

# Sacramento New Technology High School

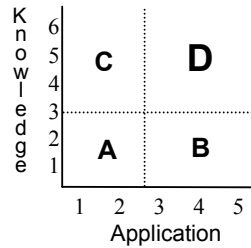
Sacramento, California

Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

## A Model of

District Operated Charter School  
Project-Based Learning  
Dynamic and Visionary Leadership  
Small Learning Community  
Rigorous and Relevant Learning  
State-of-the-Art Technology  
Student Portfolios  
Professional Development

## Rigor/Relevance Framework



## By the Numbers

355 students  
73% non-white  
62% free and reduced lunch  
28% ELL  
5% special education  
96% attendance rate  
1:1 computer-to-student ratio  
90% of graduates to college

## Executive Summary

The Sacramento New Technology High School (New Tech) opened in September 2003 as a dependent charter school within the Sacramento Unified City School District, with 200 freshmen and sophomores. Now in its fourth year of operation, New Tech has approximately 350 students in grades 9-12. As a dependent charter school New Tech has been given flexibility in various curricular, personnel, and budgetary matters. It is a member and a leading school of the New Technology High School Network. New Technology High School in Sacramento was selected as a Model School by the International Center for Leadership in Education in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

Enrollment in the school is open to all students within the state of California. The school reflects the racial, cultural, and socio-economic diversity of Sacramento City Unified School District. Over 60% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch; 70% are non-white. Special education students are 5% of the student body and 26% are English language learners.

New Tech targets individual student interests and the development of individual responsibility by teaching in a creative, business-like culture. The culture values learning at high levels of rigor and relevance while creating positive working relationships among students and between faculty and students. The school features the use of technology as a tool for learning, problem solving and communication and has a 1:1 ratio of computers to students. Students maintain a digital portfolio of their work, participate as a team member in projects, and prepare exhibits of their learning. New Tech offers engaging environments where the attendance rate is 96% and 99% of graduates pursue postsecondary learning.

The school attempts to find a balance between trust and responsibility. It is very clear to students what is expected of them regarding their behaviors and learning outcomes. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and are involved in the governance of the school. The campus is a safe, orderly, and business-like environment where students take their education seriously. The entire staff (principal, teachers, counselor, internship coordinator, IT manager, cafeteria staff, office staff, custodial staff, and hall monitor) are dedicated to their students' success.

## 1. School Culture

New Tech's mission includes the following provisions: commitment to educational reform; learning through collaboration with family, businesses, the community, and other students; using advanced learning methods, technology, and a professional environment to stimulate higher levels of learning; and creating relationships and opportunities to consistently provide innovative technology, high-quality work, and college experiences for high school students. Through project-based learning (PBL), students are exposed to high levels of technological skills and real world application of the California Content Standards and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as collaboration and critical thinking within a culture of

trust and responsibility. Students are continuously presented with unique learning opportunities as a result of the PBL learning environment.

As a small, innovative high school, New Tech focuses on four major concepts.

- *Project-Based Learning* The major approach to instruction is through project-based learning that enables higher levels of achievement by connecting content to student interests and real world problem solving. Teams of students are given a driving question that challenges them to find new information and apply it to a realistic situation. The projects are grounded in knowledge found in the California Academic Content Standards and the school's Nine Learning Outcomes.
- *Technology* Technology is used as a tool to facilitate collaboration, student inquiry, and learning. Each classroom is equipped so students have access to their individual computer - similar to a business setting - as a means to communicate, and gather and present information.
- *A Small, Inclusive Environment* New Tech can grow to a maximum of 500 students. To further personalize the educational experience, class size is 25, daily advisories are used, and Personal Learning Plans (PLP) help students set goals for the future.
- *Equity* New Tech accepts students from all academic and socio-economic strata and graduates all of them at high levels.

## 2. Core Academic Learning

All students at New Tech take a core program that gives equal access to a rigorous and relevant curriculum. Students are heterogeneously grouped and are challenged to meet high expectations for learning in all curriculum areas. The Sacramento New Technology High School has identified the following Ten Learning Outcomes for all students:

1. *Content Literacy* Based upon the California Academic Content Standards, students are expected to reach proficiency in each content area. Reading, math, and writing skills are emphasized school-wide. In assessing progress, meeting the minimum standard is graded as a C.
2. *Written Proficiency* Based largely upon the English Language Arts Standards, written proficiency is assessed in all classes, even Physical Education. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with English teachers to emphasize written communication
3. *Oral Proficiency* Based largely upon the English Language Arts Standards as well as other components within each curricular area, oral proficiency is largely assessed through rubrics utilized with presentations.
4. *Critical Thinking* Application of content learning to real world situations allows students to become creative problem solvers and flexible thinkers. Students are required to solve problems in both predictable and unpredictable situations.
5. *Technological Proficiency* Students are expected to key 50 words per minute with 95% accuracy; achieve Microsoft Office certification; and demonstrate web page and graphic competency through a web-based digital portfolio and their Personal Learning Plan (PLP).
6. *Collaboration* Students are evaluated based upon self and peer assessments and teacher observation. Students unwilling to collaborate must contend with being "fired."
7. *Career Preparation* Within the project-based learning curriculum students are exposed to a variety of realistic, job related experiences. Reflecting on these experiences and on work assigned in advisory, students explore and set goals for internships and career and college options that are then developed within the PLP.
8. *Citizenship and Ethics* A culture of trust and responsibility, community service, and the Senior Project instill civic responsibility and ethics.
9. *Numeracy* Students apply mathematics across disciplines by interpreting and analyzing numerical data to draw conclusions and make predictions in real world situations.

10. *Work Ethic:* Work ethic is the demonstration of self discipline, the ability to map, plan, and generate a product; to be responsible to oneself and to others; and the constant, energetic application to study or work with the intention of achieving excellence

Previously, the work ethic outcome was embedded in the Citizenship and Ethics outcome. Four years of practicing and assessing projects led New Tech staff to elevate Work Ethic as a unique outcome to assess and grade, given its role in promoting student self-directed learning.

New Tech is a small school and therefore is not able to present the breadth of offerings of a larger comprehensive high school. In fact, the first two years a student spends at New Tech present few choices of classes. Students are eligible to enroll in courses at the community college beginning in their junior year, where they will be exposed to an array of choices rarely available to high school students. Students are expected to complete 12 college units prior to graduation.

New Tech wants all of its graduates to be as prepared for the state's university systems as possible. Graduation requirements are based upon the recommended requirements of the University of California and the California State University systems. Though students at New Tech need 240 credits to graduate, it is expected that most students will complete 300 credits. Students take the following in order to graduate from New Tech: 4 years of English and 4 years of social science (40 credits each), 3 years of math (30 credits), 2 years of laboratory science (20 credits), 1 year of computer applications (10 credits), 1 year of computer-based fine arts (10 credits), 2 years of foreign language (20 credits), 2 years of physical education (20 credits), and unspecified electives including internship (50 credits). Most of these are taken at Sacramento City College. New Tech highly recommends 4 years of math, 3 years of laboratory science, and 3 years of foreign language to provide the best chance of gaining admission to the University of California and California State University systems.

### **3. Stretch Learning**

New Tech is committed to excellence for all students. All students must complete the rigorous high school graduation requirements that are expected for admission to the University of California and California State University systems. Students must also complete 12 college credits to graduate from New Tech. Additional requirements for all students include community service, a digital portfolio, and Senior Project.

Students engage in a standards-based curriculum that focuses on Ten Learning Outcomes. The system of project-based learning prepares students to think conceptually, solve problems collaboratively, and communicate their ideas effectively. The Ten Learning Outcomes are aligned with national and state standards. They drive the design of all PBL projects and are the basis for the evaluation of student work. The curriculum connects learning across disciplines and uses a real world context to solve problems in unpredictable situations. Teachers develop projects using the six A's: authenticity, adult connection, academic rigor, applied learning, active exploration, and assessment practices. The *16 Habits of Mind* and the U.S. Department of Labor SCANS report also facilitate a rigorous and relevant curriculum. All students are placed in the college preparatory track. Those needing extra help to succeed receive it. The eight period/four block schedule enables all students to meet graduation requirements by permitting upperclassmen to participate in support classes if necessary, participate in internships and enroll in college classes.

### **4. Student Engagement**

Students at New Tech are actively engaged in their learning. All classroom instruction is designed using project-based learning as the method for curriculum delivery. Students are placed in teams, given a problem or challenge, and are required to present a unique solution. Students are given the time and resources necessary to achieve the goals of their project. This includes all students having use of an individual computer that serves as a tool for problem solving and communication. Pairs of teachers

carefully plan each activity to insure that students are learning content that will help them meet learning standards for each core academic area. Peer interaction, support, and cooperation help students stay focused and motivated to succeed.

By its very nature PBL focuses instruction around students' interests, learning styles, and aptitudes. Mutual respect between teachers and students creates an atmosphere of high expectations and support. Teachers design special workshops on content and skills that students may need. Through flexible grouping and the use of the block schedule, time is used creatively to meet student needs and help all students maintain a learning pace that enables them to be successful. Technology is used effectively to engage students in problem solving.

A culture of trust and responsibility is enhanced by the relationships students have with teachers and by the accountability systems that treat students in an adult manner. Teachers are facilitators of student learning and coach students on their projects. The setting for learning is very much like a business environment. Collaboration among students and teachers is the primary mode of interaction. If students do not fulfill the requirements of the learning contract with their PBL team, they can be "fired" from the team and required to complete the project independently. A Trust Card is issued to all students upon entry to the school. The card specifies expectations for student behavior. Violation of this trust results in loss of privileges.

All students participate in a daily advisory period. Advisories serve as a structured discussion and feedback time as well as a learning opportunity. All teachers have an advisory class. Examples of advisory activities are values programs, test preparation, college selection, and career exploration. In addition, time is used to deal with individual or group concerns. Advisory is an avenue for student voice and a place where the instructor is a student advocate. Once per week there is a Super Advisory that mixes students from all grades (9-12), which allows for peer coaching by upper grades students.

Students at New Tech also engage in self-identified clubs and organizations. Each is initiated, led, and driven by student interests with teachers as "guides on the side."

Parents of New Tech students are required to meet a school service requirement. All parents are required to complete forty hours of service that could include various volunteer activities and or school donations. This requirement connects the parents with the life of the school and reinforces the schools culture of personal responsibility and engagement.

## **5. Personal Skill Development**

New Tech has a strong focus on character education. The use of guiding principles has led to the development of positive behaviors and attitudes and a safe learning environment. The Ten Learning Outcomes of the school include emphasis on citizenship and ethics, collaboration, and work ethic. The school also subscribes to the *16 Habits of Mind*. All of these factors are integrated into the life of the school. This includes a discipline code that specifies expected behaviors and consequences for misdeeds. The Trust Card gives students the freedom to make personal decisions regarding when they need to leave the classroom for personal business. The school does not use passes. As long as students abide by the rules on the Trust Card and ask permission to leave the room they have the freedom to do so. Abuse of this privilege will result in loss of the Trust Card. The School has recently added a student run peer mediation program.

All students must complete a community service project each year. The 10-hour project is coordinated by an advisor and is undertaken as the student and advisor feel is appropriate. Seniors must complete a Senior Project comprised of at least 50 hours of service over one semester. The social science and English teachers make provisions for release from some class assignments to provide time for this project. The project is part of the student's grade for those classes as well as a critical component of the Senior Exhibitions required for graduation. The senior community service project is generally aligned with the student's internship.

Students at New Tech are empowered to a much greater degree than at other schools. This largely results from the nature of the philosophy teaching and learning that releases responsibility to students for

their own learning. It is also designed into the governance of the school.. Student government is very involved in school management. Student representation is required on all committees and a student representative is on the Advisory Board. The Principal's Advisory Council has representation from each of the school's advisory classes. This group assists the principal with school-wide issues and provides a student perspective. Students are also involved in dispute resolution and setting discipline standards. All activities, including producing the year book, are student initiated, led, and driven. Students can initiate clubs and activities based on interest and engage teachers as club advisors. A leadership course is offered and attracts both student government leaders and other students.

## **6. High-quality Curriculum and Instruction**

The Sacramento New Technology High School has innovative classroom practices that impact student learning. Project-based learning (PBL) is the major vehicle of instruction. It is based on the presumption that students learn better when they see the relevance of skills or content. PBL presents curricular objectives which are based on state standards, incorporating a search for relevant and useful knowledge and skills. It is a real world, hands-on approach to solving problems where students first learn, and then apply, subject matter content. Rather than rote assignments from texts, quizzes, and tests, students are issued challenging questions or tasks to which they must apply the concepts they have learned. California Standards are addressed as individual components of projects, not in the traditional "by the book" manner.

Units of PBL instruction at New Tech consists of the following:

- a challenge or problem assignment with a driving question, based on California State Standards
- a selection of resources, experts, and necessary skills
- public demonstration of solutions or products
- assessment by teachers, students, peers, and guests.

An example of this instructional approach demonstrates its instructional quality. In the 10<sup>th</sup> grade World Studies class, students are assigned the task of drafting a peace treaty between Palestinians and Israel. The conditions for the treaty are that both sides must feel secure; both must have a territory; neither may have sole control of Jerusalem; solutions must be religion and culture neutral; historical precedents must be acknowledged; defense arrangements must be present for both sides; and no citizens may be removed from their homes by force. A written report and Power Point presentation will communicate solutions to a panel that uses a rubric to evaluate the work.

Instruction at New Tech is fundamentally different from most high schools. Teachers are teamed and teach a core class, with the exception of electives and PE. The common team pairings are English/social studies and science/math. Exceptions to this may be some classes for seniors, due to internships, college coursework, and other factors. Teamed instruction allows teachers to integrate their respective curriculums to enhance the power of PBL.

The educational setting reflects a business environment more than a traditional educational environment. There are no class bells. The traditional teacher-student relationship has transformed: staff are facilitators of learning, students are collaborators. Lecturing is minimized and consultation maximized. A different relationship is built; one predicated on a higher level of trust and respect than typically found in most schools.

Students do not work in isolation at New Tech. All projects are completed by small groups, whether assigned by the teacher or chosen by students. Student projects are graded for quality, group process, and presentation, and are reviewed by peers. An important aspect of group work at New Tech is the process for a team member to be fired by the group. Students who are fired may complete the project on their own.

Traditional texts, homework assignments, warm-ups, and even some quizzes or tests may be utilized. The difference is that instead of being the major components of a unit as at a traditional high school, they serve to support and supplement the PBL curriculum.

Technology is an extremely powerful and flexible tool at New Tech. A mistaken assumption about the school is that it is a vocational or technical academy. The vital components are not the technology, but the PBL curriculum and the Ten Learning Outcomes. As in the world of work, the technology simplifies information flow and lends power to the experience. Technology at New Tech supports the curriculum in the following ways.

- There is a 1:1 ratio of computers to students. Student access to a computer allows them to communicate with teachers via e-mail and web pages, as is done in the business world. Additionally, components of projects can be worked on by team members individually and shared via the Internet.
- Lotus Notes allows communication among students, teachers, and parents to an unprecedented degree.
- Parents are able to check progress on assignments and see grades through the web access grade portal.
- Each student is provided with at least 250 MB of storage to create and maintain a digital portfolio of writings, projects, presentations, and related work.

In order to provide opportunities for students, the schedule is very flexible. The basic schedule is a modified block with a built-in advisory. Students in the freshman and sophomore years are scheduled for the full 8 blocks. Juniors and seniors may trade one double block for each college class taken.

Twelve units of study must be completed at the community college. These units are to be general education requirement classes that are approved for transfer to the CSU or UC systems. A waiver may be obtained if a class is not on the transfer list but fits with a career plan/path described in the student's Personal Learning Plan. All students are encouraged to complete a course entitled "College Success" as one of their required college classes. Students with unique interests are encouraged to seek coursework that supports certification or postsecondary employment goals.

## **7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels**

The Sacramento New Technology High School regularly uses data at the school and classroom level to inform instructional decisions and address individual student needs. The School Leadership Team analyzes student assessment data from state tests, as well as local assessments, to identify strengths and weaknesses. The data is disaggregated to target improvements in special student populations. This information is used to develop written, school-wide improvement plans.

All student data is analyzed collaboratively by the total faculty, teaching teams, small mixed groups, and individual teachers. Curriculum and instruction are then adjusted based on student need. The math department has implemented a benchmark system within the framework of their courses that matches the Cognitive Tutor Software tool. Students complete a certain portion of the math units and take a benchmark test. Then their individual needs are addressed in customized workshops.

As a project-based learning school, New Tech regularly assesses each student project for progress on the school's Ten Learning Outcomes. School-wide rubrics are used for collaboration, oral proficiency, and writing. Student products are reviewed by Critical Friends (a teacher group) for alignment with the Ten Learning Outcomes. In addition, California State Assessments, digital portfolios, student presentation exhibitions, student and parent surveys, graduation rates, and teacher observation and assessment are also used as student achievement indicators.

Students and parents are able to assess weekly student progress and academic grades through an online grade portal. The parents and students are provided a holistic grade as well as the grade broken

down by the Ten Learning Outcomes. Rubrics and a wide variety of end products are used to assess student learning, including forums, town meetings, debates, fairs, brochures, and traditional exams. At the end of every project students reflect upon and evaluate their individual learning within the group process. Students are asked to identify areas of weakness and set goals for improvement on future projects.

New Tech also engages the staff in a self-study process through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. This process has resulted in recommendations for continuous improvement, which the school has incorporated into their School Improvement Plan. The school's affiliation with the New Technology Network also helps it continuously assess progress in achieving its mission.

New Tech data is processed through the district and is analyzed at both the school and district levels, with district and state comparisons. In addition, as a consequence of its dependent charter status, New Tech must provide the district with a comprehensive performance audit each October.

## 8. Transitions

New Tech has carefully planned transitions for 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Since it is a school of choice, students are provided with extensive information to help them and their parents make an informed decision to apply. Applicants are also invited to visit and shadow a student for a half day to gain a full understanding of the school, and its philosophy and requirements.

Upon entering the school, all students create a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) that is updated and reviewed each quarter. This plan is customized through student, teacher, parent, and advisor input. Plans include, but are not limited to: test scores, feedback from assessments, areas of strengths/weakness, career/college interests and goals, personal growth components, lifetime learning goals, interventions, behavior objectives, health goals, and personal goals.

Upon entering New Tech, California Standards Tests scores and other available assessments are scrutinized to set goals for each student. The PLP indicates any accommodations necessary as well as the need for after school or extra support classes.

Frosh Fest was initiated by student leaders as a way to introduce new students to a friendly school atmosphere. This overnight experience focuses on teambuilding, fostering good relationships between freshmen and upperclassmen, and acculturating students to the school's norms. At the beginning of the student's first year the four times per week advisory class serves as a valuable resource for the support they may need for academic or personal achievements. The once per week Super Advisory permits 9<sup>th</sup> graders to be coached by upperclassmen on what is needed to be successful. The formal curriculum for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade advisory is *Transition to High School Life*. The outcomes and topics for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade advisory are:

- expert knowledge of all Lotus tools, such as email, daily calendar, to-do list
- exploration and understanding of project-based learning
- mastering PBL skills and the ability to write and enforce a contract, and to read a rubric
- introductory exploration of career and college
- selected habits of mind: persisting; thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
- managing impulsivity; and gathering data through all senses
- understanding conflict resolution
- elements of the digital portfolio.

The 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade advisories investigate career and community exploration, and career preparation and college exploration, respectively. The 12<sup>th</sup> grade advisory is based on *Transition to Life*. The focus of this advisory is:

- senior project support and completion of the digital portfolio
- college and financial aid applications

- exploring the following habits of mind: questioning and posing problems; thinking interdependently; applying past knowledge to new situations; and remaining open to continuous improvement.

All of these systematic activities and programs help make a smooth transition from middle school to high school and to the world of work and postsecondary education.

## **9. Leadership/ Systems Approach**

As a dependent charter school of the Sacramento City Unified School District, New Tech's governing board is the school board for the entire district. New Tech was designed to foster collaboration and empowerment in the governance of the school. There is an Advisory Board consisting of the principal, parents, students, certified and classified staff, and community members. It is the responsibility of the Advisory Board to assist with the school site plan and expenditures of categorical funds, and to advise the principal. The school has a Leadership Team comprised of the principal, assistant principal, certified mentor teachers representing math/science and humanities, a leadership and intern coordinator, and the school counselor. It is the responsibility of the Leadership Team to plan Critical Friends meetings and focus on instructional learning. The group also helps advocate for the needs of the staff and the student body. It is the responsibility of the principal to communicate with the district and the board about achieving district expectations for student learning.

The school's Leadership Team actively works to shape and promote the school's culture and vision. The principal provides dynamic and inspirational leadership and motivates staff, students, and parents to work collaboratively to accomplish the school's mission. The staff make decisions regarding resources to support the Ten Learning Outcomes. The school works to be responsive to the community's ideas and input regarding accomplishment of the school's goals. Teachers are organized into Critical Friends groups which focus on the improvement of student learning. The staff give constant input to decision making at faculty meetings, and students give input through the Principal's Advisory and through their advisory class.

All stakeholders have a voice in developing the School Improvement Plan. This plan systematically identifies improvement needs, sets targets and strategies, and establishes an action plan to accomplish improvement goals. The current School Improvement Plan is focusing on math, writing, science, assessment and accountability, and group process skills. The plan is reviewed and updated annually.

## **10. Professional Learning Community**

New Tech promotes a collegial working environment that is characterized by high expectations for staff and students and high levels of support to meet these expectations. Much of the staff development is embedded and occurs during Critical Friends meetings. All staff attend professional development tailored to the PBL model through the New Technology Foundation. This training is content and model specific. Teachers new to the school attend a week-long intensive training on PBL and have follow-up training at the school during the year. All staff gather for a five-day Summer Institute sponsored by the New Technology Foundation. In addition there is subject-specific training in areas of need conducted during the summer.

The school also has teacher mentors. The mentors provide for collegial sharing and introduce new strategies and tools for delivering a rigorous curriculum. The mentors are an important part of a professional learning community that systematically builds knowledge, skills, attitudes, and leadership which facilitate student learning. The culture of the school fosters best practices based on sound research. Time is built into the daily schedule for all teachers to work collaboratively with their teaching partners or mentors to plan and implement a rigorous curriculum. Teachers constantly engage in self reflection, self evaluation, and peer evaluation. Once a week, staff meet for two hours to plan and coordinate the



curriculum. There are four partial days set aside for school-wide professional development. The school also receives professional development from outside partners including the University of California Davis Area 3 Writing Project.

The entire staff participate weekly in a protocol called “Critical Friends.” As part of this process teachers present potential PBL units of instruction to their colleagues for constructive criticism, suggestions for improvement, and collaboration opportunities.

The staff members are relatively new to the profession. They are bright, energetic, and dedicated to a student-centered, constructivist learning philosophy. They are fully qualified; more than half have already attained Master’s degrees and others in the process of completing Master’s degree programs.

All teachers are evaluated in accordance with district policy. Probationary teachers are evaluated annually, and other teachers are formally evaluated every other year. Teachers are measured against the Performance Expectations for Teachers used by the New Technology Foundation, as well as on the California Standards of Teaching. As part of this process teachers engage in self reflection and set goals for professional development.

### **11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners**

The staff at New Tech are dedicated to the success of all students. Failure is not an option and a safety net is in place to insure that struggling learners get the support they need to be successful. Upon entrance to New Tech the counselor and principal ensure that students are in appropriate classes and have designed their PLP. Power Skills and Academic Lab courses are offered in half-block classes to students whose reading, math, and/or study skills are in need of improvement.

PBL imbeds a support system into each class to help students master content and skills. There are pacing guides within each course and project benchmarks are used to help students stay focused on project completion. The teaming of teachers and the block schedule also provide numerous opportunities for individualized one-on-one or small group instruction, as needed. Special workshops are organized within the block time for students who need extra help with content knowledge or skills. Struggling students are identified at weekly Critical Friends meetings. Staff then select strategies to analyze and address the weakness. This can be followed by two additional levels of intervention.

In the case of students with learning problems, a Student Study Team assesses the problem and recommends appropriate interventions. For those students thought to be capable but who are not performing, other interventions are provided. Students with less than a 2.0 GPA are placed on academic probation and are required to attend after school Academic Tutorial. Two teachers staff the program and provide academic support in a technologically rich environment. Students who need additional support often attend the two Academic Saturday Schools offered each month. On average about 100 students attend each support program.

### **Lessons Learned**

Numerous programs and practices at Sacramento New Technology High School are worthy of consideration by other schools.

- *Project-Based Learning* Project-based learning is the major vehicle of instruction in all subject areas. It is a real world, hands-on approach to learning and solving problems.
- *Inviting and Supportive Environment* People treat each other with respect and dignity. Character education is not a program; it is how the school does business. Positive adult modeling and the personalized relationships that exist between adults and students exemplify the inviting environment. Advisory classes are conducted by all teachers. The classes assist students with transitions and provide academic and personal support.
- *Commitment to Continuous Improvement* This is a focused school where students come first. Direction comes from the strong vision and inspirational leadership of the principal. The school is

focused on “beginning with the end in mind.” From its inception, the school has imbedded into the instructional program the Ten Learning Outcomes that underpin the curriculum and the assessment of student progress.

- *Strong, Visionary, Collaborative Leadership* The principal’s collaborative leadership style engages and inspires staff and students to high levels of performance. Teachers and students feel empowered, expectations are identified, and staff members operate as leaders. Leadership capacity has been developed among many staff members who contribute to school-wide improvement initiatives.
- *Small Size and School of Choice* This is a small learning community which students choose to attend and where faculty choose to teach. Those who might be C students in most high schools are being stretched to high levels of rigor and relevance.
- *Technology-Rich Learning Environment.* Technology has been incorporated into all aspects of the instructional and managerial activities of the school. All classrooms are equipped with computers. The technology is used as a tool for research, problem solving, and communication in all courses and programs.
- *Student Portfolio.* All students organize and maintain a personal digital portfolio of their work relevant to all areas of study and their career area of interest. The portfolio holds students to high standards of learning and is required for graduation
- *Community of Learners.* Teachers and students have a collaborative teacher-student relationship that is exemplified by mutual respect and cooperative project-based learning. Teachers are actively engaged with their students and vigorously pursue their own professional development.
- *Integration of Rigorous Academic Education to Real World Relevance.* Real-world applications are embedded in every class every day. Preparation for the senior exhibition and project begins during the 9<sup>th</sup> grade with presentations to a staff panel after the completion of projects. Rubrics and assessments are authentic. Students learn to transfer what they are learning to the world beyond high school.
- *Stretch Learning.* New Tech is committed to excellence for all students. All students must complete the rigorous high school graduation requirements that are expected for admission to the University of California. In addition all students must complete 12 college credits, give community service, prepare a digital portfolio, and complete a Senior Project.

### **Principal’s List of Three Greatest Strengths**

Principal Paula Hanzel provided the following list of the school’s three greatest strengths.

1. Our ability to personalize is a great strength. The small school, small staff, and small class size allow us to tailor programs to individual student needs. The organization of the staff into learning communities in grade level and content areas promotes collaboration and an integrated teaching program. Staff and students are teamed in the core academic areas in grades 9-12, which allows everyone to know each other well and support each other academically, socially, and emotionally. After-school activities provide students with many opportunities to pursue personal interests.
2. Staff, administration, and students have a cohesive focus about the nature of the program. We have a shared vision and vocabulary about the rigor and relevance of the program, high expectations for all, and common classroom strategies of reading and writing in the content area, use of technology, and research. Staff plan collaboratively to meet their common objective of delivering a strong, focused curriculum. These factors unite us in pursuing our goal of a high school diploma for all students that prepares them for college-level work.

3. Faculty is empowered by the administration to be innovative in order to meet the needs of every student. Teachers use techniques such as exhibitions, interdisciplinary activities, use of technology, and project-based learning to broaden and deepen their instruction. Co-enrollment in college courses engages students in interesting, challenging programs. The learning community is fully developed and concerned with the growth of all its members. We address issues weekly from both the grade level and content area perspectives. Staff here are committed to each student's success and are actively involved in achieving that.