Mission Vista High School’s Broader Vision for Lifelong Success

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VISTA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
EXCELLENCE ★ INNOVATION
“Kids know and leverage their strengths, interests, and values to create flexible four-year plans. And along the way, they value academics as well as Habits of Mind. So they’re learning how to think, how to be, how to act, how to process, how to reflect, and how to be a team member at the same time as they’re learning math, science, English, or history.”

— Nicole Allard, Executive Director of Educational Excellence, Vista Unified School District, and former principal of Mission Vista High School
1. Persisting

**Stick to it!**
Persevering in task through to completion; remaining focused. Looking for ways to reach your goal when stuck. Not giving up.

2. Managing Impulsivity

**Take your time!**
Thinking before acting; remaining calm, thoughtful and deliberative.

3. Listening with Understanding and Empathy

**Devote others!**
Devoting mental energy to another person’s thoughts and ideas; Make an effort to perceive another’s point of view and emotions.

4. Thinking Flexibly

**Look at it another way!**
Being able to change perspectives, generate alternatives, consider options.

5. Thinking About Your Thinking (Metacognition)

**Know your Knowing!**
Being aware of your own thoughts, strategies, feelings and actions and their effects on others.

6. Striving for Accuracy

**Check it again!**
Always doing your best. Setting high standards. Checking and finding ways to improve constantly.

7. Questioning and Posing Problems

**How do you know?**
Having a questioning attitude; knowing what data are needed & developing questioning strategies to produce those data. Finding problems to solve.

8. Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations

**Use what you learn!**
Accessing prior knowledge; transferring knowledge beyond the situation in which it was learned.

9. Thinking & Communicating with Clarity and Precision

**Be clear!**
Strive for accurate communication in both written and oral form; avoiding over-generalizations, distortions, deletions and exaggerations.

10. Gathering Data Through All Senses

**Use your natural pathways!**
Pay attention to the world around you. Gather data through all the senses, taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight.

11. Creating, Imagining, and Innovating

**Try a different way!**
Generating new and novel ideas, fluency, originality

12. Responding with Wonderment and Awe

**Become intrigued!**
Finding the world awesome, mysterious and being intrigued with phenomena and beauty.

13. Taking Responsible Risks

**Venture out!**
Being adventurous; living on the edge of one’s competence. Try new things constantly.

14. Finding Humor

**Laugh a little!**
Finding the whimsical, incongruous and unexpected. Being able to laugh at one’s self.

15. Thinking Interdependently

**Work together!**
Being able to work in and learn from others in reciprocal situations. Teamwork.

16. Remaining Open to Continuous Learning

**Learn from experiences!**
Having humility and pride when admitting we don’t know; resisting complacency.

**Mission Vista High School’s shared vision for learner success and preparation for college and career encompasses both rigorous academics and these Habits of Mind.**
Mission Vista High School’s Broader Vision for Lifelong Success

The Mission Vista High School (MVHS) approach to supporting college and career readiness is multifaceted, encompassing more than academics, and it is informed by robust partnerships with higher education and workforce development organizations. According to traditional indicators of student achievement, MVHS has a strong track record of preparing students for postsecondary success. For example, the graduation rate at MVHS, as reported in their most recent school accountability report card, has been 100 percent for three years in a row.

Another key metric of college readiness in California, where MVHS is located, is the percentage of students who complete A-G courses, the classes that make learners eligible to attend California State University or the University of California. In the graduating class of 2021, approximately 76 percent of MVHS learners completed the A-G sequence, compared to the state-wide average of 43 percent for that same year. In addition to participating in college counseling, seniors at MVHS take College Applications Seminar, an elective that helps learners discover and articulate their strengths, interests, and values, as well as navigate the college application process.

As a dual-focus magnet school, the MVHS academic program provides students with a wide variety of options for charting pathways to college and careers in Arts & Communication and Science & Technology, including Project Lead The Way strands in Biomedical Science and Engineering. The high school offers 19 Advanced Placement courses, and learners can also follow their interests and take advanced coursework through concurrent enrollment at local community colleges.

Moreover, MVHS learners may pursue a CTE (career and technical education) pathway, a multiyear sequence of courses that integrates core academic knowledge with technical and occupational knowledge. MVHS’ six CTE pathways include Graphic Design, Digital Photography, TV and Film Production, Computer Science, Patient Care, and Stagehand Technology. Many of these CTE classes are coordinated with nearby Palomar College or Mira Costa College so that students can earn transferable college credit for classes taken at MVHS.
In recent years, however, the MVHS community has broadened the school’s definition of college and career preparedness to include a range of mindsets, skills, and capabilities that apply not just to academic achievement in specific subjects but also to the many learning contexts students will encounter in life beyond high school. These are articulated in Arthur Costa and Bena Kallick’s Habits of Mind, and they are now a focus of the work to transform learning at MVHS.

Jeremy Walden, the MVHS principal and a self-proclaimed “champion of the Habits of Mind,” tells the story of how the MVHS staff rethought success and expanded their graduate profile. According to Jeremy, as teachers grew more engaged with the district’s PL (personal learning) Challenge, they realized that new skills and capabilities “went hand in hand with personalized learning as well as with what we know about being an employable person in the 21st century.”

Educators at MVHS used what Jeremy calls a “two-pronged approach” to redefine student success. On one hand, they explored workplace skills identified by San Diego Workforce Partnership and data about “soft skills” and “21st century skills” compiled by organizations like the World Economic Forum and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. When they placed all of these lists side by side, Jeremy recalls, they discovered that there were quite a few similarities and that they were well represented in the Habits of Mind.

Another key influence, he says, was MVHS’s own mission and vision. “We want to be the model of educational excellence through discovery, innovation, and growth,” Jeremy explains. “We want to empower Mission Vista graduates to be self-directed, critical, and creative thinkers who persevere to positively impact the interconnected world.”

“That flowery language sounds nice,” he notes, “but what does it mean? How will it manifest itself when a student is thinking creatively and critically? How do you develop a kid to be self-directed and have perseverance? What are the smaller steps, those breadcrumbs that are going to help students get there?”

To answer these questions, the MVHS staff has embraced developing Habits of Mind as a school-wide goal. To Jeremy, the habits articulate “those small steps that we can incorporate into every classroom to help develop these 21st century skills.” For most educators at MVHS, he observes, the work to support Habits of Mind “has come to fruition through reflections during and after projects, units of study, or other assignments. “In coursework across the campus, we’re asking students to conscientiously talk about which Habits of Mind they had to employ in order to be successful.”
To support their collective learning, MVHS educators are piloting different ways to incorporate Habits of Mind into their teaching and then sharing those practices with their peers. In her role as chair of the English department, for example, Michelle Daum is working with her colleagues to rethink assessment and make a shift from categorizing student work as classwork, homework, projects, and tests to focusing on the English skills and competencies students are developing—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. According to Michelle, this competency mindset is laying the foundation for exploring how the Habits of Mind can be embedded with these subject-specific skills. As an example, she says, teachers use the Habits of Mind to “not just look at their speaking and listening, but also at the way students are working, such as how well they are collaborating with others.”

In her own classroom practice, Michelle incorporates Habits of Mind throughout learners’ projects. At the launch of a new literature assignment, for example, students take ownership of their—or their group’s—learning by expressing in writing the unique skills and abilities they bring to the task. They also identify key Habits of Mind they will draw upon to be successful. Moreover, in addition to taking notes on content from their reading and research, learners continuously document evidence of their use of the Habits of Mind as they work.

For Will Salley, who teaches photography at MVHS, using the Habits of Mind has significantly improved the quality of students’ reflections about the art they are creating. “It’s so much deeper than an open-ended ‘How did it go?’ at the end of a project. You’d get maybe one or two sentences and it wouldn’t have much depth to it.”

Will now introduces the 16 Habits of Mind in the context of the first major photography assignment in order to, as he says, “set the stage for [Habits of Mind] very early on.” Students create a three-dimensional, origami-style graphic organizer to record
and define the 16 habits, which then serves as a personal learning resource throughout the course.

Instead of posing broad questions for reflection, Will invites students to ask themselves, “What were three habits that I used a lot in this project?” Next, he asks students to “write about two Habits of Mind you would’ve liked to have used had you been conscious of them. What would’ve helped you do the project better?” That kind of focused reflection, Will observes, prompts students to generate more thoughtful and specific insights about how to improve, such as by managing impulsivity or showing persistence.

To Robert Chodola, the Habits of Mind “put a language to the habits of very effective adults and mature young people.” Whether it’s in the context of his college applications course, the senior capstone elective, or social science classes, Robert supports students to identify, apply, and internalize the Habits of Mind. In College Applications Seminar, for example, he describes a recent activity in which seniors wrote dialectical journals about an article on choosing a college major and then connected the authors’ advice to the Habits of Mind. According to Robert, “One of the pieces of advice in this article was, ‘Don’t feel too set on your major. Be open to change.’” He next asked students to draw connections to specific Habits of Mind—in this case, thinking flexibly and being open to continuous learning.

Robert also incorporates the Habits of Mind in his standards-based approach to assessment. He explains, “When they do projects, all their rubrics have three or four of the Habits of Mind. Are they thinking and communicating with clarity and precision? Or sometimes there’ll be one about applying past knowledge to new situations, synthesizing a project we did before with some new information.” At the end of a project or unit, he says, “They reflect on their learning and their growth and their setbacks and roadblocks throughout the unit. And they have to use the language of the Habits of Mind to describe it.”

Roberts adds, however, that his aim is for learners to own the Habits of Mind, and he expresses hope that, “eventually they can do it without using the explicit language—that they’ve internalized it and they’re just doing it naturally.”
According to Jeremy, many MVHS educators are currently weaving the Habits of Mind into their teaching of content. Yet the school’s goals for supporting learners to develop these skills and capabilities are sweeping, and the work of implementing them is ongoing. The pandemic, he says, has sparked an even deeper commitment to this broader definition of success. “COVID hit and, my goodness, we were asking students to have the same level of discipline and sense of perseverance that many adults are not capable of. And we were asking them to do it without being connected physically to their peers and to their teachers. So we knew that we needed to dig into Habits of Mind, teaching kids to persevere and to apply learning to new situations just to keep learning going in such a difficult time. Habits of Mind definitely helped us to navigate COVID, and we leaned into that.”

At the same time, Jeremy recognizes that the MVHS vision of student success is an ambitious one. “We want students graduating as self-directed, critical, creative thinkers, but what does it mean to have a positive impact on the interconnected world? What programs are in place to support them and not just academically? What metrics can we put in place to measure whether or not we’re successful?”

To discover the answers to questions like these, Jeremy and his staff are considering all aspects of the student experience, from MVHS’s many clubs to athletics to the link crew program that helps ninth graders transition to high school. According to Jeremy, MVHS educators value these programs, “investing time and energy on them” as experiences that support not only learners’ wellbeing but also their ability to have a positive impact on the world. “So much of [the evidence] we have is anecdotal and qualitative,” he notes. “We never thought about how to measure it.”

Until now, that is. “We’re not there yet,” Jeremy acknowledges, “but this is what we are trying to do. So far we have invested 15 hours of time collectively talking about what we mean by preparing graduates to have that positive impact and being intentional about putting things in place to get kids there. This is part of our ‘why’ that we talk about at every faculty meeting.”