High Tech High is a network of eleven schools in San Diego County, California, spanning grades K-12 that prepares students for college and careers by providing a personalized, hands-on approach to learning, strong connections between students and adults, and a common intellectual mission, with strong teacher leadership. High Tech High is authorized by California to fully credential its own teachers and also opened a graduate school of education in 2007 that offers master’s degree programs for experienced educators.

High Tech High students score better on both math and reading tests

Common intellectual mission

High Tech High schools are diverse and integrated. Students are enrolled by a ZIP code-based lottery, and there is no tracking of students by perceived academic ability. All students pursue a rigorous curriculum that provides the foundation for entry into the University of California system and employment. Schools articulate common expectations for learning that value deeper learning competencies, the integration of hands and minds, and the merging of academic disciplines. Performance-based assessments are used to gather evidence of the scope of a student’s knowledge on a subject, rather than simply testing the accuracy of their responses on a selection of questions. Students develop projects, solve problems, present findings to community panels, and complete an academic internship, a substantial senior project, and a personal digital portfolio. Teachers employ a variety of approaches to accommodate diverse learners and recognize the value of having students from different backgrounds working in collaboration.

A transparent learning environment

Walk into any High Tech High school, and you are immediately struck by the open learning environment marked by high-quality student work on display everywhere—in galleries, outdoor learning spaces, and specialty laboratories. The caliber of work is consistently high, and students are proud to showcase their learning, which is the product of hours of toil, revision, and working through challenges collaboratively.

Why deeper learning?

The U.S. education system must prepare students to be engaged citizens and to succeed in the high-skilled jobs that are increasingly required in the global economy. To meet these demands, students will need “deeper learning,” a mix of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that include critical thinking and problem solving, effective communication, collaboration, an academic mindset, and the ability to learn how to learn—all applied to the mastery of academic content.

What is the deeper learning network?

A national “Deeper Learning Network” of more than 500 schools is delivering deeper learning to students in forty-one states. Composed of ten school networks, it collectively serves more than 227,000 students, most of whom are low-income minority students. Each school network has a unique approach, but all foster the deeper learning skills that prepare young people for economic and civic success.


www.deeperlearning4all.org

Deeper Learning in Action

High Tech High seniors collaborated with the San Diego Blood Bank, along with an art teacher and a biology/multimedia teacher on the Blood Bank Project. Students were divided into pairs to research blood-related topics that incorporated various disciplines, such as biology, health, media, and history. Topics focused on leukemia, sickle cell anemia, the AIDS epidemic, the use of blood in film, and the role of blood in religion. Once the research and findings were complete, students created a painting of their theme on a large piece of custom-cut wood. An opening housed a laptop displaying an audio-visual presentation they had designed to teach the community about their topic. The final product highlighted students’ research about the importance of blood to our health, blood diseases, and the symbolism and use of blood in art and religion. Students collaborated in conducting their research and used critical thinking to analyze how blood is viewed by the entertainment industry and by religions. Students demonstrated their communication and presentation skills as they shared their findings with a broader audience. Students’ final projects were exhibited at the JETT Art Gallery in San Diego, next to the Blood Bank to promote blood donations.
and openly. Students often take risks as they try new approaches. Reflection is a standard part of their practice, which helps students develop resiliency and persistence and helps them learn how to learn. Students are encouraged to explore and investigate and use their mistakes as learning opportunities. After one student mistook an alternator for a motor and plugged the alternator into the wall, causing power to go out in his classroom, he reflected on how much he learned about electricity from his error.

**ADULT WORLD CONNECTION**

High Tech High students connect their studies to the world beyond school through field studies, community service, internships, and consultation with outside experts. Using their good communication skills, students routinely create and present work for audiences of employers and community leaders and exhibit their work in professional venues. All high school students complete internships with employers or in a community service setting, where they develop projects that contribute to the workplace or help solve a problem. One student’s project analyzed bacteria levels at popular beaches which required sophisticated measurement of the water and interviews with doctors and other health experts. The student determined the safety of the water and the illnesses that could be caused by the different types of bacteria and presented the material to peers, teachers, and local experts, making use of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

**TEACHER AS DESIGNER**

High Tech High teachers are program and curriculum designers. They work in interdisciplinary teams to design the courses they teach and participate in critical decisions regarding curriculum, assessment, professional development, hiring, and other significant areas of the school. The school schedule supports team teaching, and teachers have ample planning time to devise integrated projects, common rubrics for assessment, and common rituals by which all students demonstrate their learning and progress toward graduation. High Tech High has a deep commitment to professional development and teacher preparation and offers certification to teachers that teach at High Tech High or an affiliated school. The High Tech High Graduate School of Education offers master’s degrees in teacher leadership and school leadership which are open to experienced teachers and educators.

**RIGOROUS LEARNING, OUTSTANDING RESULTS**

Students at High Tech High are exposed to a rigorous curriculum that meets admission requirements to the University of California, and they demonstrate their learning through performance assessments and portfolios, as well as standardized assessments. The High Tech High Network reports that for U.S. schools, 98 percent of graduates go to college, a strong rate given that 35 percent of High Tech High graduates are first-generation college students. Thirty percent of students go into the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields (the national average is 17 percent), and 75 percent of graduates enroll in four-year institutions.