

San Diego Met High School

Personalization as a Foundation

The mission of San Diego Met High School is to prepare students for college and the workforce through active learning, academic rigor, and community involvement in a small school setting. Because personalization is a key component of the school culture, advisories of 20–25 students work with the same teachers (who are called “advisers”) for all four years. Advisers, parents, and students design a customized academic learning plan to concentrate on achieving proficient-level mastery of the California State Content Standards and developing students’ personal and career interests.

A strong academic foundation, combined with exposing students to the workforce through internships and permitting them to earn the privilege of taking college classes at Mesa Community College, gives San Diego Met graduates choices and opportunities they would not have in a more traditional school setting.

In advisories, each student

works with a adviser who has credentials in English, history, and art and who provides daily support and coordination of each student’s learning. In addition, math, science, and Spanish teachers rotate through the advisory classrooms to teach standards-based curricula to students. Advisories meet for extended periods three days a week and serve as the students’ core learning community and center of accountability.

Advisers serve as teaching generalists, integrating the curriculum, finding educational resources for the students, and ensuring that the students’ individual learning plans target key appropriate academic learning goals for each student. They begin with the state standards, fully integrating English with social studies, and serve as the facilitators for large and small group work as well as individual work.

Learning at San Diego Met is a process that concludes with quality traditional and nontraditional products. Assessments may include public exhibitions,

check-in meetings with advisers, journals, and annual portfolio presentations. There are high expectations for students because the assessments in this model are individualized according to each student’s plan as well as to the real-world standards of a project.

Advisers are also responsible for involving parents in their children’s education. Parental involvement is expected, not just encouraged. According to one adviser, “We expect our parents to be vocal, to be present, and to be involved.” They are required to attend important school-related events, such as exhibition presentations and parent conferences, and have numerous opportunities to be involved at the school, district, and college level.

Learning through internships is a major component of the curriculum and students participate in internships twice a week at more than 400 San Diego County businesses and organizations. Through this opportunity, students develop



Students and teachers form a small community that guarantees success.

relationships with workplace mentors who become role models, resources, and guides.

The mentors and advisers work with students to plan required in-depth projects and to ensure a high level of rigor in the internships. Quarterly, at the culmination of each internship, students demonstrate their learning by formally presenting their projects and other individual learning plan work before a panel of advisers, parents, college instructors, community mentors, and other students and are evaluated using predetermined standards.

Students can graduate with both a high school diploma and 20–25 college credits. The school is located on the campus of San Diego Mesa Community College, and the excellent

relationship between San Diego Met and the college eases the transition and increases communication between the two institutions. To qualify for the opportunity to attend college classes, sophomores must successfully complete two introductory classes that familiarize them with the expectations of and the skills they need to be successful in undergraduate-level college classes.

As a result of excellent preparation for the California High School Exit Examination and individual support for each student's needs, the school has a 100% pass rate. Its academic program meets district graduation requirements, state standards, and course requirements for admission to the University of California and California

State systems.

To help the school community achieve its goals, the school has a full complement of technology on hand for students and staff members. All advisory classrooms are equipped with separate computer stations for each student and laptops are available for student home use. Weekly assignments and calendars are posted on teachers' Web sites and the SnapGrades gradebook program is used to communicate with parents weekly by e-mail.

Students are required to research a dozen colleges every year and to participate in campus visits to at least four local universities. Students take the required entrance exams and are assisted in applying to four colleges in their senior year.

Armed with an average of 13.5 college credits, 75% percent of the 2009 Met graduates attend four-year colleges.

The Met was founded on the educational philosophy that all students can succeed if they are provided with a personalized environment, a rigorous curriculum, and support to help them achieve their goals. Five years later,

it is clear that when properly implemented, monitored, and modified when necessary, this philosophy can create a pathway to college and success for first generation college students, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, and second language and ethnically underrepresented students.

Supporting the Mission



When asked about the important actions she took to improve student achievement when she became principal, Mildred Phillips says that she focused on staying true to the mission and meeting the accountability criteria.

Because San Diego Met is one of more than 80 schools in the United States, Australia, and Europe that exemplify the philosophy of Big Picture learning, I immediately began formulating a plan to integrate the California State Standards, the San Diego Unified curriculum and graduation requirements, Mesa Community College requirements, and the principles of Big Picture Learning.

The most important actions that I took to improve student achievement were to ask myself the following questions: What will the organization of San Diego Met look like? What will the school culture focus on? How will the curriculum align with California academic

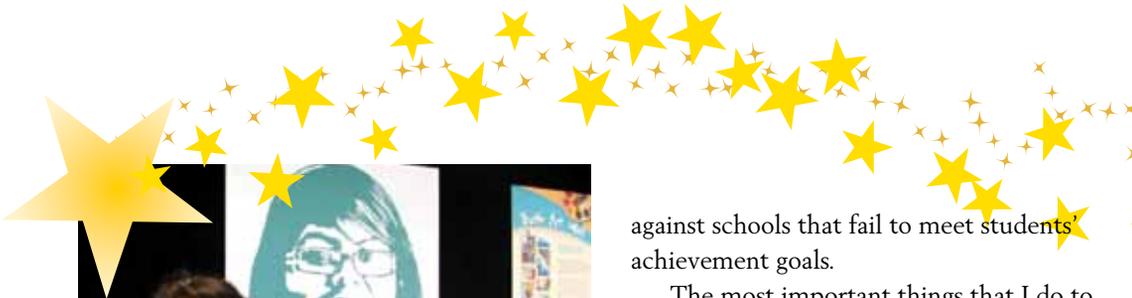
standards? How will we differentiate our instructional practice to meet the needs of our diverse student population? How will assessment, accountability, and data analysis help drive instruction? How will we ensure parent and community involvement? The culture, climate, and best practices of San Diego Met and the community must reflect the individualized nature of its unique instructional program.

Actions Taken

To achieve those goals, I focused on the following areas:

- Organization: strong leadership, vision and purpose, budget and resources, staffing, governance, and shared decision making
- School culture: small school, personalization, learning plans, advisories, exhibitions, internships, college access and success, and college tours
- Curriculum: instruction aligned with California State Standards; scope, sequence, and units of study; technology; internships; and project-based learning
- Instructional practice: academic rigor, student engagement, internships, project-based learning, and community college partnership
- Assessment and accountability: analyses of data, performance, demographics, attendance, graduation rate, academic performance index, adequate yearly progress, California high school exit exam, quarterly exhibitions, formative and summative assessment, ACTs, and SATs





- Parent and community involvement: Title I school site council, district advisory committee, English as a second language committee, special education committee, gifted education committee, and stakeholder involvement.

Advisory Families

The advisory structure is the core organizational and relational structure of all Big Picture Learning schools, and advisories are often described by students as their home or second family. Our goal is for San Diego Met students to be a part of a small advisory of no more 20 students with one adviser who is credentialed to teach English, social studies, and art and who stays with the students throughout their entire high school career.

Each advisory develops a unique culture and climate based on the personality and strengths of the individuals that compose that group. This fosters a sense of purpose and belonging that enables all students to excel at high levels. Parents help set quarterly learning goals at learning plan meetings, participate in the evaluation of their children's progress at quarterly exhibitions, and review student portfolios. Community and business members work with individual students as mentors.

My staff and I believe that to be high achievers, students need strong teachers, robust learning materials, and a supportive and safe learning environment. Unfortunately, too many students from low-income families attend schools that lack the resources they need to optimize their ability to learn. Inequities in the distribution of resources are compounded by measures that levy high-stakes penalties

against schools that fail to meet students' achievement goals.

The most important things that I do to support the mission of the school are:

- Developing a collaborative leadership team to facilitate a student-centered learning environment that provides relevant learning experiences for students
- Ensuring that the entire staff of San Diego Met is committed to the welfare and academic success of all students
- Instituting literacy and numerical programs that move at-risk students into a-g courses (requirements that must be met to attend the University of California) by implementing the goals established in the Title I Smart Goal plan
- Aligning core subject area curriculum and assessments so that students can graduate from high school and meet University of California and California State University requirements to move seamlessly from high school into college courses
- Ensuring that the San Diego Met staff has demonstrated strength in our ability to refine our educational program through needs assessments, evaluations, and professional development
- Continuing to provide targeted professional development for ongoing school improvement to meet the needs of diverse learners as we work toward closing the achievement gap
- Providing expanded professional development for the whole staff, grade levels, academic departments, and individual teachers to analyze a variety of assessment data, including the use of the district-provided DataDirector program, to modify instruction
- Building a master schedule that includes time for my staff to collaborate to ensure that rigor is maintained in all disciplines
- Increasing parent participation, school attendance, and student achievement
- Utilizing all budgets and resources to support student achievement.

San Diego Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical High School

SAN DIEGO, CA

Principal

Mildred Phillips



Grades

9–12

Enrollment

200

Community

Urban

Demographics

46% Hispanic, 23% Black, 20% White, 10% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Native American; 67% free and reduced-price meals eligible



- Advisory model
- Individual learning plans
- Content-area teachers
- Internships
- Business partners
- Project-oriented with quarterly exhibitions
- College-going culture
- Mesa Community College partnership
- Four-year college preparatory plan
- Technology

Members of the staff share their thoughts on what other schools can learn from San Diego Met.

Stacey Gillette, teacher:

I taught for 12 years but am a first-year teacher with the San Diego Met. There are several key components to this impressive model. First is the value of personalized learning. Every single student has a individualized learning plan and schedule. I have 25 students with 25 different schedules on any given school day. All students have the chance to showcase their strengths and strengthen their weaknesses because their schedules fit their needs and still fulfill their requirements.

Second, parental involvement cannot simply be desired, it must be expected and demanded. Parents know when they register their child that they are part of the team, and they are required to attend important events, such as their children's exhibition presentations and parent conferences.

The third and perhaps most effective practice at San Diego Met is looping. I cannot begin to tell you what a dream it is to begin with a single group of students and remain with them until they graduate. The continuity builds trust, respect, and a rapport that you cannot get shuffling through 90 kids a semester.

Jill Badger, internship coordinator:

San Diego Met's successful internship program has business partners throughout San Diego County. The success is due in part to a seven-week rigorous training program called "Introduction to Business Environments," where all new students learn about interviewing skills, career research, résumé writing, body language, appropriate workplace dress and behavior, and how computers are used in a business, among with other workplace skills. The business community counts on the school to bring them appropriately trained interns and has remained loyal because we have met that expectation.

Clyde Yoshida, math teacher:

It is important to share with other schools the extent to which we incorporate the use of performance data to drive our instruction. As a dedicated teacher, I also believe that the school offers something exceptionally valuable: hope. I worked in many capacities in the neverending cycle of restructuring education. I was often burnt out and dismayed at the ways my district tried to manifest change. I felt that my master of education degree was of no use because my district proposed to do all of the decisive moves for me. In this model, my principal allows me to think, use data, and develop the program without dictates that override my professional judgment. I go to school every day excited about instruction and learning. **PL**

Middle College High Schools

San Diego Met High School is a middle college high school, a secondary school that is located on or close to a college campus and that educates underserved students who have the potential to benefit from a rigorous academic curriculum offered within a supportive and nurturing environment. Middle colleges give high school students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma as well as transferable college credits.

Kate Little, the college transition coordinator at the San Diego Met, believes that "the culture in your school can change students' attitudes, rates of success, and dreams for the future." Being on a college campus, students are continually exposed to information regarding college admission requirements and high school course requirements. Each quarter for their first three years, students complete three college searches, and beginning in their freshman year, they write college essays each quarter so that they build a reservoir of essays as practice for future college applications.

Students are also taught to take on the rigor and responsibilities of college classes at an increasing rate of independence with three sequenced personal growth classes that are taught by a college counselor, have increasing rigor and responsibility, and must be completed before students can choose general catalog courses. For more information about middle college high schools, visit www.mcnc.us/aboutus.htm.