



HTH Design Principle: Adult World Connection

Students at High Tech High do much of their best learning outside the school walls. Through internships and projects based in the community, they collaborate with adults on work whose success has meaning well beyond that of a graded course. In that adult world they routinely confront unpredictable problems and situations. They develop intellectual perspectives that cut across subject areas, mingling chemistry with civics, or mathematics with the arts. And they form working relationships with adults, who model real-world problem solving and standards for excellence.

This kind of experience starts in students' early years at High Tech High, when they begin to make connections between their own interests and opportunities in the world outside school. They may "shadow" an adult through a day at work, carry out community service as an advisory group project, or meet outside adults in the school for "power lunches" on issues of interest. As their maturity and academic competence grow, they may branch out from course work to take on "field studies" for an outside organization—conducting survey research, for example, or producing video work. Every student completes at least one term-long internship outside the school as a junior or senior. By graduation year, such experiences will have prepared them to design an independent senior project mentored by an outside adult in their chosen field.

Such activities heighten students' engagement in learning and their motivation to work hard. These young people see that their own observations, actions, and reflections directly matter to the success of something that the community clearly values. Quite often, students with little previous academic success discover a new identity and new intellectual horizons as they develop expertise and gain respect in the world outside school.



For students to learn best from these adult world experiences, High Tech High teachers must also act as inquirers—helping students to make appropriate connections, think through their experiences, and relate them to the conceptual frameworks and academic skills they are developing in the classroom. Some teachers are taking on new territory as they learn to guide learning in places other than classrooms and work with adults outside of the school. Others are professionals from the workplace, inspired by the

I'm very impressed by the amount of support that the interns get from High Tech High. There's a very clear organization in making sure the students have all the tools that they need.

Bennett Peji, Art Director and Owner, Bennett Peji Designs

"I'm interning at a local law firm that specializes in Intellectual Property Law. Working at a job is so different from going to high school. At a job you are part of a team, and if one person lets the team down then it really doesn't work."

David Walters
Grade 11

High Tech High vision to take up teaching in mid-career. High Tech High's commitment to adult world connections affects everything from its budget to the bus schedules. It shows up in the way the school schedules student and teacher time and organizes its curriculum and assessment practices. An outreach coordinator interacts with the community to organize and facilitate student work outside the school. Even the school facilities have a distinctive high-tech "workplace" feel, with windowed seminar rooms, common areas where artworks and prototypes are displayed, individual student workstations, small-group learning and project areas, and laboratories equipped with the latest technology. The technology infrastructure of the building is purposely left in open view, to facilitate students' understanding and participation in its functions.

Adult World Connection: What It Looks Like

Internships, field studies, and other community-based learning

- students learn problem-solving and other higher-order thinking skills in authentic, meaningful contexts
- all students explore career interests and see how adults put together careers
- student projects contribute to the work place or community
- students form one-one-one relationships with adult mentors beyond school

Close connection between field work and academic learning

- staff analyzes placement sites for their learning potential and observes students in the field
- staff and outside mentors regularly discuss the students' learning goals and work
- students debrief and reflect on their internships in seminars that deepen and extend learning
- projects incorporate academic content and culminate in an exhibition and final assessment

School structures that support students' adult world connections



- staff member manages logistics and coordinates relationships with community partners
- flexible schedule facilitates out-of-school learning
- transportation assistance is arranged for students learning out of school
- school technology resources reflect those used in workplace settings