
High Tech High

San Diego, USA

High Tech High is a group of 11 public charter schools in San Diego. Applicants are selected by lottery according to postcode, using an algorithm to ensure that the school populations mirror the demographics of San Diego County. High Tech High is best known for its students' projects, which always conclude with a public exhibition to which the whole community is invited.



This is an extract from 10
Schools for the 21st Century.
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Image courtesy of High Tech High

Inspiring a sustained and intergenerational culture of learning

Age range: 5 - 18

No. of students: 3,500

Why it's a school for the 21st century

▶ Promoting an ethic of excellence through project-based learning:

In 2005, a class of students at High Tech High wrote a field guide to the flora and fauna of San Diego Bay. The students' research has since been used by environmental groups to assess the bay's health, and is available for purchase on Amazon. Since then, students have published three more books about the bay. Describing the latest volume, the Director of the San Diego Zoological Society summarised the whole project's remarkable achievement: "Part history, part politics, part biology, part artistic reflection, and all heart, this compilation is a remarkable testament to the power of project-based learning in a complex and changing world."

The San Diego bay field guide project was designed and run by a biology teacher, a humanities teacher and a maths teacher. Collaboration like this is standard practice at High Tech High, where teachers work in multidisciplinary teams and are given planning time to develop extended projects that combine 'academic' and 'practical' work.

A visitor from Virginia asked his tenth grade tour guide at High Tech High: "Do you have homework?"

She replied, "No."

The visitor said, "Then what do you do at night when you are at home?"

The student replied, "I finish my projects."

High Tech High projects always conclude with a public exhibition. These are crucial for two reasons: first, because a live audience provides a stronger incentive to produce quality work than teacher assessment ever could, and second, because they bring parents and other local people into the school on a regular basis, strengthening the links between school and community.

▶ Learning for teachers as well as students:

In 2007, High Tech High opened a school of education, open to all teachers (not just those at High Tech High). The school sees itself not just as a place for disseminating knowledge but as a 'laboratory of teaching and learning for all its members', with graduate students working alongside High Tech High teachers and students to try out new ideas and learn more about how everyone learns.

The evidence that it works

99% of High Tech High students go on to university or a two-year college. 35% of these are the first generation of their family to do so.