a four-night trip to Thompson Island. During the first week of school each fall, freshmen spend time learning about each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and the students participate in group activities that help them learn to trust one another and work as a team. According to school documentation, many seniors reflect back on this initial freshmen trip as important to their success at Fenway.

**“From the beginning, Fenway explains that college is an expectation.”**

*– Fenway High School parent*

Another program Fenway implements in order to create small learning communities is the House System.

All incoming freshmen are grouped into three learning families of approximately 75 students (including students from grades 9 through 11), and they remain in these groups throughout their first three years of high school. Each House has its own faculty that teaches the core curriculum areas (math, science, and humanities) to the same group of mixed-grade students. In addition to the faculty, each House also has a student support counselor, a special education teacher or coordinator, and one or two teachers from minor content areas. Essentially, the House System allows for the creation of diverse cohorts, and these diverse cohorts provide students the opportunity to work together and encourage one another in their academic pursuits.<sup>9</sup>

A third way in which Fenway works to develop small learning communities is called the Advisory Program. In this program, each teacher serves as an advisor to approximately 25 students in their assigned House, and advisory groups meet as a class three times per week. While students remain in the same advisory group throughout their high

school experience, different teachers in their House will serve as their advisor at each grade level. This allows students to get to know their teachers better, and it allows teachers to become highly proficient in the advisory curriculum that they teach in their assigned grade level.<sup>10</sup> The Advisory Program is specifically focused on helping students develop the following college and life readiness skills and behaviors: 1) study skills and time management, 2) presentation skills, 3) decision-making skills, 4) violence prevention, and 5) planning and preparation for academic deadlines. Helping students develop these skills and behaviors takes place in a variety of ways, including class assignments, outside speakers, and electronic media.

### A Challenging College Preparatory Curriculum and Advanced Assessment Practices Provide Opportunities for All Students to Become College Ready

All students at Fenway High School take the same college preparatory curriculum that develops the following habits of mind: 1) perspective, 2) evidence, 3) relevance, 4) connection, and 5) supposition. The school's documentation indicates that these habits of mind are a part of Fenway vocabulary and the pedagogical approach used at the school. Additionally, students are expected to understand them and employ them across the curriculum. The core curriculum, taught within each House, includes four years of math, four years of humanities, four years of science, and Spanish I and II. These courses constitute graduation requirements for all students. In addition to these core content area courses, students take physical education, and seniors can elect to take a psychology course called "Dynamics of the Self." The course seeks to help students develop their communication skills, understand their own behavior, and improve their imagination and stress management skills. Additionally, the course stresses taking responsibility for oneself. Overall, the core curriculum and other course opportunities provide students with opportunities to develop the key cognitive strategies and learn the key content they will need to be successful in the college learning environment.

To gauge student competency within the core curriculum areas, Fenway employs a unique set of advanced assessment practices, including portfolios and exhibitions. All students must complete the Fenway Junior Review process before they proceed to their senior year. The Junior Review includes a student-created portfolio that is representative of their best work in all core content areas during their first three years of



high school. In addition to examples of work completed, the portfolio usually includes a résumé and an essay completed by the student that outlines their strengths and weaknesses, future plans, and what the student intends to do to make the most of their senior year. Each student then formally presents their portfolio to a panel of teachers in their House. The panel comments on the presentation and discusses the student's upcoming senior year. The Junior Review provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate competency in key content areas, as well as develop the important overarching academic skill of presenting to an audience.<sup>11</sup>

After successfully completing the Junior Review process, students move on to the Senior Institute. In preparation for college, and life after high school, students in the three Houses are mixed into three new cohort groups, and they study with new teachers in the core content areas of math, science, and humanities. However, students remain in the same Advisory groups so that they can support each other through the college application process and the completion of senior graduation requirements. All seniors write a senior position paper, and they complete additional portfolios in all key content areas (math, science, and humanities).

In addition to the practice of using portfolios to assess student progress in the junior and senior years, the most important form of assessment at Fenway is an exhibition. Exhibitions require that students demonstrate that they understand material they have studied, research that they have conducted, or problems that they have solved. Often, exhibitions involve student presentations to panels of Fenway staff, colleagues, and other community partners. Exhibitions commonly take place at grade-level science fairs. These fairs culminate in a student-designed senior project that is exhibited at the Boston Museum of Science. Advisory groups provide students with opportunities to prepare for the exhibitions, and the cross-curricular focus on this form of assessment allows students to develop their academic behaviors, such as time management, and overarching academic skills, such as presenting, that they will need to be successful college students.

## Collaboration with a Local Community College and Other Community Partners Provides Learning Opportunities Outside of the High School Environment

In order to help students develop their college readiness skills and behaviors, Fenway High School has a dual enrollment program with Emmanuel College. Emmanuel College is a local four-year college that students can reach within a 10-minute walk from the Fenway campus. Both juniors and seniors may meet with their Advisor or another teacher to discuss the possibility of dual enrollment in subjects of their interests, if Fenway has a similar course, students are able to receive both high school and college credit. In order to participate in the dual enrollment program, students must demonstrate competency in the subject area, be able to manage an increased academic workload, and be able to handle a different schedule. Overall, the dual enrollment program provides students the opportunity to experience a college classroom while still having the support of the high school environment.

In addition to the optional dual enrollment program, juniors and seniors are required to participate in the Fenway High School Ventures Program. To help students prepare for life after high school, this program is designed to help students develop their communication and entrepreneurial skills. Once a week in the second half of their junior year, students participate in “The Pitch,” which focuses on the development of initiative,

resourcefulness, communication, problem solving skills, respect for others, self-disci-

pline, and self-confidence. This portion of the Ventures Program culminates with a presentation of a business proposal to a panel of judges. During the beginning of the senior year, students in the Ventures Program learn about personal finance, living on a budget, insurance issues, interviewing skills, résumé writing, and how to get and keep a job.

At the end of the senior year, all students complete a six-week unpaid internship, which is required for graduation. The requirements for the internship include:

- 1) working at least 30 hours per week at the internship site;
- 2) returning to school on Mondays for an early afternoon seminar;
- 3) working on a large project at the internship site, assigned by the student’s internship supervisor;
- 4) maintaining a weekly hours log, which has to be signed by the internship supervisor; and
- 5) completing a senior portfolio which contains work done during the internship. By completing an internship, students gain first-hand experience with the concept that certain jobs require certain skills, and those skills are developed in the college learning environment.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Fenway High School. (n.d.). *Background*. Retrieved June 25, 2008, from <http://fenwayhs.org/Background.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Fenway High School. (n.d.). *History highlights*. Retrieved June 25, 2008, from <http://fenwayhs.org/HistoryHighlights.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Center for Collaborative Education. (n.d.). *Pilot/Horace Mann Schools Network*. Retrieved June 25, 2008, from <http://www.ccebos.org/pilotschools/boston-pilotschools.html>

<sup>4</sup> Boston Public Schools. (n.d.). Retrieved June 25, 2008 from <http://boston.k12.ma.us/schools/RC646.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education. (n.d.). *Massachusetts charter schools*. Retrieved June 27, 2008, from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/>

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[ccebos.org/pilotschools/boston-pilotschools.html](http://www.ccebos.org/pilotschools/boston-pilotschools.html)

<sup>8</sup> Fenway High School. (n.d.). *Background*. Retrieved June 25, 2008, from <http://fenwayhs.org/Background.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Fenway High School. (n.d.). *A community of learners*. Retrieved June 25, 2008, from <http://fenwayhs.org/Community-Learners.htm>

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## Special Thanks

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Carol Lazarus, *CES Mentor School Liaison*

Peggy Kemp, *Principal*

Charis McGaughy and Allison Lombardi, *EPIC Staff Members*

# POLYTECH HIGH SCHOOL

*Woodside, Delaware*

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**POLYTECH HIGH SCHOOL** is a magnet career technical high school with a college preparatory curriculum where all students are expected to perform at high levels. The graduation rate for African American students is 96 percent, which is the best in the state of Delaware, and the overall graduation rate in 2006 was also 96 percent.<sup>2</sup> Sixty percent of graduating seniors go directly into postsecondary education, and 40 percent choose to go directly to work. Most of the students graduating from POLYTECH and enrolling in a college or university upon high school completion are first generation college students. The school's successful integration of academic coursework with technical specialties provides students with marketable skills, and many graduates choose to utilize these skills to support themselves through college.

## State and Local Context

POLYTECH High School is located in Woodside, Delaware, which is a small town just south of Dover located within Kent County. While Woodside has a population of less than 200, Kent County has a total population of nearly 127,000.<sup>3</sup> The school population of more than 1,100 students is 71 percent white and 22 percent African American.<sup>4</sup> These demographics are comparable to those of the

POLYTECH High School			
Year Established	1991	Enrollment	1,164
Locale	Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City	African American	23.9%
Free/Reduced Meals	21.8%	Latino	4.6%
Attendance Rate	95.0%	White	69.4%
ELL Students	38%	Native American	1.1%
AP/IB Participation	5.8%		

Source: State of Delaware 2008-09 School Profile<sup>1</sup>

Kent County population.<sup>5</sup> The school draws students from throughout the county, which includes five school districts and a mix of rural communities, small towns, and small cities.

In the beginning, POLYTECH was a half-day vocational program that catered primarily to students struggling academically. During the 1990s, the school underwent a restructuring using the High Schools That Work model, and in 1991 it became a full-time technical high school, which resulted in shifts in external perception and name change. Today demand for admission is high, and some students travel up to 90 minutes each

way to attend the school. The school admits an equal number of students from each of the five local school districts on a first-come, first-served basis.

The State of Delaware requires 22 credits for graduation from high school, which is comparable to other states. Students who maintain at least a B average qualify for funding to attend a community college. Many students use this program to acquire a community college degree and then transfer to a four-year institution.

Only 45 percent of the students at the University of Delaware come from in state, and some individuals suggest that this might reflect a preference for out-of-state tuition dollars.

## The Curriculum and Academy Structure

The integration of academic coursework with technical specialties helps students to realize the practical applications of their skills and knowledge; it also provides them with marketable skills, which encourages students to take their work seriously. At POLYTECH, the expectations of all students are high, as demonstrated by the rigorous curriculum required of all students. The school graduation requirements meet the State of Delaware curriculum standards, with additional required credits in a technical concentration area. Consequently, POLYTECH has the highest number of required credits in the state (27 minimum), and seniors graduate with an average of 31 credits.

POLYTECH is comprised of five academies: the Educational Foundations Academy for freshmen, and four career academies with industrial, modern technology, professional services, and health/medical themes. The freshman orientation process acclimates students to the academy structure, as well as the expectations that are enforced through a strict discipline policy. The freshman Educational Foundations Academy courses include college-preparatory English, science, social studies, and math. During their first year students explore each of the 21 technical concentrations, and to eventually select a concentration within one of the four career academies. Once students have chosen a technical area, they go through a formal interview process for admission to the program. Ninety percent of students are accepted into their first or second choice technical area. Over the next three years, students follow a prescribed course plan. By graduation, students have gained skills



in a high-demand career area, and in some cases, students also have earned a professional certification (ASE automotive, cosmetology, CNA, and pilot certifications are all possible).

## The Focus is on College Preparation

POLYTECH has a marked focus on college preparation, which makes it stand out from many other career/technical schools. Every student in the school takes a similar college preparatory academic curriculum in addition to their career academy classes. It is the only technical school in Delaware to offer AP courses, and given the current demand, the school hopes to offer

more AP courses in the future. Writing, critical reading, research, study skills, and oral communication are integrated across subject areas.

Students are encouraged to take risks and to take advantage of the opportunities to attend classes at local colleges. Students begin writing papers in APA style their freshman year, and their paper length and quality requirements increase each year. During their final year, POLYTECH seniors complete a rigorous senior project that includes a research paper, a tangible product, and an oral presentation. These senior projects prepare students for college-level independent writing, research, expectations, communication, and presentations. All POLYTECH students also develop a portfolio including their resume, references, cover letters, report cards, and examples of their best academic work.

## PASS Program Provides Systemic Support

All POLYTECH students benefit from the POLYTECH Advise-

**“I stand in front of the faculty each fall to identify the good, the bad, and the ugly, to put it out front and to let them know where we need to improve.”**

*– POLYTECH High School principal*

ment and Support System (PASS). Teachers and administrators act as advisers in the PASS program, and each teacher and administrator mentors eight to ten students. The advisers function as caring, committed adults in the lives of the students, and they are matched with students on the basis of student interests and needs to the extent possible. Administrators advise freshmen, and once freshmen have selected a technical concentration, they are transferred to an advisor within their chosen academy. Students meet with their advisers at least four times per year to discuss their four-year high school plan and their two-year post-high school plan (known as the 4+2 plan). Advisers regularly review student grades and make sure students stay on track to meet their goals. Each spring, students and their parents meet with their PASS advisers to discuss course selections for the upcoming year as well as the six-year plan.

The PASS program is administered by the school's guidance counselor office and guidance counselors train the teachers, help students select colleges to apply to, and provide information to students about other postsecondary options. The program is low-cost, effective, and won the State of Delaware's Superstars in Education Award. In addition to providing students with strong support, the PASS program increases cohesion across the staff. In order to advise students effectively, teachers need to understand the requirements across departments.

## Communication is Frequent and Standards are Clear

Teachers and administrators at POLYTECH interact frequently and in meaningful ways. Excellent communication promotes the dissemination of data to and among teachers and administrators, which in turn drives instruction. Administrators expect close ties between the technical and academic programs, and they also expect that all teachers share in the school's philosophy of high expectations for all students. Students who perform below state standards are enrolled in multiple English and mathematics courses. Teachers within content areas such as math or social studies subjects meet twice weekly to collaborate and integrate state standards across the academies. Within each academy, academic and technical faculty also come together for weekly meetings. The principal meets with lead teachers each week to ensure teachers are on the right track and to improve the curriculum. Additionally, teachers at POLYTECH are given the freedom to take instructional risks, and the administration is supportive of funding teacher-determined professional devel-



opment opportunities. Additionally, the principal meets monthly with all students (by class) at Town Meetings to hear student concerns, to honor students who have garnered awards, to highlight key upcoming events, and to emphasize the importance of attendance.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> State of Delaware. (2008). *POLYTECH High School profile*. Retrieved February 5, 2009, from <http://profiles.doe.k12.de.us/SchoolProfiles/School/Default.aspx?checkSchool=652&districtCode=39>

<sup>2</sup> POLYTECH High School. (n.d.). *POLYTECH fact sheet*. Retrieved May 15, 2008, from <http://www.POLYTECH.k12.de.us/hs/index.htm>

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<sup>4</sup> POLYTECH High School. (n.d.). *POLYTECH fact sheet*. Retrieved May 15, 2008, from

<http://www.POLYTECH.k12.de.us/hs/index.htm>

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### Special Thanks

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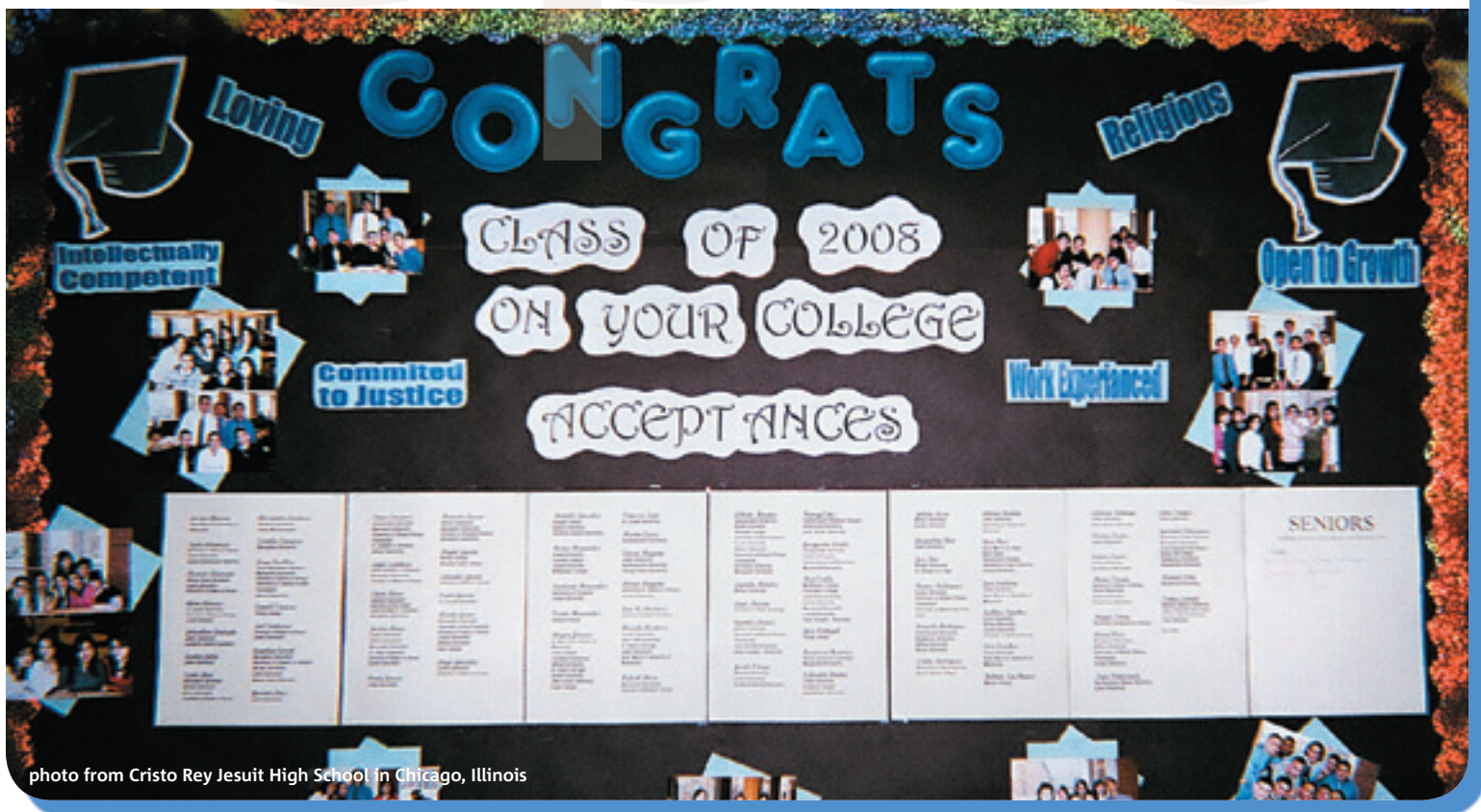
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# PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS

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Cristo Rey Jesuit High School  
Denver Street School

epic



# CRISTO REY JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL

*Chicago, Illinois*

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**CRISTO REY JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL** is a private, Catholic high school that serves low-income, at-risk immigrant students primarily from the Pilsen and Little Village neighborhoods of Chicago, Illinois. Recognized by President Bush in 2008 as a successful and innovative school model,<sup>1</sup> Cristo Rey is structured around a four-year internship program that provides students the means to finance their private education.<sup>2</sup> The school's vision is to provide its 500 students with a safe and challenging learning environment in which they can maximize their potential to assume leadership roles in their civic, religious, cultural, and professional lives. This is supported by a dual language college preparatory curriculum and the expectation that all students will apply to and attend a four-year college or university. To be admitted to Cristo Rey, students and parents must participate in a comprehensive application process. All new students attend an intensive, three-week summer orientation to learn relevant job, study, technology, and time management skills. The student body is 100 percent Latino.

The attendance rate at Cristo Rey is 98.5 percent, and the graduation rate is 99 percent.

## Cristo Rey High School Statistics

Year Established	1996	Enrollment	535
Locale	Large City	ELL Students	0.3%
Free/Reduced Meals	86.4%	Latino	100.0%
Attendance Rate	98.5%		

Source: Self report data, Spring 2008

Ninety-nine percent of students are accepted into either a two-year or four-year institution. The school's success at preparing students for college and the working world can be attributed to its unique structure, bilingual curriculum and culture, and comprehensive student support services.

## State and Local Context

With more than 400,000 students, Chicago Public Schools are the third-largest school district in the nation. Eighty-five percent of its students are considered low-income, and 92 percent are from minority backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> Approximately half of the city's freshmen successfully graduate within five years of entering



high school.<sup>4</sup> District officials have undergone targeted efforts over the past decade to steadily improve academic performance and graduation rates, including new programs created in partnership with city officials, non-profit organizations, philanthropists, and communities.<sup>5</sup> One of the larger contributors is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Since 2000, the Gates Foundation has gifted \$66 million to fund school improvement initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

Nearly 15 years ago, Jesuit priests dedicated themselves to helping low-income immigrant families living in Chicago's near-southwest side. By surveying the community, they found that families in Pilsen and Little Village sought a small, college preparatory high school, but were unable to afford private education. In response, the Jesuits developed a work-study program to generate income for the school and provide students with valuable work experience. Through Cristo Rey's Corporate Internship Program (CIP), Chicago businesses and firms hire students to work as interns; all income earned by students through CIP is applied to their tuition and fees. In addition to local companies, the high school partners with the University of Chicago School of Social Work, DePaul University, Chicago School of Professional Psychology, and Loyola University. The school's overall success has led to the establishment of 19 Cristo Rey Jesuit High Schools around the country.

While Cristo Rey has achieved a high graduation rate (99 percent), student retention, at 70 percent, is below target. Administrators are committed to improving retention and highlight three main reasons students are asked to leave the school: 1) failing a class and refusing to complete summer school; 2) being suspected of gang activity, or 3) being fired from an internship and deemed to be unemployable. The latter scenarios, which make up the majority of cases, necessitates strict policies to ensure student safety and the financial sustainability of the school. Students and parents support these policies, and report that Cristo Rey is one of the few places in their community where they feel safe and valued.

### Corporate Internship Program Develops Community Connections and Contextual Skills

The Corporate Internship Program (CIP) was designed to make private education affordable to at-risk youth



living in economically challenged areas of Chicago. The program combines job sharing and employee leasing. The school contracts with private companies that pay the school \$28,000 per academic year for each full-time, entry-level position filled by Cristo Rey students. Four students share each position. Students spend four extended days at school and one at work each week.

As part of freshman orientation, the school provides comprehensive training to prepare students for the experience. Topics include everything from professional attire to operating office equipment, Microsoft Office skills, team building,

and relevant terminology like "HR," "VP," etc.

All 500 students participate in the program, and fewer than two percent are fired from their internships each year. When this occurs, students must complete a re-employment process during which they read *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and complete a report and PowerPoint presentation on its concepts. They must also write a letter to their parents, the school, and the employer to describe the circumstances that led to their dismissal and how the situation could be prevented in the future. Additional technology training may also be required. This process helps students develop self-awareness as well as resilience. All students and their sponsoring companies complete an exit survey at the end of the year to determine which students will return to the same location; 20 percent of students stay with the same company all four years. Overall, the CIP program cultivates independence, self-advocacy, strong communication and time management

**"The school works with us from the very beginning and helps us achieve the goal of attending college right after graduation."**

*– Cristo Rey Jesuit High School senior*



writing, and presentation skills in both languages are incorporated into English and social studies courses. This complete integration of English and Spanish into the school curriculum and culture works to help students appreciate, improve, and, ultimately, apply their language skills in college and the workplace.

Since nearly everyone at the school is bilingual, parents feel more connected to their children's education. One parent indicated that she really appreciates the opportunity to speak to teachers in Spanish about her daughter's education. "The teachers here are really helpful. I know that I can go to them for help with her grades, attitude, or anything. Since I don't speak English well, it would be difficult to talk about these things in English. When talking about your kids, it is important to be

able to communicate confidently." The ability to discuss these issues in Spanish encourages closer relationships between parents, teachers, and administrators and builds a stronger community for students. A Spanish-speaking culture also allows parents to fully participate in important college-related classes, known as Escuela Para Padres, which cover topics such as completing the FAFSA, financial aid, and cultural transitions from high school to college. Students report that these classes have been very valuable in helping families understand why students want to attend college, as well as the value of a college education.

### Bilingual Students and Staff Enhance Culture and Parental Involvement

The dual language curriculum at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School is an integral part of the school's culture. Students must demonstrate ability in both English and Spanish to be admitted to the school. The vast majority of teachers and administrators are fluent in Spanish in order to communicate fully with students and parents; teachers who are not bilingual may still be hired for some positions, but administrators acknowledge that this creates unwanted barriers inside the community. All students are required to take Spanish courses, which helps them develop advanced writing and reading skills in their first language. Grammar,

able to communicate confidently." The ability to discuss these issues in Spanish encourages closer relationships between parents, teachers, and administrators and builds a stronger community for students. A Spanish-speaking culture also allows parents to fully participate in important college-related classes, known as Escuela Para Padres, which cover topics such as completing the FAFSA, financial aid, and cultural transitions from high school to college. Students report that these classes have been very valuable in helping families understand why students want to attend college, as well as the value of a college education.

### A Collaborative Approach Drives Curriculum Design and Assessment

To accommodate CIP work schedules, the curriculum for freshmen and sophomores is fixed so that students in each grade take the same courses; juniors and seniors have more freedom to select electives. Teachers work collaboratively to design and assess the college preparatory curriculum through benchmarking, goal-setting and soliciting feedback from alumni currently enrolled in college. Instructional objectives and learning outcomes are evaluated against college entrance requirements, accreditation requirements, Illinois state standards, ACT standards, AP standards, and Jesuit



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education standards. Interdepartmental goal-setting helps to strengthen the curriculum and reinforce student academic knowledge and skills, such as reading and critical thinking skills. Last year, departments worked to increase students' reading skills by incorporating active reading strategies, such as underlining and the use of graphic organizers to enhance notes and reading comprehension into most classrooms. Similarly, the history, Spanish, and English departments collaborated to increase activities that promote higher-level thinking skills, such as interpretation and reasoning, across courses. Alumni feedback has also helped teachers determine how closely the curriculum is aligned to college coursework and to identify how it should be modified. This multi-layered and collaborative approach enables teachers to evaluate and improve the curriculum in order to consistently prepare students for college.

## Personalized College Counseling Supports College Readiness

College counseling at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School begins during freshman orientation when counselors meet one-on-one with students to establish the expectation that all students will apply to and attend college. The school hosts two college fairs each year, and students across all grades are invited to learn about specific colleges and the application process. The college counseling program intensifies in junior year; there are college visits, retreats, and individual sessions with counselors. Juniors are required to take the ACT and PSAT and engage in career exploration activities through IllinoisMentor.com. Seniors are invited to attend a three-week summer institute to work individually with counselors on writing personal statements and completing applications. Some students are able to submit all of their applications during this time. Roughly half of the seniors complete the institute, while the others attend

an after-school workshop held three days a week once the school year begins. College counselors also send information about scholarship opportunities and summer writing programs offered at the local colleges to students and parents via email. Cristo Rey's comprehensive and personalized college counseling program reinforces the school's expectations and offers students important contextual skills for college success.

## Homework Center Cultivates Academic Behaviors

A few years after the school opened, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School instituted an after-school homework center to provide students with additional academic support. Students struggling to meet academic standards or complete homework on time are required to attend, but roughly half of the students in attendance on any given day are there by choice. Up to four teachers from different departments and additional peer tutors are available for assistance. Students can also arrange to meet teachers who are not scheduled to work in the center for additional help. The center includes space to work on group projects and computers to complete research. This structured, yet flexible study environment promotes accountability, focus, self-management, and time management skills. It also helps students develop persistence by understanding that mistakes or failure should not cause one to give up. Administrators indicated that the central purpose of the homework center is to help students develop the ability to seek out help and take the necessary steps to correct mistakes. Such behaviors will position students to succeed in high school, the workplace, and college.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. (n.d.). Retrieved on September 6, 2008, from <http://www.cristo-rey.net/>

<sup>2</sup> Admissions. (n.d.). Retrieved on September 5, 2008, from <http://www.cristorey.net/admissions/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Chicago Public Schools. (n.d.). *At-a-glance*. Retrieved April 3, 2009, from [http://www.cps.edu/About\\_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/At-a-glance.aspx](http://www.cps.edu/About_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/At-a-glance.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> Wallis, Claudia. (2007, May 8). *On a Listening Tour with Melinda Gates*. *Time Magazine*. Retrieved September 6, 2008, from <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1618468,00.html>

<sup>5</sup> Chicago Public Schools. (n.d.). *Highlighted CPS Programs and*

*Initiatives*. Retrieved September 8, 2008, from <http://www.cps.k12.il.us/programs.html>

<sup>6</sup> Wallis, Claudia. (2007, May 8). *On a Listening Tour with Melinda Gates*. *Time Magazine*. Retrieved September 6, 2008, from <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1618468,00.html>

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*EPIC Staff Members*

# DENVER STREET SCHOOL

Denver, Colorado



**DENVER STREET SCHOOL** is a low cost private alternative school in Denver, Colorado, primarily serving at-risk students in grades 7 through 12 who may have dropped out of traditional schools or are at risk of dropping out. Tuition is \$50-\$150 per quarter depending on family income. The school was founded in 1985 and is the first of what has since developed into a nationwide network of 43 similar programs called the National Association of Street Schools.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 48 percent of Denver Street School students are Latino, while around 20 percent are African American and 29 percent are white.<sup>2</sup> Denver Street School is a faith-based organization; however, religion is not fundamental to the curriculum and students of any religious or spiritual persuasion are welcome to enroll.<sup>3</sup> Class sizes are kept very small (between 3 and 12 students) and teachers take a personal interest in each student's academic progression, as well as the life circumstances that contributed to their previous school failure. Denver Street School students often face challenges such as substance abuse, teen parenting, family dysfunction, and homelessness. As a result, teachers need to address both social and academic skills in their work with youth, helping them develop as "whole people." Economic literacy is emphasized throughout the curriculum, allowing

Denver Street School			
Year Established	1985	Enrollment	100
Locale	Large City	African American	20.0%
Free/Reduced Meals	87.0%	Latino	48.0%
Attendance Rate	88.0%	Native American	3.0%
English Learners	12.0%**	White	29.0%

Source: PSS Private School Universe Survey data for the 2007-2008 school year  
 \*\* Students with English as a second language (no special ELL services)

students to gain a practical understanding of financial decision-making and the realities of living an economically independent life. Denver Street School improves the prospects of their at-risk students by building advocacy and personalized academic attention into their programming, emphasizing writing across disciplines, and building life-skills that position students to have more choices about the future when they graduate.

## State and Local Context

Denver Street School is located in an urban neighborhood close to downtown Denver. The city has a population of just over half a million residents, about 35 percent of which are Latino, 11 percent African

American, and 3 percent Asian.<sup>4</sup> Denver is known for being a city with a highly educated population.<sup>5</sup> However, in the last few years improved measurements have exposed the fact that graduation rates in the state of Colorado and in Denver specifically are significantly lower than previously thought, having dropped to levels considered unacceptable to Denver Public Schools.<sup>6</sup> The dropout rate for all schools serving grades 7 through 12 in Denver was over 11 percent in 2006, significantly higher than the statewide rate of 7.3 percent.<sup>7</sup> Approximately half of Denver students who enter the 9th grade do not graduate on time, and African American and Latino students graduate at lower rates than their white peers.<sup>8</sup>

Curriculum development within Denver Street School is aligned with state standards where possible and national standards when state standards do not exist. Students are evaluated upon intake into the school and then regularly thereafter to track their performance relative to themselves and to other students as measured by the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). Denver Street School also adjusts its graduation requirements based on shifts in college admissions requirements so that students leave with a diploma that equips them to pursue secondary education if they should choose to do so.

### Advocates Provide Students with Intensive Personal Guidance

Most students who attend Denver Street School have struggled to thrive in mainstream schools for a variety of reasons. Teachers are very aware of these special needs and make an effort from the point of enrollment forward to identify the patterns and deficits that stood in the way of student success in the past. Part of this process is assigning each young person a faculty advocate. Advocates meet with groups of students every day, but also maintain regular contact with students individually outside of school hours, getting to know their



**“The students feel they are in a school environment where the teachers care about them, and they feel safe at the school as a result. This is a great jumping off point for education.”**

*– Denver Street School teacher*

living situation and personal challenges as well as their educational strengths and weaknesses. It is within the context of this advocacy relationship that much of the skill-building work is done at Denver Street School. Advocates emphasize the difference between formal and informal speech, how to speak effectively to adults in a professional environment, how to negotiate challenging communication scenarios, and

techniques to maintain decorum when becoming emotionally triggered. Many 9th- and 10th-grade students participate in job shadowing as part of their advocacy work, setting up appointments and developing relevant questions as a team, and later working on resume development and interviewing skills with their advocate. Advocates can also nurture the students' social and emotional health by connecting them with needed services and providing a caring, reliable adult presence in their lives.

In addition to developing close individual relationships with students, advocates also provide a link to the school at large. Staff meet daily to discuss the performance status of their students; having a faculty member who is intimately connected to each student means that no young person can fall through



the cracks and all successes and failures are noted and reinforced at both the classroom and advocacy levels. Becoming invested in the relationship with their advocate increases the likelihood that a student will become and remain invested in their educational process.

## Language Arts are Emphasized Across Disciplines

Teachers at Denver Street School note that their students consistently arrive with very low-level skills in the areas of reading and writing. Because written and oral communication are both central to postsecondary success, the school's curriculum integrates writing, vocabulary, and language usage skills into every subject. For example, students in math classes may be expected to describe their answers in words, using complete sentences and proper grammar. Assignments like these are marked as if they were English assignments so students get the benefit of exercising their skills and receiving constructive feedback consistently throughout the day. Writing persuasive essays, conducting interviews, giving speeches, and completing several drafts of a college entrance exam are just a few of the ways in which Denver Street School students learn to express themselves correctly and effectively, all the while engaging academic content at the college preparatory level.

## Economic Literacy Curriculum Reinforces Practical Skills

Due to the challenging circumstances surrounding their lives, students who attend Denver Street School have not developed many of the skills necessary to effectively set and achieve postsecondary goals. In an effort to identify and

close some of these gaps, the school has incorporated an economic literacy program to help adjust students' thinking about their futures and equip them with both the cognitive and contextual knowledge necessary to be financially savvy and self-determinate adults. Called the Keystone Economic Principles model, the program includes nine principles, all of which apply to economics but also have application in daily life and decision-making. For example, one of the principles states, "All choices have consequences," the explanation for which stresses that while we cannot always know what the consequences will be, we can use past experiences and research to increase the odds of making a decision that has positive consequences.<sup>9</sup> Because the principles of economics involve determining optimal actions based on likely future outcomes, teachers find that incorporating these principles across the curriculum helps Denver Street School students perceive their daily actions as part of a set of circumstances over which they do have a certain level of control. Once they make a connection between having this control and understanding that how they manage it matters to their futures, many students experience improvements in not only their financial lives, but in their relationships, behavior, and academic functioning.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Doherty, C. J. (2006). *Street schools offer a personalized education for at-risk youth*. The Education Innovator, 4(4).

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