

**Practices Worthy of Attention**  
**Eastside College Preparatory School**  
**East Palo Alto, California**

**Summary of the Practice.** Eastside College Preparatory School in East Palo Alto, California, is an independent school serving students in grades 6–12 from populations that are historically underrepresented in higher education. Students all take four years of mathematics, with a minimum course requirement of Precalculus upon graduation.

**Need.** East Palo Alto differs from its neighboring affluent communities both in socioeconomic status and ethnic makeup. The community has been without a local high school since 1976, and students were bussed to high schools where they were often placed in the lowest-level classes. In fact, 65% of students from East Palo Alto dropped out of high school, and of the 35% who graduated, only 10% enrolled in college.

**Goal.** The goal of Eastside is to provide a strong student-centered academic environment that offers historically underrepresented students the opportunity for academic success by providing a college-preparatory curriculum and all the kinds of assistance and support students could need to meet the high expectations of the curriculum.

## Demographics

Eastside College Preparatory School in East Palo Alto, California, is an independent college-preparatory school serving students in grades 6–12 from populations that are historically underrepresented in higher education. Enrollment in 2006–2007 was 210 students. Table 1 shows the percentage of students enrolled by race/ethnicity. The majority of students at Eastside (97%) are first-generation college-bound.

**Table 1. Eastside College Preparatory School Enrollment Rates for 2006–2007**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Percentage of Enrollment</b>
<b>Asian American / Pacific Islander</b>	9
<b>Black</b>	33
<b>Hispanic</b>	58

The demographic makeup of East Palo Alto is vastly different from that of its affluent neighboring cities. Residents of East Palo Alto make on average \$30,000 less per year than other residents in their county. The majority of residents in East Palo Alto are racial or ethnic minorities. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 58% were Hispanic, 23% were black, 9.8% were Asian American/Pacific Islander, and 6.5% were white. In 1992, East Palo Alto had the highest per capita murder rate in the country.

## **Description of the Practice**

Eastside College Preparatory School opened in 1996–1997 with the goal of setting high expectations for all students and providing students with the support they need to succeed. Most students come into Eastside not adequately prepared for high school; in addition, they have daily challenges outside of school, since most of them are from economically disadvantaged families. For many teachers, students, and families, dealing with the daily challenges outside of school takes away any energy they could put toward academic achievement. Eastside aims to provide students with the energy and commitment necessary to succeed in school.

Before Eastside, there had not been a high school in East Palo Alto since 1976. Students had to be bussed to high schools in the surrounding area, which placed an additional burden on their daily lives, as the bus ride to and from school was about an hour each way. In addition, after students were bussed to these schools in more affluent neighborhoods, they were usually placed on a non-college-bound track, limiting their educational opportunities. Students from East Palo Alto who were the most academically successful often chose to stay in the lower-level classes with their friends, as they did not feel supported in the more difficult classes, and had trouble decoding the social norms of their schools. In fact, in the mid-1990s, 65% of students from East Palo Alto dropped out of high school, and of the 35% who graduated, only 10% enrolled in college.

Teachers self-select to work at Eastside, with 70% of faculty coming from the teacher-training program at Stanford University. Though Eastside is an independent school and thus makes up its own school district with complete autonomy, the school has a constrained budget. Teachers work long hours but are not paid much differently than teachers in public schools in the same area. Eastside's principal says that the school's teachers are truly dedicated to their purpose in teaching and that their sense of purpose is palpable. Teachers work with small classes of about 16 students and have at most 80 students total for the school year. This allows teachers to spend more individual time with their students.

Eastside focuses on four key components in its operation. The first is a thorough application process for choosing students that Eastside staff believe will be the best fit for the school. The second is a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum, which all students are required to pass to graduate. The third and largest component is student support, as many students enter Eastside without the academic preparation to succeed in high school or beyond, and without knowledge or guidance about how to use their K–12 education as a stepping-stone for college admission and success. The fourth component is regular teacher collaboration in developing and revising goals to best serve Eastside students.

### ***Application and Admission***

For admission to Eastside, there are no entrance exams, standardized test cutoff scores, or grade requirements. The school looks to serve students historically underrepresented, such as first-generation college-bound students, students of color, and economically disadvantaged students, as those are the students Eastside staff believe can benefit the most from their school. Eastside chooses students who are making the choice to be in school and become

successful, regardless of their past academic experiences. Eastside staff have tried to talk with every eighth-grade class in the local area about the school, so that students know the school exists and is a local option for them for high school. Staff also look at student motivation over parent motivation in admissions, as they will not accept students who indicate that they are applying because of parental pressure. And at the same time, if students have little to no parental involvement, they are immediately admitted to Eastside.

The application to Eastside is similar to application for college admission, but perhaps more detailed and intense in the personal statements and teacher recommendations. For a student to be considered for admission, he or she must submit the following by mid-January for admission the following academic year: application, handwritten student statement, a copy of the family's completed annual tax return for the prior year (all students receive financial aid for 100% of the tuition), standardized test scores from the previous two years, transcripts (grades) from the current year and last year, and teacher recommendations. The application itself involves several pages of demographic and logistical information on both the applicant and his or her family members, including the schools and levels of education of each family member (parents/guardians, siblings).

Students are required to handwrite their responses to several questions about their lives, including their main interests outside of school and why those interests are rewarding, the most difficult challenge they have had to face and how they responded, the qualities of a good teacher and why those qualities are important, descriptions of their family, their biggest dream, and descriptions of when they are happiest and the most proud. The final question asks why the student wants to attend Eastside. The purpose of these questions is to get a strong profile of the personality of the student applying. Eastside requires a heavy commitment from its students, and this application process helps screen students who will make the commitment to be successful in the school. Eastside wants its students to have the drive and motivation to succeed in school.

Parents are considered an important part of a student's success at Eastside. They are also asked to complete three questions as part of the application, including what their goals are for their child's immediate and long-term education, their child's strengths and weaknesses, and how they see themselves contributing to Eastside.

Student applicants need teacher recommendations—one from a mathematics teacher and one from an English teacher. The recommendation form asks teachers to rate on a Likert scale the student's academic and personal qualities, such as study habits, attention span, ability to work independently, maturity, integrity, behavior, relationship with peers, and self-confidence. The recommendation form also asks several open-ended questions, including the level of mathematics the student is enrolled in, comparing the academic achievement versus the ability of the student, noting if there is anything that the admissions committee should be aware of that has affected the student's academic progress so far, discussing the academic independence of the student (e.g., whether the student needs prodding or supervision), and how absences have affected the students' academic performance. Finally, the recommendation form asks teachers to comment as a whole on the student as a person, considering the categories listed above.

Once students are admitted, they meet with their parents/guardians and Eastside staff for an hour to discuss expectations of the students, parents, and teachers. Eastside staff discuss how hard work and academic preparation pay off, as 100% of their students have graduated and attended a four-year college. They discuss how regular attendance and completing homework are key aspects of students' success at Eastside. In essence, Eastside staff talk about the concrete steps it takes for students to succeed, stressing that the student's success is within reach. Students and parents are thus inducted into the foundation of the school policy and expectations during these meetings.

### ***Curriculum***

Eastside's college-preparatory curriculum demands a lot from students: long hours, a serious commitment to their studies, and personal accountability for their actions. One of Eastside's goals was to create a program so that all students could take the coursework they need to be admitted into a four-year college. This begins for some Eastside students in middle school (grades 6–8). The middle school curriculum provides students with the foundations in content as well as the academic skills and study habits needed to be successful in high school and in their postsecondary lives.

Eastside's high school graduation requirements are higher than the California-mandated high school requirements and higher than what is required and even recommended for admission to the University of California and California State University. All students take four years of mathematics. Students entering ninth grade in Algebra I will take Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and Precalculus, while students who passed Algebra I in eighth grade will take Geometry, Algebra II/Trigonometry, Precalculus, and Advanced Placement Calculus AB. Students graduate from Eastside with a minimum of Precalculus completed. Regardless of what mathematics course students enter with in ninth grade, they participate in a double-block of mathematics their ninth-grade year. The purpose of this is to reinforce the pre-algebra and algebraic skills needed as a foundation to succeed in the higher-level mathematics courses.

Other academic courses required are Mathematics Reasoning and College Readiness. These courses focus on reasoning and analytical skills as well as topics in college admission and transitioning to college. In addition, the Senior Research Institute is a course that helps prepare students for the demands of independent research and writing at the college level. In the Senior Research Institute, students are required to write academic research papers. The purpose of these courses is to provide students with a strong foundation in academic skills and habits that are necessary for academic success in high school and beyond.

Students begin taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses in their junior year. Students also participate in Saturday review sessions 4–6 weeks before any AP end-of-course exam. The AP classes offered at Eastside include Calculus AB, Economics, English, Physics, Spanish Literature, and Spanish Language.

### ***Student Support***

The student support structure at Eastside is key to students' success in the rigorous coursework. There are six pieces of student support: open campus, tutorials, resource

program, advising, summer bridge/enrichment, and college preparation. These six pieces are monitored by different Eastside staff members, so they can intervene regularly to provide students the accommodating and individualized support they need.

### **Open Campus**

Eastside has extended school days (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.), which run three hours longer than days in public high schools. The computer lab is open until 10 p.m. each weeknight and for most of Saturday. School opens for breakfast at 7 a.m. each weekday. The point of these hours and resources is to make the campus as accessible and useful as possible to students so that they want to be at school, and so that school begins to have a positive effect because they feel connected and supported. Eastside can feel like a second home for many students, transforming their outlook on how positive school can be.

There is an incentive plan for students to be more efficient in their school day. If students have grades of B+ or better in all courses and no missing homework, they are allowed to leave school early (at 3:05 p.m.). However, in the 10 years that this incentive plan has been offered, only a few students have taken advantage of this plan each year. Students opting to leave early tended to have after-school jobs. Most students choose to stay for the extended school day five days per week.

### **Tutorials**

Two 90-minute tutorials are built into the school day to ensure that students are getting support to understand the core course content (English and mathematics) and are completing their homework. For each of these courses, teachers tutor around 20 students in the 90-minute tutorial right after the course, so students receive immediate help on concepts and ideas from the same teacher. This framework offers consistency of instruction and allows the teacher extra time to work with students who are struggling with certain ideas. Some students did not do homework before coming to Eastside and most likely would not do the homework if Eastside did not provide the time and help during school. Tutorials are structured so that students can complete homework before leaving school. This extra time spent each day in supporting mathematics learning ensures that students have the assistance they need to pass four years of mathematics while at Eastside.

The first 15 minutes of each English tutorial period involves students participating in sustained silent reading (SSR). These 15 minutes help reinforce the idea that Eastside wants students reading more and provide a minimum amount of time for students to do this daily. SSR was built into the tutorial period because Eastside alumni said they felt prepared academically for college but not for the college reading load. Eastside students are now involved in a reading project every six weeks, so they are working on reading books outside of their required English coursework. The last 75 minutes of the tutorial is devoted to homework.

### **Resource Period**

A 90-minute resource period is built into each school day for each student, designed to help students in mathematics, reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary, test preparation, and study habits. The resource period is held at the same time as tutorials for students needing more intense support. Resource periods are limited to about 3–6 students. In mathematics

resource periods, students review materials from the day's lesson and have a preview of content for the next day's lesson.

### **Advising**

An advisory system is also in place so that students meet daily with an advisor, who helps them specifically with their personal and academic challenges and issues. Advisors are teachers assigned to a group of 6–8 students they work closely with over the four years of high school. This is another layer of student support that has faculty checking in with students individually. In addition, every six weeks, the group meets for academic goal setting and reflection on their work for the previous six weeks. This monitoring process provides an overall check-in across content areas, so advisors can talk with other teachers about where students are having the most difficulty and how to customize resources or tutoring to ensure students have the proper support to understand the content.

### **Summer Bridge/Enrichment Programs**

All rising freshman attend Eastside's six-week Summer Bridge Program, where they study mathematics and English and a variety of electives. The purpose of the summer bridge program is to prepare students for the rigorous culture of high expectations and the accompanying coursework. Teachers also use this time to learn about the academic challenges students face, so they know what they will need in the resource program or tutoring once school begins. These six weeks serve as the transition to high school, as students get to know their teachers and one another and become familiar with the expectations so they can begin working academically once the academic year begins.

Eastside students are also encouraged to participate in summer enrichment programs based on their own interests and how the program would help them achieve their goals. Students are required to write a proposal that has them self-assess where they are and where they want to be. Some summer enrichment activities include Stanford Summer College, Stanford Summer Discovery Institute, Columbia University Summer Session, University of California–Los Angeles Summer Session, research assistance at Stanford Medical School, SMASH (a math and science program at the University of California–Berkeley), the Eastside–Berkeley Project (in which Eastside students work in UC Berkeley neurobiology labs), the Telluride Association Summer Program at Cornell University, and job internships at Hewlett Packard, Intuit, Visa, Skolar, and Instill. Most of these summer activities offer academic enrichment to students, so they are involved in academic thinking year round.

### **College Preparation**

Almost all Eastside students are first-generation college-bound, and thus do not have family members who can advise them on the college admissions process. Eastside has developed classes to help with the transition to college. For instance, College Readiness is a course required for all juniors. This course covers standardized test preparation, college research, and college essay writing. The Writing for College course, offered as the junior-level English course, focuses students on literary analysis, complex research, and multi-thesis writing. Lastly, all seniors are required to take Senior College Prep, which is designed to guide them through the college application process—developing their list of colleges to apply to, highlighting their academic and extracurricular accomplishments, writing their personal statements, and applying for financial aid.

## ***Teacher Collaboration***

Eastside teachers have built-in times within the school day as well as formal meeting days scheduled throughout the school year to collaborate. Teachers meet by content area during staff development week, which is the week before the academic year begins. Before this meeting, teachers build an agenda by exchanging emails about what was accomplished the year before and what they are concerned about. For example, mathematics teachers for both middle school and high school might plan to use the staff development week to discuss how to build strong connections within the curriculum. The teachers also talk about how to capitalize on their current resources and what resources should be developed to enhance mathematics learning.

As a group, mathematics teachers devise mathematics goals for the year, and then follow up to reflect on their progress toward the academic year's goals during the staff development days that are scheduled every six weeks. Mathematics teachers measure progress toward the yearlong goals through their deep understanding of individual students, given the low teacher-to-student ratio of one teacher to 10 students. During staff development days, teachers also meet across content areas to discuss the needs of individual students; teachers share a high percentage of students, given the small school size and the way the curriculum is set up for each grade.

Teachers conduct only one 90-minute tutorial per day for their subject area. The second 90-minute tutorial period for students gives teachers common planning time within their subject area. Because Eastside is a small school, if teachers believe something needs to be changed, they can agree to implement changes right away and see immediate results. In general, these meetings provide teachers daily opportunities to interact regarding their subject matter. Some of these daily meeting times can be organized by department heads or administration with a handful of teachers who need additional support.

## **Results**

Since Eastside is an independent school, it is not required to participate in California's No Child Left Behind-mandated testing. As such, test scores are not public record. However, Eastside discusses other kinds of data that show they are meeting their goals.

The goal of Eastside is to have all its students be accepted to and enroll in a four-year college or university. In the seven classes that had graduated when this report was written, all students had indeed met this goal. The 109 Eastside graduates have gone to such colleges and universities as Amherst College, Columbia University, Harvard University, Pomona College, Princeton University, Santa Clara University, Stanford University, Tufts University, University of Pennsylvania, University of California-Berkeley, and Yale University.

## **Conclusions**

Eastside College Preparatory School is continuing to grow. Eastside has created a culture of mutual respect and admiration between students and faculty, where students have become

active participants in their own educational and personal growth, as seen in their participation in summer enrichment programs and admission to four-year colleges or universities. The four components ensure that Eastside can create and maintain its academic culture and mission of high expectations. The application process helps Eastside staff choose the students who could benefit the most from the school. And having both parents and students involved in an induction meeting that has parents, students, and teachers sign a contract about their commitment to Eastside allows for very explicit expectations to be seen and understood by all.

Most importantly, having the many built-in support systems allows for a variety of faculty to ensure that students are on track, providing extra support or resources as necessary. Although developing another Eastside campus is quite costly and some critics would say impractical given the small school size, there are still many things to learn from this school in terms of its practices. Having a common vision of high expectations for all students is possible, given the proper academic support. The six pieces of Eastside's support system can be modeled in larger urban high schools, as Eastside is aware of students coming in with a variety of needs and scaffolds as necessary. In addition, the embedded time teachers have to collaborate within and across content areas ensures that students have the best support available. Large high schools can structure similar programs to support teachers and students, which could lead to improved teacher practices and thus higher learning and achievement for a higher percentage of students.

**About *Practices Worthy of Attention: Local Innovations in Strengthening Secondary Mathematics***

*Practices Worthy of Attention* is a joint initiative of Achieve, Inc. ([www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)), and the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin ([www.utdanacenter.org](http://www.utdanacenter.org)). The initiative is led by Pamela L. Paek, a research associate at the Dana Center, who, in 2006, examined 22 program, school, and district practices that showed promise—based on early evidence and observation—of strengthening secondary mathematics teaching and learning.

Our goal was to document practitioners' descriptions of *what is really happening* in the field to strengthen secondary mathematics education around the country. Thus, while the practice highlighted may be common, the specific structures and strategies used to implement the practice are worthy of attention. These initial investigations set out to mark these practices for future rigorous scientific inquiry by Dana Center and other researchers.

Ultimately, we hope to create a community of inquiry made up of university researchers working with administrators and teachers from featured schools and districts to more rigorously research how effectively these practices improve secondary mathematics learning for all students.

**Reports and practice profiles.** An executive summary details the methods for this initiative and analyzes themes. Two cross-case analyses discuss specific strategies for raising student achievement and building teacher capacity. Brief profiles describe each practice. All of these publications are available on our website at [www.utdanacenter.org](http://www.utdanacenter.org).

**Data.** In all cases, data about the practice were provided by the program, school, or district studied as part of a description of their practice. We did not independently analyze data gathered through a consistent assessment tool, and we did not evaluate their uses of data for measuring effectiveness. Thus, the data in the practice profiles are intended not to prove the practice's effectiveness from a research perspective, but to paint a detailed picture of the practice and what data were used by the program, school, or district to gauge how well it was working.

**Theoretical frameworks.** In some cases, district staff mentioned specific literature on theory or practice that they used when they developed the practice we highlight. In those cases, we cite that literature in our discussion of the practice.

**How to cite this profile**

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