

Chapter IV: Category E

School Culture and Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth

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E1. To what extent does the school leadership employ a wide range of strategies to encourage parental and community involvement, especially with the teaching/learning process?

Regular Parent Involvement

A cornerstone of Downtown High School's support for students is the level of parent/guardian contact and involvement that is carried out. The moment that a student enrolls at Downtown High School, parents/guardians are expected to be involved. Parents and students sit down with the counselor, and the Special Education Coordinator if the student has an IEP, to conduct an intake interview and let the parent/guardian know about the academic and behavioral expectations of the school. The counselor assists in paperwork, orients the family to Downtown High School, breaks down our credit system, informs student and family how the student can gain even more credits after school in programs like Cyber High, night school, ExCEL classes, and trade programs, and conveys rules and expectations are all during the meeting. Parents and student can ask questions and voice concerns during this orientation.

As previously described throughout our self-study, teachers involve parents/guardians in teaching and learning through regular home contact. In addition to ongoing phone calls regarding attendance, behavior, and academic performance, many teachers now also email and text those parents/guardians who prefer to be contacted in that way. In addition, our most powerful tool for involving families continues to be the quarterly parent/guardian-student-teacher conferences. During these conferences, families are informed of student progress toward graduation, academic performance, attendance,

behavior, learning gains, skills and deficits. Families, students, and teachers work together to develop plans that facilitate student success.

In the interest of maximizing involvement for all our students' families, the school has staff available in the front office who are able to provide translation in Spanish and Mandarin or Cantonese. All major mailings are also provided in those languages. Two parents are currently active in our school's English Learner's Advisory Committee, which meets with the School Site Council and makes decisions regarding the governance of our school and the allocation of funds.

Use of Community Resources

Every classroom and teacher at Downtown High School makes it a priority to forge community partnerships with local businesses and non-profit organizations to enhance both the academic and experiential aspects of their projects.

- Physics Reflected in Social Movements (PRISM) works with an organization called Writer's Corps to provide students with workshops in creative and expository writing. They also work with Apple, Inc. to bring students to the local Apple store for training in using various programs to produce academic work. In addition, they partner with a local arts organization called Southern Exposure to teach students urban planning skills that align with their project curriculum.
- Students in the Get Out and Learn (GOAL) project find themselves off campus building boats and receiving academic instruction at sites where their teachers have established community partnerships, such as at with the San Francisco Maritime National Park Association at Hyde Street Pier. They have been trained to run the ropes course with the Pacific Leadership Institute at Fort Miley in San Francisco, leading community groups through the course once a week. GOAL students also travel to KQED, the local public television station, to gain hands-on training in video and audio production with the Digital Storytelling Project.
- The Wilderness and Arts Literacy Collaborative (WALC) has established its own non-profit organization together with their partner WALC chapter at Balboa High School.

They also partner with an organization called Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) to study local applications of environmental justice issues. LEJ conducts both classroom presentations and ongoing environmental stewardship projects with WALC. WALC has also been partnering with the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department's Natural Areas Program (NAP) for the past ten years. With NAP, students engage in environmental science lessons at local natural areas and then follow through with habitat restoration activities.

- Ecology and Agriculture Together for Sustainability (EATS) works with Mission Graduates to provide sexual and health education. They also partner with Alemany Farm here in San Francisco and the Center for Land-Based Learning in Winters, California, to learn agricultural skills and hands-on knowledge of biological and botanical information. In addition, EATS teachers have been collaborating with the McKinley Park foundation to develop a vision for utilizing the park up the street from the school as a second classroom into which they can expand their school gardening projects, with both edible plants and native plants.
- Build! Investigate! Know! Explore! (BIKE) is a new project that uses the common bicycle to explore themes of justice, safety, and environmentalism. They partner with the Presidio YMCA to gain training in bike riders' safety, and have been communicating with several local bike-related organizations to explore possibilities for their students.
- Math and Music Alive in Resistance to Social Systems (MMARSS) also works with the Writers Corps and Apple, Inc. to teach students writing skills they can apply to songwriting and lyrics, as well as skills in digital music production through Garage Band, both aligning with core subject matter.
- So You Think You're Ready for Hollywood? (Hollywood) has worked closely with local actors and filmmakers to help teach students acting, sound, lighting, and filming techniques. They have also partnered with the Conscious Youth Media Crew to teach students video editing and provide them the space, equipment and skills to edit their films for Hollywood.
- Still Life, Real Life (Still Life) partnered with the Rayko Photography Center to teach students photographic techniques, provide them with a studio setting in which to photograph their subjects, critically analyze photography, and have a professional

gallery space to exhibit their own work. Still Life also worked brought professionals in the field to teach students Photoshop.

Outside of the classroom, an extensive number of community-based organizations and businesses are brought in to support student achievement and enrichment, doing work around culture, arts, environmental issues, physical and mental health, community service, and college and career services. Please see the Appendix for a more complete list of the community partnerships that occur at our school.

In addition, case managers from community-based organizations work one on one to support students who are struggling with attendance, behavior, and/or academics. The PI program has two case managers on site to work with students who need intensive intervention and support. These case managers come from the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House and a CBO called United Playaz.

Parent/Community and Student Achievement

At enrollment, the mandatory nature of our parent/guardian conferences is emphasized during every student and parent/guardian orientation, which sets the tone for expected parent/guardian involvement at Downtown High School. Although we emphasize the importance of parents/guardians coming on-site for our quarterly conferences, we have incorporated phone conferences as a means of accommodating working parents and guardians who are truly unable to take time off from work during the day. We also give parents/guardians all the conference dates at the beginning of each year, along with other important holidays and school schedule (see Appendix). Teachers and other staff address any interventions that need to happen before conferences and track their contact with families with Counseling Logs (see Appendix) that are gathered and reviewed by the administrative team. Parent/guardian conferences in the form of Student Success Team (SST) meetings with administration or counselor during the grading term, as opposed to at the end, have increased intervention for students with attendance or behavioral issues. All of these collaborations with families address the

extent to which students are achieving the DHS academic standards (ESLRs and CAS) within the project curriculum.

Through Real Options Organizing for the Future (ROOF), the name of our ExCEL after school program, Downtown High School provides additional opportunities to empower families and provide them with the skills they need to be advocates for their children in gaining a quality education. For example, ROOF coordinates a “parent literacy” program, which provides trainings to build parent literacy and capacity to achieve economic self-sufficiency and social empowerment. For example, trainings have addressed navigating the juvenile justice system, literacy, life and job skills, GED completion, computer literacy, financial aid, and financial literacy. Job-search and job-retention skills that have been addresses are resume writing, interviewing, time management, office communication, and dress.

ROOF will also coordinate trainings to help parents assume the role of their child’s primary teacher and educational advocate. For example, workshops might include: How to Help with Homework, The IEP Process, Navigating School Paperwork (e.g. free/reduced lunch forms), Setting Boundaries, Motivating Your Teen for Success, Adolescent Health: What Parents Can Do for Teenagers, Raising Kids Who Want to Learn, Positive Discipline at Home, Being A Decision-Maker at Your School, How to Graduate High School, and Accessing College. Workshops and training began in December and have been scheduled monthly throughout the school year. In addition, fliers, phone calls, mailings, and the auto dialer are used to present these opportunities to the parents/guardians at DHS.

The Wellness Center also works with parents/guardians and offers resources to them that are based in the community. When a student is referred to the Wellness Center, its staff often contact family members to discuss issues that come up for students and take that opportunity to offer referrals and information for support services available to parents and adults.

Strengths and Prioritized Growth Areas

Strengths	Evidence
1. Extensive incorporation of community resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of community partners used by projects Use of CBOs to carry out Wellness services (over 15 total) PI program partnership with United Playaz and Potrero Hill Neighborhood House for case management ExCEL after school program partnerships
2. Parent involvement in student academic and overall success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance for quarterly parent/guardian- student-teacher conferences Intervention meetings such as SSTs
Prioritized Growth Areas	Evidence
1. Increase the number of families involved in school activities and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of parent/guardian organizations Limited role of families on SSC/ELAC/SAC

E2. To what extent:

- **Is the school a safe, clean, orderly place that nurtures learning?**
- **Is the culture of the school characterized by trust, professionalism, high expectations for all students, and a focus on continuous school improvement?**

Safe, Clean and Orderly Environment

Downtown High School defies the stereotypical ideas of the out-of-control, unruly continuation school. School violence is minimal because of strong and constant interaction with the students on the part of school security, administrators and even staff members one would not think of as responsible for maintaining safety and security at school. Through this team effort, and in conjunction with various programs and

policies, major issues such as fighting and drug sales are kept to a minimum. What the school is left with are relatively minor infractions such as MP3 player and cell phone use and misbehavior such as defiance. The low incidences of violence and drug use are achieved by identifying students who are at risk and offering them preventative intervention such as Wellness services. Parent/guardian contact as soon as problems arise also serves to help with maintaining positive behavior. Communication between security, administration, Wellness staff and teachers keeps everyone abreast of issues happening with students and offers students several layers of support. As a result, Downtown High School is a place where students stay in class, traverse hallways and grounds that are safe and secure, and may focus on the learning that is to be gained from their progress.

Furthermore, the single most effective assurance of making Downtown High School a safe and orderly place has been an indirect result of the project-based structure. With no school-wide passing periods, there are very few opportunities for students to be an anonymous member of a large group in the hallway. Outsiders are more easily spotted, wayward students are more easily located, and group confrontations can be avoided. Fights have drastically declined.

The team-oriented nature of projects has also increased school safety in that members of the same project are encouraged to bond. Should conflicts between classmates arise, they are often quelled within the projects before they escalate. Project teachers, and even peers, are able to facilitate resolution as if in a family setting. Our discipline has declined so much that we consolidated our dean/head counselor position, deciding as a school that most students' issues can be addressed in class, with our academic counselor, assistant principal, principal, and Wellness Center assisting in the more severe cases.

Downtown High School operates on an asset-based model which is integrated into various aspects of the school's functioning to create an environment that truly nurtures learning. Examples are as follows:

- The School Health Programs, through which the Wellness Center operates, uses an "Asset Based Approach" to working with young people. This comprehensive approach addresses supporting the whole child in building the strengths that young people need in order to grow up to be healthy and responsible. The development of both external and internal assets is vital to the resiliency that an individual demonstrates both as an adolescent and as an adult; school settings offer an ideal environment to build upon these assets. The Wellness Center reinforces attendance, academics and overall student well being through consistent feedback and check-in of emotional status.
- Students get to pick projects based on their own perceived strengths and interests, after which staff convenes to ensure that each student is placed in a project that will both engage their current strengths and challenge them to build new ones.
- ROOF/ExCEL programming is based on student interest and skills development.
- A needs assessment conducted on the first two days of school with each student helps identify the programming in which students are interested. The school population is small enough that, when opportunities arise, students are easily identified, recruited and coached into open positions for employment, school-time psycho-educational groups, community arts programs, college exposure, after school groups and other youth programs.
- As evidenced by PI and wraparound services, our school approach is a departure from traditional disciplinary action such as suspension or expulsion. Staff and support providers in the school have taken the route of encouraging students to learn about, reflect upon, and understand the consequences of their actions as well as healthier and more productive options.

Downtown High School employs two school security aides who participate in activities beyond simply policing the school. They operate on a relationship-building model, getting to know each student personally before any problems or issues arise. They serve as informal mentors to many of the students and attend both the weekly Student Assistance Program (SAP) meetings and weekly Support Staff meetings. At SAP meetings, security offers useful information and insights into the behaviors of students and the motivations behind them, contributing to an action plan to support students.

During weekly Support Staff meetings, administration, security, Wellness staff, ExCEL staff, secretaries and the attendance liaison meet to discuss topics including strategies for maintaining security at the school, such as areas to patrol or any brewing student tensions that should be watched closely. Additionally, security aides, along with any staff member on campus, are empowered to submit Student Support Referrals, Wellness Center referrals, and SAP Referrals when they see students engaging in activities that are of concern or that they feel puts students' health and/or well-being at risk.

Security and most of the school staff also collaborate in the interest of safety as well as in the interest of establishing positive classroom culture each semester, when class scheduling occurs. On the first day of each semester, students come to school and are given information about the projects available. Each student must meet with project teachers in order to rank their top three choices for projects. Once the students sign up for projects and leave for the day, DHS staff gather together and collectively schedule students for each project. During this meeting, staff is able to discuss any student needs or concerns that may arise when certain students are placed in the same project together. Both positive and negative relationships are discussed and any dynamics that exist between groups of students are managed through strategic placement in projects. Additionally, an effort is made to balance gender and ethnicity according to demographics so that projects are as representative of general school population as possible. After all collectively agreed-upon scheduling shifts are made, students receive one of their three top choices for projects.

A tour around the campus of Downtown High School reveals one of the cleanest and most orderly buildings and grounds in the district. Thanks to the efforts of a full-time janitor and a part-time janitor after school, the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria and other common spaces of the school remain free of trash and graffiti throughout the day. A waste diversion program initiated by the WALC and EATS projects has resulted in bins for recycling and composting in each classroom, and in common areas such as the hallways, bathrooms, offices, cafeteria and staff lounge. Downtown High School boasts the highest percentage of waste diversion among all district high schools: 70% compared with just 56% for the second place school.

Effective supervision by security and school staff has eliminated areas where students can sneak away to smoke. The administration works to keep the school free of clutter and unwanted furniture and equipment by working with the district to arrange pick-up and removal. “Rightations” are awarded to students seen picking up trash, encouraging students to “lead by example” in keeping school grounds clean. Further, the clean and orderly campus of DHS suggests that students take pride in the school environment. It is often argued that people in communities maintain and protect their environment when they feel a sense of ownership and investment in it. We at DHS believe that the tight-knit community established at our school has produced students who care about their school, teachers and peers and therefore take pride in keeping their surroundings free of excessive trash and vandalism.

High Expectations/Concern for Students

One of the most effective methods for establishing a positive school culture that focuses on academic achievement is the school-wide exhibition that occurs each semester. With guidance from their teachers, each project’s students plan for presentations that will exhibit, for the entire school community, major work products that showcase the depth and breadth of knowledge they have gained over the course of the semester. Using an exhibition rubric developed by the Curriculum and Professional Development Committee, students and staff are able to evaluate the effectiveness of each project’s exhibition. In addition, the public aspect of exhibition holds each student and project to a level of academic accountability that is not present in most schools. Students must demonstrate that they have processed the content they were taught during the semester and also showcase work products that reflect their skills and knowledge. Students and staff may question presenters on their knowledge and products, thus encouraging them to be prepared and competent. Students feel galvanized to display their level of achievement and take pride in their work, as evidenced by the multitude of students putting in extra hours and effort into their exhibition work after school and on weekends as the time draws near. A level of healthy competition also emerges; leading up to

exhibition, students from different projects grill each other about what they will be presenting and, after students see the presentations and products of their peers displayed, they have been known to make extra effort to ensure that their work can compete with that of other projects.

A school-wide initiative that has raised expectations of student achievement has been the 80% attendance program. Since the inception of this school-wide attendance goal, DHS has experienced dramatic gains in attendance and was recognized by the district for this accomplishment. Beginning with the first school assembly of this year, considerable emphasis has been placed on keeping students at 80% attendance or better. On a regular basis, students who have 80-100% attendance are recognized publicly during assemblies. They also receive awards and prizes, such as special lunchtime barbeques, "Golden Tickets" that allow one off-campus lunch, and Silver Tickets that can be exchanged in threes for Golden Tickets. Every two weeks, every student's attendance percentage is posted in the entryway of the school. The second phase of this student achievement initiative has been the establishment of the goal of at least fifteen credits earned per quarter. The thinking behind this goal is that, because students may earn as many as thirty credits per semester at a comprehensive school, they must earn at least fifteen credits each quarter at DHS, if not more, in order to fully take advantage of the accelerated program offered at a continuation school. These goals are also tied to our Student Assistance Program, described in more detail in E3-E4.

Each grading period, the school celebrates student success by creating an Honor Roll for students who have earned twenty or more project credits as well as a grade point average of 3.0 or better. Certificates are given to students and duplicates are posted in the hallway outside the office. Also at the end of each grading period, students participate in conferences with their parents/guardians to discuss their academic and personal progress. Strengths and successes are honored, and areas requiring improvement are noted. We also have raffles and assemblies to recognize students achieving at a high level academically.

As part of a move to increase student attendance and achievement, as well as pro-social behaviors, the Wellness Team devised a new social action plan called “Rightations.” In keeping with an asset-based approach to boost school culture, encourage positive and healthy behaviors, and affect student attendance and achievement, the Wellness Center has created a system to acknowledge positivity. Rightation citations are given when students are observed engaging in voluntary “good” behavior and random acts of kindness or responsibility.

Students who receive three Rightations will be recognized with their one-time pass (Golden Ticket) to the corner store at lunchtime. We encourage teachers and other staff to make public mention of the student as a role model of exemplary and responsible behavior. Students who receive Rightations are honored on a centrally located Rightation Wall of Honor. Rightations and Golden Tickets have been a great incentive for our students. Students must hand in their three Rightations directly to the principal in exchange for a Golden Ticket. This method ensures that DHS Administration is aware of students’ positive behaviors. Any staff can give out a Rightation. To date, teachers, Wellness Center staff, security guards, the principal, and the assistant principal have all given out the certificates. In addition to establishing high expectations for students, this program helps to further reinforce students’ connections to staff, which will assist them in feeling an overall connection to school, one of the factors that can help students attend and achieve.

Atmosphere of Trust, Respect and Professionalism

Downtown High School is a small school with a staff of thirteen teachers, three paraprofessionals, three administrators, three office staff, two janitorial staff, four Wellness staff, six ExCEL staff, two security aides, and one cafeteria worker. Because our group is small, staff enjoy a collegial relationship, keeping up on one another’s personal milestones and spending time together outside of school.

This level of camaraderie goes beyond the staff. Because we have a relatively small student population, we are able to have whole-school events that the students have come to value. These events are planned and executed by the School Culture Committee, which is made up of staff members. Students are encouraged to be involved in planning and executing the events through the Youth Outreach Worker program, a Wellness initiative. For example, Thanksgiving potlucks have become annual celebrations, during which students, staff, parents/guardians, community organization members who are involved in projects, and district representatives can bring food and eat a sit-down holiday meal together. The high turnout and general enjoyment of this event is a celebration of our program's success in that it showcases the sense of community that has evolved out of project-based learning. In addition, students and staff participate in a whole host of school-wide events and activities that encourage community spirit and awareness of issues (often regarding topics that coincide with the ESLRs, Balanced Scorecard, and Wellness Center goals) such as the Roots Conference, an all day event that allows students to attend workshops on social justice issues that may personally interest them. This year was the second annual Roots Conference and welcomed a number of community-based organizations to share their knowledge and expertise. Other school-wide events coincide with national awareness months such as AIDS, LGBTQ, and Tobacco. Youth Outreach Workers are recruited amongst the student body as part of a district-wide initiative to encourage peer education on physical and mental health issues and help to plan, lead and execute these activities.

An outgrowth of the feelings of trust, respect, and professionalism on campus is a shared vision to provide students with an excellent education and services that will support them in having happy, successful, and healthy lives. To that end, the school has established committees to work on initiatives for the school's academic and overall improvement, thus maintaining a focus on the continual development of teaching and learning. The Literacy Committee meets to discuss assessment and teaching strategies around the whole-class book that each project chooses for the semester. They have established a school-wide rubric for use with the essays that are written about the class book. The rubric establishes rigorous expectations for student writing, outlining criteria that are aligned with grade-level standards for quality writing. The Literacy Committee

presents these assessment tools such as the essay rubric, as well as relevant teaching strategies, during professional development time at the school. The work of the Math Committee has resulted in a resource binder filled with math units that are friendly to project-based learning. The Curriculum and Professional Development Committee works closely with all teachers to improve their project-based curriculum. Advancing our program through these collegial structures would not work without an atmosphere of trust, respect, and professionalism. Teachers believe that we share a commitment to the best interests of our students, our staff, and our school. Committee work gives us an opportunity to enact that commitment.

Professional development (PD) takes place once a week at Downtown High School and is dutifully utilized as a tool to improve the school. The Curriculum and Professional Development Committee (CPDC) oversees professional development and works in conjunction with other committees to offer a full range of workshops, demonstrations, and discussions to address the needs of the faculty and staff in order to teach, work, and support students more effectively. PDs are often created using resources provided by our talented teachers and other staff, who prepare workshops for what has been dubbed "Downtown University." During these workshops, teachers model research-based best practices to present a variety of topics, as evidenced by the creation of our professional development calendar and the related agendas. Oftentimes, teachers work together to read articles on educational research topics and integrate the information into their teaching practice. When necessary, experts in their field are brought in from outside the school. For example, in the Fall 2009 semester, a consultant was brought in to carry out two, three-hour sessions on the topic of behavior management.

The Wellness Center also offers a series of PDs to address issues in which they have extensive expertise. Wellness Center PDs have included "Wellness 101," introductory information on Wellness services so that teachers can better refer students and help them access services, and workshops on topics such as Child Protective Services, Wellness Tips for Staff, Stress & Coping, Anger Management, Working with Students Who Have Been Exposed to Trauma, De-escalation Techniques, Marijuana and the Teen Brain, Teens and Stress, Teens and Depression, and STIs and Pregnancy Prevention.

In addition to professional development, Downtown High School’s teachers also participate in a peer observation process, whereby teachers observe one another’s lessons with one of the administrators and then debrief the observation afterward. This practice allows teachers to learn best practices from colleagues and offers all teachers involved a fresh perspective on their teaching practice. We have duplicated the peer observation protocol using video recordings of teachers in action and brought samples of student work to the table to share and critique with one another. Planning has also begun to help teachers develop their teaching practice through project portfolios, which is an initiative adopted by the faculty to help evaluate the efficacy of project curriculum in accomplishing learning goals. Professional development time has been set aside to establish the expectations for project portfolios culled from research-based readings. The eagerness of the faculty to engage in these processes in order to hone their practice is evidence of a trusting, respectful, and professional atmosphere.

Strengths and Prioritized Growth Areas

Strengths	Evidence
1. Ability to provide students with environment of achievement, safety and trust, especially around attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance data • Numbers of Golden Tickets and Rightations awarded • Counseling logs • SAP meeting minutes • School-wide goals of 80% attendance and 15 minimum credits • Assemblies
2. Orderly and respectful environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low number of fights and major disruptions • Celebrations • Exhibition • Appearance of building and grounds • Waste diversion rates
3. Collegial atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PD calendar, agendas and attendance • Committee membership and meeting notes • Committee work products and initiatives

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in school-wide events
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Prioritized Growth Areas	Evidence
1. In order to systematize and incentivize high expectations school-wide, build upon support structures such as PI to help students meet the requirements of the attendance and credit initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gains in attendance rate • Student contact with case managers through PI • Attendance data and record of rewards earned

E3-E4. To what extent:

- **Do all students receive appropriate support along with an individualized learning plan to help ensure academic success?**
- **Do students have access to a system of personal support services, activities and opportunities at the school and within the community?**

Adequate Personalized Support

At this time, students who require academic intervention outside of that provided by teachers are given an individualized learning plan (ILP). Using some of the structures already in place within the school, the school administration has developed an individual graduation plan. At this time, teachers are provided with a credit evaluation for each student from the counselor, which outlines their credits earned and makes very clear what coursework students must complete in order to earn their diploma. Teachers also review these credit evaluations with parents/guardians and students during the mandatory, quarterly parent conferences and have students outline their next steps in order to earn credits toward graduation in the upcoming quarter or semester. These practices, coupled with diagnostic assessments, evaluation of assessment information available from the school district, and the expansion of the Prevention Intervention (PI) program (described below) will form the prototype for an ILP system that will support the needs of all the students at our school.

A comprehensive system of support ensures that all students are connected to the school in meaningful ways through the academic program, co-curricular activities, work-based learning, and/or intervention, counseling and health services. First and foremost, the personal nature of our school structure—organized into self-contained project teams of no more than two teachers and no more than fifty students—creates a smaller learning environment for students at school and ensures that students are connected to the academic program. This structure makes certain that teachers and staff know the students as individuals, and each student is connected to at least one adult who provides support and guidance. Students are with the same teachers all day, every day and thus “belong” to their projects; they are GOAL students, WALC students, EATS students, etc. Teachers, being completely responsible to their project’s students and only their project’s students, are able to dedicate themselves to forming personal relationships with the students in their projects. Teachers become advisors as well as teachers, checking in with students daily, calling home when attendance, behavioral, or academic issues arise, holding parent/guardian-student-teacher meetings regularly, and even getting involved with social workers and probation officers.

The intimacy of projects and the smallness of the school also allow students and parents/guardians to ask for and receive help when they need it, with no stigma attached to asking for special help. Teachers and staff communicate with students on an ongoing basis, when they enter the building, in class, in the office, in the hallways and in the computer labs. Staff is also in regular contact with home; teachers hold quarterly parent/guardian-student-teacher conferences, providing families with opportunities to seek any assistance they might need.

For the most part, once the student is enrolled and part of the “family” at DHS, the school community maintains a close relationship with the student’s family to ensure student academic success and guidance in post-high school paths such as vocational training, community college, or career exploration. A major vehicle is consistent phone calls home. Teachers call home if students are absent, struggling academically, or present behavioral issues in class. The smaller learning environment of the school

further allows for the staff and administration to work collaboratively and work closely with the students and families. The administration or counselor periodically conducts parent/guardian-student-teacher meetings to discuss specific problems or issues. Home-to-school communication around an individual student's needs occurs regularly as parents/guardians are encouraged to contact their child's project teachers or any other staff member who can assist them. In addition to attending mandated parent/guardian-student-teacher conferences four times per year, families are invited to events such as the school-wide exhibitions and Thanksgiving potluck. Some projects also host their own friend and family oriented events.

Another way our students receive support are our credit evaluations. Each student at Downtown High School receives a credit evaluation that breaks down exactly where his or her credits are. Every quarter, the credits are updated and a new updated credit report is given to the teacher to present to the student and parents/guardians during their quarterly parent/guardian-student-teacher conferences. This is a monumental task because our students typically have attended multiple schools, often in different cities, so their credits may not be updated or captured on the district's transcript records. These credit evaluations are constantly used to motivate students and assess their progress toward success and graduation. Another individual plan is conducted during our SAP meetings. Students that are brought up during SAP meetings are given an action plan, which usually consists of a Wellness referral, counseling services, and site support to help the student succeed. Individual plans are also part of the SST meetings, where we sit with families and teachers to create a plan to assist students in becoming more successful in school. All of these individual plans are carried out to create interventions so that our students can achieve success and graduation.

Finally, any staff member can refer a student for an SST, Wellness Center services, academic counseling, or ExCEL tutoring. An array of staff typically discusses students at lunchtime, faculty meetings, and professional development; students who need support do not remain anonymous.

Direct Connections

Our ESLRs and CAS inform all aspects of the school's plans and allocation of resources. For example, in order to increase support for students in reaching the academic goals outlined in the ESLRs, the ExCEL After School program has been expanded to provide increased academic support and tutoring for all students. DHS is also the pilot school for the Prevention and Intervention (PI) program. PI is a wraparound service approach which focuses on implementing individualized support plans aligned to the array of other CBO and city agencies who are all working to address the complicated, multi-dimensional needs of our students. PI focuses on meeting needs of families and their students by capitalizing on the family and community's unique strengths. Through wraparound services, students and their families will develop an effective support network to increase their sense of competence, acquire new skills for managing the special needs of their child, and have access to the supportive resources they need to build brighter futures for themselves. PI is about partnership with the agencies that work together, sharing resources and working as efficiently as possible to maximize support to and reduce duplication or the unnecessary provision of services. Its ultimate goal is to facilitate student academic success, which means accomplishment of DHS's academic standards.

Recently, the establishment of the new superintendent's Balanced Scorecard (BSC) has allowed the school to further focus on related skills and expand the connection between the ESLRs, school culture and support for students' personal and academic growth. Following are the BSC Goals:

- Goal 1: Access and Equity – Make Social Justice A Reality
 - Objective 1.1: Diminish the historic power of demographics.
- Goal 2: Student Achievement – Engage High Achieving and Joyful Learners
 - Objective 2.1: Ensure authentic learning for every student.
- Goal 3: Accountability – Keep Our Promises to Students & Families
 - Objective 3.2: Create the culture of service and support.

The Wellness Center, in striving to provide services that facilitate academic success, aligns itself with BSC goals in the following manner:

Goal One:

In the group format, to increase access and equity, the Wellness Program assists in diminishing the historic power of demographics through provision of culturally relevant curriculum by group facilitators. We strive to recruit individual service providers sensitive to and that have a deep understanding of our students' range of cultures and life experience. Wellness staff coordinates the School Culture Committee, which plans events and creates curriculum addressing monthly cultural foci as suggested by SFUSD (i.e.: Black History Month, Women's History Month, American Indian Heritage Month). As well, the Wellness Coordinator serves as the LGBTQ Student Liaison and works with students to address historic powers of oppression. The Community Health Outreach Worker serves as the Foster Youth Liaison to provide additional support services to one of the statistically highest risk populations in the district. The Wellness Program is an integral part of the school's Health Promotion Committee and works closely with the Youth Outreach Workers to plan for and provide campus-wide health awareness events to increase students' knowledge of health issues as they are affected. One particular event, an all-day, on-campus conference, focuses specifically on social justice issues affecting our population.

Goal Two:

To ensure authentic learning for students, the Wellness Program provides support groups and individual therapeutic services that help students deal with mental, emotional and physical health issues which may be impacting their ability to focus and retain information in class. This supports, encourages, and allows for students to better understand themselves and their responses to stress as well as empower them with coping strategies to deal with their stressors. Through having increased abilities to manage their issues and therefore focus better on academic growth, as well as gaining improved connections with caring adults, students are able better engage as high achieving and joyful learners.

Goal Three

In order to assist the school in keeping promises to students and families, the Wellness Program provides case management and therapeutic services as well as lunchtime activities for students. This programming strives to address accountability to our community by creating and maintaining a holistic model of support for students. Wellness providers are also accessible by families as well as participatory in reaching out to families of students involved in individual therapeutic services. Additionally, the Wellness Center partners with the ExCEL After School program to help plan and run family literacy events, which involve students and their caregivers in learning opportunities. Core Wellness Staff such as the Nurse, Behavioral Health Therapist, Community Health Outreach Worker and Wellness Coordinator are available for consultation regarding outside resources, parenting education, and behavior management for students' caregivers as well as school staff.

The purpose of DHS is fundamentally to help students achieve academic success. Given the nature of our continuation school population, comprised of students who have struggled in school for a wide variety of reasons, most of our students need personal support in order to accomplish learning goals. The ultimate goal of Wellness, ExCEL, and PI is to provide the support that directly facilitates student engagement in school, resulting in educational success.

Strategies Used for Student Growth/Development

Project-based structure of the school is the first and foremost strategy used to offer students personalized learning and an alternative instructional approach, as this self-study has discussed at length. Teachers are highly involved with students, students with special needs are fully included, and the curriculum allows for all types of learners to engage in a rigorous curriculum structured around meaningful standards. The many strategies to further support students outside of the classroom often result from teacher intervention, or the intervention of other staff.

PI is designed to support students academically and emotionally, monitor progress through data collection coupled with case management, and continue to create a positive environment. The challenge that PI seeks to solve is to ensure communication and accountability of individualized support plans amongst all the people involved in the student's lives. This communication will be the responsibility of the case managers, who will make sure all the players are at the table. Currently, we have two case managers from Potrero Hill Neighborhood House and United Playaz. We at Downtown have created a team effort approach, which consists of family, CBOs and outside agencies to address the needs of our youth.

Students are categorized in three risk levels based on attendance. Attendance is used as the defining variable due to the complexity of student needs, which requires minimum attendance to implement individual student support plans.

- Risk Level I (0-40%): Approximately 15% (on average) of the students at DHS are in this range. In general these are habitually truant students, who are in serious drop out danger, and do not access support services at school to the degree necessary to develop an individual support plan.
- Risk Level II (41%-79%): Approximately 65% (on average) of the students at DHS are in this range. In general, these students tend to have fluctuating attendance, but they access Wellness Services, and have a commitment to graduation. However, they lack the discipline to meet minimum requirements.
- Risk Level III (80%-100%): Approximately 20% (on average) of the students at DHS are in this range. In general, these students have made the commitment to graduate, access Wellness, access ExCEL programs, attend night school, and have the self discipline to meet DHS minimum requirements.

On a case-by-case basis, students in Risk Levels I & II will be coordinated with a case manager who will provide intensive case management. Case managers will be assigned during SAP and coordinated to the best degree possible considering neighborhood and outside ongoing CBO services. The Case Managers are lead on ensuring that the student is attending and following through with their individual support plan. They will have access to non-confidential/sensitive attendance data and academic progress from

school, wellness, and after-school programs. Case Managers will also coordinate information distribution to all stakeholders in the students' lives.

Downtown High School recognizes that for many of our students, truancy has been a major component in preventing school success, especially in examining students' school records and prior intervention documents that were completed before the student was transferred to or entered our school. For that reason, we follow a system for addressing student attendance concerns:

- **Step 1 - Student Assistance Program (SAP):** If a teacher or any staff member is having difficulty with a student, they fill out a SAP referral. The SAP team discusses the student and sees what immediate action can be taken to curb behavioral issues. Based on the information the SAP team gets from the referring staff member, a combination of Wellness services, case management, academic support, and/or direct academic counseling will be initiated with the student.
- **Step 2 - Student Success Team (SST):** If the behavior and/or issue does not change to an acceptable level, then the teacher will schedule the student for an SST, which requires parent/guardian participation. The tone of the SST is positive and supportive, addressing behavior and any issue the teacher feels important to discuss. The SST coordinator (counselor, principal, assistant principal, or attendance liaison) will schedule the SST in coordination with the family so they will be in attendance. Wellness staff, counseling staff and administration will automatically be in attendance. Designated hours for SSTs are Tuesdays and Thursdays in thirty-minute blocks in the morning before school, so teachers can participate.
- **Step 3 - Referrals and Suspensions:** If behaviors or concerns continue to persist with a student, then the counseling office and/or principal will immediately call the parent and make a decision to call community members meeting and the issue will again be dealt with directly. This may include a combination of mandated counseling groups and services as well as suspension from school.

Support Services and Learning

The special education program at Downtown is unique for a continuation school and, for that matter, unique in relation to comprehensive high schools. Two special education teachers and two special education paraprofessionals are employed in the Special Day Class (SDC) program. However, students in the SDC program do not find themselves in a self-contained class, removed from their general education peers. Though not an official inclusion program, Downtown High School's SDC program allows its SDC students opportunity every day to interact with general education peers and a general education teacher. By pairing an SDC teacher with a general education teacher to form one project, DHS students with IEPs do not find themselves facing the social stigma of being in a self-contained classroom. They also receive exposure to a general education curriculum that is scaffolded and modified by their special education teacher as needed to work towards reaching IEP goals and master skills and content from the general education curriculum.

DHS also employs a third special education teacher who works as a resource specialist (RS), coordinating special education services for all students with IEPs. The special education resource specialist acts as exactly that, helping teachers and students to access resources at the school and in the community, ensuring equitable access to DHS's curriculum, as evidenced by a schedule of small group or 1:1 pullout instruction, push-in instructional support, help in curriculum development, or coordination of support services. The RS teacher also works with district and community-based partners to provide transition support for students so that they can be ready to take their next steps past high school. Currently, students with IEPs are able to access vocational training, paid internships and competitive employment through partnerships with Jewish Vocational Services and Bridges. Students are also given support pre- and post-graduation through the District's Transition Partnership Program, 18-22 Mild to Moderate Program, and the state's Department of Rehabilitation services.

Downtown High School has no formal English Language Development program for English Language Learners, though all teachers are required to have CLAD (Cross-cultural, Language, and Academic Development) certification and are therefore eligible to teach sheltered classes. Students who need more language support than projects can offer are referred to other schools during intake interviews. However, projects emphasis on different types of learners, personal attention, and hands-on instruction are similar to sheltered English strategies and offer a viable level of support to students who might otherwise be mainstreamed or placed in .6 sheltered classes. Also, tutoring through our after-school program is offered, often in a student's primary language, for students who need English skill support or have academic needs based on the challenges of English language acquisition.

Equal Access to Curriculum and Support

The 2008-2009 school year marked the 10th anniversary of DHS's project-based model. We have grown increasingly successful in engaging students who have had difficulty in other schools. Given the array of challenges that our students face, here are a few reasons why our students are better able to access our curriculum than they were in traditional high schools:

- Project-based curriculum incorporates elements that appeal to multiple learning styles. All projects include hands-on, kinesthetic, experiential and visual components along with reading and writing.
- Students are able to choose projects based on interest and learning styles, thus increasing their buy-in.
- Alternative curriculum, which allows students to learn content and master skills in a variety of ways, changes students' views on learning. Students realize that there are different ways to learn, and find some ways in which they can be successful.
- Projects are highly personal environments. A low student teacher ratio also means students cannot hide in the corner; teachers and peers are aware of when they are doing their work and when they are not, and they can get the attention they need if they are struggling with an assignment.

- The projects students must complete engage them in a process during which they can see growth, not just right and wrong. Students take pride in their growth.
- The real world focus of every project gives learning a context; school is not just for school's sake because it connects to communities, careers, and opportunities.
- Experiential learning provides a way for students to learn outside of classrooms. Students who have negative associations with the idea of school buildings and classrooms have an outlet that remains educational in nature.
- We meet each student at her/his own level and demand growth, so students at all levels can access the curriculum and still be challenged.
- Curriculum is interdisciplinary, allowing students to explore project themes across subject areas. The focus on depth over breadth allows more students to access project content at multiple entry points.

In examining the demographic distribution of students throughout projects, we note that all projects do not necessarily reflect the same distribution as the school. We attribute this to the fact that students may choose their projects. Groups of friends, who are often ethnically similar, tend to sign up for the same project together. This results in each project having cycles of one population being more represented than others during different semesters. However, to the degree that we can while still protecting student choice, we try to correct strikingly uneven demographics when we meet together as a staff to finalize project assignments.

Students are never forced to repeat a project in which they were not successful. Rather, we see that there are often cases where a project is not the best fit for a student's interests or learning styles, so we encourage them to try something new. When students do find a project that is a good match for them, they may be able to return for multiple semesters because many projects have developed two, three or four discreet semester-long units. Students therefore can return, playing valuable leadership roles, without repeating curriculum.

Co-Curricular Activities

Real Options for Organizing the Future (ROOF) is Downtown's High School After School Program. ROOF is an ExCEL grant-funded program whose main focus is to provide homework, recreation, and enrichment to the students at Downtown High. ROOF serves the students of Downtown High School at no cost with tutoring, homework assistance, literacy based programs, and enrichment activities that support project curriculum and therefore ESLRs and CAS.

ROOF uses the basics of the youth development theory and practices for underlying framework for program design, implementation, and evaluation, aiming to keep youth safe, active, and involved so that youth can grow up to be successful adults. ROOF also meets youth where they are. This creates a more approachable and comfortable space for youth—a space where youth feel that they belong. In order for students to succeed academically, ROOF provides small group tutoring and one-on-one tutoring. Group tutoring consists of one tutor for a group of 3-5 youth. In group tutoring, skill building is practiced to encourage and promote peer-peer tutoring. One-on-one tutoring is provided when tutors first need to establish relationships with the youth in order to help them be productive and successful in and out of the classroom.

Wellness programming, at its core, offers individualized mental and physical health case management to traditionally underserved students who otherwise may not access such services. Furthermore, the Wellness Program introduces youth to a plethora of community-based organizations and providers to which they might not have connection and thus, access. All Wellness services are designed to support students' academic success by addressing their mental, emotional and physical well being.

Student Involvement in Curricular/Co-curricular Activities

Students' involvement in curricular and co-curricular activities is tracked through regular communication between the academic counselor, ROOF/ExCEL, the Wellness

staff, and teachers. There is currently no formal way in which involvement in activities is coordinated or communicated; however, the small number of students and staff makes communication easy and frequent. When needed, any issues or needs around student activities can be discussed informally or through the Leadership Team. For example, when questions arose this fall about the pre-requisite requirements for Youth Outreach Workers (YOWs), DHS's student leadership group, the issue was brought to the Leadership Team and criteria was established so that it could be assured that students participating as YOWs met certain academic and behavioral criteria in order to represent the school. In terms of support services, the Wellness staff has recently begun releasing regular emails to all staff that include their internal report outlining the different support services that each student has accessed. By releasing this information to staff, teachers can have a better idea of where students are getting support. The DHS support team, made up of the principal, clerical staff, security aides, academic counselor, attendance liaison, Wellness Coordinator, ExCEL coordinator, Resource Specialist, and the two case managers from Potrero Hill Neighborhood House and United Playaz, meet weekly for the Student Assistance Program to coordinate services for students and discuss plans of action for student who have been referred to SAP. In assessing the progress of the students engaged in co-curricular activities and support services, the school can evaluate the efficacy of those programs.

Student Perceptions

Student perceptions of support services are tracked annually through the district's Wellness survey data, which is administered to students by the Wellness staff. In addition, teachers, administration, and staff dialogue with students regularly. The general consensus is an appreciation for the vast array of services and activities provided, especially those through which students can earn credits. While some activities are more popular than others, all of them are attended. Both Wellness and ROOF/ExCEL actively solicit student input on the kind of services and programming they would like to see offered at DHS. A more formalized structure for collecting and evaluating student perception data is something the administration and Leadership

Team have proposed. Discussions around how to structure an assessment process are underway with Wellness and ExCEL.

Strengths and Prioritized Growth Areas

Strengths	Evidence
1. Easy and widely-used system for referral of students for support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SST, SAP, and Wellness referral form records
2. Wide range of supportive programs that are both positive and challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellness services offered • ROOF/ExCEL programs offered • SST forms • SAP referrals and support plans
3. Built-in time put aside for intervention and communication between school and home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly conference sign-ins • Counseling/phone logs

Prioritized Growth Areas	Evidence
1. Design school-wide, uniform Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current limited use of ILPs
2. Develop centralized data-sharing systems around student support services in order to increase communication and allow for assessment of services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of formal assessment of support services over a sustained amount of time Existing assessment data not currently used to inform improvement or future use of support services