

# HIGH TECH MIDDLE CHULA VISTA

## Linking Hands and Minds Through Project-Based Learning

*We believe deeply in empowering each of our unique students to explore their world and take ownership of their learning.*

*Andrea Morton, humanities teacher*

### SCHOOL INFO:

**Location:** Chula Vista, CA

**Type:** Charter

**Focus:** Project-based, Hands-on Learning

**Network:** High Tech High

High Tech High is a network of schools spanning grades K-12 that prepares students for college and careers by providing a personalized hands-on approach to learning.

### BY THE NUMBERS:

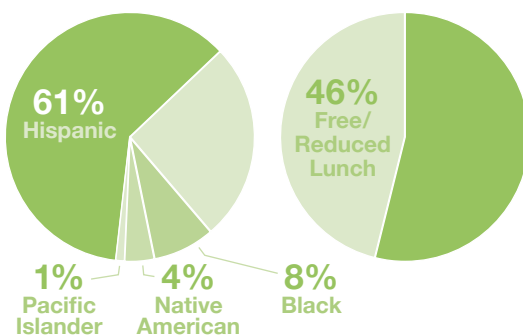
**Date Opened:** 2011

**Grades Served:** 6-8

**Enrollment:** 328

**Teachers:** 15

**Students Demographics:**



### What is Deeper Learning?

Deeper Learning teaches students to master core academic content, think critically, solve complex problems, work collaboratively, communicate effectively, direct their own learning, and develop an academic mindset.

“All teaching and learning at High Tech Middle Chula Vista (HTMCV) is guided by the deep conviction that students learn more by directly experiencing and participating in the world around them,” said sixth grade humanities teacher Andrea Morton.

The curriculum, co-designed by teachers with student input, is based on three High Tech High Design Principles:

- a common intellectual mission;
- an adult world connection;
- and a personalized learner-centered approach.

As such, it is designed to harness student passion and inspire them to develop the curiosity, knowledge, skills, and ambition needed for successful adulthood.

With those goals in mind, students participate in Project-Based Learning experiences that engage them in the Deeper Learning activities by solving complex, open-ended problems. Morton noted that students often have the opportunity to work with local business professionals and other community members as they develop their critical thinking, critique, and presentation skills. In the process, they create beautiful, relevant work to share in the “real world.”



*Utilizing beautiful textures and colors, abundant windows, comfortable furniture, informal meeting areas, and ample gallery space for student work, HTMCV's building communicates their high level of trust and respect for the work being done.*

## Student Spotlight:



*Eliana smiles outside one of the hands-on classrooms at HTMCV.*

“I have never worked so hard,” said then-sixth grader Eliana Bentley about the play she wrote and directed to demonstrate her understanding of life in ancient Rome. “I really did put all my heart into it.”

Eliana is a bright and determined student, who is recovering from years of undiagnosed celiac disease, which caused severe challenges in her visual processing and auditory memory. Her mother noted that despite still feeling sick and tired much of the time; Eliana has thrived thanks to HTMCV’s hands-on personalized learning environment. She was able to learn in the modality that worked best for her and received targeted support from teachers. “She had been so discouraged by her previous experience that she had given up and formed a self-image of being an incapable outcast.” Her mother has also noted an exponentially increasing desire to learn and participate in school since Eliana came to HTMCV.

As Ms. Morton puts it, by being encouraged to tap into her inherent abilities, Eliana now leads her class as a writer and knows she has a powerful voice the world wants to hear.

## ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH PERSONALIZED AND PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Students are strongly encouraged to take responsibility for their own education within a highly personalized, Project-Based Learning environment in which each individual is well known by his or her teachers and challenged to meet high, but attainable, expectations. This has fostered an environment where, with the support of teachers, students are able to uncover their interests and harness them to develop the curiosity, knowledge, skills, and ambition needed for a successful transition into adulthood.

Learning is also personalized by giving students “voice and choice” within project work, which allows them to explore their passions and interests. Students are given opportunities to explore subjects they are passionate about, while studying and following a rigorous process of evaluating the credibility of a source, conducting field interviews, and creating, implementing, and evaluating surveys. This research process allows students to develop an academic mindset paired with personal interests.

To meet the needs of the diverse student population at HTMCV, teachers constantly monitor student performance and quickly modify instructional strategies. If students don’t understand concepts or need extra help, teachers offer after-school tutoring as needed. “Because we are dedicated to providing a personalized environment for our students, we are constantly finding new ways to change or individualize how we teach. We aim to scaffold our projects and provide multiple entry points for all students, leading toward quality products and outcomes in which the content is fully understood.”

Teachers work collaboratively across content areas to develop projects that focus on collaboration as well as mastering the skills necessary for each subject. In all classrooms, inquiry-based study engages student interest and encourages the development of essential skills such as cooperation, collaboration, and effective communication.

Performance-based assessments are a major aspect of academic life at HTMCV. With that in mind, students work on purposeful and engaging projects and present their findings in such a way as to demonstrate their ability to apply what they have learned. These authentic projects task students with solving real world problems to create a deeper understanding of various concepts.

All of this work is assessed in multiple ways. Each fall, students facilitate a conversation in which they reflect on their educational progress. At the end of each semester, students lead formal Presentations of Learning (POLs) where they demonstrate their work to a panel of teachers, parents, peers, and community members. Through these POLs, students develop presentation skills while reflecting upon their learning and growth.

HTMCV, along with the eleven other HTH schools, strives to be a powerful community of learners, with adults learning alongside students. As part of this mission, HTH features a Graduate School of Education (GSE) embedded within its K-12 schools. At any given time, a majority of HTH teachers are involved in adult learning in some way: as graduate students, GSE faculty, interns, or mentors. In addition to pushing their own practice, adult learners at HTH model what it is to be a curious, intellectual, and reflective adult, which inspires students to do the same.



GettingSmart.com  
Deeperlearning4all.org

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