

City High: A Visitor's Guide to their Educational Outcomes and Approach November, 2006

What is City High's stated mission?

The MISSION of City Charter High School, a technology infused public school, is to graduate students who are academically, technologically, personally and socially prepared to succeed in post-secondary education or training. Using a team approach, City High cultivates a safe, supportive and academically rigorous environment by ***recognizing and nurturing individual talents, needs and skills.***

CORE BELIEFS

Individual responsibility for learning. Academic success is dependent on students taking an active role in their learning.

Continuous challenge. A curriculum constructed with multiple levels of challenge and aligned to the Pennsylvania Standards best meets the academic needs of individual students.

Connections to the real world. Career focused curriculum and related experiences convince students that what they do at City High impacts their future.

Personal Academic Connections. Success relies strongly on each student feeling connected to one or more adults at City High.

Safe and caring environment. A safe and caring environment – physical, emotional, intellectual – is essential to active classroom engagement.

Collaboration. A student's ability to collaborate is essential in today's work environment.

Who are City High's students?

- 520 students
- 81% from Pittsburgh Public School district, remainder from 23 surrounding districts
- 56% African American
- 60% eligible for free/reduced price lunch
- 11% special education
- Wide range of ability on entry. Average is slightly below national average but City High serves students from all test score quartiles.

What do we know about City High's performance to date?

SUCCESS INDICATORS*

To measure success in achieving its mission and living its values, City High uses a multi-dimensional indicator framework. After graduating its first class in 2006, these are some of their outcomes:

Academic Achievement

- Met overall and subgroup goals on the 2006 PSSA in math, reading, and writing
- Consistently meets or exceeds national norms on the rigorous New Standards examination

Workforce Skills

- 109 members of the senior class had 297 Microsoft Office Specialist certifications, a valuable workplace credential
- All graduating seniors successfully completed an internship of 130+ hours. 67% of workplace mentors rated their performance as excellent (plus 23% as satisfactory)

Transitions

- 89.4% graduation rate for the first graduating class (93 graduates, 11 students who are known to have dropped out of school. This percentage does not include students in the cohort who transferred from City High to another school).
- 79 out of 93 graduating seniors were accepted into a 4 year, 2 year, or certification program.
- Student ratings of their preparation for college, ability to use technology, and developing clear career goals and workplace skills exceeded national averages

Parent Satisfaction

- 90% of surveyed parents gave City High an overall grade of A or B (national average is 69%)

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

City High uses data to identify areas for improvement and target resources and staff development. Areas of current focus include:

Building the buy-in of all students, but especially 9th graders, to the school's academic culture: City High's approach demands that students take increased ownership of their own learning, a challenging transition for many students.

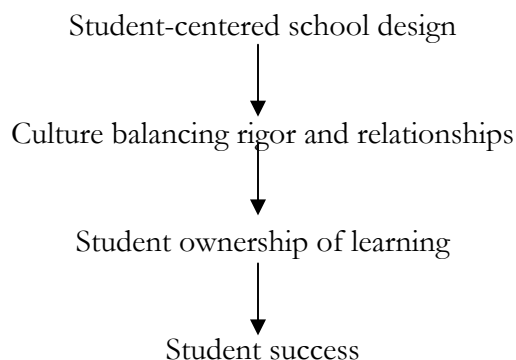
Teaching a rigorous curriculum to diverse learners: City High serves students of all test score quartiles in the same classrooms. Teachers at City High must work to create access to a challenging curriculum for struggling students while continuing to stretch stronger students.

Staffing a demanding school model: With an extended school day and year-round calendar, the need for teachers to develop multiple courses as they advance with their students, and the intensity of student relationships, working at City High can be demanding.

Calculating accurate completion rates: As a school of choice, it is difficult but critical for City High to accurately track student retention and graduation. If students leave City High is it because the school was a bad fit for them or because they didn't receive the support they need? How many who leave City High go on to graduate from other schools and how many are dropouts?

** City High's full annual report card, including 43 benchmarked outcomes in these 4 and 4 other domains, is available on their website.*

What are the core elements of City High's design?



(1) Student-centered school design

Based on four years of data collection (including annual student, faculty, and parent surveys, analysis of grades, attendance, and assessment data, and intensive case studies tracing the academic development of individual students in the first graduating class), the evaluation team believes that the following are critical elements of City High's model. By critical we mean the elements that most differentiate City High from a traditional high school and that most contribute to student success:

- a) Student/faculty cohorts stay together for 4-year cycle
- b) Year-round calendar and longer school day
- c) Solid grounding in research and presentation skills, culminating in senior project
- d) Career preparation with workplace visits, career investigation, mentoring, and a 130+ hour internship in the selected field
- e) Technology integration in academic subjects; instruction in advanced technology
- f) Untracked curriculum: all students participate in the same rigorous academic classes, with opportunities for extra support and challenge as needed
- g) Student-centered instructional approach: extensive use of project-based and other interactive and investigational forms of learning. Students are rarely sitting and listening- they are doing.

(2) Culture of rigor balanced with relationships

The design elements cited above enable a culture which balances challenging expectations with supportive, caring relationships. The cohort model is particularly crucial, allowing faculty to know each learner extremely well and both challenge and support them based on that specific knowledge of their capabilities. Our research shows steady increases in both the level of classroom challenge and the sense of trust and caring experienced by students the longer they are at City High.

(3) Student ownership of learning

The City High experience supports what research (particularly in Gates Foundation supported schools) has demonstrated: in an environment that balances rigor with relationships, students take ownership of their own learning, the underpinning for success. Both teacher ratings and students own attitudes and actions demonstrate increasing ownership over their own learning as they advance through City High.

(4) Student success:

City High's progress in achieving its mission of preparing students for college or careers is summarized on page 2 of this guide.

What looks different at City High?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	WHY THIS MATTERS
Business casual dress code	Builds buy-in to seriousness of school and connection to the future. Students are part of downtown community and prepared to go out on internships and site visits.
Laptops used as routine learning tool	Largely paperless environment helps students stay organized and prepares them for the modern workplace. Wireless internet allows fast access to information resources, assignments, and grades.
Students working in groups	Project-based learning builds planning, teamwork, and communication skills highly valued by employers.
Teacher planning time and common work space	Faculty teach 2 of 3 blocks, leaving them 2.5 hours during the school day for planning, curriculum development, and team collaboration. Teacher professionalism and collaboration is fostered by grade-level office space rather than leaving teachers isolated in their classrooms.
Grade level community by floor	All grade level classes are on a single floor and students and teachers stay together for four years. This facilitates ownership of the floor and close relationships.
Interdisciplinary subject blocks	Linked subjects (for example, English and Social Studies) are team taught in 2.5 hour blocks, allowing interdisciplinary exploration of concepts, flexible student grouping, and time for students to engage in project-based work.
Mixed ability classes	There is no academic tracking at City High. Students of all entering ability levels experience the same rigorous, standards-based curriculum with modifications to access content at various levels.