



DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT:

Val Verde Unified School District, CA

Schools Blend NGSS with STEAM for Powerful Combination

It doesn't take long to discover the rare beauty in Riverside County, California, where snowcapped mountains loom high over palm trees. And a closer look at schools reveals something even more rare is happening with its students.

Most children in the region start out with an uphill challenge, but students at Val Verde Unified School District are getting a head start in classrooms, where an innovative combination of leadership, vision, and technology is driving achievement.

Even from the earliest grade levels, lessons in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) are woven through each classroom experience.

"We wanted our students to have the problem-solving, 21st-century learning capabilities that can keep them competitive in today's job market," said Superintendent Michael R. McCormick. "So we decided that all of our kids deserve to be immersed in STEAM learning."

Val Verde educators also recently made the leap to Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), using Discovery Education Science Techbook for NGSS to reinforce instruction.

Val Verde's STEAM Coordinator Doug Henderson said Techbook's focus on real-world, relevant phenomena has been a huge win for Val Verde's schools as they transition their classrooms to NGSS.

District leaders were initially attracted to Science Techbook because of its deeply rooted connection to NGSS. Powerful model lessons help teachers give students a relatable anchor point for learning about the world around them, inspiring them to discover the passion of a scientist in each of them.

"It is our primary source in my science classroom," said Armando Flores, 6th grade math and science teacher. "When students have something that feels kind of outside the box from normal instruction, they get really excited."

Techbook's ability to switch the text between English and Spanish languages on-the-fly, along with a text-to-speech function, added up to another big plus for Val Verde's set of diverse learners.

"After showing our elementary teachers they can teach reading and writing using science as the hook, and have it speak to you in English or Spanish, we all signed off on Techbook being the best product out there for us," said Henderson.

Students: 20,245

Race/Ethnicity:

Hispanic (74%)

African-American (14%)

White (5%)

Other (7%)

FARMS*: 83%

*Percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals

"Discovery Education provided the guidance and structure we needed to switch to phenomena-based and inquiry-based instruction."

Doug Henderson

STEAM Coordinator
Val Verde USD





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Starting A STEAM Cultural Transformation

The STEAM transition at Val Verde began more than six years ago. Educators started incrementally, and slowly but surely, a true STEAM cultural transformation has developed.

Schools now host STEAM-themed family engagement nights, there are district-wide, student-focused STEAM events, and the district’s graduation rate is now 10 percent higher than the state’s.

Armed with 1:1 devices in most classrooms, students are not only mastering technology, they’re creating new technologies. From as early as kindergarten, students are learning the building blocks of coding and developing a lifelong appetite for conquering new challenges.

“We start them early with STEAM, because kids are such great problem solvers,” said Henderson. “We want them to develop the mentality that they can solve their own problems, and through that process, understand their world.”

This work is augmented through the district’s STEAM labs, an impressive overhaul of select classrooms featuring high- and low-tech engineering staples like 3D printers, interactive digital displays, and robotics equipment.

There’s never a finish line in STEAM education. Val Verde students are already looking ahead to the job market when learning in these advanced labs. High school course offerings now include computational logic, and access to a career technical education lab, where students can work with the same high-tech equipment found in modern warehouses.

Students are now actively engaged in inquiry-based learning. The district has partnered with local universities and the City of Perris to provide experts to students, guiding them through their new, branching interests in gardening and science experiments.

The district’s superintendent said Discovery Education helped bring this transformation to fruition with a partnership that was alongside them every step of the way.

“Discovery really took the time to go see some of our school sites, meet our teachers, meet our people,” said McCormick. “We then co-constructed our vision for a brighter future with Discovery Education as our partner.”

Science Techbook for NGSS is a breakthrough K-12 digital science textbook that changes the way students and teachers experience real-world science phenomena, boosting achievement and igniting interest in the exploration of science concepts. ²

Learn more at DiscoveryEducation.com/NGSS