

# *Mountain View High School*

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***Clint Independent School District,  
El Paso, Texas***



# MOUNTAIN VIEW HIGH SCHOOL

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## 1998–1999 Data

Campus data	
Enrollment	889
Attendance rate	95.1%
Dropout rate	1.3%
Economically disadvantaged	86.6%
Mobility rate	23.7%
Limited proficiency in English	26.0%

Campus demographics	
African American	.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	.3%
Hispanic	94.8%
Native American	.1%
White	3.8%

District data	
Enrollment	7,000
Number of high schools	2
Economically disadvantaged	87%

Source: Texas Education Agency, Academic Excellence Indicator System, [www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis)

## Average Texas Learning Index scores for economically disadvantaged students (1998–99)

	Mountain View High School	State Average
Reading	82.6	79.2
Mathematics	80.1	74.9

Source: Texas Education Agency, [www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us)

**Selection Criteria:** Texas Learning Index (TLI) scores in reading and mathematics

### General Criteria:

- District enrollment of 5,000 or more students
- Campus population of 40 percent or more economically disadvantaged students
- No selective academic entrance criteria
- Grades served: 9–12

### Performance Criteria:

Mountain View High School was selected for participation in the study based on its 1998–99 performance on the Texas Learning Index. It was one of only a few Title I high schools in Texas that met all of the following criteria:

- 1998–99 average TLI scores of 80 or above in both reading and mathematics for economically disadvantaged students
- A 1998–99 achievement gap (between students who were economically disadvantaged and students who were not economically disadvantaged) of 5 TLI points or fewer in reading and mathematics
- 1997–98 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) exemption rates equal to or less than the state average (8.9 percent)

## **Notes**

- In 1997–98, 94.2 percent of the school’s student population participated in the TAAS.
- In 1998–99, Mountain View High School had an achievement gap of .7 and .55 TLI points between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students in reading and mathematics, respectively. Statewide, the average achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students was 7.1 TLI points in reading and 5.4 TLI points in mathematics.

## MOUNTAIN VIEW HIGH SCHOOL

Mountain View High School, home of Los Lobos, sits on the edge of the Red Sands Desert, 20 miles southeast of downtown El Paso. The foothills of the Hueco Mountains can be seen in the distance, rising over the quiet expanse of unbroken desert. The visitor driving to Mountain View from El Paso is easily struck both by the beauty and remoteness of the school's location.

Clint Independent School District serves 7,268 students from a 300-square-mile area. It is made up of three distinct communities: the older and historically Anglo farming community of Clint, which is located just north of the Rio Grande; the suburban community of Horizon, located in the middle of the district; and the newer, predominantly Mexican-American community to the north, known as the Montana community. Settlement in the Montana area has developed over the past 20 years and continues to grow as Mexican immigrants buy and settle small parcels of unrestricted land, and Mexican-American residents of El Paso move east from the city.

Many residents of the Montana community live in colonias,<sup>1</sup> which are scattered across the desert and connected only by a rough network of unpaved roads. Public transportation is virtually nonexistent. However, signs of local development and the hard-fought victories of grassroots leaders are also obvious. Ample, well-appointed homes with trees and elaborate gardens sit alongside compounds consisting only of trailers, basic wooden and tin structures, and water tanks. Residents note with pride the gradual increase in the infrastructure and services in the area, which now boasts a police station and several family-owned restaurants and stores. But perhaps most notable is the presence of the public schools themselves.

Mountain View High School, with an enrollment of 889,<sup>2</sup> was established in 1989 to serve the children of the Montana area of the Clint Independent School District. The student population is nearly 95 percent Mexican-American. Eighty-seven percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Prior to 1985 there were no schools in the Montana area, and children had to ride school buses for as much as one-and-a-half hours to attend school in the town of Clint. Because of the rapid growth in the area, schools were overcrowded, and the district was not able to build schools fast enough to accommodate the students.

For a time, Mountain View served grades 6 through 12, and it was only when a new middle school opened in 1991 that Mountain View became a high school serving grades 9 through 12. The existence of a complete feeder pattern of two elementary schools, one middle school, and a high school is a recent victory for the community. Residents recalled with almost palpable excitement their celebration of each step in this process of opening the new schools, describing the moment ground was broken for the new high school and when water service began at the middle school. Teachers spoke of frequent visits to the high school construction site, where they envisioned their role in pioneering a new school.

In 1997–98 the Montana community had further cause to celebrate, when, under the leadership of Principal Olivia Campos, the teachers and students of Mountain View High School attained Recognized<sup>3</sup> status in the Texas state accountability system. This achievement marked a major turnaround for the school. Just a couple years earlier the school had been floundering, its performance lackluster in both academics and athletics. In 1995 Clint ISD intervened, reconstituting the entire

administrative team of the high school.<sup>4</sup> In many ways the school's success also represented the coming to fruition of this district intervention. With its new status as a Recognized campus, Mountain View High School started to break many of the negative stereotypes associated with low-income schools and communities and to reduce its isolation and anonymity.

Since 1997–98 Mountain View High School has maintained its Recognized rating. In 1998–99, the year before our site visit, Mountain View High school was one of only a handful of Title I high schools in the state where student Texas Learning Index scores were above 80 in reading and mathematics, with no significant achievement gap between students who were economically disadvantaged and students who were not economically disadvantaged.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, this achievement was attained without exempting high numbers of students from the state accountability exam.<sup>6</sup> The rate of academic improvement at the Mountain View High School far exceeded that of the state for the period 1994–2000.

To achieve these gains, the administration and staff at Mountain View set high expectations for students and defined challenging goals. They used student assessment data to focus their instruction and increased instructional time in those areas in which students needed more assistance. They participated in a year-long, schoolwide professional development series to improve instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics. They became dedicated to preparing their students to be successful in college and worked with students and families to remove barriers in the admissions process.

At the same time, the staff made sure that no student would fall behind no matter what the needs or circumstances. Instructors were always available to tutor, and programs were set in place to ensure that students who became parents would be able to finish their high school education. The administration actively fostered a collaborative team environment so that the whole school community—teachers, administrators, and parents—would be working to support the school's goals. Finally, the staff realized that students need more than academic instruction to flourish and reach their highest potential; they supported students in developing high aspirations and at every turn treated them with respect and care.

## **SETTING CLEAR GOALS AND ESTABLISHING HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

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**A**dministrators and teachers at Mountain View High School hold high expectations for student achievement and an expanding vision of educational and career possibilities for their students. A parent, originally from Mexico, aptly described the school's high expectations and commitment for student success:

Los maestros tienen altas expectativas de los niños. Y yo creo que eso ha hecho la diferencia con nosotros aquí [en Mountain View]. Los tratan como cualquier otro niño del west side, que es el lugar más afluente de esa comunidad [El Paso]. Las expectativas académicas son igual que los niños tienen en el west side. Claro que nos faltan muchos recursos. Pero ya estamos teniendo más computadoras, más tecnología. Eso hace que los niños sean más competitivos. De aquí, son iguales que todos los niños: el rico, que el de medio, que el de pobre. Somos iguales.<sup>7</sup>

Such high expectations were not always present at Mountain View but rather have been cultivated actively by the administration. Indeed, one of the principal's first steps toward school improvement was to develop a campus culture that embraced the belief that success was possible and that it was everyone's responsibility. Holding firmly to her own belief in the students, and fueled by the desire to topple the negative perception of the community and school, the principal constantly barraged staff and students with motivational messages. She backed up her words with her presence and support. One senior related, "[Ms. Campos] inspired us. She was always telling us, 'You guys can do it! You guys can do it!'" One of the assistant principals recalled this shift in the school's approach: "It wasn't anything magical or fancy. It was just, 'There are no more excuses. We're going to do the best we can.'"

Administrators and faculty at Mountain View set challenging goals for academic achievement. The staff made their first goal to achieve success on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills.<sup>8</sup> In 1997–98 the school made tremendous headway on this first goal. With 83 percent of the students passing each section of the TAAS, an attendance rate of 95.1 percent, and a dropout rate of 1.3 percent, the school attained Recognized status in the state accountability system.

The experience of success with the TAAS inspired a sense of even greater possibilities for Mountain View teachers and students. A student expressed this sentiment: "It's just showing we've really begun, . . . and we've been Recognized twice. Think what we could do in the next two years!"

While staff and students continue to work for high performance on the TAAS and reach for the highest rating—Exemplary—in the state accountability system, they have defined new achievement goals beyond the TAAS. Staff and students alike now see their success on the TAAS as just a first step, and they have set their sights on the higher goal of college readiness. As one teacher said, "Let's get past the TAAS so we can move on, and college is the focus." The principal concurred, stating the school's ultimate goal succinctly: "I want kids leaving this school who are actually ready for college."

Toward this end the school is currently working to increase student performance on end-of-course exams,<sup>9</sup> improving the quality and availability of advanced course offerings and encouraging greater participation in these courses, and preparing students for college admission and success.

High expectations at Mountain View extend beyond academics. Staff expect that all members of the community—students and faculty—will conduct themselves in a respectful and professional manner. Trust, respect, and tolerance are salient values in the school culture. As one student said, "Here that's just normal, to be nice, to be polite, and to show respect for others." The staff approach the standardized dress code<sup>10</sup> and the discipline policy with these values in mind, using them as tools to bring out the best in the students.

Students themselves demonstrate that high expectations have truly taken hold at the school. They are present in the school early in the morning and late in the afternoon—studying, being tutored, and working on projects. They demonstrate that they know they can be successful, and that they have respect for themselves, for each other, for the adults in the school, and even for their school building.

## USING DATA TO GUIDE INSTRUCTION

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The administration and teachers regularly examine student performance data and use it in guiding their instruction. The principal, whose instructional specialty is English, and the mathematics department chairperson combine their instructional expertise and work together to carefully analyze student performance on each reading, writing, and mathematics objective in the TAAS. They regularly make this information available to teachers through a number of forums, the most important of which is the in-house professional development workshops.

Staff use student performance data both to track progress and to guide ongoing instruction. They review longitudinal data going back to the time the current high school students were in middle school. This process reinforces teachers' sense of efficacy as they examine the improvements in student achievement over time. However, and perhaps more important, the staff uses data formatively to plan and focus their instruction.

They systematically review assessment data of all incoming students from middle school to determine their strengths and weaknesses, and use this to target instruction and tutoring to the students' specific needs. Then again at midyear, they analyze data from student practice assessments to see how far the students have come and decide what instruction needs to occur next. Finally, the process is repeated at the end of the year when the preliminary TAAS results arrive back at the campus. This year-end review informs the instructional priorities and shapes the professional development series for the coming year.

The principal emphasized that the specificity and thoroughness of the data analysis was critical to their success. She and her team made a point of getting as much information out of the data as possible, examining not only the instructional objective assessed in each question, but identifying the specific instructional target within that objective as well. She explained,

If we're saying your class is not doing well in reading objective number three, which is "Main Idea," that "Main Idea" has three instructional targets—Stated, Implied, and Summarization. Why are the teachers going to work on the Stated Main Idea when [data indicate] they're having problems with the Implied? That's why we broke it down to its smallest parts. What we were using before was a shotgun approach rather than zeroing in.

Teachers reported a new-found sense of mastery, highlighting the ways in which linking performance data with instructional objectives reduced confusion and made their teaching goals more transparent and manageable. One teacher said,

Four years ago we were all pretty much just doing our own thing, and nobody really understood [what to do]. We were covering TAAS because that's what we were supposed to do, but we didn't know [how]. I mean [Ms. Campos] taught us how to break it down, how to teach the kids test-taking strategies. Now we really know what we're doing and why we're doing it.

## FOCUSING ON INSTRUCTION AND INDIVIDUAL LEARNING

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The administrators and staff have implemented a variety of strategies to support student achievement. The administration used a year-long, in-house professional development series to provide teachers with extra tools to meet the state standards. When necessary, staff have made changes in the school schedule to make room for increased instructional time in areas in which students need more assistance. Teachers and administrators became active in preparing their students for college—working to strengthen advanced course offerings, exposing students to college, and helping them and their families with the college admissions process. The staff have been dedicated to making sure that no student falls behind, and they work hard to help students imagine new possibilities for their future.

### ***Providing In-House Professional Development***

The administration at Mountain View took responsibility for providing teachers with the training and support they needed to help students meet the new and higher achievement goals. After conducting an extensive campus needs assessment, the principal and department heads developed a year-long series of ten professional development workshops for the staff.

The workshops were primarily intended to support teachers in meeting the state’s instructional standards in reading, writing, and mathematics, which are outlined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills<sup>11</sup> and measured by the TAAS. The workshops provided teachers with information about student assessment data and helped them use this data to guide and focus their instruction. The workshops also introduced new tools and strategies for teaching reading, writing, and mathematics. Two sessions provided information on varieties of student learning styles. Consistent with the school’s new emphasis on college readiness, one session focused on preparing students for the college entrance examinations.

Student performance data was prominent throughout the entire workshop series—setting the tone for the series and informing the emphasis of each content session. The first session of the series focused exclusively on the use of data. Each subsequent content session on reading, writing, or mathematics opened with a review of performance data in that area. The series concluded with a review and examination of the students’ state assessment results for the year.

Every teacher was expected to attend the complete workshop series. The administrative team set this policy to ensure that all members of the instructional staff would be prepared to teach reading, writing, and mathematics in a daily thirty-minute class period, and to incorporate identified reading, writing, and mathematics objectives when teaching their own classes. All teachers, regardless of their specialty areas, began to integrate the instructional objectives in their classes. The school’s physical education teacher described how this worked in her class: “We incorporate mathematics, like dimensions of the court or percentages in shooting and throwing. We try to do as much as we can to teach [the core subjects].”

This policy—that all teachers attend the in-house professional development series and teach and reinforce the reading, writing, and mathematics objectives—was not initially welcomed by all staff. However, the policy provided the foundation for the now widely shared belief that all teachers in all subject areas are responsible for student success. Moreover, for perhaps the first time, teachers felt well

equipped to help their students master the TEKS objectives and in turn to be successful on the TAAS. One teacher described the impact of the professional development workshops:

It's really amazing, the changes that I've seen all around—in the teachers' attitude, in the students' attitude, and the abilities of the students. When I first started here our scores were very low, and the attitude toward the TAAS was very negative. Nobody really cared about it. Since we've gotten trained on it and understand it a little bit better, our scores have really increased. It's helped us teach the basic concepts for TAAS.

The administration supplements the standard workshop sequence by generously supporting teachers' individual requests for specific off-campus professional development as well.

### ***Increasing Instructional Time***

The administration at Mountain View made changes in the school's schedule to add a daily period of instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics. They accomplished this by changing the students' lunch period from a single period to a staggered schedule. Under the new schedule half the students are served lunch while the other half participate in an enrichment period.

Teachers use these thirty-minute sessions to address reading, writing, and mathematics objectives and to provide students with test-taking skills. This extra period is the only time devoted specifically to helping students prepare for the TAAS. Ms. Campos explained the rationale for this change: "These kids don't have the academic language that some kids [do], so we [must help them with the language] on the test, and the skills."

Teachers tailor instruction to the individual needs of each student as indicated by performance data. Moreover, to encourage students' responsibility for their own progress, teachers share this data with the individual students themselves.

After students have passed the TAAS, teachers use the daily thirty-minute class period to help them with the college admissions process. As the principal explained, each student who passes the TAAS will go on to participate in thirty-minute enrichment sessions devoted to preparing them to excel on the SAT or ACT college entrance exams. Ms. Campos underscored this point: "Every single kid that has passed the TAAS will do an SAT or ACT."

The students themselves attributed much of their success to these daily classes. Describing the enrichment class, one student said, "It's just mainly a class that they review TAAS or SAT, depending on what test you haven't done. And that is how we really learned how to pass the TAAS, because we learned so much in there."

The school has also devised ways to increase instructional time in those specific academic areas in which data shows students to have the greatest need. Specifically, when staff realized that many ninth graders were arriving at high school with weaknesses in mathematics, they responded by instituting a double period, or two-hour class, of algebra for those students. The school awards students who complete this year-long pair of classes two credits, one a credit required for graduation and the other a local elective credit.

## ***Preparing Students for College***

The staff at Mountain View have been working hard to make college a real possibility for their students and, furthermore, to make sure students are prepared to be successful when they reach college. As Ms. Campos said,

The freshman dropout rate in universities is about forty percent. That means many students don't have the tools necessary. We wanted to provide what we could so these students, when they left high school, could do well in their first year of college.

Mountain View is approaching this goal by trying to strengthen their Advanced Placement offerings and instruction and encouraging more students to take the AP courses, and by offering daily planning and preparation for college admission. The latter includes actively participating in programs at the local colleges and universities so that students gain exposure to and interest in college; offering preparation for college entrance examinations to all students who pass the state assessment and making these exams easily accessible and affordable; and offering bilingual assistance to help parents complete financial aid applications.

### ***Improving and promoting Advanced Placement courses***

Over the last several years the administration has promoted professional development for teachers of Advanced Placement courses. These campus efforts are in line with a recent district initiative to improve the quantity and quality of advanced courses. In addition, the high school staff have worked with the middle school to intensify and align curriculum so that students entering high school will be better prepared to take on the challenges of Advanced Placement courses. Finally, the school makes special tutoring sessions available so that students in advanced courses have the extra help they need to be successful on the exams and obtain college credit.

While many students are already assigned or “tracked” into AP when they leave middle school, the advanced courses are made available to any other student who shows special interest or ability in the area. Teachers make a point of encouraging students to take more challenging coursework in their areas of interest and are open to student requests to take the classes. Students described how their teachers motivated them to take Advanced Placement courses, highlighting how these teachers sparked an interest in college and prepared them for college-level work. As one student explained,

My first class was Pre-AP Biology. It was a challenge. It motivated me to do my homework every day. I passed it with good scores. And all these AP classes motivated me to [take more AP classes] like English and math. I thank the teachers for motivating me to do this. If I wouldn't have had these classes I might not have considered college. It's great! Now I want to go to college. I want to be the best I can.

### ***Daily planning and preparation for college admission***

The guidance counselors and teachers take advantage of a number of programs offered at nearby colleges to stimulate student interest in applying. For example, they encourage students to participate in Upward Bound, a program in which local college students come as mentors and tutors to the high school to work with students. Students participating in this program are also able to visit the

college campus with their mentors. One student described her experience and the benefits of the program:

I take some classes in college, just to get used to the environment. Now when I get out of high school, it's going to be like, "I've already been to community college," because that's where we take our classes for Upward Bound. I know where everything is; I know how it's going to be; I know how long the classes are. It's an experience!

The school encourages every student to prepare to take the college entrance exams once they have passed the tenth-grade TAAS. The teachers use the thirty-minute midday period formerly devoted to TAAS preparation to prepare students for the college entrance examinations and to help in the actual application process. Teachers help students identify possible college choices and coach them in writing their application essays. One of the assistant principals underlined the school's commitment to preparing students for success after graduation: "One period a day, [the students] are working towards what they are going to do after high school."

The staff recognize that being well prepared is not enough. They know that their students face a variety of barriers, such as limited transportation and limited financial resources, in carrying out the many steps of the college admissions process. They have worked hard to make sure their students and the students' families have access to these opportunities.

To reduce the many expenses involved in applying for college, the school's two full-time guidance counselors obtain waivers for college entrance examination fees. They also help by mailing the students' college-related correspondence if necessary.

Many families in the area do not own cars, and public transportation to and from downtown El Paso is limited to one county bus per day. Recognizing that this would make it very difficult for students to get into town to take the SAT exam, the guidance counselors began administering the tests on the Mountain View campus. Currently Mountain View High School is the only location in the Clint district and wider area where the full set of college entrance exams is offered.

Mountain View High School partners with the local community college and university in helping parents complete the daunting college financial aid forms. The high school hosts an evening program during which the college-based financial aid officers provide hands-on instruction to parents and walk them through the entire financial aid application. These sessions are conducted in both English and Spanish and are well attended.

### ***Providing Extra Support for Student Achievement***

Mountain View staff show dedication to providing students the extra help and support they need to succeed in school. Staff members are available to help students with their work, not only staffing formal tutoring sessions, but coming to school early and leaving late to meet informally with students. The administration and staff want to make sure that no student falls behind. They have devoted extra time and resources to making sure that students who become parents can complete their high school education.

The teachers at Mountain View make sure that students can get the extra help they need to master

their coursework. Formal tutoring sessions, staffed by Mountain View teachers, are available every day before and after school. Any student needing help in a given subject area may attend these tutoring sessions voluntarily. In addition, the teachers and guidance counselors recommend that particular students who are struggling attend tutoring.

Moreover, teachers make themselves available informally to work with students. It is not at all unusual to find many teachers in their homerooms early in the morning or late in the afternoon providing extra one-on-one instruction. Students emphasized their teachers' availability and support. As one student said,

The teachers, if they notice you need help, they're here before school; they're here after school, during lunch, during the SAT class, after you finish your homework, you can go and ask. The other teachers give you permission to get out of that class and go for the extra help. There is always help. That's what makes us better because there is no way you can't pass, because there is always help.

The administration and staff at Mountain View dedicate extra time and resources to ensure that students who become parents do not get sidetracked from their goal of completing high school. A staff member of the local YWCA Project Re-Direction Program comes to the school to work with students who are pregnant, offering parenting classes and a wide range of educational and support services. The YWCA counselor continues to meet with each student and monitor her progress throughout her pregnancy and delivery. The school provides home schooling services for a period of six weeks for any student who has become a new mother so that she may continue to get instruction and complete her credits in the core curriculum areas.

When the student returns to school the guidance counselors are available to provide support, and the student may participate in an ongoing support program available for new parents. In addition to these formal supports, students underscored the high level of overall support extended to students who become parents. As one student said,

The teachers help them a lot. They're not like other schools. I don't know how other schools are, but I would think that if a girl in another school gets pregnant, they would be like, "It's your fault; we can't help you; why did you do that?" They help them here a lot.

## **SUPPORTING TEACHERS AND ENHANCING COLLABORATION**

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The teachers and administrators at Mountain View High School feel that they are part of a team that is working together to support student achievement. The administration made a conscious effort to nurture this spirit of collaboration and teamwork. They were open to ideas and suggestions, made sure that teachers had time to meet formally and informally, used hiring practices to foster commitment and unity, and participated actively on the team.

### ***Providing Opportunities for Communication and Collaboration***

Teachers described the school as a place where people are free to exchange ideas with their peers. As one teacher said, "We [talk together] more in the faculty lunchroom. I feel like we communicate

in a more positive manner than I have at other schools.” Teachers use their departmental meetings to share ideas about what they have learned at off-campus professional development sessions and to help each other with any problems that arise. Furthermore, teachers keep their classroom doors open to their peers and feel comfortable dropping in to visit a colleague’s classroom or having another teacher take a look at their teaching. As one teacher put it, “Doors are open. Doors are open around here. You can talk!”

This spirit of easy-going exchange includes the administrators. For example, Ms. Campos makes it a practice to drop into the lunchroom and visit with teachers. Moreover, teachers felt that the principal and assistant principals were very supportive and receptive to any ideas that might improve teaching and learning. As one school counselor said, “[The principal] is very open to anything that might help the students.” A teacher expressed a similar view, “I feel comfortable that I can go to Ms. Campos or [the] two vice principals. They’re all open to suggestions, whether they’re good or bad, criticisms or praises. They are open to that.”

Teachers at Mountain View have two daily planning periods. They frequently use this time to share their expertise with one another informally. Teachers also conduct formal in-house professional development sessions for their peers. In addition, the administration reorganized the school’s room assignments so that teachers in the same departments would have classrooms next to each other. This makes it easier for them to collaborate, plan instruction, and discuss student achievement. A teacher described the benefits of this change for her teaching:

Putting us all in the same hall has helped a lot in being able to coordinate. You can stand out in the hall, and when you’re monitoring the halls [you can] talk about what you’re doing.

### ***Providing Leadership That Promotes Commitment***

The school’s strategic approach to hiring prospective teachers has also strengthened the team at Mountain View High School. Current teachers often recruit new teachers themselves—sharing with recruits their enthusiasm for working with the students at Mountain View. Interested applicants must visit and spend a full day at the school with teachers and staff before they are interviewed. In this way candidates can get a feel for the school and decide whether they can see themselves as part of the professional team at Mountain View.

Ms. Campos made sure to be visible and involved and to work hard alongside the teachers regardless of the task. As she explained, “If we had an enchilada dinner, I cleaned tables, I served, I was out there. At all the games and as many of the activities as I possibly could, I was there.” In making this effort, Ms. Campos noted that she was consciously trying to “model commitment” in order to build and strengthen the team. Indeed, teachers indicated that the principal’s visibility and energetic participation has made a positive impression. As one teacher said, “You see her out in the halls all the time. She’s rarely in her office. She interacts with the kids. She’s there. She’s in the trenches doing stuff for them.”

Most important, Ms. Campos takes an active role as an instructional leader. For example, she led the school’s in-house professional development sessions herself. By doing so, she earned respect and gained credibility among staff. One teacher spoke of the impact of Ms. Campos’s active engagement:

She conducts the TAAS seminars for the faculty. She doesn't have somebody else do it. She does it, which is really amazing to me. I've been at so many schools where you never see the principal, or they're not right there involved with the faculty and the students, and that's not the way it is here!

## **FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT OF RESPECT AND AFFECTION FOR STUDENTS**

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The teachers and administrators at Mountain View acknowledge that it takes more than a high-quality academic program to help students realize their full potential. They offer a variety of opportunities geared toward helping students imagine and aspire to new possibilities for their future, exposing them to new experiences and new worlds. Perhaps most important, staff at Mountain View High School consistently demonstrate their respect and caring for their students.

### ***Promoting High Expectations***

The teachers and administrators provide and promote experiences that will help their students define and strive for future goals. The school has experimented with same-gender classes to support self-confidence and provide girls and boys with exposure to professional role models. They encourage participation in a wide range of extracurricular activities and foster student leadership, expecting student participation in decisionmaking committees alongside adults.

### ***Providing professional role models through same-gender classes***

In an effort to provide students with extra support and encouragement, and to bolster their self-confidence, the principal decided to offer a few same-gender classes during the daily thirty-minute midday class period. Ms. Campos carefully selected the teachers for these classes so that the students would have instructors who were particularly strong male and female role models, and who would be able to teach the same cohort of students throughout their four-year career at the high school.

Teachers of these classes bring in outside speakers so students can meet people in a range of occupations and professions. Discussing the rationale for this pilot program, Ms. Campos explained that she had seen far too many situations in which young girls and boys with tremendous potential never dream of possibilities beyond their immediate circumstances. She hoped that these classes would stimulate students' academic and professional aspirations.

The school initiated this program in 1997–98, offering it to a small group of ninth-grade girls and boys. Since that time, same-gender classes have been offered to groups of incoming ninth graders. The majority of students have been able to continue with their cohorts and with the same teacher. Approximately 100 students have participated in the classes. The school will be evaluating the success of the program by looking at student achievement, graduation rates, graduation plans, and teen pregnancy rates. Informal preliminary review indicates that the program has had positive results. All of the participating students passed the TAAS on their first attempt. The number of pregnancies has also dropped dramatically over the last several years.

Moreover, students themselves spoke enthusiastically about the classes, describing them as fun, comfortable, and motivating. One girl in a same-gender class said, "We actually have a lot of fun

since [the teacher] brings special presentations and speakers and motivators—women that have good careers to motivate us.” Students also noted the extra measure of comfort afforded by the same-gender composition of the classes. As one said, “There’s a lot of girls that are shy or embarrassed to ask the question in front of guys, or they’re afraid that they might be laughed at. So with all girls, it’s not embarrassing because we all understand each other.”

### *Providing exposure to new experiences and new worlds*

The staff at Mountain View recognizes that the school’s geographic isolation might limit their students’ opportunities and experience. In response, they work hard to provide students with experiences that might broaden their perspectives and pique their interest in new possibilities for their futures. The school encourages participation in community service and a wide range of extracurricular activities that bring students into contact with the world outside their immediate community. Almost every Mountain View student participates in several of these extracurricular activities.

Students are required to contribute twenty hours of community service in every six-week period. Ten hours can be completed through service to the school, but the other ten hours must be in service outside the school. Students appreciate the ways in which these experiences bring them in contact with new people and ideas. One student said, “Well, [community service] helps us out too. It’s fun, because you get to meet a lot of people.”

Another student underlined the way community service has contributed to her self-confidence: “It gives us a lot of experience. If we go out and get a job, we won’t be like, ‘I don’t know this person, so I don’t want to talk to this person.’” One student described how her work painting and preparing a building to become a community club had allowed her to meet people from Cuba:

In the community club, the owners are two Cuban guys. The music they play there, it’s Cuban music. So I heard that music and the way they talk. You get to know a new culture. It’s very different from us. That’s what I like.

Students also have gotten more exposure to new cultures at school. In 1999–2000 a school counselor and several teachers initiated a foreign exchange program by hosting two exchange students from Japan and one from Germany.

Extracurricular activities, such as the school’s strong UIL program, its many successful sports teams, and the popular ROTC program, also offer the students the chance to interact with the wider community, to confront new challenges, and to discover new talents and interests. The Explorers Program, for example, sponsored by the local sheriff’s department, gives selected students an opportunity to meet with and assist the school’s security officer and to participate in adventurous field trips to nearby mountains. One student explained that his participation in the Explorers Program had helped him define a career interest in law enforcement.

### *Nurturing student leadership*

The principal has been adamant about providing Mountain View students with opportunities to exercise their leadership within the school and the district. For example, Ms. Campos advocated at the district level for student representation on the district’s special programs committee. The deputy superintendent for Clint ISD described Ms. Campos’s support for student leadership: “She really knows

that this is their school. This is their school, and she lets them know it.”

The district did open the committee to student representation, and since that time Mountain View student participation on the committee has left a mark. At the high school, students participate along with the administration and teachers on the Campus Improvement Team and also conduct an active student council. They have contributed to the development of the school’s standardized dress policy and attendance procedures. The principal explained that when the students “have a voice,” they “feel part of what we are doing.”

Students expressed pride in many of their accomplishments. They organize and carry out a hugely popular Enchilada Night, during which the school hosts a dinner for parents and community neighbors. This annual event has become a successful vehicle for communication between school and parents. The student council decided to hold the prom at the school in order to better address student transportation problems and to avoid problems with alcohol consumption. Students also had a major role in the beautification of the campus; their input led to trees being planted on the school grounds. Moreover, these leadership experiences give the students insight into decisionmaking, budgeting, and planning.

### ***Expressing Respect in All Interactions***

Students at Mountain View emphasized that they feel respected and cared for by teachers, administrators, and other staff at the high school. They described the respectful and affectionate ways in which adults at the school speak with them, and highlighted their teachers’ availability and ready willingness to help in whatever way needed. They feel genuine caring expressed in the teachers’ and administrators’ high expectations for their achievement and behavior, sensing that the adults at Mountain View are truly invested in preparing them for their future.

Teachers and administrators at Mountain View routinely address their students with respect and show that they care through their words and actions. They are not hesitant to express the affection and delight they feel in working with their students. One student happily recounted this example: “[My teacher] says, ‘I have a hard time waking up [in the morning], but for me, knowing that I’m coming out here to see my students, that’s what makes me get up.’”

Adults also demonstrate their respect by approaching matters of discipline with clarity and guidance, providing information that acknowledges students’ maturity and ability to reason and grow. As one senior explained,

None of the teachers here treat us like students; they treat us like friends, and they are teaching us at the same time. They are not forcing us. They are showing us, “Well if you don’t do this, this will happen.”

The adults’ respect has in turn fostered respectfulness on the part of the students themselves. As one student explained,

Teachers always say “Thank you” and “Please open your books to page 21” or “Would you please pass her the pen?” or “Thank you for answering the question.” They’re like that. When

[we] go somewhere [we] do the same because [we're] so used to being polite in school.

Students also show great respect for the school building itself, seeing it almost as an extension of their home or of themselves. Halls are spotless, bathrooms clean, vandalism nonexistent. One student said, "You've got to take care of your school because . . . if you didn't, it's like doing it to your own self, because you are destroying something." Another student said,

Everyone here has pride for their school. Definitely! Pride. They have respect for the school. That's why nobody marks it, nobody scratches it, nobody puts anything around here because it's beautiful.

### ***Being Available and Taking Time to Listen***

Like most other high schools, Mountain View is a busy place, with many demands on teachers' time. However, the students know that adults at Mountain View always have time for them and are willing to listen and help with academic or personal issues. One student underscored this point:

They take their time. They really support us and everything, and we don't have a problem. We could just go to any teacher and they'll help us out. They'll take their time; they would even take after-school time, school time, their life.

Indeed the school counselors and most teachers are at school well before the first bell rings and usually stay after school to be available to work with students. Describing her personal policy of being accessible before school, a counselor said,

I'm here at 6:30 in the morning so the kids, if they have a problem or something at home, or they might just start off with a bad day, they can come in and talk with me before school. Therefore, we are saving time for instruction.

Adults go out of their way to encourage students to speak with them about their concerns. Teachers make it easy for students to go speak to one of the school counselors when necessary. The school's security officer invites conversations in the weekly campus newspaper. As one student said, "Our teachers talk with us about how we feel. Like our security officer says, 'Let everything out.'"

Teachers are attuned with their students and approach them when they see that something is wrong. One male student described the help he had received from his coach:

I had a problem with my dad. All day and all through practice I was feeling really down and my football coach, he's like a second dad. Actually, he's like a first dad to me. He took his time, his own personal time to come where I was. He came and he asked me what was wrong with me.

The student was able to confide in the coach and felt assured that he could turn to him again if needed.

## **Expressing Care Through High Expectations**

To students, the faculty's high expectations for behavior and academic achievement signal genuine caring. They know that the teachers and administrators are invested in preparing them for the future. For example, reflecting on the school's "standardized dress policy," one male student said,

When I was at another school I dressed really weird. I always had just a regular shirt, long baggy pants torn at the bottom. I just walked around, didn't do much of anything, didn't do much of anything at all. . . . Well, when I came here everything changed. I had to start wearing more, well, clothes that actually fit. I had to start wearing shirts with collars and everything. I didn't like it at first, but it helped me when I went to go get a job. I wanted to go, but I didn't know how to dress. So I wore what I usually wore to school, and that's what got me my first job. . . . The manager said I looked elegant and not too anxious.

And a young woman spoke about a teacher's support and high expectations:

I have a teacher this year and I guess she really cares about me because she knows I have a baby, and I thought I couldn't go to college because I had a baby. I figured I wouldn't make it. But she's like, "No. You can make it." And I have been looking into college ever since because of her. . . . I never thought teachers cared about us, but I think they do [here] because if they're going to push us to [make] A's, then they really do care.

## **CELEBRATING SUCCESS AND LOOKING AHEAD**

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The staff at Mountain View High School have made significant strides in the last several years. The Montana community now boasts a high school that is getting noticed—gaining recognition in El Paso and beyond for both its academic achievements and its winning athletics teams. For the students of this community, which until recently has been easily dismissed and overlooked, this recognition has been especially sweet, coming as a powerful affirmation of their potential. They celebrate the fact that they have shown, despite pervasive doubts and damaging negative stereotypes, that they have been able to achieve high performance in the Texas accountability system. As one student said, "We had to prove, even though we are Hispanics and we are from a poverty area, that we can still do it. And we did it! We proved them all wrong!"

Members of the school community are not stopping here however. Their success in the state accountability system has stimulated the desire for further improvement. Under the leadership of a new principal, Mr. Ray Saenz, the school continues to aim for Exemplary, but has also broadened its goals and is focusing greater energy and more resources on the challenging goal of preparing students for college.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Colonias are unincorporated residential areas that generally lack most municipal services, such as sewer and water connections and paved streets. Residents usually buy their lots with monthly payments and build their homes on the sites, expanding them as they have the funds to do so.
- <sup>2</sup> Enrollment was 889 in 1998–99; it had risen to 910 in 1999–2000, the year the site visit was conducted.
- <sup>3</sup> As part of the Texas public school accountability system, each school receives an annual rating that takes into consideration their students' performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and the school's dropout rate. Among other things, a Recognized rating means that at least 80 percent of the students who took the TAAS passed all core subject areas—that is, reading, writing, and mathematics. In addition, it means that at least 80 percent of each ethnic group and 80 percent of students identified as economically disadvantaged passed each subject area test.
- <sup>4</sup> Ms. Olivia Campos was an assistant principal on the reconstituted administrative team.
- <sup>5</sup> The TLI is a scaled score anchored at the spring 1994 exit-level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, or TAAS. This test is administered to high school students for the first time in grade 10. Because we were interested in selecting schools where students were performing above the expected minimum standards, we set as an inclusion criterion that a school's economically disadvantaged students must have an average 1998–99 TLI score of 80 on both reading and mathematics. A TLI score of 80 represents student performance considerably above the minimum passing level of 70. In choosing the schools, we also looked for schools where the TAAS participation rate was equal to or less than the state average (for 1997–98) and where the TLI achievement gap between students who were economically disadvantaged and students who were not economically disadvantaged was low—five TLI points or fewer in reading and mathematics.
- <sup>6</sup> Although state law mandates that every student in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10 must be tested, there are circumstances under which some students do not take the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. For example, students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities may be exempted from taking the TAAS.
- <sup>7</sup> Translation of Spanish: “The teachers have high expectations for the children. And I think that has made the difference with us here [at Mountain View]. They treat them like any other child from the west side, which is the affluent part of town [El Paso]. The academic expectations are equal to those that they have for the children on the west side. Of course we lack a lot of resources! But we are getting more computers, more technology. That's making the children more competitive. They are the same as all other children: rich, middle income, poor. We're equal.”
- <sup>8</sup> The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a criterion-referenced test given to students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10. The test is administered during the spring semester of each

school year. In grade 10, the test measures student achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics. The grade 10 test is known as the exit-level test; students are required to pass it in order to qualify for graduation from high school.

<sup>9</sup> End-of-course examinations measure student learning in certain high school courses—Algebra I, Biology, English II, and U.S. History. Specifically, the Algebra I EOC exam measures how well students understand the mathematical concepts set forth in the Texas state curriculum standards (known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS) for Algebra I.

<sup>10</sup> The standardized dress code is implemented districtwide in the Clint Independent School District.

<sup>11</sup> The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS, are curriculum guidelines set by the state of Texas. They articulate what over four million Texas children must know and be able to do in each subject area (mathematics, English language arts and reading, and so on).

