HTH Design Principle:
Personalization

Students learn better at High Tech High because they belong to a learning community where their teachers know them well. Research shows clearly that personal attention from the adults in their lives makes a major difference in young people's academic and social development.

To achieve this "personalization," High Tech High limits its size to roughly 100 students per grade level. It also keeps to 50-75 the typical number of students for whom a teacher bears responsibility (their "student load"). By collaborating in teams that work with the same students, teachers share important information about their charges' individual needs. Students receive extra support as needed in class and in a variety of tutorial contexts, including sessions with a special education teacher.

Insight into the individual learner deepens in the advisory groups to which all High Tech High students belong. Here twelve-fifteen students meet regularly with a teacher-advisor who closely follows their personal and academic development. In fact, every student has a "personal learning plan" in which, with the advisor's guidance and the family's input, they set out individual goals and keep track of progress toward them.

High Tech High's emphasis on projects as a learning strategy also helps students develop a personal connection to their work, in the classroom and beyond. As they explore their individual interests and passions, they connect these to their emerging identities as learners, workers, and citizens. When such projects take them into the world of work, they also encounter the attention, support, and high standards of adult mentors.

Students also demonstrate their learning in personalized ways at High Tech High. Curriculum units usually end with student presentations before an audience, and a more formal presentation takes place before students may proceed to a higher academic level. Across the high school years, students organize and present their work in a cumulative "digital portfolio," giving evidence that they meet the standards of the school and the state.

> "My advisor tries to get us to open up. The group is sort of like a little family."
>
> Michelle Gutierrez
> Grade 11

> "Each adult in the building has a set of students that we are responsible for during their lifetime at High Tech High. They can call you at night, or if there's a problem that they are having during the day, there is always someone they can seek out to help them through."
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> Jeff Blount
> Math Teacher

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The facilities at High Tech High also reflect its emphasis on personalization. In the Great Room, over 100 individual work stations with networked computers are accessible to students throughout the day. Nearby are areas especially designed for small-group learning, as well as project rooms for hands-on activities. The Commons area serves as the intellectual and social hub of the school, promoting a sense of community. Exhibition spaces attractively display student work, and a "signature wall" near the school entrance allows students to express their identities as members of the High Tech High community.

Personalization: What it Looks Like at High Tech High

A learning community on a small scale

- no more than 100 students per grade level
- ratio of students to teachers is 20:1 or lower
- teams of teachers share students and common planning

Advisory groups for all students

- groupings of 12-15 students meet weekly with a teacher-advisor
- nurtures personal and academic development
- home visits by advisor build communication with families
- develops sense of belonging to school community

Personal learning plans

- personal goal setting in consultation with advisor and family
- regular reviews to map individual progress
- student projects that pursue interests and passions
- academic challenges through projects in and out of school
- opportunity for choices within the curriculum

Demonstration of student learning in individual ways

- presentations before an audience at key transition points
- each student collects evidence of learning in a digital portfolio

Adult mentors for all students

- internships in the adult world to advance learning
- individualized expectations that reflect real-world standards

Support services for students with needs

- mixed-ability groups that respect differences in learning
- individual coaching wherever necessary

Facilities tailored to individual and small-group learning

- individual work spaces with networked computers
- small-group learning areas
- project rooms for hands-on activities
- commons area promotes sense of community
- exhibition spaces for individual expressions of learning and identity

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