



Promising Practices from the Woodrow Wilson Early College Network

Teaching Persistence and Resiliency

Building student efficacy through trust, high expectations, and extensive support
East Palo Alto Academy High School – Cañada College – Stanford University

School Type: Public Charter by Stanford Schools
Corporation

Principal: Bonnie Billings

School Location: Menlo Park, CA

Level: 9-12

Number of Students: 275

I do know my kids are going to be successful in college because they know how to advocate for themselves. They know how to get the help they need. They're not going to compete with kids from Palo Alto right down the street here because they have the same educational experience coming in; they're going to compete because they understand themselves.

They know their strengths. They know how to leverage their strengths. They know their weaknesses and they know how to get help with those weaknesses. And that really is what is going to make a difference for them. The critical point that I need to make with them everyday is you have to ask questions. You can't sit there and not ask questions because you think people are going to think you are stupid... You are going to be stupid if you don't ask questions.

--Seth Leslie, Math Teacher East Palo Alto Academy High School

Goal: Build student efficacy—their power to learn

A recent report from the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute found that family demographics influence social capital available to families to ease their children's transition from high school to college. The Institute's research clearly documents that a parent's immigrant status, job setting, income and personal educational background often results in limited formal and informal connections—social capital—to assist them in preparing their child for college. If Early College high schools are going to be successful, they must design their schools with this reality in mind.

Social capital is primarily about relationships. And, schools that develop strong relationships, "*based on trust and cooperation among teachers, principals, parents and community residents can play an important role in improving schools in several ways. ... When teachers and principals build trust with each*

other and with parents, they can develop a common vision for the school.”¹

Notably, the leaders of East Palo Alto Academy High School (EPAHS) have developed policies and structures to foster trust and facilitate cooperation. The end result is a cohesive learning environment that has furthered student efficacy, in short, their power to learn. 90% of the first two graduating classes being admitted to postsecondary education in a community where more than two thirds of adults have not graduated from high school is powerful evidence of the success of the school.

School Context

EPAHS is a small, neighborhood public high school that is preparing its diverse student body for college and the 21st century workplace. As a charter public school, it is open to all students. The student population is predominantly Latino (78%), with 14% African American and 8% Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Filipino students. Approximately 80% of the students are English language learners and 68% participate in free/reduced lunch programs.

The school aims to meet the needs of students by combining the most successful models of urban school reform with highly qualified teachers and a curriculum that connects the work of the school to the life of the community.

EPAHS, Cañada College, and Stanford University designed a program for each student that meets or exceeds State Department of Education graduation requirements. It is guided by national standards and by standard entrance criteria for four-year colleges and universities. Students have completed standard high school courses, blended courses that integrate the standard A-G high school courses with college level requirements so that college credit can be earned, dual enrollment courses taken at the college and earning both college and high school credits, and courses taken for college credit only. The goal is for all students to

¹ Warren, M.R. (Summer 2005). *Communities and Schools: A New View of Urban Education Reform. Harvard Educational Review.*

access college coursework, and based on interest and readiness, some students will have the opportunity to complete as many as 30 college credits during the traditional four years of high school.

The school opened in 2001 and converted to an Early College High School in 2005. The Early College partnership between EPAHS, Cañada, and Stanford is supported by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation as part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Early College High School Initiative.

“Habits of Mind” Drive Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

As we realized the need for unity across disciplines and a focus on the essential, we didn't want an endless laundry list, so we wrote down five [habits], based on many years of watching kids and observing our own habits, and now they are posted in most classrooms... They are at the heart of each curriculum as well as being the basis for judging student performance.

In order to make such "habits" habitual, they need in-depth practice. Young people need to be immersed in their use.
--Deborah Meier (Coalition of Essential Schools Website 2007)

East Palo Alto Academy High School Habits of Mind
<i>Personal Responsibility Social Responsibility Critical and Creative Thinking Application of Knowledge Communication</i>

See attachment A

EPAHS created “habits of mind” to guide school conversations about curriculum, instruction and assessment. The habits of mind are ever present in student work throughout the school. Quality student work is the goal. Hence, teachers are pressed to employ a variety of methods to help students develop competency

in the habits. This requires, as Meier states, in-depth practice and revision of student work.

*We have kids that attend high school that probably never in their lives had a really successful academic moment, where they've worked hard and accomplished something of quality... Think about it, being at the end of high school and never been pushed to do quality work. How do you possibly go on and live a fulfilling adult life when you've never been pushed to do quality work? So I think the exhibition process is that opportunity. Once a year you will do something that is high quality. And if you don't, you won't graduate.*²

Though not explicitly stated, revision is a target habit. Students learn that when they don't reach the standard or fail, they can persevere, be resilient and succeed. Students that accept revision as a norm reject the feeling that they have failed if they have not reached the standard in their first or second shot. They learn they just have more work to do to reach the goal. Accordingly, teachers insist that students continue to revise their work until it meets the expressed public standard. Students observe the presentations of their classmates. They hear the kinds of questions posed by judges. What they need to do to succeed is very public and not hidden from them.

We have standards [habits of mind] for passing and passing with distinction, and then a revision policy. You never fail an exhibition. Ideally you never fail anything here... The philosophy is, okay, you're not there yet. We're going to keep working with you. You need to take this class again or, you know, maybe we can find some other way to improve. There's just too much failure in these kids' lives. We don't want to perpetuate failure.... It's not about quantity. It's not a race. It's not about who's smartest. It's about showing me that you're

² Leslie, S. (2007). Interview February 2007. p. 3.

*learning and moving forward. We're all going to end up in different places. We all came in different places. So let's just keep moving forward.*³

--EPAHS Teacher

*They pushed me a lot. I wasn't an A student when I was there. They never gave up on me. Eventually it worked. They kept pushing me; never giving up. I wouldn't have graduated if I had gone to xxxx with a lot more students. There would not be that much connection with teachers. No one would have pushed me like they did.*⁴

--Graduate EPAHS

As previously noted, the school staff works to build trust and cooperation between teachers and students. Students work to master the five habits of mind, and teachers channel their energies toward the same goal. Therefore, as students witness their classmates succeed, they develop faith and trust in their ability to be successful as well.

Meaningful conversation between teachers and students about the habits permeate classrooms. Whether or not students receive an A or B remains important, but the conversation between teachers and students is focused on the habits. When asked about grading/classroom assessment, one teacher said:

*I want to sit down and say, here are your 5 habit scores, here's your letter grade. How do you feel about this? What do you see as your strengths? What do we need to work on?*⁵

Graduates of EPAHS confirmed this:

I transferred from xxx High School. EPAHS was so much better [than the previous school]. The thing I noted

³ Leslie, S. (2007). Interview February 2007. p. 11.

⁴ Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M., and Winston, D. (2006) Season of Change: An Evaluation of Progress at East Palo Alto High School. P. 11.

⁵ Leslie, S. (2007). Interview February 2007. p. 12.

*about EPAHS grading is that it is not just a letter grade, but a rubric that tells you where you need to improve.*⁶

Significantly, students have observed how they learned personal and social responsibility at EPAHS. Upon reflection they remembered how the school taught them to work well with others. An emphasis on these habits resulted in trusting relationships between students and teachers.

There were a lot of teachers you could trust. I think trust is a powerful word because you need to trust the teachers.

*Most importantly, it was the way the teachers interacted with the students. You could go to them for anything, not just school stuff.*⁷

Exhibitions drive significant conversation in the school and create a school culture focused on achievement and rigor. Because each student is required to prepare and complete an exhibition each year, the impact on student and school is pervasive and powerful. It is striking how many students reported that exhibitions—a task that takes months to complete—positively impacted their academic and social development. For example one student stated:

*A lot of things that EPAHS helped us with were presentations and showing work to the community... For any job you have, you have to show yourself well. They taught us responsibility and that is important for any job.*⁸

A second student reported:

⁶ Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M., and Winston, D. (2006) Season of Change: An Evaluation of Progress at East Palo Alto High School. P. 12.

⁷ Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M., and Winston, D. (2006) Season of Change: An Evaluation of Progress at East Palo Alto High School. P. 11.

⁸ Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M., and Winston, D. (2006) Season of Change: An Evaluation of Progress at East Palo Alto High School. P. 10.

*Exhibitions really prepared each student for exactly what they needed in the future.... My reading got much better than it was before. My writing: my essays are better, more detailed. In the science class we were dealing with real stuff; more exciting stuff.*⁹

Commitment to Personalized Support for Each Student

Perhaps the most notable component of EPAHS's program is the personalized support for each student. EPAHS does not approach its education mission with rose colored glasses, they are fully aware of what each student must overcome to succeed in high school and college. The challenges students face are real and formidable. For example, during our visit to the school we learned about the recent unrest in the community of East Palo Alto. A local paper provided this summary:

Five teenagers have died in a police shooting and another was critically injured by gunfire in the city of just 33,000 over the past six weeks. Nearly two dozen people have been shot. A 13-year-old was caught carrying a loaded handgun into his middle school.

The violence has been a blow to civic self-confidence. Community leaders hoped they had put behind them the small city's reputation for murder and mayhem that once made national headlines. The recent shootings have left residents confused, frustrated and frightened. (Mercury News Editorial)

Comprehensive Support System at EPAHS

In response to the challenges of the local context, school leaders developed and continue to enhance a comprehensive support system to support each student. School counselors and staff work diligently to build student knowledge about college. One staff person teaches a

⁹ Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M., and Winston, D. (2006) Season of Change: An Evaluation of Progress at East Palo Alto High School. P. 12.

college readiness course—Apply to College—and organizes a wide range of other activities designed to help students prepare for college, including SAT prep, tutorial support, wrap around support for college courses, college mentors and visits from local colleges. The instructor of Apply to College noted:

I spent the first two weeks trying to get them to think about what they wanted, what they needed, and getting them to think about college in general. And having a captive audience like that really makes a huge difference, especially for kids who apparently have not ever thought about it ever before... I got them looking online at schools to get an idea of what kind of school they could go to locally. [I want] them to understand that Santa Clara University is different from the Cal State system and the UCs are different from the Cal State system and different from the private colleges.¹⁰

As elucidated above, counselors teach students how colleges differ. The goal is to help students select a college that best matches their interests and needs. Some students will need continued support in college, others will not. If circumstances were different, this information would be available in the home. However, nearly all of the school's students will be the first in their families to attend college. Two-thirds of their parents have not graduated from high school. Thus, few parents are able to provide their children with information needed to select the best college.

EPAHS's investment in counseling and support is significant. The investment ensures professional staff has sufficient time to understand individual student needs and develop appropriate support plans. Sabrina Wilson, the school's new college counselor, explains:

It has been really great being here full-time. I think that's made a huge

difference to the experience for students, because they look at me and go, "You're still here?!" ...I sit in their classes. I go to their advisories. I yell at them passing by [in between classes].

A very personal relationship with students develops as a consequence.

What I did at the beginning of the year is I went through all of their transcripts, being that I didn't know them. I went through all of their transcripts to see where they were, what the GPAs looked like, how many courses they completed... and how it differed from what the universities wanted. And then I met with almost every student individually and talked about what they were interested in, where they wanted to go, what they were going to need to resolve missing coursework, and what they needed from me. That created a personal relationship with each one. So they were comfortable coming to me and saying, "Hey Miss – when they didn't know my name yet – can you help me with that?"¹¹

A wide range of support is available to students. The school organizes tutorial support from college mentors and visits from local colleges; and selects organizations to provide SAT preparation support. All of these activities are designed to support specific needs of EPAHS students. For example, the school selected a local SAT prep organization because they demonstrated that they understood the EPAHS students better than other providers.

xxx is very local. They're based in San Mateo. They have an office right down here in Palo Alto/Menlo Park, and they sent us two very good people to work with the students. They were willing to work with the students. They understood our population.¹²

¹⁰ Wilson, S. (2007) Interview February 2007. p. 2.

¹¹ Wilson, S. (2007) Interview February 2007. p. 20.

¹² Wilson, S. (2007) Interview February 2007. p. 3.

Creative strategies have been employed to provide students with funds for college tuition, summer programs and miscellaneous college costs. Funds were found for students who do not qualify for state and federal grants. EPAHS staff has secured funds to send students to several summer programs including Stanford's Upward Bound program and Phillip Exeter's summer school program. And EPAHS teachers have boosted student confidence with the awarding of \$200 to \$2,000 grants to EPAHS students on their way to college.

Interestingly, assisting students with the college application process has emerged as a strategically important task for school staff:

I have them applying at Cal State first, because it was the most simplistic application and it got them getting the idea, "Oh! This is what my transcript looks like. This is how I transfer it to the application. This is how it works. These are the things that I can actually put there. I can't put creative writing, because that doesn't count. But I can put Physics, because it does count." The other wonderful thing about it is to see the pride that all of the students have in finishing their applications. ... Just getting their application in and being so exhausted, and yet proud of themselves to do that was really good.¹³

Bringing colleges to EPAHS to meet with students has also proven very successful. Over the course of this year, 10 campuses have come to speak with the students. Reports reveal that students enjoy these visits.

I've found that the students are engaged. They really want this. They're fascinated by the experience and they keep asking for it.¹⁴

Several college courses are being offered on the EPAHS campus this year. Unlike EPAHS teachers, college professors do not use the habits

to grade papers, and additional support is needed to help students succeed in college courses. Several strategies are employed to support students. First, students have access to two Cañada Community College *College Success* classes. These classes meet once a week and are scheduled during advisory period to make them accessible to students. Each advisory teacher is allocated spots for their advisees. Second, an AmeriCorps aide provides tutorial support to students in college courses, takes notes in every class, and keeps a binder of everything handed out in the class to assist students who are absent. Finally, staff has developed a wall chart to record student work and progress in college courses. Tracking student progress in college courses is an important tool to monitor what support is needed, but also to help students begin to monitor their own work.

I am constantly getting updates from the professors as to their grades. ... We also put their grades, their quarter grades and their semester grades on their report cards. That means the professor sends the stuff [grades] to me and I type it up or Jennifer types it up onto their report card. We don't give them their habit grades... We just write comments. The student is missing these assignments and they're getting X grade.¹⁵

Summary

EPAHS has created an effective Early College program that focuses on developing student efficacy—students' power to learn. Students are taught how to be persistent and resilient in the face of many odds. The school, working with Cañada College and Stanford University, successfully mobilizes social capital on behalf of EPAHS students.

Teaching targets the cognitive, social and emotional development of children by matching rigorous curriculum goals with the support needed to help students succeed. Importantly, exhibitions are one chief strategy to achieve this

¹³ Wilson, S. (2007) Interview February 2007. p. 3.

¹⁴ Wilson, S. (2007). Interview February 2007. p. 9.

¹⁵ Altamirano, R. (2007). Interview February 2007. p.17-18.

goal, providing focus for a significant piece of the school's instructional program.

In closing we offer this comment on college readiness from an EPAHS staff member. He is describing comments made to a school evaluator by a graduate of the school who presently lacks the financial resources to go to college:

She told her, "I'm not sure when I'm going to college, but the school planted the seed. And so I always think about it now. It's in the back of my head and I know that at some point I'm going to go. I just need to find the right set of circumstances." And I just thought that was so brilliant. You know it was so brilliant. And that's really ultimately what we need to be striving to do. We need every kid to believe college is an option. And even if they don't believe it's an option right away, we want them to at least think that, "One day, I can go to college."¹⁶

¹⁶ Leslie, S. (2007). Interview February 2007. p. 30.

Attachment A

PRELIMINARY SCORE SHEET—TO BE COMPLETED BY EACH JUDGE.

STUDENT'S FULL NAME: _____

YOUR NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Each judge will complete his/her own assessment on the following pages.
After the presentation, judges will confer to agree on a final score and a record will be made for school files.

EXPLANATION OF GRADING: Rather than points or letter grades, student work is assessed as "Meeting the Standard," "Approaching the Standard," "Emerging Competency," or "No Evidence." Work that goes beyond the requirements of the assignment is considered "Exceeding the Standard."

REQUIREMENTS:

- o Research paper is a minimum of four written pages.
- o Power Point presentation w/ minimum:
 - o Introduction
 - o Historical Context
 - o 2 Evidence slides
 - o Conclusion
 - o Sources
- o Copies of abstract provided for every judge
- o Agenda

RECOMMENDATION (Check one):

- o **Pass with distinction** (Student work Exceeds the Standard in five habits, Approaches the Standard in no more than three habits.)
- o **Pass** (Student work at least Approaches the Standard in every habit)
- o **Pass with Contingencies** Student must demonstrate that he/she approaches the standard in deficient habits. Check as many as apply:
 - o **Written revisions necessary by _____ to pass this year.**
 - o **Oral revisions (Re-presentation) necessary by _____ to pass this year.**
 - o **Research paper must be revised.**
 - o **Research paper must be submitted and assessed.**
- o Student did not present

EXHIBITION PRESENTATION RUBRIC

Habit		Exceeding the Standard	Meeting the Standard	Approaching the Standard	Emerging Competency	No Evidence
Personal Responsibility	<i>Punctuality</i>	Student presents <u>earlier</u> than his/her designated time slot.	Student comes on time and is ready to begin.	Student gives advance notice that he/she will be late.	Student is late but is able to complete required tasks.	
	<i>Preparation</i>	Student is prepared beyond the requirements of the assignment and/or overcomes unexpected challenges	Student comes prepared by completing all requirements on checklist above. Presentation shows preparation and rehearsal.	Student meets all requirements at a basic level.	Student shows some preparation but is missing one or more of the requirements.	
Social Responsibility	<i>Building Bridges to the Community</i>	Student represents school in an <u>exemplary</u> way in all criteria (behavior, language, and dress).	Student represents school in a positive way: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ appropriate behavior, ○ appropriate language, ○ formal dress¹ 	2 of the 3 criteria (behavior, language, dress) are met.	1 of 3 criteria are met.	

Habit		Exceeding the Standard	Meeting the Standard	Approaching the Standard	Emerging Competency	No Evidence
Application of Knowledge	<i>Strong Thesis</i>	Clearly defined, strong thesis.	Thesis is clearly defined.	Thesis is present, but too broad or not well-defined.	Thesis is unclear.	
	<i>Evidence & Argumentation</i>	Complex argument clearly presented and supported by specific and relevant evidence. Evidence described in <u>vivid</u> detail. Argument builds over course of presentation.	Thesis is supported effectively by reasonable evidence. Presentation describes evidence in detail. Presentation explains connections between evidence and thesis.	Evidence is provided. Evidence is not described clearly or in sufficient detail. Analysis does not connect evidence and thesis, but the reader is able to make the connection to thesis.	Evidence is lacking or does not clearly support a particular idea. Analysis is lacking or makes inaccurate connections between evidence and thesis.	
	<i>Understanding of Historical Context</i>	Deep understanding of historical time period and context is clearly evident. Analysis of issues yields well-developed, original ideas.	Presentation provides accurate historical context necessary for supporting the thesis.	Presentation provides accurate historical context at a <u>basic</u> level and general understanding of how it is relevant to the main idea.	Little or no evidence about the historical context is included or the presentation shows inaccuracies or misunderstanding.	

Notes: _____

¹No jeans, no sleeveless shirts, no text on shirts, no exposed mid-drifts

Habit		Exceeding the Standard	Meeting the Standard	Approaching the Standard	Emerging Competency	No Evidence
Critical & Creative Thinking	<i>Connections</i>	Draws deep connections between subject matter and current events or self.	Conclusion explains a connection between subject matter and either current events or personal anecdote.	Connection between subject matter and current events/self is not developed.	Does not yet reflect on the connections between subject matter and current events/self.	
	<i>Reflection</i>	Reflection meets the standard and is remarkably insightful.	During Q & A student reflects on all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ quality of final product ○ sources used ○ study habits for this project. 	Student reflects on 2 of 3.	Student reflects on 1 of 3.	
Communication	<i>Effective Organization</i>	Clear, compelling introduction and conclusion that effectively synthesizes the argument. Clear, effective transitions between slides.	Clear introduction and well constructed, conclusion. Organization of presentation supports the thesis. Sections are clear & use thesis words as headings.	Argument is clearly organized, but a section is incomplete or out of order.	Presentation does not have clear organization or is lacking a major section (intro/historical context/conclusion/sources)	
	<i>Oral Presentation-Strong Expression</i>	Students' eye contact, body language, and voice enhance presentation. Viewpoint is expressed in an engaging way with vivid language.	Student uses appropriate eye contact, body language, and voice projection. Style is straightforward and interesting.	Student sometimes uses appropriate eye contact, body language, and voice projection. Student relies on/reads from notes or slides for presentation.	Student rarely uses eye contact, appropriate body language, or voice projection. Student reads from notes or slides for majority of presentation.	
	<i>Visual (Power Point)</i>	Presentation manner and Power Point visual impact are exemplary.	Student has a Power Point visual and uses it to enhance presentation	Student relies on Power Point for structure of presentation.	Power Point does not enhance presentation, or distracts from it. Power Point slides include several grammatical errors. Power Point is incomplete.	

Notes: _____
