Student-Centered Learning:
Impact Academy of Arts and Technology

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Table of Contents

Overview

About SCOPE

The Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) was founded in 2008 to foster research, policy, and practice to advance high-quality, equitable education systems in the United States and internationally. SCOPE engages faculty from across Stanford and from other universities to work on a shared agenda of research, policy analysis, educational practice, and dissemination of ideas. SCOPE is an affiliate of the Stanford University Graduate School of Education and the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE) at Stanford.

About Student-Centered Practice

Student-centered practice is a school reform approach driven by student learning and a commitment to equity. Student-centered practices are flexible and responsive to students' needs. They emphasize positive and supportive relationships between students and adults in schools, which enable students to persist and succeed in academic environments that are challenging, relevant, collaborative, student-directed, and applied to real-life situations. Research shows that this is the type of setting necessary for students to develop the skills to succeed in college, career, and life. Students are assessed on their mastery of knowledge and skills and have multiple opportunities to demonstrate that mastery. Educators are supported in creating a student-centered learning environment through opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and leadership.

Student-centered practices are more often found in schools that serve affluent and middle-class students than those located in low-income communities. Addressing the opportunity gap for low-income students and students of color requires an examination of how to implement student-centered practices in schools serving those students with the most to gain from them.

Student-Centered Schools Study

The Student-Centered Schools Study, funded by the Nellie Mae Foundation, looks closely at four California high schools that use either the Linked Learning or Envision Schools model to achieve positive outcomes for all their students. These schools all serve predominately low-income students and students of color. These signature models of student-centered learning can inform efforts to address the national opportunity gap through student-centered practices.

Case Study Schools

School type	School	Location
Linked Learning	Dozier-Libbey Medical High School	Antioch, CA
	Life Academy	Oakland, CA
Envision Schools	City Arts & Technology High School	San Francisco, CA
	Impact Academy	Hayward, CA

Linked Learning began as a state-wide district initiative funded by the James Irvine Foundation to support implementation in nine districts across the state. The program has expanded through state funding since 2011 to include nearly 70 additional local educational agencies. Linked Learning integrates rigorous academics with career-based learning and real-world workplace experiences.

Envision Schools is a small charter network focusing intently on creating personalized learning environments in which educators also create project-based assignments that foster development of 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration.

Both of these models show clear evidence of engaging and developing high levels of proficiency for students of color, English learners, and low-income students at levels that far exceed traditional schools serving similar students. In addition, the schools in this study provide the types of learning experiences that prepare students for college and meaningful careers as well as graduating students of color, English learners, and low-income students at rates that exceed similar students in their districts and California.

Case Studies and Research Methodology

This case study is one of four written by SCOPE about student-centered practices in schools.

The case studies address the following questions:

1. What are the effects of student-centered learning approaches on student engagement, achievement of knowledge and skills, and attainment (high school graduation, college admission, and college continuation and success), in particular for underserved students?

2. What specific practices, approaches, and contextual factors result in these outcomes?

The cases focus on the structures, practices, and conditions in the four schools that enable students to experience positive outcomes and consider the ways in which these factors are interrelated and work to reinforce each other.

The researchers employed mixed methods to look at the micro-level of classrooms and schools. Data collection for this study was conducted between March 2012 and September 2013. Quantitative analysis was used to compare short- and long-term student outcomes in the case study schools with similar students in other schools in the same district. Qualitative data collection activities included formal interviews with administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members; observations of instruction, advisory, professional development, teacher collaboration, student exhibitions and defenses, community events, and graduations; and a review of essential documents.

Post-graduation data were a critical component to understanding the long-term impact of the schools' practices. We surveyed and interviewed graduates from each school and tracked their higher-education enrollment through the National Student Clearinghouse. Additionally, two of the schools in this study were simultaneously participating in the Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and Outcomes funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and conducted by American Institutes for Research (AIR). Rather than survey these schools twice, we used their survey results of teachers and students and used the AIR survey to collect data from the other two schools. Employing this survey enabled us to draw on the full data from the survey, which included a comparison sample of 12 additional schools.

The case studies have been verified with key members of each of the schools for factual accuracy. Details about the data collection activities for this study can be found in Appendix A.

Resources

Findings from the Student-Centered Schools Study are published in four case studies, a cross-case analysis, a policy brief, and practitioner's tool. Visit http://edpolicy.stanford.edu/projects/633 to view these products.

Introduction

When visitors first arrive on the campus of Impact Academy, they are immediately aware of the strong connection between students, staff, and teachers. This connection can be felt in the most fleeting of moments—for example, a student comes in tardy to school, and it is clear that this student is not just a nameless number. Instead, the office manager asks about the student's dental appointment and makes sure that the student is okay to make it through the day. The student, a young lady in the 10th grade, responds with a smile and a joke about not being able to talk because her mouth is numb.

A seemingly insignificant and brief conversation between secretary and student immediately signals to the outside observer that there is something special about this place; Impact is not just a school—it's a community of people. There is a universal culture of family and community evident on the Impact campus. Teachers and students alike rely upon close relationships as a means of encouragement and motivation for the hard work that is required for all members of the school community to achieve positive outcomes for students. This personal connection is not superficial—it's deep and meaningful and purposefully fostered. In many ways, the relationships that teachers and staff build with students can be interpreted as the foundation of Impact. Learning and intellectual growth are the ultimate goals, yet for the students to achieve, the staff believe in the need to first know and understand their students. And that means getting personal.

This case study goes in-depth to uncover the ways by which Impact Academy establishes, fosters, and builds upon its student-centered approach to education. The case includes descriptions of the school and its student outcomes, analysis of the curricular and pedagogical approach, and opportunities for teacher learning to support the school's instructional model as well as a close look at both the benefits and challenges associated with this particular approach to learning. The hope is that this case study will serve as an exemplar of a school that uses a personalized academic approach to learning to ensure deep, meaningful educational experiences for its students. See Appendix A for research methodology and data sources.

Impact Academy Demographics 2012–2013	
Size:	462
Latino:	55%
African American:	17%
White	10%
Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander:	10%
English language learner:	18%
Free/reduced lunch:	65%

Source: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

School Description and Outcomes:
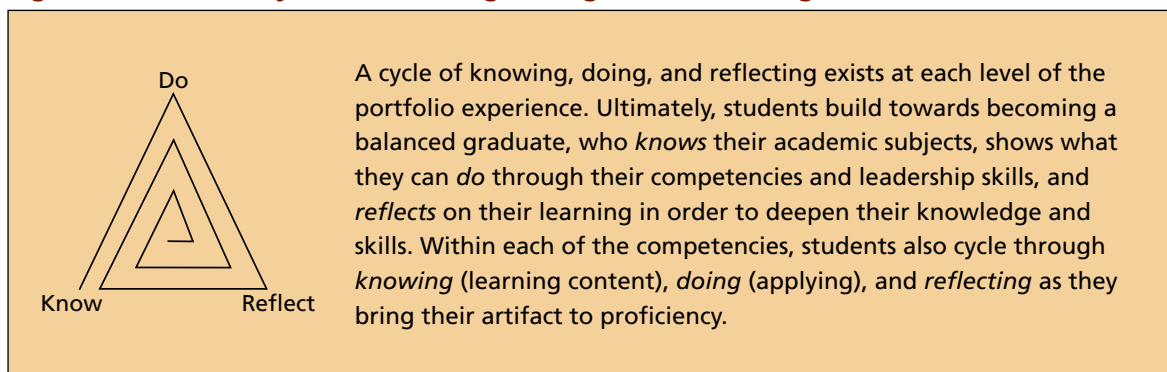# A Distinctive Place to Learn

> Impact Academy is dedicated to transforming students' lives by preparing them for success in college and in life. Impact Academy offers students a rigorous academic experience and a diverse, compassionate community in which to grow. Our students are inspired and empowered to be leaders in their high school education and their communities.
>
> —*Impact web site*

Located in Hayward, California, Impact Academy of Arts and Technology prides itself on using project-based teaching to foster strong academic growth and deep, meaningful learning experiences for its students. Impact is managed by a non-profit charter management organization, Envision Education, and is one of three public schools in the network. Envision Education's philosophy is built around a focus on the "4 R's" of education: (1) *rigorous* college-prep curriculum, (2) strong *relationships* supported through small, personalized learning environments, (3) *relevant* coursework that motivates and supports deep learning, and (4) high academic standards that lead to positive *results*. Furthermore, as referenced in the graphic below, instruction at Envision Education is designed to support an iterative cycle of learning described as "Know, Do, Reflect," in which students build *knowledge* on a topic, actively *demonstrate* their understanding through applied learning opportunities, and *reflect* on what they have learned and how they can continue to improve.

Impact faculty describe the Envision Education model as a bridge of sorts, linking traditional content areas with non-traditional ways of doing school. Using common subject areas—math, English, science, social studies, art, and Spanish—married with the school's five Core Competencies—research, analysis, creative expression, inquiry, and workplace learning—Impact deliberately steps away from relying on antiquated ways of delivering instruction and assessing learning. Jesse Bean, Impact's principal for the 2012-2013 school year, suggests that although there may be tests and quizzes, that is by

Figure 1: Envision Cycle of Knowing, Doing, and Reflecting

A cycle of knowing, doing, and reflecting exists at each level of the portfolio experience. Ultimately, students build towards becoming a balanced graduate, who *knows* their academic subjects, shows what they can *do* through their competencies and leadership skills, and *reflects* on their learning in order to deepen their knowledge and skills. Within each of the competencies, students also cycle through *knowing* (learning content), *doing* (applying), and *reflecting* as they bring their artifact to proficiency.

Source: Envision Education Professional Development Materials, 2012

no means the sole source of summative or formative assessment. He offers an example of what this looks like:

> For example, we also ask students to do project-based work where they are creating meaning in ways that ask them to draw upon multiple disciplines and to do work that's related to their everyday experience or that might be sort of pre-professional in the sense that we're giving them a problem that an engineer might tackle. It's a junior version of the game, but nonetheless it gives them the sense that what they're working on is important, and we believe there's deeper investment and engagement in that work.

Serving approximately 460 students in grades 9-12, Impact offers a full college preparatory curriculum with a focus on arts and technology. With a distinct focus on personalization and individuation based on student interest and engagement, Impact stands out as a unique learning environment when compared to neighboring comprehensive high schools.

Like many new charter schools, Impact had to move locations since its founding in 2007. The school opened in San Leandro and then moved up to the Hayward hills, a traditionally middle- to upper-middle-class neighborhood close to California State University, East Bay. Today, the school resides close to the 880 Freeway in a working-class neighborhood with a larger Latino population. The facility itself is past its prime, with low ceilings and dim hallway lights. The classrooms are small and filled with furniture that has withstood heavy use, and a fourth of the school's classrooms are located outside in the yard in portable bungalows replete with metal ramps and steps and sterile, off-white-colored walls. That said, the staff has installed a plethora of college pennants, pictures, encouraging posters, and inspiring quotes along the hallway walls as a way to portray a sense of welcome and high spirits despite what appears to be a somewhat bleak physical space.

Likely because of its change in location, Impact has undergone a distinct shift in demographics. In 2008-2009, about one third of the students were African American, one third White, and one third Latino. Compared to last year, those numbers have shifted significantly, and the Latino population is closer to 50%, and the White and African American populations have decreased markedly. (See Table 1, page 4)

In 2012, 66% of ninth-graders were Latino, with about half of them English language learners. The population at Impact, however, is largely representative of Hayward as a whole and is especially representative of the particular neighborhood that the school is located in currently. Generally, parent education levels are low: Of the 188 students who completed the student survey, 34% had a mother whose highest level of education was a high school diploma, and 29% had a father whose highest level of education was a high school diploma. Furthermore, 17% of students had a mother with less than a high school diploma, and 19% had a father with the same designation.

Table 1: Impact Academy Student Demographic Shifts, 2008-09 through 2012-13

Students	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
All	237	361	416	439	462
African American	35%	32%	24%	19%	17%
Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander	8%	8%	9%	9%	10%
Latino	32%	39%	43%	49%	55%
White	23%	14%	15%	14%	10%
English learners	17%	7%	11%	11%	18%
Free & reduced price meals	54%	49%	56%	57%	65%

Source: California Department of Education, Dataquest. http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

To enroll at Impact, parents must submit a one-page application, and then students are chosen at random via a lottery to fill the spaces for each incoming class. Additionally, 10% of the student population has an Individualized Education Program or 504 Plan, a percentage that is similar to surrounding district schools.

As a public charter school, Impact students must take both the California Standards Tests (CST) and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The school is then ranked based on student test scores, all of which factor into the school's Academic Performance Index (API) score. Like any other public school, Impact must adhere to state and federal regulations around testing and accountability under No Child Left Behind. Since its founding in 2007, Impact has experienced a steady increase in student test scores, and as a result, the school's API has increased as well, starting at 693 in 2008-2009 and growing to 793 in the 2012-2013 school year. Eighty-seven percent of Impact students pass the English portion of the California High School Exit Exam in the 10th grade, and 86% pass the math portion on the first attempt. See Table 2 on page 5 for a more in-depth look at these data.

Across the board, Impact test scores indicate that its students achieve at rates much higher than the Hayward Unified School District, with double and sometimes triple the proficiency rates in some student categories. It bears noting that despite the school's non-traditional academic approach, students at Impact are relatively high performing when it comes to standardized state tests—a benefit to both students and school.

A College-Going Culture

The school's goal is for every student to leave Impact with the option and desire to attend a 4-year college. To instill this desire in students, Impact educators create an environment that consciously creates learning experiences and institutes structures that ensure that students will graduate Impact with this particular mindset. With a keen focus on both growth and rigor, Impact focuses on the interdisciplinary nature of school-

Table 2: API Score, CST, and CAHSEE Proficiency and Pass Rates 2012-13

Assessment	Types of students	Impact Academy	Hayward USD	California
Growth API	All	793	722	790
	African American	720	679	708
	Latino	785	697	744
	English learners	714	681	721
	Economically disadvantaged	766	701	743
CST Gr 11 ELA % proficient or above	All	63%	30%	48%
	African American	56%	18%	32%
	Latino	54%	25%	36%
	Economically disadvantaged	61%	24%	35%
CST Algebra % proficient or above	All	70%	27%	36%
	African American	38%	14%	21%
	Latino	78%	23%	27%
	English learners	72%	9%	12%
	Economically disadvantaged	71%	24%	28%
CAHSEE Gr 10 ELA % passing	All	87%	70%	83%
	African American	75%	62%	73%
	Latino	90%	65%	78%
	English learners	45%	23%	42%
	Economically disadvantaged	85%	66%	77%
CAHSEE Gr 10 math % passing	All	86%	75%	84%
	African American	69%	60%	71%
	Latino	89%	71%	79%
	Economically disadvantaged	83%	72%	78%

Source: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

work and asks students to engage with the curriculum in a holistic, inquiry-based way. Aligned with this focus is a high standard for graduation. All students at Impact must complete the following to graduate: 1) pass the CAHSEE; 2) pass all courses required for CSU/UC eligibility (A-G requirements); 3) apply to a 2- or 4-year college; 4) pass the College Success Portfolio and Defense.

To further facilitate a college-going culture, the school has a full-time college admission counselor, a focus on the college application process in advisory for 11th and 12th grades, FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) night for parents, SAT classes for juniors, a college application "boot camp" for students, and a focused college prep culture that celebrates acceptances and promotes progression to higher education post-high school. As a result of this focus, Impact boasts a cohort graduation rate far higher than the district and state averages, and 100% of students in all categories leave Impact with full completion of the A-G courses required for admission to the CSU/UC systems. (See Table 3, page 6)

Table 3: Cohort Graduate Rate and A–G Course Completion, 2011-12

Graduation and course completion rates	Students	Impact Academy	Hayward USD	California
Cohort graduation rate	All	92%	71%	79%
	African American	90%	65%	66%
	Latino	88%	67%	74%
	English learners	83%	57%	62%
	Socioeconomically disadvantaged	94%	69%	73%
Percent of graduates completing all courses required for UC/CSU admission	All	100%	44%	38%
	African American	100%	34%	29%
	Latino	100%	39%	28%
	Socioeconomically disadvantaged	100%	45%	30%

Source: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

Although it is a requirement for all students to apply to a college, the reality is that some students aren't necessarily prepared for a university experience right after high school. But according to National Clearinghouse data, 81% of all 2011 Impact graduates and 78% of 2012 graduates enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college. Fifty-nine percent of 2011 grads and 64% of 2012 grads enrolled in a 4-year college—a percentage that is indeed high for the demographics of the school (see Table 4). Additionally, 38% of 2011 graduates and 40% of 2012 graduates matriculated at a California State University, making it by far the most popular university system for Impact graduates.[1]

Table 4: Types of Institutions Attended

Types of institutions	2011	2012
2-year public or private	39%	34%
4-year public or private	59%	64%
Training programs	2%	2%
Total N	67	59

Source: National Student Clearinghouse http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/about/

Among 2011 Impact graduates who enrolled in a college or training program, nearly 66% persisted for a second year of college while 34% had 1 year of enrollment or less. Students who enrolled in 4-year colleges were more likely to persist through the second year of college than students who enrolled in 2-year colleges. For the class of 2011, 81% of 4-year college enrollees persisted to a second year versus 42% for 2-year college enrollees.

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[1] This version varies from the original version of the case. It contains an updated accounting of the college attendance and persistence data using a different methodology.

Attending college is an integral part of the atmosphere at Impact Academy. One teacher explains, "College is the message absolutely, but I think we realized and have refined our process over time that you have to also give students really meaningful options and support them in getting there." Another teacher reiterated, "We're really proactive from day one…and then senior year we walk them through the personal statement, and then we walk them through the college applications, and we watch them turn the stuff in to make sure that it happens." In addition to progress monitoring, the school helps students envision themselves in college by taking all students on annual college trips starting in the 9th grade. The college admissions counselor discussed that the goal of the trips is "to go somewhere the kids are really interested in" so that they can start to feel that excitement about the next step in their academic trajectory. In 9th grade, students visit UC Santa Cruz and California State University, Monterey Bay; in 10th grade they visit Saint Mary's College; in 11th grade Santa Clara University and San Jose State University; and finally, in the fall of 12th grade, students visit UC Merced.

Current students articulate how the college-going atmosphere at Impact has influenced their approach to schooling in general. One student said, "Here [at Impact] I actually have friends that motivate me, or I try to compete with them to get above them or get at the same level so that actually helps me." Another student agreed

> **"My first year in college was amazing. Everything that you guys taught us here, I use. Every, single, thing."**
> — *Impact Graduate ('11)*

with this, saying, "When I'm here [at Impact] there are so many people around me that do good, and I want to do good like that too." These statements confirm that Impact's focus on college is not just something promoted by and believed in by the staff—the students themselves have internalized the importance of attending college and therefore approach their high school work with the motivation that they are preparing for the next step. High school itself takes on a new sense of importance; students are no longer going through the motions and instead have embraced the value of higher learning. The power of the college-going culture at Impact has certainly paid off in terms of both getting students to college and having them feel successful in their classes once matriculated. A recent Impact graduate expressed, "Because the whole structure of Impact was geared toward preparing us for college, when I got [to college] I already knew how to do it." Another Impact alum echoes this sentiment, saying, "At Impact, going to college was always talked about; by senior year we were convinced. I realized how good of an idea it would be to go to college [because of Impact]. When I got [to college] nothing caught me off guard; I was prepared for the class work and the out-of-class expectations. I had been told about this all my years at Impact." These responses are reflective in graduate survey data as well that indicate that students found their high school experiences at Impact significant and congruent with the expectations they face in college (see Table 5, page 8).

Given the newness of Impact Academy, student enrollment and persistence in college is available for only a 2-year period as college graduation rates are not yet available. That

Table 5: High School Experiences that Contributed to College Readiness

Highest-ranked influences	Somewhat or very helpful
Working with other students	100%
Leadership skills	95%
Computer technology courses	91%
Relationships with teachers/advisors	91%
Instructional quality	90%
Projects/major assignments/exhibitions	90%

Source: Graduate Survey

said, Impact takes feedback from its graduates on an informal basis about what has been most helpful and what areas need ramping up to ensure better preparation. One administrator reported that the Envision Support Office was at one point using Beyond 12[2] as a means of staying in touch with graduates to continue to provide support and mentorship post-graduation. One teacher reported that based on feedback from graduates with whom she has spoken, humanities preparation seems to be most up to par, but science and math could use more rigor. On the other hand, another teacher emphasized, "We do spend a lot of time on leadership skills and work habits, and I think those have also been helpful to students—like public speaking and presentations. Those are places where students feel super prepared." According to Impact graduate survey data, where the response rate was 21% (out of 152 graduates, 33 responded), 45% of the graduates responded that they felt college was as challenging as expected, and 35% reported that college was less challenging than expected. In other words, 80% of the graduates surveyed felt prepared for college and the level of work expected.

Parents responded with a resounding "yes" when asked if they felt their students were being adequately prepared for college by Impact Academy. One parent shared a story about one of his son's friends: "Some of my son's friends have already called him and told him that after going through Impact, [college] is a cake walk. You're prepared." Parents expressed with unanimous agreement that Impact has delivered on its promise that upon graduation, students will be prepared for college. Another parent explained, "From the first day, the first day of freshman year, the message has been 'you're going to college.' They put that in your brain."

The continual messaging of college as the next step after high school is certainly an intrinsic part of the Impact culture. Immediately past the front doors of the school, the hallways are lined with 8x10 color photos of recent graduates and current seniors

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[2] "Beyond 12 is a national nonprofit organization that was founded in 2009 to increase the number of traditionally underserved students who earn a college degree. By integrating personalized coaching with intelligent technology, Beyond 12 bridges the gap between K-12 and higher education to ensure that all students succeed in college." www.beyond12.org/about_us.html

with a list of schools they've applied to, been accepted to, and will attend the following semester. This public display makes for an environment of collective celebration and a tangible representation of the school's mission: college. In the spring, when decision letters are mailed to students, there's a tradition that photocopies of acceptance letters are taped to the hallway walls as well—rows and rows of congratulations letters are displayed as a sign of accomplishment for not only students, but teachers as well. One current student talked about how the college wall has an impact on her:

> I like that we have that because when our first founding students gradu-ated, they had their pictures up there and it was so cute to see them. I can't wait to be on the wall and see which college I'm going to be at. I think that's really nice that we have it there and now, the lower-division students can see where we're going and see the process.

When an Impact student gets into college, all members of the school community revel in a shared sense of celebration and achievement.

Getting to Know You: Personalization as the Hallmark

Personalization is a central component of what it means to create a student-centered school. Instead of students being forced to adapt to a top-down, rigid set of rules, students are welcomed into a space that is culturally relevant, responsive, and receptive. The school is organized in such a way that it takes into consideration the needs, personalities, and interests of the students in meaningful and intentional ways. For example, students participate in weekly community meetings, daily advisories, and have direct access to teachers and support providers during and after school office hours. On every level, the idea of *knowing* students is central to the success of the academic program overall.

Parents laud the difference they notice between Impact and larger district schools, saying, "I really like that it's smaller and the ability of teachers and staff to sort of reach through the privacy and confidentiality and get real personal with our kids." As a result of this intentional relationship-building, the school community as a whole becomes like a family. Students also speak about the relational connections among people on campus. One 10th-grade student explained that her advisor "knows my social life, and she knows about my academic life. She's attentive, and she really is in line with knowing about her students." This sense of deep caring and familiarity makes for a tight-knit connection and sense of belonging for all stakeholders. It is on this foundation that the academic program is built. The relationships are not secondary to the academics, they seem to come first as an essential and primary element to the creation of a safe, welcoming learning community—something that Impact embodies in a tangible and powerful way.

Advisory: The Foundation of the Personalized Approach

> Advisory for me…is a place where you reflect on your social character. It's partly academic, but it's more about yourself as a social person and what ways do you impact or in what ways do you interact with the world? Your life is not going to be all about academics all the time. You're going to need some real-life skills to live. You're going to have to know when to make the right decision and when it's okay to goof off or when it's okay to do something. You're developing social skills that you're going to use in real life and that you're going to need to get a job, and you're going to need to interact with people at a job. It's pretty much preparing you for real life.
>
> *—10th-grade male student*

The central means by which this closeness is achieved is through the advisory system. Every student is part of an (18-25 student) advisory that meets four times per week, 35 minutes each on Monday and Tuesday and 65 minutes each on Wednesday and Thursday. Advisory is more than just homeroom. A 12th-grade humanities teacher explained that advisory is structured in such a way that "students have an adult at school who

knows them well, who is there to support them, and they have a group that is like their mini family community at school within a larger community." Teachers as advisors become advocates for their students so that they can teach students not only how to be a good student, but also to ensure that "no matter what, no kid is going to totally slip between the cracks." In many ways then, advisory becomes the touchstone for the school day and a central component of students' high school trajectory.

The content of advisory changes over time in response to where students are in their high school careers. For example, in freshman year, advisories focus on topics such as: problem solving, organization strategies, communication techniques, study habits, and sex education. In junior and senior years, the focus shifts to include SAT prep, writing the personal statement, and the college application process. To help facilitate this process, teachers "loop" with their students. Lower-division students (9th and 10th grades) have the same advisor for their freshman and sophomore years, and upper-division students (11th and 12th grades) shift to another advisor who they stay with through the last two years of their time at Impact. The purpose of advisory is to be what the students need it to be. A 9th-grade math teacher speaks about her advisory in just this way.

> They call me Mama because I really function like that. I call them my babies. I check their grades. I talk to teachers if something happens to be going on. I'm like their counselor in a way where I have students who pop in. They're just like "I need to talk," and I'm like "Okay let's do it." I've even had to call home and [say] "Can we schedule some time to sit down because so-and-so wants to talk and he wants me there with him?" I'm also the one that [says] "You're messing up and we've got to fix this. You're skipping school. Why? What's happening?"

The advisor advocacy functions as a bridge between student, school, and home where students are girded with all of the necessary support so that they can navigate the intricacies of high school in a productive and positive manner.

At the same time, because of the fluidity of advisory, there exists a lot of variety between classes. Some advisories might be focused on personal statements while another advisory is working on FAFSA applications. An English teacher explains:

> As an advisor, your job is to see how your students are doing. Are they passing their classes? If not, you go between the student and the teacher where they're struggling and you make that thing happen. Advisors also lead parent conferences with their advisees. You're kind of an added set of eyes for your group of 20 or 25 to make sure that they graduate, which is easier said than done.

This focus on graduation and college attendance makes the advisory a hub for ensuring that students get to where they need to be and ensure that the school itself holds true to

its promise made by the principal to "prepare and inspire all students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college."

A group of 9th- and 10th-grade students echoed the sentiment that advisory allows them to let loose and dig deep into the social-emotional components of their lives that may not get as much attention in the school day given the rigorous academic program. One student described advisory as "a time to think about decisions you're making in your life and behavior and stuff that's going on." Another student equated it to a "whole room counselor" and "it's like an in-school family"—a place where together they support one another through the stresses of high school and find security in having a group of people "to help us and tell us that we're doing good or bad, we're going to make it."

Student survey data supports the responses given by students in focus groups, where overall, the majority of students feel a strong connection to teachers and view them as sources of support for both personal and academic elements of their lives (see Table 6).

Table 6: Student Perceptions of Student-Teacher Connections

In my school this year, there is at least ONE teacher who:	Impact students, agree or strongly agree	Comparison school students, agree or strongly agree
Would be willing to help me with a personal problem	88%	59%
Really cares about how I am doing in school	90%	63%
Knows who my friends are	86%	58%
Respects me	94%	62%
I could ask to write me a recommendation for a job, program, or college	91%	66%

Source: Student Survey Data[3]

This sense of belonging, respect, and genuine caring makes for a school environment designed around student emotional and social well-being as an essential component necessary for pushing students academically.

Student Voice in the Classroom

The personalized approach at Impact Academy extends to the way that students participate in the classroom. As the primary space for learning, it's imperative that classrooms be safe, productive environments where students are not just viewed as empty vessels

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[3] Student Survey Data includes 188 students, 41% of students. Comparison data is taken from the Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and Outcomes funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and conducted by the American Institutes for Research that included several of the schools in this study. The student comparison sample with a total of 1,392 students comes from 10 schools across the country.

waiting to be filled with knowledge from the teacher. Impact teachers explicitly ask students for feedback about the way that they are taught—a practice that is often relegated to college surveys *after* a course is completed. An 11th-grader explained, "For the most part when it comes to the way we're taught we have a say. [Teachers] even ask us, like 'What do you like that I do, what do you think I should change?'" There seems to be a common practice for teachers to design learning experiences that allow students a certain amount of freedom and choice academically (see Table 7). They also view students as active participants in the learning environment, where it's fundamentally important to know if the lessons designed by teachers actually work for the students themselves.

Table 7: Student Input on Academic Learning Experiences

In my school this year:	Impact students, two or more classes	Comparison school students, two or more classes
My teachers ask me to think about how I learn best	82%	62%
My teachers check to make sure we understand what they are teaching us	91%	59%
My teacher lets me try out my ideas to see if they work	73%	64%
My teacher notices when I am having trouble with something	84%	49%

Source: Student Survey

Unlike some approaches to education, in which students are expected to adjust to the style of instruction that the teacher prefers, it appears that at Impact, many teachers make the process of learning explicit and seek frequently to determine how well students learn and then use that information to adjust their pedagogy. This explicit communication between teacher and student is powerful in ensuring that students don't "check out" or "opt out" for reasons unknown to the teacher. Because teachers want to know how students feel and experience the learning process, it makes for a powerful community of learners where all members are expected to grow and develop over time—teachers and students alike.

Leading the Way: Student Leadership Opportunities

> So our leadership skills operate as the way for kids to reflect on how they go about the work and how it's contributing to their ongoing re-definition of "who I am as a person and as a student."
>
> *—Jesse Bean, principal*

Students are encouraged to participate in expressing their voice, opinion, and leadership outside of the classroom as well as within it. There are formal and informal path-

> **Envision Schools Leadership Skills**
> All Envision Schools promote a focus on four 21st century skills.
>
> 1. **COLLABORATE PRODUCTIVELY:** working together toward a common goal
>
> 2. **THINK CRITICALLY:** thinking deeply in order to create new meaning
>
> 3. **COMMUNICATE POWERFULLY:** expressing yourself so that others understand you
>
> 4. **COMPLETE PROJECTS EFFECTIVELY:** finishing what you start with your best effort

ways for students to engage in the structures and flow of the school day. Like in many other schools, Associated Student Body (ASB) is perhaps the most formalized way for students to express their voice on campus. Student elections are held annually in September, and student officers stay in their positions for the duration of one school year. ASB students are also responsible for some of the recruitment activities for the school, sent as representatives to local middle schools to recruit incoming ninth-grade classes.

Students in the 11th and 12th grade explain that the ASB has more than 50 students participating this year. With such a large representation of the student body active in ASB, it's not surprising that overwhelmingly students feel that they have a "huge voice" in how the school is run. Students feel that the teachers and administrators are "pretty open" and willing to hear and accept proposals for new clubs or recommendations for changes in existing structures. Just this year, students excitedly explain how they petitioned to have new vending machines installed, filled with healthy food and drinks. One student explains the process for submitting a proposal:

> You have to write a proposal that has a legitimate reason to how it's going to help the school or just benefits it'll have. You have to have a teacher that's in on it with you. It can either be a supervisor or if it's just like a proposal to change something they can support you in it, and you have to turn that in. And eventually you have to discuss it with the principal or vice principal, and ASB and everybody has to look over it. It's kind of…I feel like it's almost like getting a bill passed (laughter).

The other central means for student expression is through membership on the Leadership Council, a site-based governance committee. The Leadership Council is comprised of voting representatives from all of the stakeholder groups—parents, teachers, students, and administrators. This group is a decision-making body that evaluates the effectiveness of existing policy, proposes new policies, and provides key feedback to leadership around issues of culture, rules, and academics alike. Students are members of the council like everyone else. Sometimes they are admitted based on administrator or teacher recommendation, while in some instances students request to be members of the council. Having students included in this decision-making body reifies the school's philosophy of fostering leadership and advocacy within its student body.

According to one teacher who served on the Leadership Council, the purpose of the council is to review proposals for changes in rules or policies and determine as a body whether to approve the proposals. She mentioned that in the past, proposals have been submitted and revised multiple times until approved by the Leadership Council. This suggests that the council does not function solely as a rubber stamp committee—instead they hold fast to the school mission and view themselves as a group that can effect positive change when needed and requested by other stakeholders. This willingness to adapt over time based on the needs, ideas, and desires of all constituents is one of the many things that coincide with the school's overall commitment to learning and growth. Another teacher explains that Impact is the "kind of school that if you have anything to say you can say it. We'll talk you through it, and if we feel like it's a legit concern, we'll bring it to the admin or wherever it needs to be addressed."

Students also are essential to the establishment of clubs and activities on campus. Virtually all clubs are student-initiated and run with teachers and other staff members acting as sponsors. Students are encouraged to start new clubs and can submit an application online via the school's web site. Clubs range in scope from the Hip Hop Club and the Tennis Club, to the Gay Straight Alliance and the Story Writing Club—all based on student interest and leadership (see Table 8).

Table 8: Student Feelings of Belonging and Contribution to the School Environment

In my school this year…	Impact students, agree or strongly agree	Comparison school students, agree or strongly agree
I feel like a real part of my school	71%	48%
Other students in my school take my opinions seriously	75%	49%
I am included in lots of activities at my school	55%	45%
People at this school are friendly to me	95%	61%

Source: Student Survey

Ultimately the spirit on campus is such that students step up to fill formal and informal leadership roles on campus, and all members of the school community contribute to the elements that make the school unique. From helping to organize exhibitions, to leading weekly community meetings, to volunteering to create a school-based public service announcement or initiative around a cause that students care about, Impact Academy allows for all students to participate in a myriad of ways. One 12th-grade teacher explains how this atmosphere of shared leadership exists on campus: "I think in all grade levels, teachers really rely on student leaders to step up and help guide others in groups, presentations, to tutor and support each other."

Giving Props: A Culture of Celebration and Engagement

There are few schools that can pull off actively promoting a culture of joy and celebration within the context of a serious, college prep, academic setting. Impact Academy is one of those schools. In addition to a family-like camaraderie between students and teachers, there are specific elements of the school designed to purposefully encourage student excitement and celebration around important core values and academic progress. There are a couple of specific ways by which Impact facilitates this culture: community meetings, PROPS (Positive Rewards On Positive Spartans), and Spirit Points.

Community meetings take place weekly for an hour during the school day and are separated into the lower division (9th- and 10th-graders) and the upper division (11th- and 12th-graders). These meetings are a place for the school community to bond. One of the administrators explains that community meetings are a time for "teachers and students to sit back a little bit and laugh, play, learn about a new topic that's relevant for the month or the time of year." The weekly meetings are co-planned with the vice principal and students in the ASB, and students often take on the role of the emcee, helping to facilitate giving out awards for school spirit or for exemplary exhibitions or recognition for "small things" like turning in work on time or to celebrate students who have a big jump in SAT scores. Often the agenda for the meetings will include student presentations about something they deem important for the school community to know about, or guest speakers will visit to talk about a pertinent topic or share their experiences in college or the workplace. Overall the atmosphere is celebratory and relaxed, and having fun together is valued and important. The sidebar on page 17 paints a picture of a community meeting.

Another key element that emphasizes one of the school's agreements—"We support each other"—comes in the form of PROPS, Positive Rewards On Positive Spartans, an online message board that serves as a public means of "shouting out" positive behaviors that are in alignment with the school's mission and vision. Students log in to the school web site and enter their name and the name of the person they wish to recognize publically. The PROPS are then posted in the hallways for all to see.

Finally, Impact teachers use Spartan of the Week awards to recognize positive behavior or students who have shown academic growth and improvement. Every week, teachers come together during their collaboration time to determine which students

> **PROPS is when you give someone their proper respect.**
>
> 1. **Be SPECIFIC:** Prop one person for one specific thing they did, don't prop groups.
>
> 2. **Use PAST TENSE:** Only prop people for something that already happened.
>
> 3. **Be INCLUSIVE:** Try to give props to Spartans who aren't your closest friends.
>
> 4. **Be POSITIVE:** Only use props to bring other people up, not put them down.

Source: http://www.es-impact.org/student-life/

Upper-Division Community Meeting

The multipurpose room is packed with 11th- and 12th-graders sitting with their advisory group. Teachers are standing around the periphery of the room. They are here for their weekly community meeting, a time for students to celebrate together. The excited din of student chatter quiets as students take turns taking to the stage to announce school happenings like the winter ball, or a new student-run snack cart. Each announcement is met with enthusiastic cheers. Next, Principal Bean gets on the stage, "What's up class of 2013/2014?" which is responded to with raucous cheers. "I have a quick announcement for you, the leaders of our school. I have a full-time job as a principal and a part-time job as a trash picker-upper. I am retiring from my part-time job." He continues that he will be choosing advisory classes to help him clean up the school. "We need to all do this together."

Students are then invited by the vice principal to figure out who in their advisory can do the best stupid human trick. Game show style music plays as students and their advisory huddle together and select a representative or group of representatives. The students parade on stage with their tricks to laughing and cheering from their peers.

Next, advisors walk on stage to announce the "Spartan of the Week," students carefully selected not only for exemplifying the Impact culture, but also for demonstrating growth. Teachers are careful not to select a student more than once. The student's advisor shares the name of the Spartan of the Week, and invites the student on stage to loud cheers from her peers. Her advisor hugs her and says:

"Here are some things that her teachers say about her: She is mature beyond her years, thoughtful, deep critical thinker, takes responsibility for her work, lends a hand to her peers, not only pushes herself but also her classmates. She is going to excel in college. She is a very valued member of our community."

Three students in the audience raise their hands to add praise for the student, such as, "She is a support system for me and for others." "I love her." "She turns everything into a positive situation." Next, another Spartan of the Week is announced. His advisor says, "He has a quick mind, is a sweetheart, he has gotten rave reviews from his WLE mentor." Other students add, "He is my best friend." "He has fun in school but does his work." "He brings a nice atmosphere to those around him."Following this activity, students and staff are invited to give props to anyone else they are feeling appreciative of.

Students say:
"I want to give a prop to 'M' for staying after school and helping with college applications."

"Props to 'Ms. W' for helping me with my essay, she showed how my life is a strength."

"I want to give a prop to 'A,' she's been super sick but still stayed on top of all her work."

Teachers say:
"Props to 'J' for stepping it up in ASB and showing the kind of skill in advocating for yourself in a way that will be really helpful with professors."

"Props to all seniors to get all their college applications in, especially 'A' who lost all his work and did not give up and got in his UOP application and turned around some great work."

Students leave the community meeting feeling appreciated and celebrated.

deserve the award, and the vice principal keeps track of who has earned the recognition during the year to avoid multiple rewards and to encourage teachers to pick students who may be doing well but haven't been acknowledged. This is yet another purposeful means of showing public support for students who are working hard and staying focused. Spartan of the Week awards are then announced publicly during community meetings.

Parents as Partners in Education

Parents are an integral part of the school community at Impact. Where in many traditional schools, parents only set foot on campus a couple times per year for events like Back to School night or Open House, at Impact, parents are regularly invited in as essential partners in student learning. Beginning in freshman year, parents are welcomed during New Parent Orientation Night, described in the sidebar. Throughout the school year, parents are welcomed to monthly Parent Night Meetings on the first Wednesday of every month. Within the parent association, there are various committees, such as senior fundraising, campus beautification, and staff appreciation.

Twice per year, there are family conferences that are mostly student-led and focused on academic and behavioral reflection and goal-setting. For three days, in the fall and in the spring, school ends early and each advisor schedules a conference with their advisees and their parents or family. Each conference lasts 40-60 minutes, and the student and advisor lead the family through a review of the report card, discuss current progress, and outline action steps for improvement if necessary. According to an administrator, more than 90% of students have at least one family member attend these parent-teacher conferences. A teacher reflected that "seeing the students lead those conversations and reflect on where they're at, and celebrate, and also set goals, and be pushed by families was really a unique part of the school." It is indeed a process of self-reflection and accountability that is evident in every aspect of school life.

Sometimes the parent conferences can be challenging because relationships between teachers and students may be strained. In these instances, either the principal or one of the vice principals might attend as a sort of mediator to help facilitate productivity in the midst of difficult conversations. Principal Jesse Bean explains that in these sorts of tenuous relationships, it's really restorative and transformative to have teachers "to be present to the impact of their words and actions on kids and apologize when necessary. I think those can be really powerful....And then again we walk away with a clear contract or set of action steps for moving forward."

This sort of clear, honest communication is what builds trust and speaks to the depth of the relationships that are so fundamental to the culture at Impact. These biannual parent conferences are not the only times parents meet with faculty and staff however; parents and advisors can schedule this sort of in-depth conference at any time.

During the 2012-2013 New Parent Orientation Night, the multipurpose room was packed; parents, siblings, and grandparents filled up all the seats and lined the walls and aisles ready to learn about Impact Academy. The principal began the evening by saying, "What makes our school unique is that it is small and built on these relationships, and that's what makes it transformative for our students."

With this as the foundation, all of the teachers introduce themselves, current students share about projects and what they like about Impact, and some alumni speak about how Impact prepared them for college. One could feel the excitement in the room—a palpable sense of hope and pride emanating from parents who believe and trust that their child's future is secure at Impact.

Parents are also invited to campus for exhibitions and defenses—they, along with teachers, community members, and other students, make up the "authentic audience" for student presenters. In this way, parents are a crucial part of what makes Impact student-centered—parents provide support at home and in the classroom as a wraparound approach to student learning. In many ways, just as students learn what it means to be students, parents are also able to see what it means to be an active participant in their student's educational experience at Impact. (See the Academic Program section for more information on Exhibitions and Defenses at Impact.)

Parents feel they have a voice in what happens on campus and have formed a sort of accountability structure among themselves, working together to be sure that as many parents are involved in the school as possible. The school itself operates under an open-door policy, and one parent explains, "I just like that I can just show up at any time and they're just like, 'Okay come on in,' whereas at other schools it was like, 'Make an appointment, tell us what day you're going to be there, what class you want to visit' so they can get it all organized and be on their best behavior, where here it's like I can just walk in any class at any time." In the spring of 2012, as part of a focus on equity and bridging the achievement gap, Impact hosted a parent panel in which the staff gathered feedback from families of color about their experiences working with the school's largely white staff. Such events as these further demonstrate the school's ability to address their own potential shortcomings by first garnering information from the people who matter most—the families at the school. In this way, Impact's student-centered approach goes beyond the walls of the classroom and takes seriously the input of all stakeholders in an effort to truly be responsive to its students.

Academic Program

At Impact Academy, the role of the teacher is one of facilitator and guide rather than holder of all the knowledge; students are regularly prompted to explore, research, defend, and challenge information as part of the learning process. Because of this philosophy of education, Impact teachers have the freedom to assess learning in meaningful, authentic ways and are not constrained by standardized tests. Impact Academy, however, is not exempt from traditional standardized tests.
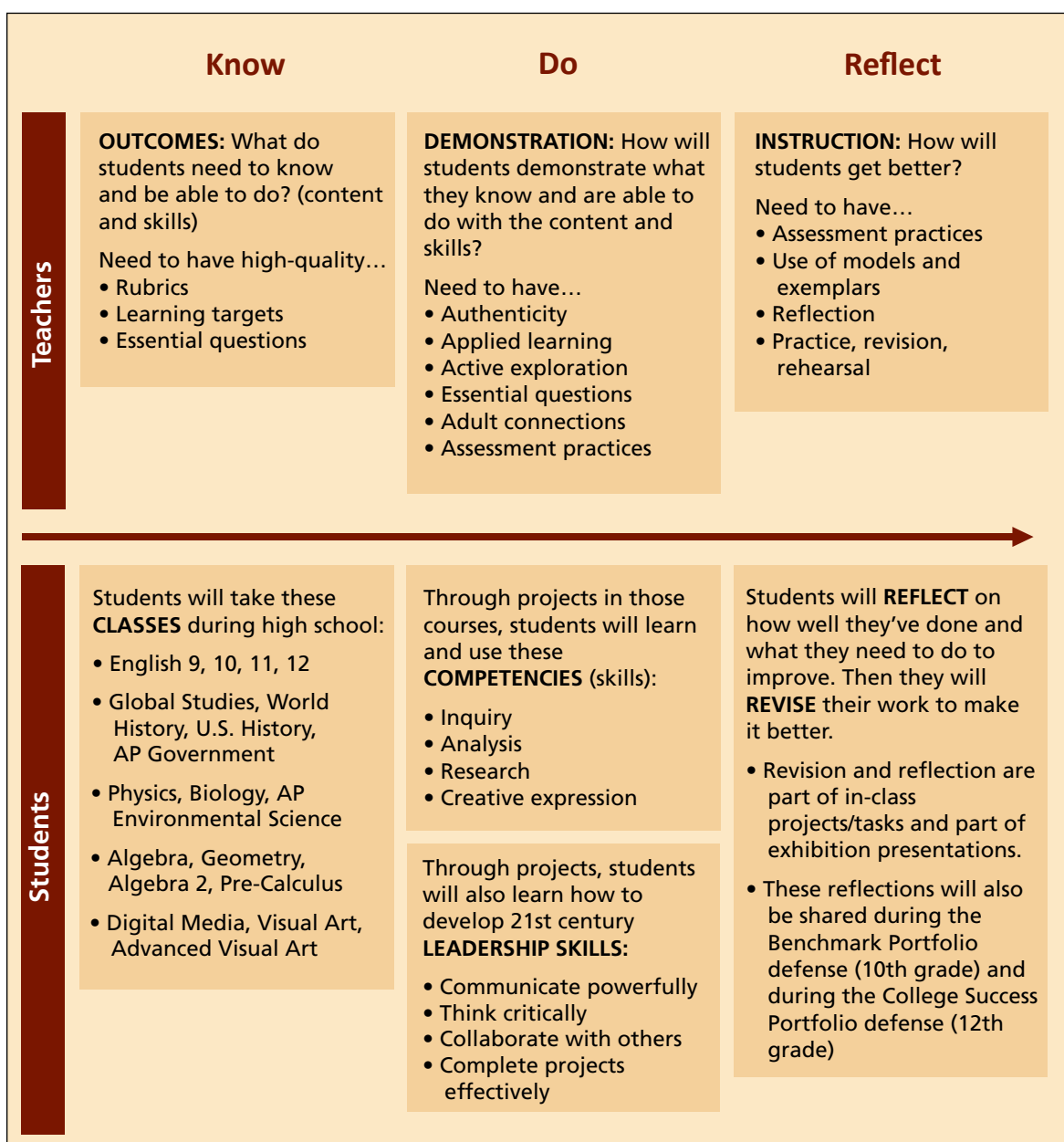
Despite these universal structures that govern all public schools, Impact has taken an approach to pedagogy that is non-traditional. Instead of having the tests dictate the content and ways in which students are taught, Impact uses standards and research-based practices to determine how best to ensure that students not only learn the content in each of their classes, but also perform solidly on the state tests. This freedom means that students are expected to demonstrate knowledge in non-traditional ways, and sometimes, students have a choice about how to demonstrate their understanding.

The school uses a unique block schedule of classes. Each class meets for 65, 70, or 105 minutes at different times during the day. For example, Period One meets on Mondays from 8:10 to 9:20 a.m., on Tuesdays from 2:25 to 3:30 p.m., on Wednesdays from 8:10 to 9:55 a.m., and on Fridays from 1:45 to 2:55 p.m. The purpose of this scheduling is so that classes don't meet at the exact same time every day when energy and attention may not be optimal. For example, a class that meets every day after lunch might have really low energy, so shuffling the time that classes meet allows students to experience all of their classes during different times of the day. (See Appendix B for the Impact Academy Bell Schedule.) In addition to a unique bell schedule, teachers and students organize ac-

cording to grade-level divisions: 9th and 10th grades are in the lower division, and 11th and 12th grades are in the upper division.

There are also system-wide academic expectations guided by the Envision Education leadership. The Support Office provides for its schools a year-by-year framework for teaching, learning, and assessment. This framework is a timeline of sorts, where at each grade level students move through the *know, do, reflect* cycle to achieve important milestones during their progress toward graduation. Figure 2 gives an overview of how these crucial pieces of the Envision model work in tandem to guide teacher instruction and curriculum development and inform students about where they are expected to be academically and meta-cognitively each year.

Figure 2: The Know, Do, Reflect Cycle

	Know	Do	Reflect
Teachers	**OUTCOMES:** What do students need to know and be able to do? (content and skills) Need to have high-quality… • Rubrics • Learning targets • Essential questions	**DEMONSTRATION:** How will students demonstrate what they know and are able to do with the content and skills? Need to have… • Authenticity • Applied learning • Active exploration • Essential questions • Adult connections • Assessment practices	**INSTRUCTION:** How will students get better? Need to have… • Assessment practices • Use of models and exemplars • Reflection • Practice, revision, rehearsal
Students	Students will take these **CLASSES** during high school: • English 9, 10, 11, 12 • Global Studies, World History, U.S. History, AP Government • Physics, Biology, AP Environmental Science • Algebra, Geometry, Algebra 2, Pre-Calculus • Digital Media, Visual Art, Advanced Visual Art	Through projects in those courses, students will learn and use these **COMPETENCIES** (skills): • Inquiry • Analysis • Research • Creative expression Through projects, students will also learn how to develop 21st century **LEADERSHIP SKILLS:** • Communicate powerfully • Think critically • Collaborate with others • Complete projects effectively	Students will **REFLECT** on how well they've done and what they need to do to improve. Then they will **REVISE** their work to make it better. • Revision and reflection are part of in-class projects/tasks and part of exhibition presentations. • These reflections will also be shared during the Benchmark Portfolio defense (10th grade) and during the College Success Portfolio defense (12th grade)

The past couple of years, Envision Schools have focused on the workshop model of instruction as a means of strengthening literacy levels for students. The workshop model, if done well, opens up opportunities for teachers and more advanced peers to provide one-on-one support to students who are struggling. Key aspects of the workshop model include the following:

- Teachers engage students in a 10- to 15-minute "mini-lesson" on a core concept or idea or demonstrate a hands-on activity. During this mini-lesson, teachers talk through their thinking process, demonstrating for the students how to approach the problem or activity.
- Students are then released to work on a problem or activity on their own, in pairs, or in small groups. During this time, the teacher moves around the classroom to answer questions, check for understanding, and provide more focused support to the students who need it. In some cases, students who have a strong grasp of a concept are encouraged to help their peers.

The workshop approach is student-centered in that it provides the space for individual work and for ongoing scaffolding of learning by teachers and proficient peers. It serves as a vehicle through which teachers can differentiate instruction and engage one-on-one with students, meeting them where they are rather than expecting students to be at the same level.

One teacher praised the workshop model because it "works particularly well with struggling students, students who need a lot of practice, who need a lot of help both from peers and from [the teacher]. So the idea is if we can change the way teachers are teaching and make it more student-centered, they're actually talking more with students in the classroom and it's not as lecture-based, which is a helpful shift because the teacher engages more with students in the classroom context."

In addition to pedagogical consistency around the implementation of the workshop model, Impact also utilizes other crucial components that make its academic program strong: (1) cultural relevance and real-world application, (2) project-based learning experiences, (3) an emphasis on collaborative learning, (4) an instructional mindset in which the teacher is facilitator, and (5) a focus on individualized, differentiated instructional materials. Used together, these elements create a learning environment that is supportive of the students' cognitive development and cognizant of the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation to bolster engagement in learning. The following sections delve into these components of the Impact academic program in more detail.

Curriculum That Is Real-World and Relevant

Ultimately, the heart of Impact's academic approach is that, as the principal explains, "kids have multiple ways of knowing and making sense of things, and we're celebrating

their strengths and their ability to demonstrate mastery in multiple modes of expression." Impact Academy teachers prioritize the utilization of curriculum that is relevant and relatable to students' lives. Using this approach on how texts are chosen and assignments created, means that what students learn in classes is decidedly student-centered because the students, and their interests, are used to guide the process of curriculum development.

Student investment in the work comes as a result of teachers' purposeful linkage of the academic skills and content to real-world application. Teachers work to create an environment where students can see immediately how what they are learning is connected to a greater world and to their own personal trajectories as students and young adults. Part of creating this environment means that students have the freedom to follow a line of inquiry about a topic or subject that interests them. However, this does not mean that students *only* study those things they are interested in, but it does mean that within the scope of a given class, students are often presented with options about how to go about completing a task.

One science teacher explained that student choice presents itself more in terms of how to show understanding.

> For example, in the ionic bonding unit, students had a choice of showing what they knew and understood through a skit, a love letter, a poem, or they could write and perform a rap. So they had all these different ways of deciding how they wanted to do it, and it made for some entertaining products that the lessons really got into.

A humanities teacher employs similar strategies in her classroom. When teaching students different perspectives for analyzing literature, she teaches them how theory informs the way we read and changes the things that we see in the text and allows us to find competing interpretations that can both be right. She explained: "I think kids often are like, 'This book means....' [But,] I explain, 'This book can mean lots of different things, and having these different lenses can help you access different interpretations that are all right.'"

Teachers build bridges to the curriculum by encouraging students to make connections between self and text/task and to draw from prior experiences. Part of creating curriculum that connects to students' lives is finding fresh ways to approach traditional concepts. One 12th-grade student characterized the curriculum as "more interesting than textbook stuff." He went on to explain how in a government class, students set up a mock Congress in which each student represented a state, they proposed bills on the "Senate floor," proposed revisions, and went through the process that Congress goes through to make laws. In this exercise, even the principal of the school came in and sat as the "president." The student explained how this activity gave the class a "visual and an example of what Congress actually does instead of just reading in the textbook. So it's really more hands-on. It gave me a better understanding of what they actually do."

Another student chimed in and reiterated that the process "gave me more respect for what they have to do because ours was just like a tiny bit of what Congress does, and it took forever to get through those bills and to have to satisfy everybody's needs. It was a great experience."

Impact Academy students are able to aptly articulate how it is to be a learner in this student-centered environment. The curriculum content along with the pedagogical style is important to students. One student pointed out, "They give us all these opportunities to actually prove that we learned something, like debates and Socratic seminars and exhibitions and grad portfolio and stuff like that rather than just trying to teach us something and giving us a test to make sure we get it. They actually make the students prove that we actually get what they're teaching us." Table 9 illustrates how students perceive their learning experiences at Impact.

Table 9: Student Perceptions of Learning Experiences in the Classroom

In TWO or more of my classes this year....	Impact students	Comparison school students
My teachers give us activities to do, other than just listening to them	95%	81%
I work with other students on projects in class	95%	79%
I use what I've learned to solve new and different problems	89%	73%
I combine many ideas and pieces of information into something new and more complex	81%	61%

Source: Student Survey

This expectation of demonstrated learning for the students translates to a more profound sense of connection to the content, transitioning students' motivation to learn from a desire to get a grade to an intrinsic desire to learn associated with a sense of pride. One student explains that the sense of accomplishment in learning and demonstrating new knowledge is something that he hadn't experienced before Impact. He said that the process "pushes me a lot harder, and it makes me more proud of what I'm learning about. Especially when I can teach somebody else what I learned about, it makes me feel better about learning that subject."

When students care about a subject, and feel a sense of accomplishment when learning and demonstrating learning, the knowledge is more lasting because it is applied learning, not rote regurgitation of facts, dates, or numbers. Another student points out that in previous schools, she didn't like history because all that it centered around was "writing in the little textbook" whereas at Impact, "[history is] just so interesting to me now because I'm actually learning about what's happening, what's happened in the past….Everything we do here kind of grabs your attention, and you have no choice but to internalize it." The internalization that this student speaks of is fundamental to the student-centered approach to teaching and learning; the content, skills, experiences,

and environment all work in conjunction to transform students' approach to school and life in general. Another student speaks about how experiences in her English class have impacted her ideas about what she will do when she grows up, a prime example of how rich learning experiences at Impact influence not just students' daily lives but also their conceptions of what options and opportunities they will have in their adult future. The student said:

> When we were learning about *Animal Farm,* we had a mock trial putting Napoleon up on the stand, and you think it's the stupidest thing ever, you're arguing about a pig, and yet it gave you this experience. And I know there's people that want to be lawyers out there, and I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to talk to Congressman Eric Swalwell last weekend outside of school, and he was talking about the one thing that inspired him to become a lawyer and a congressman was the fact that he did a mock trial his senior year in high school. I'm thinking, I did that my 10th-grade year! I think it's insane the kind of inspiration we're getting here because I know people in [other] schools, and they have no clue what they're gonna do with their life.

Teachers explain how their construction of curriculum units allows for a balance between ensuring students acquire the requisite skills and knowledge while also making sure that the content of those units is relevant to their lives now and in the future. A history teacher described a unit on Reconstruction:

> We've been studying Reconstruction, and we looked at different historical interpretations. So they looked at textbooks from the 1870s and from the 1920s and from the 1960s and so on, and they had to pick a claim that a historian in one of those years made about Reconstruction. They had to do research to either prove the claim true or debunk this historical claim and compile the primary source research and analyze the documents. So this person was (looking at a visual) analyzing the claim that Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation because he wanted to free slaves, and that's a highly contested historical claim. What was the nature of the Emancipation Proclamation? So find out if it's true or not.

This particular approach to teaching history allows for students to interact with sources in a way that is authentic and valuable; history is not taught as an already written absolute but as a version of truth that requires interrogation and interpretation, not passive acceptance. Welcoming students into this process of critical thinking and analysis seems universal at Impact Academy—across the board, teachers prompt students to interact with texts such that they work in collaboration to make their own meaning of the world around them. Table 10 on page 26 illustrates survey data regarding how Impact teachers rate their colleagues on adjusting their practice to meet students' learning needs.

Table 10: Teacher Instructional Practices

Teachers at this school…	Impact teachers, agree or strongly agree	Comparison school teachers, agree or strongly agree
Adjust instruction to meet the needs of each student	95%	60%
Review student learning and understanding in order to adjust their practices	90%	75%
Pay attention to what motivates each student	81%	58%
Have made changes to best meet the needs of the school's diverse student body	95%	74%

Source: Teacher Survey[4]

Ultimately, teachers at Impact are guided by the philosophy that, according to one teacher:

> Students have to care about the topics they're learning about, so whether that's identifying with the curriculum from a racial aspect, from a gender aspect, from a class aspect, or from just what they're interested in today… they're most engaged when you're talking about things that relate to their lives, so keeping students at the center when you're devising and coming up with curriculum is important.

As part of building a classroom culture focused on deep learning, teachers also take into consideration factors that affect students' lives and views of the world. One teacher explained that she incorporates cultural relevance in terms of what books are read and the tasks associated with those texts. For her students, she explicitly designs lessons on class, gender, and race as a means of preparing students for in-depth discussions and dialogue. Similarly, another teacher uses student demographics and current events as a means of designing lessons that students care about while also embedding traditional classic literature as well. She starts off with texts like *The Crucible* and *Young Goodman Brown* and then teaches students how to transition the skills learned with those texts to more modern literature like *The Tortilla Curtain*, which students "really get into." She explained, "This school is 50% Latino…their family members, their friends. [The book covers] real issues that they're facing so they liked learning about it in a fictional context in the English classroom."

The effectiveness of the instructional practices and curricular choices utilized in the classrooms at Impact is echoed in student survey data, where 86% agreed or strongly agreed that the topics they study in class are both interesting and challenging.

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[4] Teacher Survey is of 21 teachers, 91%. Comparison data is taken from the Study of Deeper Learning: Opportunities and Outcomes funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and conducted by the American Institutes for Research that included several of the schools in this study. The teacher comparison sample with a total of 356 teachers includes results from 12 schools across the country.

The freedom to decide on and adapt curriculum has its challenges, however. One teacher articulates why this can be hard on teachers:

> It's bittersweet because as a teacher I get the freedom to teach whatever I want to and cover it in any way that I feel necessary, but it's also hard because I'm planning my own curriculum and every year it may be different because my kids may need more fractions help than they need algebraic help. And so I have to assess the needs of the kids and plan according to the needs of the kids. At one end it's good because I get to help and fill in the gaps, but then I could be doing and teaching all new things next year and spending more time on different things.

Although the malleability of the curriculum and instructional approach might be a challenge for some teachers, the point is that it is rewarding and meaningful for the students; at Impact, teachers adjust based on student need and not the other way around. This can be especially hard for new teachers when there is a high level of variability not just from year to year but from class period to class period of the same subject.

Hands-On and Project-Based Learning Across the Curriculum

Students estimate that 75% of their day is spent engaged in some sort of hands-on activity. These projects are not isolated from the content or frivolous activities for the sake of an activity—these hands-on tasks are an integral part of what it means to learn at Impact. One student characterized the process in this way:

> [Teachers] explain everything, and before they even start the project they do like a step-by-step process and they tell you everything that we're going to do. We write a whole bunch of stuff about it ahead of time. We do a lot of prep before we do projects so it's like before we even start it's like we're learning everything we need to know before we even do it. Then once we start the project it's pretty much hands-on.

Students report that the humanities classes employ similar project-based learning. One student recalls a Socratic seminar and another reminisces about a poetry unit in English class in which students did a project about their own personality and character, the idea being that they could have full creative freedom to come up with how best to communicate their own style and sense of self. This student explained that she made a song about herself while another classmate made a scrapbook, and another wrote a poem. Students are savvy about being able to pick out the distinction between when a project is just a project and when it's really designed as a learning experience. One student compares projects from middle school to the types of projects at Impact by saying, "In middle school, it was more about doing art projects—it wasn't really like learning," whereas at Impact, "the projects we've done here have actually taught me more than I've

learned my entire middle school years."

A group of 9th- and 10th-grade students spoke at length about how the hands-on nature of the science classes is not only engaging, but also seems to bring the content to life. When speaking about a biology lesson, one student shared that in learning about diseases and mutations, the teacher had the students use beans as a symbolic representation of how viruses are spread. Another student built off of this anecdote with a description of an activity he did in a physics class.

> I remember we had to plan out a gravity car. We had to make a car that was running on gravity, and we had to set up the whole thing. We had to cut and measure [heights], we had to make wheels, we had to pretty much engineer. It was cool. You feel like you're at a job or you feel like you're at a facility where you're coming up with ideas that you can even use in the future to come up with some kind of invention. You actually feel like there's a purpose to your work instead of just putting it all in a notebook and then throwing it away at the end of the year.

A recent graduate of Impact Academy confirmed the sentiments of current students and teachers when she explained how her high school learning experiences prepared her for college projects and presentations. She explained, "The way classes were structured [at Impact]—applied learning versus just tests—is more like what we do in college. We have lots of applied learning and projects, and I know how to do more than just throw up what we learned from the teacher. I know how to internalize."

The uniqueness of the projects that students experience at Impact speaks to the freedoms that teachers have in developing curriculum that is responsive to student interests and therefore specifically student-centered. As a result, students become co-creators of the learning experiences they engage in within classrooms.

A culture of collaborative learning
At Impact, students are encouraged to cooperatively create learning experiences that demonstrate their knowledge of a particular concept. Collaborating productively is one of the four leadership skills emphasized at the school, and as a result, teachers ask students to work together on a regular basis to access the curriculum. Of teachers surveyed, 95% responded that they get students to work together a fair amount or a great deal during regular classroom time. These responses highlight a trademark Impact approach to curriculum and instruction that asks students to "know, *do*, and reflect," with the understanding that "do" doesn't always mean work must be done alone.

During an observation of a math class, students were finishing up a unit on quadratic equations. The culminating task for this unit was for students to work in small groups to create a tutorial video for their peers on a particular theorem, property, or problem-solving strategy. The classroom audience was expected to follow the steps presented in

the video, take notes, complete the practice problem, determine if they solved it correctly according to the method taught in the video, and assign a "grade" based on the rubric provided by the teacher. At the end of each video presentation, students in the audience could ask questions or provide written feedback on the rubric cards for each group. Reminiscent of a Khan Academy video, students became the teachers, and experts, on one part of the unit on quadratic equations.

As the video played, the student "audience" is prompted to try solving a problem on their own. As students complete the problem, they proclaim with joy upon getting the right answer, "Hey! I got that!" and "Yes!" As the first video ended, the teacher instructed the students, "At this time, write down at least two pieces of constructive warm feedback and at least two pieces of cool feedback"—a feedback strategy used in exhibitions and defenses as well as in daily classroom interaction. In addition to the written feedback, the teacher led the class through an oral reflection as well. Students chimed in with praise: "I like how they explain in detail what to do exactly in this problem" and "the video was upbeat and wasn't boring—they had good energy." When giving cool feedback, one student said, "When they were explaining the problems they went a little fast," and another offers, "They only did one practice problem—we needed one more example."

This sort of classroom culture of collaborative learning is not only present in the tasks but in the reflective practices as well; learning is cooperative. Additionally, this process allows students to get familiar with giving feedback to each other and having their work critiqued. Part of what makes this work is that the task itself is an authentic and creative way for students to practice these equations, making it more engaging than just a worksheet or a lecture that is solely teacher-directed. The power transfers from the teacher to the students—they become their own resources and experts for how to be mathematicians.

Teachers as facilitators of learning: "Most of the doing is done by students"
Another common instructional method seen in classrooms at Impact relies heavily on the importance of discussion and the discursive nature of learning. Students are actively engaged in speaking and doing work while teachers create the environment and give students the tools to do this well. A 12th-grade teacher explained, "Most of the doing is done by students" in the classroom, which "has been interpreted to mean hands-on learning that involves movement and discussion and open-ended questioning and group work." To make this happen, teachers plan units and lessons in such a way that require students to continually implement what they've learned and verbally explain their understanding as a way for teachers to assess learning continuously but also as a means of maintaining high levels of engagement. Students are not receptors of knowledge, they are co-creators of knowledge, a philosophy that closely ties into the school's focus on the 21st century Leadership Skill: *think critically*.

An 11th-grade teacher explains, "Keeping students at the center, both when you're designing curriculum and when you're teaching, means incorporating as much student involvement as you possibly can—that's where the whole project-based learning piece

Collaboration in Action

In a freshman math class, students do a jigsaw activity in which they start in pairs on one problem and then join a group of four to then teach their new group members how to do the problem. The students work together at a very high level, well above what might be expected for ninth-graders. Students who are "learners" during the jigsaw are expected to take notes and ask clarifying questions while the student who is "teaching" is expected to make sure that everyone in the group knows how to do the problem—they are responsible for each other's learning. While the room fills with chatter and the sound of pencils on paper, the teacher moves around the room to ensure that students are in fact on task and on track. At one group, the teacher stops and asks them to pause and look closely at whether their final answer can be simplified one more time. The group of four looks intently at the solution and together they realize their error—all four students erase their work to get the right answer.

At the end of the short jigsaw, the teacher takes a moment to clarify for the whole class. She says: "I want to point out something from one group. If you write x+1√3 it looks like you're only multiplying this radical by 1 but you are actually multiplying by x+1, which is why parentheses are so important. Everyone make sure you have that distinction on your notes." This point of clarification may not have become apparent if students were working alone or if the teacher didn't also have a way in which to check for understanding along the way.

Using a group task like the jigsaw, in which students must become teachers of their peers, the information becomes immediately more useful than if they were only receptors of information and passively taking notes. This example of an instructional segment is the norm at Impact; students regularly engage in collaborative problem solving as a means of learning.

comes in. When students are doing projects that are very hands-on, students are the ones doing the heavy lifting. Teachers are hands-off, which is a good way for students to learn." Another teacher explains that in his chemistry classroom, the student-centered learning approach is "premised on the constructivist learning theory in that students have to develop understanding in their own heads. Whatever strategies I use as a teacher ultimately rest on students developing their own understanding." Of surveyed teachers, 81% feel that students should be allowed to think of solutions to practical problems themselves before the teacher shows them how they are solved, and 81% of teachers view their role as a facilitator of students' own inquiries.

This is not to say that at Impact lecturing does not exist. Instead, when teachers do present new information to students in the form of a lecture or mini-lesson, along the way students are prompted to discuss with a partner, share in their own words their own understanding of a theory or equation, or respond to application questions that will allow the teacher a gauge by which to measure how well students are grasping the new information.

Parents also expressed how the concept of collaborative learning and critical thinking becomes central to students' learning experiences. One parent said said:

> Another thing they teach here that is different from other places is they teach them how to have collaborative disagreement. They teach them how to

listen to opposing opinions without hate and without judgment.…And it's teaching that how to build synergy from very different viewpoints so that when they get out in the world and they go to college if someone disagrees with them they're not going to go, "Oh I hate you." They're teaching them how to argue without ignorance…arguing intellectually, and that is very different from what our society is teaching our children on an everyday basis. Here at this school if somebody doesn't agree with you you're encouraged to find out why.

The principal highlights that the purpose behind the tasks assigned is:

> Students do work that requires them to pursue an original line of inquiry and draw on multiple ways of seeing and making sense of the world… [and] this model actually gives kids the space to begin thinking and acting as professionals.

Part of getting to this is that students are regularly asked to explain their thinking along the way as a means for the teacher to determine if and how well students understand the concepts.

Additionally, in valuing student talk and the power of discussion and dialogue as a means of learning, Impact students become adept at the reasoning behind what they are asked to do and take their work seriously. One teacher deftly explained that she is explicit with her students about the way that they will be expected to learn in class. She says to them:

> You're not really learning because I'm just talking, so it's better when you're more accountable for your own education and therefore you know that I need to make sure I understand this in order for me to explain it. I'm a big believer in if you're able to explain it then that means you know it.

In other words, the process of learning is as important as the product. Acquisition of knowledge doesn't end with a student's ability to answer a question correctly, instead, students on many occasions will be asked not only to explain their thinking but then also bear some responsibility for teaching peers to do the same—a process that links to the "know, do, reflect" cycle of learning.

Teachers implement the jigsaw strategy, a common collaborative learning strategy traditionally used to promote literacy in humanities classes. The math teacher whose class is highlighted in the sidebar on page 30 wondered if the jigsaw strategy would facilitate students teaching each other math. She was interested in finding a way to have students teach each other math in much the same way. She explained:

> Let me say the first time I did it, the students definitely struggled because some of them weren't taking it seriously and some of them were just copy-

ing the answer but not really understanding what they were supposed to be learning. So we debriefed after and I said, "Okay, so what were some of the things that were helpful? What are some of the things that weren't helpful?" So I had them talk about the process for them to understand that if you don't take it seriously you are affecting someone else's education and therefore you may not end up learning. I asked them, "What's important when we do this?" Then they came up with: "We have to stay focused and to actually teach [the problem and process]."

What's significant about this "trial and error" implementation of the jigsaw is that student feedback and reflection were a crucial part of how this particular activity became the norm in this class. In this way, teachers seem to strive to find meaningful ways for students to interact with the curriculum and with each other, underlining the student-centered nature of Impact's pedagogical approach.

Differentiation to ensure student access to challenging curriculum

To achieve multiple access and entry points for students to acquire new information and demonstrate their understanding of knowledge, Impact teachers rely heavily on a scaffolded, differentiated approach to instruction. To provide scaffolding and differentiated work, teachers frequently use formative assessments like exit tickets and classwork to determine what adjustments to their pedagogy and curriculum are needed. For students who are misunderstanding central concepts, teachers will assign adapted work—tasks that are different in terms of difficulty or length but still require students to access the same curriculum concepts. This method of differentiation is universal at Impact.

One history teacher explained that she differentiates in a variety of ways for her students based on what is challenging for them.

> [For] some students it's executive functioning stuff, for others it's skill deficits, or it's reading—how much they are being asked to read, or eliminating elements of a project, creating an alternative assignment, or doing lots of scaffolds for writing….I do a lot of literacy stuff with all the students, but basically I try to figure out what is their capacity if they're working super hard and just modify and scaffold as appropriate.

This same idea resonates in the English department, where one teacher explained:

> I do a lot of more subtle stuff of like modified readings and modified tests and shorter essays or modified essays that are not nearly as clear to other people, and kids advocate for that all the time. I do think that most of the kids feel very good being successful and know that the resource that I'm providing will allow them to be successful more than going for the harder thing where they'll feel frustrated and bad.

Central to the Impact Academy approach to all things is this idea of students learning to advocate for themselves. This same expectation—where students will say what they need when they need it—appears instructionally as well. Differentiation should not be mistaken for low expectations, however. Instead, teachers use differentiation as a means of scaffolding student learning to ensure that they can meet the rigorous and college-prep level expectations (see Table 11). The teacher survey data illustrates how high expectations and differentiation sit side by side at impact.

Table 11: Teacher Expectations and Scaffolded Instruction

Teachers at this school…	Impact teachers, agree or strongly agree	Comparison school teachers, agree or strongly agree
Identify challenging yet achievable goals for each student	90%	62%
Set high expectations for academic work	95%	80%
Encourage students to keep trying even when the work is challenging	100%	91%

Source: Teacher Survey

Differentiation happens not just for students who are struggling but also for students who need more of a challenge. Another English teacher explained that in one of her novel units, she has all students read *A Man of the People* and then has higher-skilled students read *Things Fall Apart* as well. This way, her hope is that students will "be in little discussion circles making meaning together" while she can work with other students on skills and content while they read *A Man of the People*. Ultimately, the goal is that students, on all reading levels, can have shared knowledge about one book and then build in classroom time for the teacher to intervene and provide support during the class period without necessarily slowing down the pace. A math teacher explained that she has implemented an "early finisher's station," a place where students can go and work on more challenging problems once they are finished with the tasks assigned to the whole class. This way, students can take responsibility for their own learning by embracing challenges and continuously working hard even when it's clearly on work that is "above and beyond." Table 12 on page 34 highlights how differentiation in the classroom is interpreted by students in terms of their access to the curriculum.

Overall, the methods used for differentiation in the classroom differ from room to room, and teachers maintain the freedom to determine what will work for each group of students and then alter differentiation strategies for different groups of students. One teacher offered some insight on this pedagogical flexibility:

Table 12: Student Perceptions of Differentiation in the Classroom

In TWO or more of my classes this year....	Impact students	Comparison school students
My teacher will help me catch up if I am behind	73%	52%
My teacher explains difficult things clearly	81%	53%
My teacher pays attention to all students, not just the top students	90%	58%
My teacher will help me stay busy and interested if I get ahead	69%	42%

Source: Student Survey

> I think teachers do it differently. In an English classroom I've tried leveled texts so students are reading texts at different Lexile levels that are appropriate for them, but I don't actually like it because I feel like even the highest students need support and you can't give that individual support when everyone's reading a different book. I tend to teach with the highest performing students in mind and then figure out how to support the students who are struggling, whereas other teachers might teach to the middle and then they have extension projects or other assignments that go in both directions for the high [students] and for the low [students].

There exists a thread of independence and autonomy afforded to teachers when it comes to making instructional decisions around what's best for kids. In a student-centered environment like this, teachers are seen as professionals, trusted with using their best judgment, expertise, and research-based best practices as a means of ensuring student achievement. This particular method of instruction is structured around the theory that, as one teacher puts it, "I've rarely met a student who couldn't rise to the occasion, and if they weren't rising to the occasion it was probably because they needed extra support." Finding out what that support is and how to implement it seems to be the central job of Impact teachers.

The "Learning Center Model" to Support Students with Special Needs

Classroom teachers serve as the first line of defense for student support, but they are also backed by the "learning center model." The "learning center model" for special education has two learning specialists, or special education teachers, work with general education teachers to make modifications and provide accommodations for students with learning disabilities. On some occasions, learning specialists provide push-in services in which they co-teach with general education teachers while at other times they pull students out and provide small group or one-on-one instruction as needed or as dictated by their IEPs. Additionally, the learning center houses a part-time school psychologist and a staff of four counselors who provide services for all Impact students.

Learning specialists meet with teachers on a weekly basis to check in with each teacher who provides instruction to students with IEPs. Meetings consist of a review of the week's learning objectives, discussion of the modifications and/or accommodations needed, and depending on each teacher's comfort and capacity, sometimes the learning specialists will adapt projects or worksheets for teachers. During these weekly meetings, teachers will also schedule push-in time or schedule specific times for students to be pulled out.

The learning center is also a place that students can go to during the school day to get extra help. Unlike some schools where there is a stigma attached to needing extra help, teachers explain that there seems to be no stigma attached to this resource for students at Impact. One teacher pointed out, "Students want to go there for extra help. So you'll actually have students who maybe don't have IEPs or 504s that actually may ask to go there. I think that's a really unique aspect of it and really speaks to the culture of the students and the school." For those students who just want the extra help but may in fact have a learning challenge, the school uses Response to Intervention (RTI) strategies to determine students' ability to meet given standards and also as a means to evaluate potential interventions necessary to help them succeed. Starting with a Student Support Team (SST), advisors and teachers will schedule a meeting with the parents and one of the administrators to determine what interventions are needed. Over the course of a 3-month period, the SST reassesses student progress using student achievement data and anecdotal information from faculty to determine if the next steps should be to assess the student for Special Education or to determine if adjusting other factors might be an appropriate next step.

In addition to formal SST meetings, the staff communicate regularly to discuss which students are falling short and to determine action plans for how to support students in meeting the standards. There appears to be a downside to the hyper-vigilant methods by which teachers identify and respond to student needs, however. One teacher expressed frustration when explaining that once a student is receiving modifications it's not as easy to remove those supports: "I think the idea is that we provide the scaffolds and then hopefully get to remove them at some point, although I haven't seen a whole lot of evidence of that really happening."

For students who fall under the Tier 3 for interventions, they are pulled out into a small group or receive one-on-one instruction depending on their designation. One teacher reports that the "learning center isn't staffed as much as it needs to be so I don't often think that kids get the support that they need when they're there," although the school is ramping up and has hired a new specialist to help address the burgeoning student learning needs. Even the principal admitted that at Impact:

> We're not prepared to offer the kind of comprehensive menu of special education services that a traditional school does. We have a learning center model that appeals to some families and we try to be as transparent as

we can about that with families that come check us out, but yeah there are some challenges to supporting all kids the way that we hope to.

This is a common sentiment among charter schools that often struggle to adequately fund the range of supports needed for their students.

The funding challenges also exist in preventing the school from adequately addressing the needs of English language learners. Over the course of Impact's 6-year existence, the student population has shifted dramatically. There now exists a large contingent of Latino students, many of whom speak Spanish as their first language. Unfortunately Impact has not been able to keep up with the changing language need of students. One teacher expressed, "There's no direct way for students who are language learners to get help, which is a real problem." Teachers have expressed a sense of not knowing what to do for students whose academic struggles are linked to an English language proficiency gap; because there is no staff member specifically assigned to serve these children and support teachers in their literacy practices, some students who fall into this category may not be getting the specific language support that they need. The gap is so evident that teachers don't necessarily know who is a designated English Language Learner. One teacher aptly posed the question, "How can you scaffold for [ELL] students when you don't even know that they're in the classroom?"

According to the administration, the school does not yet have plans to hire another staff member specifically designated to support English language learners. However, the school has refocused the ninth-grade English curriculum on ramping up reading and literacy skills for all students. This includes the incorporation of the Accelerated Read-er[5] program as a supplemental reading fluency support.

Offering Support Through Alternative Uses of Time

Another key component of academic support comes through the alternative use of time outside of the regular school hours. Impact requires teachers to host office hours after school to ensure that students are academically successful. Office hours are reminiscent of college office hours in which professors make themselves available to students outside of class for further help, discussion, and support.

The one-on-one nature of office hours allows for teachers to give students individualized attention that may not be available during class time. The other important aspect of office hours is that it requires students to advocate for their own learning, a component of the Impact model that has been highlighted by students, parents, and alumni of

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[5] Accelerated Reader, a program created by Renaissance Learning, is designed to "monitor and manage independent reading practice" for students based on determining their current reading level and recommending books that are within the calculated Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Students complete reading tests at the end of each book that measure reading comprehension skills. This information is shared with the teacher and parents via an online interface. http://www.renlearn.com/ar/default.aspx

the school. Although teachers are required to have at least one hour per week of office hours, teachers report that they are available much more often than the minimum of one hour. Several teachers report that their doors are always open after school, and students can count on having the freedom to drop in when they want to speak with teachers. Office hours are also a place where students who are highfliers can stick around and offer help to their peers. One teacher explained that one such student "stays after on some days and tutors so that the kids don't feel like they have to come to [teachers], but can get help from someone who they're maybe comfortable with."

There are times when office hours are not purely by choice, but become compulsory. If a student is struggling, the school will assign that student to Mandatory Office Hours (MOH). Students can be assigned to MOH if their grades are not sufficient or the quality of work produced is not acceptable. In essence, the MOH becomes a way to teach students to take responsibility for their grades even if they are resistant or unsure of how to go about making changes academically. One student explained, "You couldn't get out of [Mandatory Office Hours] until you got your grade up. You have no choice but to pass. You kind of have to try to fail. If you fail you can [blame] yourself."

Upper-division students make the parallel between "normal public schools" and Impact where, "if they're not doing well they're not really getting the support that they need to do well, and here [at Impact] you have office hours. You have teachers who, even if you don't want to go to office hours, they're going to make you go."

The concept of office hours at Impact has changed over time. Originally, office hours were only mandatory after the school had sent out report cards and it became evident that intervention was needed. For every C- or below that a student earned, he/she must go to office hours. But instead of waiting until report cards or quarterly progress reports to assign students to office hours, teachers can now recommend mandatory office hours to students at any point. This shift is an important change for the school in that the early intervention and support is an important way for students to get help along the way before it gets to the point of feeling like it is too late.

Applied Learning in the Workplace

Although the atmosphere at Impact is definitely centered on getting students prepared for the "real world" via college, there is also a focus on career development. An Envision-wide program called Workplace Learning Experience (WLE) requires junior and senior students to take on internships in fields that they are interested in exploring as a career. In the second semester of junior and senior year, students spend 11 or 12 weeks, up to 80 hours, at their respective internships. According to an upper-division teacher, "WLE is rooted in the fact that so many of our students are first generation to college, some are first-generation high school graduates. Most of our kids' families don't have lots of professional networks or contacts. I think the genesis is from that desire to pro-

vide students with professional networks and expose them to professional work settings."

In an effort to give students a sense of social capital afforded to many students whose parents are already college graduates or professionals, Impact picks up some of the responsibility for preparing students for the workplace. In this way, Impact has found yet another avenue by which students are expected to practice leadership skills in an authentic way. Instead of simply telling students what it will be like once they have a job, they give them an internship where they must not only do work on a regular basis, but also reflect on how well they are applying the skills they've learned in school. WLE internships are as diverse as the student body itself—students have completed internships at companies like Tesla, Waste Management, and Deloitte, as well as at local auto repair shops, veterinary hospitals, investment firms, and preschools.

Internships are established for students in a number of ways. Some partnerships are a result of existing connections that have been in place for years, while others are born out of relationships that teachers have with organizations or corporations that are willing to welcome high school students in as interns. Other internships come about as a direct result of student advocacy and interest. Advisors will help students make phone calls and conduct Internet searches or send letters to find companies that align with student interests.

Much of the oversight of WLE rests with the advisors, who bear responsibility for placement, coaching students throughout the internship, and checking in with the internship contact people to ensure the placement is running smoothly. One teacher explains that the process of internship placement is a "community approach." She said, "We try to help each other and connect kids who would be perfect for certain opportunities… even if it's not my student." The placement of 225 students can be a challenge, however, and though the benefits of WLE are tremendous, it remains somewhat of "a hard thing logistically." In response to the logistical challenges of WLE, the principal did appoint a part-time WLE coordinator and provided 12th-grade advisors with release time every Monday to coordinate logistics on behalf of their students. This adaptability indicates the school's responsiveness not only to the students but to the teachers as well, ensuring that the school structures are in place to afford teachers with the time to advocate for the students and fulfill Impact's promise to provide this crucial learning experience.

Assessments are Regular and Ongoing

The way that Impact approaches assessment is embedded in the philosophy that deep learning comes about by doing, teaching, explaining, and performing, and this is of-

ten reliant upon a cooperative setting in which learners work in conjunction with one another to create meaning and demonstrate understanding. Impact assesses students in four ways: (1) in-class formative assessments, (2) project-based exhibitions, (3) portfolio defenses, and (4) quarterly Common Interim Assessment for Math, Common Writing Assessments for Writing, and STAR Reading Tests (via Accelerated Reader) for Reading. Principal Jesse Bean explains, "Philosophy behind the work is that kids are most engaged, and learners in general are most engaged, when the stakes are high, when it matters to them and it matters to people that they care about. It's not just about a grade." Given the school's approach to curriculum and pedagogy, it makes sense that the way the school measures learning is similarly engaging, relevant, and reflexive. The expectation is that students will become thinkers, not students skilled at regurgitation armed with test-taking strategies. The grade is not the end goal; instead, the goal is for students to walk away with an arsenal of information that they know deeply, understand fully, and can use to look at the world with a greater sense of awareness.

In-class assessments are a regular component of the *know, do, reflect* cycle as well. At all grade levels, students participate in tests, quizzes, performance tasks, common interim assessments, projects, and exhibitions as necessary formative and summative assessments used by teachers to determine student progress toward the set objectives.

Impact values the notion that students should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery. Part of demonstrating mastery is not only accomplishing the standards, content, and skills of a given course, but also evident in students' ability to revise and reflect on the process of learning. The means is just as important as the ends.

To gain an additional data point, the school uses a benchmark system of quarterly tests to formally assess student achievement individually to ensure that students aren't hiding deficiencies or slipping through the cracks. After the results of the benchmarks are distributed, teachers work together to identify students who need intervention, support, or additional work to ensure that at all levels of students are achieving and feeling challenged.

Impact students regularly participate in exhibitions, where they share project-based learning publically, and portfolio defenses, in which they present exemplar pieces of work (artifacts) in a public defense. The sidebar on page 40 provides an illustration of a ninth-grade exhibition.

Performance-based assessments themselves are a crucial element of the learning process. In order for a project or essay to be ready for presentation to an audience, the work itself must meet several criteria, according to Principal Bean: "We ask kids to organize their best work and refine it to the point that it's college-ready and then present and defend that work through a rigorous process." Central to the performance assessment process is that students will learn what it means to advocate for themselves, take ownership over their own learning, learn and then practice skills that will be fundamental to having productive lives post-high school.

Freshman Exhibition

The curriculum at Impact is not limited to projects nestled within individual classrooms—teachers regularly work in conjunction with one another to design units that overlap, build on one another, and require students to use skills from one subject area in another way in a different subject area.

In the ninth grade, students work through a unit on identity that spans the Digital Arts and English classes. The project culminates in a final exhibition titled: "Identity: A Symbolic Exploration of Self," in which students present art projects and English essays that they've been working on as part of a unit on discovering their own identities, strengths, weaknesses, and life goals.

In a packed community room filled with parents, grandparents, friends, and younger siblings, eager ninth-grade students sit nervously in their dress clothes (ties, skirts and stockings, button-down shirts tucked neatly into slacks) with note cards in hand while the principal welcomes community members to the exhibition—the first for these new freshman at Impact. The principal gives an overview of the process for the evening and explains the importance of exhibitions. He says, "We believe that students learn by doing, and they are the most engaged when they are doing. Over the course of the evening you will see exhibitions around a series of personal topics….Through these projects students were able to examine their own role as capable and emerging adults. The goal here is for students to have the ability to think critically, and communicate clearly, with an advanced level of preparedness for the academic and career paths that await them beyond these walls."

With that send-off, the audience files into the classrooms to observe, ask questions, and grade (using a rubric) student exhibitions. All members of the community become part of the process of evaluating and supporting students in the exhibition.
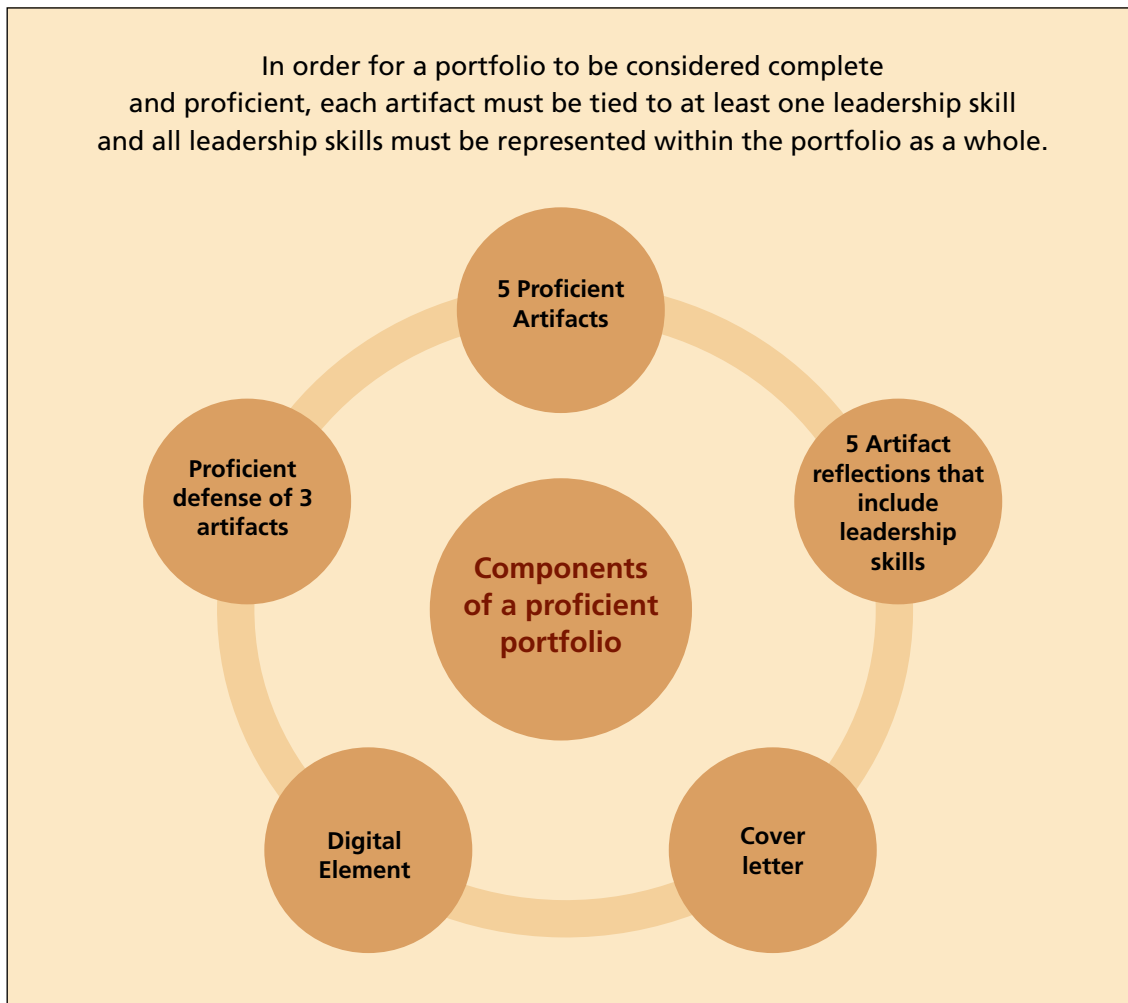
Benchmark Portfolios and College Success Portfolios

In the 9th and 10th grade, students complete Benchmark Portfolios, and the 11th- and 12th-grade students complete College Success Portfolios. Portfolios are designed for students to choose five pieces of work representative of the Workplace Learning Experience (WLE) and each of the different competencies: *research, inquiry, creative expression, and analysis*. Additionally, students' reflection on the artifacts must incorporate the Leadership Skills of the school: *collaborate productively, think critically, communicate powerfully, and complete projects effectively*. In their defense of the portfolio, students will have to explain the purpose of each artifact, what the expected process was for completing the task (e.g., essay or project), and what they learned from the process.

The goal of the benchmark and college success portfolios is for students to demonstrate how much they've grown, what they've learned and what they've noticed about themselves in the process, and what they will need to improve on to ensure a successful upper-division high school career or success in college.

One teacher characterized the graduation portfolio and benchmark portfolio as drivers of the school model because the artifacts used in those portfolios are done in classes and "take a consider-

Figure 3: Components of a Proficient Portfolio

In order for a portfolio to be considered complete
and proficient, each artifact must be tied to at least one leadership skill
and all leadership skills must be represented within the portfolio as a whole.

5 Proficient Artifacts

5 Artifact reflections that include leadership skills

Proficient defense of 3 artifacts

Components of a proficient portfolio

Digital Element

Cover letter

Source: Envision Schools College Success Portfolio Handbook 2011-2012

able amount of deliberate support and teaching in alignment" with the student-centered and project-based philosophy of the school. These portfolios are focused in large part on personal reflection and growth, which result in "products themselves that involve more student-centered learning than you'd have in a classroom that's more lecture-based." So as students engage in collaborative, project-based tasks in class, they must then also be able to explain their processes in a public way as representative of the learning they've done within the span of a school year. In this way, exhibitions act as an accountability structure that requires students to gather up their best work into a portfolio and explain the processes used to accomplish the completed work.

Revision is a crucial piece of preparing a document or project for exhibition or defense; the work itself must be high-quality, or "certified," as they call it at Impact. If a piece of work doesn't meet the "Proficient" standard as determined by Envision Schools College Success Rubrics for each Core Competency, students must persist in working on it until it has met the expectation. The teachers determine whether an artifact gets certified, and although the process might be arduous for some students, the teachers read-

ily appreciate that the process of revision ensures deep and meaningful learning for all students. This insistence on quality becomes the line that teachers and administrators must hold. If the expectations are lowered, the learning process itself becomes compromised. One teacher spoke about the cyclic nature of artifact certification, saying that the process itself ensures that as a school, Impact "does not let a kid go under the bar any longer."

Once the pieces of the portfolio are complete, the students are ready to defend publically in front of an audience of teachers, community members, parents, and friends. The defense is an opportunity for students to explain their learning processes and share their reflection and growth. According to Envision Schools Portfolio Handbook, students will use pieces of "certified" work as evidence of their learning, and will "defend his or her mastery of the Envision Schools 21st Century Leadership Skills, and demonstrate how the presented work meets the schools' criteria for graduation and supports his or her professional growth." Defense committee members (the audience) use the Benchmark/College Success Portfolio Defense Checklist as a guide for determining whether the presenting student has the required assessment criteria needed to meet the standard to pass (see Appendix C). Finally, the defense rubric is completed to determine whether the student has met proficiency within each of the scoring domains: mastery of knowledge, application of knowledge, meta-cognition, presentation skills, and response to questions and comments to the audience/committee (see Appendix C).

Teacher Collaboration and Professional Development

The benchmark portfolios and graduation portfolios drive teacher work and collaboration in that the tasks assigned to students must be varied enough throughout the grade level such that students can complete the portfolios with a broad range of work completed within the given domains. The high degree of accountability provided by school-wide portfolios requires that teachers work together and communicate consistently so that students will be in the best position possible to succeed. One teacher reported that often teacher collaboration time within the family would focus around questions such as, "How do we build up to them designing their own investigations? How do we build up to them doing the analysis fully on their own with some scaffolds available for students who really do need it?"

To keep the high levels of cooperation between teachers such that students remain at the center of all curricular and instructional decision-making, the school is organized in such a way that the structure of the school week and year is conducive to regular teacher communication.

At Impact, each grade-level team is called a "family," and each grade-level family works in collaboration to design cross-curricular projects and assignments, plan exhibitions for their grade level, discuss strategies to support students who are struggling in their classes, and discuss overarching goals around what it means to be promoted from one grade to the next. Each grade-level family has a lead teacher; lead teachers are selected through an application process and voted on by their peers for a two-year term.

The lead teacher assigned to each grade-level family facilitates collaborative conversations among teachers. They build the agenda for collaborative meetings along with other teachers in the family and the administration; the meetings are communal with a common focus that the members agree is important. In one family, the lead teacher described that her grade level was "really pushing for having a set of exit skills for reading and writing." In determining how to articulate what these specific exit skills could be, the teachers focused their conversation around finding specific answers to broad questions like, "What sort of things do we want to see kids be able to do by the time they're at the end of 9th grade and 10th grade and 11th grade?"

Lead teachers also function as the mouthpiece for their grade-level family, providing the administration with feedback and suggestions around campus-wide needs and in helping to provide perspective on needs that may not be met by the school as a whole. Having teachers involved in policy making on campus is yet another way that Impact values all members of the school community and shows openness to change when it's in the best interest of the students. One teacher expressed praise for this process of decision making, saying, "Decisions go through the lead teachers or the lead staff and then it gets to the teachers during a professional development day and then either we pass it or

not and every single person votes." Using collective intelligence in this way makes for a more synergistic and cohesive team of educators working toward a common goal.

The lead team, made up of one teacher per grade level, a learning specialist, the college counselor, and the administration, meets weekly on Mondays. Lead team meetings often entail a discussion about what professional development should look like for the week (or upcoming weeks). The lead team also vets proposals for policy changes before they are presented to the entire staff. A member of the lead team shared an example of the range of topics discussed at one of the lead team meetings:

> Our vice principal just brought to us his revised discipline management system, which would change how to log detentions and referrals. So in our meeting we talked about that before he's going to present it on Wednesday [in PD]. Also, we are going to get observed for instructional rounds next week, and so we were brainstorming ideas for a problem of practice and then yesterday we had a concrete proposal for what our problem of practice should be.

After the lead team meets on Mondays, the school engages in full staff professional development time every Wednesday. Principal Bean explains that Wednesday professional development is focused around two areas: the first on intentional capacity building around an identified school-wide gap goal, or common core growth area, which is led by the administration, and the second piece focuses on team-based grade level work time, where lead teachers "own" the content of those meetings.

In the second hour of PD, sometimes teachers start off in their respective "divisions"—upper division is 11th- and 12th-grade teachers and lower division is 9th- and 10th-grade—before breaking off into grade-level families. In divisions they might select a Spartan of the Week (a student who is recognized publically in weekly community meetings), or they might focus on office hours or brainstorm ways to support struggling students. Another central focus for the division meetings is around curriculum alignment and reporting on how well goals have been met that were stated at the start of the year. For example, for the 9th-grade teachers, one common goal was around routine setting, focusing on questions like, "What are students doing in the first five minutes of class? Are we all agreeing to have students write in their planners? At the beginning of class they have to write down homework, etcetera."

After division time, either teachers will meet as a grade-level family or spend time co-planning with other teachers. According to Principal Jesse Bean, the tendency is to focus primarily on conversations in which there are students in common and focus less on the subject area. Bean explained that because of the focus on student-specific concerns, there has been "less opportunity to think about what it means to write well as a 9th-grader versus to write well as a 10th-grader. We have very few vertically aligned conversations about academic skills, and I think we have tried to interrupt that this

spring by changing our PD so that there's more time for subject areas to talk and for grade levels to talk about this very thing." The principal's response highlights an area of tension around the amount of time available for professional development and collaboration. Both vertical alignment and specific student concerns are equally important, but there doesn't seem to be sufficient time to do both deeply and well. In general, however, the professional development and collaborative time at Impact is driven by the needs of the students, which allows for a level of freedom that is welcomed and appreciated by the staff nonetheless.

The aforementioned professional development practices have contributed to a culture of continual growth that teachers feel positively support their ability to share with and learn from peers on an ongoing basis. This is also reflected in teacher survey data, which show that the vast majority of teachers at Impact feel that they have regular opportunities to collaborate with their peers and work together to better serve their students. In particular, the data show that Impact is especially strong at providing teachers with opportunities to discuss and collaboratively define school-wide practices and standards for student learning, as compared to other schools. Table 13 describes these findings in greater depth.

Table 13: Teacher Perceptions of Teacher Collaboration

How frequently do you do each of the following with other teachers in your school....	Impact teachers, sometimes or frequently	Comparison school, teachers, sometimes or frequently
I am observed by another teacher	81%	39%
I observe another teacher teaching	67%	49%
We work on implementing particular instructional grouping strategies	67%	60%

Source: Teacher Survey

The Envision Support Office: Guides for Practitioner Growth and Development

The Envision Support Office functions similarly to how a traditional school district would work in terms of payroll, operations, and overall curricular and instructional guidance. However, instead of focusing most heavily on compliance, the Support Office functions as a resource to its school administrators in ensuring that their leadership is aimed at facilitating research-based, highly effective, and student-centered practices aimed at garnering strong student achievement results.

One such way to foster innovative and reflective practices is through the use of a practice called instructional rounds. Instructional rounds were devised so that each school

in the network can get valuable feedback from other educators within the Envision network. This process of continual observation, feedback, action plan development, and more observation lead to a culture that values reflection and action; the school itself is engaged in finding ways to learn and grow in the same way that students are asked to reflect in the process of learning and growing. The instructional rounds also function to provide key support and feedback to the principal, who must juggle the challenges of providing staff with enough support in their already demanding jobs, while focusing his feedback to teachers on specific, school-wide strategies to ramp up the effectiveness of instruction.

Another way that this reflective practice is promoted system-wide is through the annual leadership huddle in June, when each lead team from each school gets together to reflect and plan. Principal Jesse Bean explains that in the huddle, the lead team essentially plans out the school's goals for the next school year and devises a plan on how to introduce the goals to the staff in such a way that the staff can be accountable for follow-through throughout the year. The foci for the year, which in 2012 were literacy and the workshop model of instruction, are then incorporated into the professional development meetings. Teachers work together to build on what this means at Impact with regular discussions and analysis of videotaped teaching and student work samples.

Conclusion

mpact Academy is an exemplar of what student-centered teaching and learning looks like in an urban center with more than half of its students living in poverty. Impact has amassed an impressive track record for graduation and college attendance. The hallmark of Impact's success is by far its attention to the importance of personal connections—students, teachers, administrators, and parents all echo how the family-like setting on the campus leads to high student engagement, high expectations, and profound results. Despite the challenges that come with such a small and personalized school setting, like teacher burnout due to long workdays, the benefits to the students is indeed evident. Principal Bean points to this challenge when reflecting on how teachers sometimes struggle to stay with the school for the duration of their teaching careers. He said, "Schools sometimes are organized in ways that are convenient for adults, and our model is not, which touches on a related issue around retention and how difficult this work can be."

What is clear about this model, however, is that it works for students. Students are expected to know how to synthesize information, determine what's important, and present what they've learned and be able to answer any questions that may come up about the content and process of learning. In this way, Impact's assessment model, exhibitions, and defenses become the ultimate measure of whether a student fully understands a concept. The public nature of these assessments also adds another layer of accountability for learning where there is no such thing as busy work.

Yet another important determination of how well a school is doing is by the satisfaction of its parents. Parents at Impact shared that the changes they notice in their students are a direct result of the type of learning that is afforded their children at Impact and the expectations that students are given. One parent shared an anecdote about the ways in which he saw his child changing as a result of the Impact approach. He explained:

> The kids don't even realize that they're learning. I realized it when I was trying to get my son to do something, and all of a sudden he was giving me these Socratic arguments of why my theory wasn't holding water (chuckling), you know. So [the school's] expectation is matched by their techniques in teaching. So their expectation is for the kids to leave here being able to advocate for themselves.

Overall, Impact faculty and staff represent a community of educators determined to uncover and address the ways that they can improve, a dedication to student learning, and an impressive ability to use the same reflective techniques their students use in order to refine their own instructional practice.

Appendix A: Methodology and Data Sources

Impact Academy

The case study employs mixed methods, with data drawn from multiple sources, including interview, observation, and survey data. Interviews were conducted of school staff, parents, current students, graduates, and community members. Surveys were administered to teachers, students, and graduates. Observations were conducted of classrooms, staff collaboration, and professional development and performance assessment activities. Graduate college attendance data was gathered from the National Clearinghouse data set. Student achievement data was gathered from data available to the public from the California Department of Education. The table below provides a detailed accounting of the data sources.

Type of data source	Number
Administrator/staff interviews	4
Teacher interviews	7
Student focus groups 9th & 10th grade and 11th & 12th grade	2
Parent focus group	1
Graduate interviews	4
Classroom and advisory observations	9
Exhibition and defense observations	6
Community meeting observation	1
Graduation ceremony observation	1
New student parent orientation observation	1
Professional development/teacher collaboration	3
Student survey	188 surveyed Response rate 41%
Teacher survey	21 surveyed (out of 23 teachers including Learning Specialists, athletic director) Response rate 91%
Graduate survey	33 surveyed Response rate 22%

Appendix B: Bell Schedule

Impact Academy Bell Schedule
2013-2014

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	Period 1 8:10 - 9:20	Period 5 8:10 - 9:20	Period 1 8:10 - 9:55	Period 3 8:10 - 9:55	Period 5 8:10 - 9:20
	Period 2 9:25-10:35	Period 4 9:25-10:35	Break 9:55-10:05	Break 9:55-10:05	Period 4 9:25-10:35
			Advisory / AS 10:05 - 11:10 UD Community Meeting	Period 4 11:05-11:50	
	Break 10:35 - 10:45	Break 10:35 - 10:45			Break 10:35 - 10:45
	Period 3 10:45-11:55	Period 3 10:45-11:55	Period 2 11:15-1:00		Period 3 10:45-11:55
	Lunch 11:55 - 12:25	Lunch 11:55 - 12:25		Lunch 11:50 - 12:30	Lunch 11:55 - 12:25
	Advisory / AS 12:30 - 1:05	Advisory / AS 12:30 - 1:05		Advisory / AS 12:35 - 1:40 LD Community Meeting	Period 2 12:30 - 1:40
	Period 4 1:10 - 2:20	Period 2 1:10 - 2:20	Staff Lunch 1:00 - 2:00		
				Period 5 1:45 - 3:30	Period 1 1:45 - 2:55
	Period 5 2:25 - 3:30	Period 1 2:25 - 3:30	Staff Meeting 2:00 - 5:00		

Appendix C: Evaluation Rubric for Portfolio Defense

FORMAL OR ACADEMIC PRESENTATION

SCORING DOMAIN	EMERGING	E/D	DEVELOPING	D/P	PROFICIENT	P/A	ADVANCED
CONTENT AND PREPARATION	• A lack of organization makes it difficult to follow the presenter's ideas. • Draws on facts, experience, or research in a minimal way and/or it is unclear how they are related to the topic.		• Inconsistencies in organization and limited use of transitions may make it difficult to follow the presenter's ideas. • Partially draws on facts, experience, and/or research that may be unclear how they are related to the topic.		• Presentation is organized with a beginning, middle, and end, and utilizes appropriate transitions. • Draws on facts, experiences and research to express an understanding of the topic.		• Presentation is clearly and logically organized, with an engaging introduction, a logically sequenced body with effective transitions, and a clear and convincing conclusion. • Facts, experience and research are synthesized to demonstrate an understanding of the topic.
PRESENTATION SKILLS	• Makes minimal use of presentation skills, including body posture, language, eye contact, voice and timing. • Uses language that is unsuited to the topic and audience • Responses to the questions are vague and demonstrate a minimal command of the facts or understanding of the topic.		• Makes partial use of presentation skills, including body posture, language, eye contact, voice and timing. • Uses language that is at times unsuited to the topic and audience • Responses to the questions are limited and demonstrate a partial command of the facts or understanding of the topic.		• Demonstrates a command of presentation skills, including body posture, language, eye contact, voice and timing. • Uses appropriate language that is suited to the topic and audience • Responses relate to the questions and demonstrate an adequate command of the facts and understanding of the topic.		• Demonstrates consistent command of presentation skills, including body posture, language, eye contact, voice and timing that keep the audience engaged. • Uses sophisticated and varied language that is suited to the topic and audience • Responses to questions are precise and persuasive, demonstrating an in-depth understanding of the facts and topic.
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS	• Presenter lacks enthusiasm. • Presenter's energy and affect are unsuitable for the audience and purpose of the presentation.		• Presenter shows minimal enthusiasm. • Presenter's energy and/or affect are partially appropriate for the audience and purpose of the presentation.		• Presenter shows some enthusiasm. • Presenter's energy and affect are appropriate for the audience and support the presentation.		• Presenter is consistently enthusiastic. • Presenter maintains a presence and a captivating energy that is appropriate to the audience and purpose of the presentation.

Appendix C (cont'd): Evaluation Rubric for Portfolio Defense

Benchmark/College Success Portfolio Oral Defense Checklist

Name of Student: _____

Committee members: _____

Date/Time/School: _____

Oral Defense Assessment Criteria

The members of the Oral Defense Committee assess a student's performance on the following criteria:

What does this student know? (Mastery of Knowledge)
- ❏ Student demonstrates detailed content knowledge through each artifact, including the context of each artifact.
- ❏ Student provides appropriate and consistent evidence to support the thesis and arguments about the contents of the portfolio.
- ❏ Student relates knowledge to the explanation of the world around him or her.

What can this student do? (Application of Knowledge)
- ❏ Student connects and applies learning from one area of study **or** point of view to another.
- ❏ Student demonstrates evidence of the use and application of the 21st Century Leadership Skills:

– *Think **C**ritically*	– ***C**ommunicate Powerfully*
– ***C**ollaborate Productively*	– ***C**omplete Projects Effectively*

How reflective is this student? (Meta-Cognition)
- ❏ Student recognizes his or her growth, accomplishments and successes.
- ❏ Student honestly acknowledges areas where further personal and/or cognitive growth and development are needed, and has a plan or strategy to manage their needs.

Presentation Skills
- ❏ Student has clear and well organized presentation.
- ❏ Student shows a command of presentation skills: body posture, language, eye contact, voice and timing.
- ❏ Student communicates clearly and uses effective language to convey a thesis, ideas and opinions in defense of his or her learning.
- ❏ Student makes effective use of Digital and/or Visual elements to demonstrate his or her learning.

Student's Response to Questions and Comments
- ❏ Student directly responds to questions and comments from members of the panel.
- ❏ Student uses evidence/examples to convincingly support answers to questions.

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