



Overview

Vista High School XQ Super School Journey

Vista High School began its path toward change in 2016. Vista’s leadership recognized a need to redefine how the school constitutes opportunity and success for its students. Serving a population of 79% Latinx and 67% free-and-reduced-lunch students, Vista’s team operates on the belief that in order for students to succeed they must feel supported, valued, and capable.

The school has undertaken an innovative approach to holistic well-being and self-directed learning. Since participating in the XQ Super School Competition, Vista leaders and staff have been re-envisioning themselves as learners who co-create student experiences that are relevant, authentic, and meaningful to students’ interests and futures. The journey hasn’t been easy, but it’s been worthwhile.

Vista High School, a traditional public high school until 2016, is rethinking how it can serve its historically disadvantaged student population by supporting its students in developing social-emotional wellbeing and solving authentic challenges.



Discover Vista High School

The more than 2,300 students at Vista High School are building strong, trusting, and caring relationships with their classmates and teachers. They are supported by the school's development of a personalized and self-directed learning environment that features a robust focus on students' social-emotional growth. The school team focuses on the creation of learner-centered dynamics throughout the school, with an emphasis on students and teachers co-creating academic, behavioral, and social/emotional learning experiences. Aligned to this effort, they have created a wellness center and built a wellness course into students' class schedules, providing students opportunities to learn mindsets, behaviors, and strategies to help them thrive as self-aware and self-directed learners.

Vista High School is a public school that was opened in 1936, serving roughly 2300 students grades 9-12.



Vista High School Design Features

1. Wellness and restorative practices

Social-emotional skills, restorative justice, healthy habits, and overall wellness are all major components of the Vista experience. To set this tone school-wide, all freshmen take a wellness seminar to build understanding of their individual strengths and how to incorporate those strengths into their learning experiences. The school's Wellness Center, which is available to all students at all times, is staffed by two Wellness Center teachers per period. Vista annually delivers a holistic student survey to gather student feedback on both the academic and social-emotional climate of the school. Restorative practices are also a major component of Vista's approach—in restorative circles, students learn how their choices impact others and how to build positive relationships in order to create a safe, productive, and supportive community. Many students report using the techniques they learn outside of school, in their home, and personal lives. By creating a sense of belonging for the entire student body, Vista strives to fulfill its promise that Vista CARES and creates students who are curious, who are advocates, and who are resilient and empathetic as well as socially and emotionally well.



2. Self-directed learning

Vista staff strive to develop self-directed learners who inquire about challenges they see in their world, understand varying perspectives in relation to that challenge, and prototype solutions to positively impact the world around them. This starts with giving students a say in how—and what—they learn. In collaboration with teachers, students at Vista learn to co-create learning opportunities that connect the study of content to their emerging interests, strengths, and passions. To support teachers in shifting from the school's former passive style of classroom organization, the school's leaders developed a cohort of peer-to-peer coaches who collaborate with teachers as thought partners to develop new ideas for building student voice into learning experiences. Students at Vista report that they learn better when they have opportunities to co-create their learning experiences. School leaders and teachers at Vista have committed to giving students more and more opportunities to do so.

“No longer could students take the anonymous path. For me, that was the biggest eye-opener. There was no invisible student in the classroom any more.”

— [Matt Stuckey](#), Teacher



Hi, I'm Loreli Peña.

"I am not only taking in information but I'm also learning what to do with the information in a positive way. I think it is teaching me how to prepare for the real world to solve any issue no matter how big or small."

3. Global Citizenship

Vista helps students build understanding of global issues while connecting these issues to the challenges they face in their everyday lives. Vista educators do this by engaging with content differently than they have in the past. For instance, as students read John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, they examine the characters, their lives, and their actions through the lens of the United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the same time, the school has built a digital media lab to help students understand, develop, and practice the types of storytelling and technical skills they will need to engage in meaningful challenges, develop potential solutions, and make difficult decisions successfully. Today, students at Vista are reaching out to their local Congressman to ask him to speak at their school, forming peer counselor groups to support students on campus, and organizing voter registration to support civic duty in the community. Students at Vista are finding challenges, creating solutions, and acting to improve their community.

"At Vista High School we believe that all students deserve a challenging and personally relevant education."

— Vicki Curtis, Teacher



4. Rich, rigorous, and authentic pathways

Vista’s creation of a caring environment, where students are supported in developing and pursuing academic interests, will culminate in a system of personalized pathways that align to the students’ passions and post-secondary goals. These pathways will guide students through California’s A-G course requirements for college eligibility while leading each and every student to develop a collection of post-secondary goals and plans. These plans include work that help students develop 21st-century skills like collaboration, research, analysis, and reflection.

“We are all experiencing a shift in thinking around the learning pathways that students are taking; a shift that includes moving to a student-centered approach to education, in which the students step away from their traditional role as recipients of core-subject content and move into the driver’s seat of their quest to become flexible, nimble thinkers and learners in an increasingly complex society.”

— Adriana Rigo, 11th Grader



Theory Into Action

Student work: Co-creating learning experiences

Teacher innovation has helped students learn to take greater control of their learning process to be better prepared for college and career as well as create a productive and meaningful life. In one recent example, 10th grade teachers collaborated with their students to imagine what a co-created semester might look like. ELA and world history teachers laid out the standards and non-negotiables, and the students added their thoughts and ideas as to how they might demonstrate their understanding. The results? Students decided to work together to put many of the characters of history and literary works “on trial” through live role-play in order to demonstrate their understanding of complex nuances in the ELA and social science content they were learning.

Competencies Met:

- ✓ Creating, Imagining, and Innovating
- ✓ Thinking Interdependently

State Standards Met

- ✓ Students interpret past events and issues within the context in which an event unfolded rather than solely in terms of present-day norms and values.
- ✓ Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.



Matt Doyle, Ed.D

Superintendent of Schools

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Goals for Grads

“By the time our students graduate from Vista High School, each student will be able to describe their strengths, articulate how they overcame challenges, and expound upon how they are prepared to confront any and all future obstacles. Our graduates will embark into their future with a plan or pathway based on their interests and, ideally, their passions in order to create a meaningful and rewarding life.”

— **David Jaffe**, Principal

Student data

Tiger Ventures serves 73 students in grades 8-12 this school year.

2%	Black	63%	Free/Reduced price Lunch
14%	White		Special Education
79%	Latinx	18%	
3%	Other		
1%	Asian		
>1%	American Indian or Alaska		
>1%	Native		
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific		
	Islander		

Blogs and Media

- [What Happens When Students Decide How They Learn?](#)
- [The True Meaning of 'Lord of the Flies'? Ask These 10th Graders](#)
- [School Builders Share What It Means to #ReThinkHighSchool in Practice 'The Most Rewarding Thing I've Ever Done'](#)
- [In a Contemporary, Media-Driven World, These Two Schools Are Rethinking Education](#)
- ['The Most Rewarding Thing I've Ever Done'](#)

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