

Focus on Learning Action Plan 2016



Downtown High School

**693 Vermont Street
San Francisco, CA 94107**

San Francisco Unified School District

At Downtown High School, the WASC Action Plan has been driving our school's progress for the past eighteen years. It was a WASC Action Plan that guided us through a process of restructuring our school into the alternative, project-based model that has become the solid foundation of everything we do. It was another WASC Action Plan that helped us standardize expectations schoolwide, raise the bar for all projects, and launch the academic initiatives and professional development structures that are now so well institutionalized at DHS. The most recent Action Plan allowed us to create tools for assessing student academic growth, more deeply incorporate student well being into our program, and continue to improve our projects. Through the WASC Action Plan process, our school has reached a place where the academic expectations across projects are comparable, students are well supported by a broad array of services and programs, and structures are in place that support all teachers in developing rigorous, accessible, and engaging curricula.

Our mission at Downtown High School has always been two-fold: to address both the academic and personal needs of our students. As such, in past WASC cycles, we have consistently identified critical needs related to our instructional program, and separate critical needs to address support for students. This time, however, we have created Critical Learner Needs (CLNs) that integrate both aspects of what we do at DHS. Our 2016 CLNs are umbrellas, under which academics and student support both fit. Actions taken to enhance each of these two realms at DHS will address our larger student-centered schoolwide goals:

1. Increase student investment by further developing project-based curriculum and student support structures.
2. Facilitate a growth mindset among students by further developing and implementing schoolwide assessments and transition processes.

It is the practice of our school to address our Action Plan through Leadership Team planning and weekly professional development. The Leadership Team is the keeper of the school's vision for improvement, the party responsible for regularly revisiting the Action Plan and identifying necessary professional development strands and initiatives to address our goals. Faculty and staff participate in the Action Plan through their participation in committees, professional development, and common planning. This work includes everything from co-planning and delivering workshops, collaboratively authoring and anchoring rubrics, developing curriculum or classroom protocols aligned with Action Plan objectives, and offering feedback on initiative progress and the effectiveness of new structures and policies. At a small school like ours, the entire staff takes responsibility for our growth and everyone plays an active role.

Because our Action Plan is a living, working document, the most practical and helpful structure has proven to be an outline of goals and benchmarks rather than a timeline that repeatedly

designates responsible parties as the Leadership Team, Faculty, and Committee of the Whole. The following Action Plan is an authentic representation of our intentions for the next six years.

Critical Learner Need 1

Increase student investment by further developing project-based curriculum and student support structures.

As a continuation school, it is our job to re-engage students who are at risk of dropping out of or failing to graduate from high school. Our self-study points to the fact that, despite the gains we have made in improving our project-based academic program as well as our range of support for students’ personal growth, the majority of our students struggle to come to school every day, often because they lack a vision of themselves graduating. The reasons for their disengagement are varied: academic deficits or learning disabilities (often undiagnosed) that make schoolwork difficult; mental health issues; tumultuous home or community environments; a discouraging history of academic failure; trauma; and negative interactions with or low expectations from previous educators. These are among many other causes, both academic and personal.

It is clear to us that, if we are to improve attendance and graduation rates at DHS, we must increase student investment in our school in as many ways as possible—including through our project-based curriculum as well as by offering students support services and a positive school climate. The following chart details our Action Plan for CLN 1:

Critical Learner Need 1: Increase student investment by further developing project-based curriculum and student support structures.	
<i>Growth Area/Rationale</i>	<i>Prioritized Action Steps</i>
<p>A. Support teachers in <u>project-based curriculum</u> development.</p> <p>Engaging project curriculum is at the forefront of increasing student investment. Developing multiple interdisciplinary, semester-long, project-based units is a formidable challenge that requires a great deal of coaching and support. Further, as a project-based</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess teacher needs regarding curriculum development and identify professional development goals accordingly. 2. Develop and implement a professional development plan that allows for project curriculum planning, sharing and feedback related to project design as well as fully trains teachers in each of the academic initiatives.

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<p>continuation high school, our faculty turnover is consistently high and the number of newer teachers exceeds the number of veteran teachers. (Only 4 of 12 classroom teachers were here for the last full self-study six years ago.) Our professional development must be designed to support newer teachers as they develop their projects, while also helping veteran teachers to grow and improve.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Create a coaching process for teachers that includes goals, strategies and benchmarks for growth. 4. Facilitate the design of four semester-long, thematic, interdisciplinary units per project so that each project has two years of curriculum to rotate through, and coordinate the cycle of delivery to minimize repetition of content for students. 5. Explore opportunities to design and write grants for intensive learning experiences such as travel or weeklong immersions into specific learning opportunities.
<p>B. Develop <u>social justice curriculum</u> in every project.</p> <p>Students best engage with curriculum they perceive as relevant to their lived experiences. As primarily low-income students of color, our student body seeks ways to understand and combat the systems of oppression that have shaped their lives. Project curriculum must therefore address social justice, as collectively defined by our school, as a means of facilitating solidarity among students that leads to a deeper investment in our academic offerings.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Based on the DHS Definition of Social Justice, identify and develop the following components of our Social Justice Initiative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative goals • Elements of social justice curriculum that each project must offer • Structures for delivery of social justice curriculum • Relevant assessments, especially as related to Critical Academic Skills. 2. Develop project partnerships with social justice organizations in order to enrich the curriculum and incorporate action projects. 3. Fully implement Social Justice Initiative, including anchoring student work in order to assess curriculum and progress toward initiative goals.

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<p>C. Develop <u>community organization partnerships</u> to enhance support for students and project curriculum.</p> <p>Many of our students face inconsistent support in the form of parent/guardian or family involvement in their schooling. However, most of our students come from communities where there are community-based organizations that have a presence in their lives. Building school and project partnerships with these organizations can deepen student investment in DHS as they experience a connection between school and community, as well as bridge communication between DHS and families, helping us build trusting relationships with families that can deepen student investment in the school.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess project and school needs and goals for partnerships with community-based organizations. 2. Through a community mapping process, create a database of past, existing and potential community partners who can support our students and their families. 3. Contact neighborhood-specific organizations to explore the possibility of neighborhood liaisons between school and community 4. Design and implement communication procedures and involvement opportunities for partners. 5. Monitor and assess efficacy of each partnership, adapting involvement and finding additional organizations as needed.
<p>D. Improve <u>school culture and climate</u>.</p> <p>As a continuation high school, DHS faces negative perceptions that are internalized by our students even before they enroll: DHS is not a “real” school, we do not offer a rigorous academic program, our students are not serious about learning or graduating. If students are to invest in attending and graduating DHS, we must create a positive school culture and climate in direct opposition to such perceptions.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design and implement structures for student involvement such as student council/government and student court/mediators. 2. Generate school spirit through activities like monthly assemblies, cultural events, project showcases, incentives for attendance and positive behavior, creation of a mural, etc. 3. Launch a positive public relations campaign to improve perception of DHS via video, website, social media, community outreach, etc.

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<p>E. Implement <u>consistent schoolwide policies</u>.</p> <p>Our students have often lacked consistent high expectations of both behavior and academic achievement throughout their schooling. Furthermore, many of our students lack stability in their own lives. As such, the school must provide students with clear and consistently enforced norms in order for them to invest in a school where they feel comfortable, safe and supported.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaboratively revisit, prioritize, and revise our Healthy Community Policies and Protocols related to student behavior. 2. Design and implement a plan for focused behavior policy implementation, including a sequence of protocols and consequences to be communicated, taught, and enforced to schoolwide each semester. 3. Simultaneously develop a system of attendance support using our Innovation Grant to implement consistent attendance-related expectations and protocols.
<p>F. Incorporate <u>additional social/emotional support for students into the school program</u>.</p> <p>The more mental health and student support services we have on campus, the more we realize what a high percentage of our students have experienced/are experiencing trauma, the effects of which directly interfere with their ability to engage in the classroom. Students can only invest in DHS if they understand that our school can serve them as a person, understand their social/emotional needs, and work to address them. We must therefore build as much social/emotional support into the school program as possible.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collect and analyze data related to social/emotional supports students are currently accessing in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the extent to which each type of service (Wellness Center, therapeutic services, SAP, SST, classroom-based) affects students' academic achievement • Identify and prioritize additional support services needed • Refine relationships and services offered with existing support providers 2. Research and identify additional support providers, community-based organizations and curriculum models that can be utilized at DHS and outside of school 3. Implement system to regularly gather data that allows for evaluation and modification of the range of services provided.

Critical Learner Need 2

Facilitate a growth mindset among students by further developing and implementing schoolwide assessments and transition processes.

Fundamentally, students come to DHS to grow. Our school is their second, third, or even last chance to succeed in high school. Given that the students who are assigned to Downtown can come with as few as zero and as many as 200 credits, success means different things to different students. For some of our students, success is learning how to come to school every day, complete assignments, participate in discussions, bring class materials, and meet behavioral expectations before transitioning to the Conservation Corps or an adult program. For others, success is graduating from DHS and continuing on to college or to a job. All of these paths are valid; yet what is evident in our self-study is that, while we have developed the tools to measure academic progress and help with transition after high school, we need to better involve students as active participants in all stages of their own growth.

In order for to facilitate the level of ownership that translates to students taking greater responsibility for their academic progress and their future pathways, we must develop structures through which students develop a growth mindset that applies to both personal and academic progress and deepens throughout their time at DHS.

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<p>A. Develop systems for coordinated assessment of progress toward Critical Academic Skills.</p> <p>As a continuation high school, our most fundamental goal is for our students to grow academically and achieve some measure of academic success. The measures we most value are accomplishment of our school’s Critical Academic Skills and we therefore must establish consistent and meaningful use of the corresponding rubrics that assess student progress toward those performance</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review schoolwide rubrics and examine student work samples to anchor each rubric. 2. Develop a plan for schoolwide implementation of rubrics. 3. Facilitate consistent use of rubrics through professional development activities designed to establish the role of rubrics in articulating expectations before beginning major assignments, helping students monitor progress during assignments, assessing student work once complete, and sharing results during all stages.

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standards. Furthermore, in order to facilitate a growth mindset in our students, we have determined that they must develop an awareness of their progress toward mastery of our CAS, ultimately participating in monitoring their own growth and taking responsibility for their learning.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Increase student awareness of Critical Academic Skills and corresponding assessments through schoolwide and classroom-based activities. 5. Incorporate student work demonstrating growth over time in ILPs and/or digital portfolios.
<p>B. Implement <u>individual transition plans</u> for all students.</p> <p>If students are to develop a growth mindset, they must have goals toward which they grow. While we have structures in place to support graduating seniors with transition after high school, as well as procedures for students who need to transition out of DHS to a more appropriate program for their needs, we need all of our students to have a transition plan for life after DHS. While such plans can be living, changing documents, they can also serve to guide students in establishing and monitoring timelines for credit earning, identifying acquisition of skills, and evaluating their own progress toward their goals—whether the goal is graduation from DHS, college, a job, a GED, or an alternative route to a diploma.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a transition plan template to be used during the student intake process, then immediately shared with project teachers, counselors, and appropriate support staff. 2. Design a process of regularly revisiting and revising transition plans, such as during quarterly parent conferences, SST meetings, SAP meetings, and IEPs. 3. Identify and implement ways to incorporate career exploration into the school program. 4. Develop an intensified transition planning process for seniors. 5. Structure a warm send-off for students transitioning out of DHS before graduation that involves assisting students in identifying, researching, making contact with, and registering in alternative programs.
<p>C. Develop structures for students to access <u>workforce and post-secondary education opportunities.</u></p> <p>An integral part of student growth is exposure</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research and identify opportunities for jobs, internships, career shadowing, service learning, scholarships, mentorship, college counseling, etc. and create a database.

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<p>to opportunities relevant to their futures. Participation in jobs, internships, career shadowing, and college preparation can help students practice growth in tangible ways, making their growth mindsets more immediate as well as exposing them to possibilities for their futures that can potentially influence their transition plans.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Develop relationships with organizations and companies willing to partner or participate with DHS and identify potential collaborations (guest speakers, mentors, job placements, hosting students, specific services, etc.) 3. Create a system for identifying student interests and connecting them with relevant opportunities and activities as well as linking projects with organizations and companies related to their curriculum.
<p>D. Offer social/emotional learning to all students.</p> <p>Students must have social/emotional skills in order to maintain a growth mindset. Given the high incidence of trauma and upheaval in our students' lives, the opportunity to learn such skills as emotional self regulation, active listening, reflection, coping, conflict resolution, and mindfulness, for example, can help our students achieve the mental space, self awareness and emotionally honesty necessary in achieving a growth mindset. All students should be provided with access to social/emotional learning through school programming and integration with project curriculum.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a means of regularly surveying students regarding social/emotional needs in order to offer appropriate support. 2. Collaboratively identify priority social/emotional lessons/topics. 3. Develop and implement a tiered system of social/emotional learning opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schoolwide lessons provided for every project as Healthy Community lessons, project curriculum, or workshops • Enrichment activities for students with greater social/emotional needs, offered by service providers and/or Wellness staff via pullout lessons • Intensive social/emotional curriculum for high needs students offered by outside agencies and service providers who communicate and collaborate with the school. 4. Regularly assess the system and modify as needed.

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<p><u>E. Engage family and community support for student progress.</u></p> <p>All students need support in their growth, and our student population needs as much support as possible in order to surmount the challenges they face in life and in school. In addition to our staff, the participation of family and/or community members is critical in reinforcing students’ growth mindsets. We must cultivate opportunities for family and community to engage in monitoring student progress and celebrating their milestones.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generate a list supportive family and community members for each student that is shared with staff, and create a system for regularly updating it. 2. Survey supportive family and community members as to their needs, interests, priorities for involvement, and possible contributions to DHS. 3. Develop an efficient system of communication with family and community as well as a system for integrating their participation at schoolwide events such as assemblies, celebrations, performances, presentations, and exhibitions. 4. Create incentives for family and community participation, such as childcare, meals, groceries, prizes, laundry services, etc.

Developing our Action Plan has, by far, been the most engaging part of our self-study process, during which newer and more veteran staff members, classified and certificated, were able to share ideas and collaborate to create a common vision. We look forward to further improving our school with a student-centered Action Plan focused on investment and growth.