

PRACTICE & POLICY BRIEF 2023: BRINGING A GRADUATE PROFILE TO LIFE

CAJON VALLEY USD:

A VISION FOCUSED ON CAREERS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND HAPPINESS = ENGAGED STUDENTS

"President John Adams once said, "There are two educations. One should teach us how to make a living and the other how to live." In everything we do at Cajon Valley USD, we aim to provide both. As educators, we're trying to repair the fading American dream, so we have to get back to the basics of school—listening to our students and helping them discover and nurture their identities."

– Dr. David Miyashiro, Superintendent

Cajon Valley Unified School District (CVUSD)

began its journey of profound change in 2013, when Dr. David Miyashiro became superintendent and made an outreach effort to the local business community. Many of the people he spoke with noted that educators seemed to discredit skilled-trade jobs and professions that did not require a college degree. This led to the creation a few years later of "[The World of Work](#)," a K-8 curriculum that has since become nationally recognized and adopted by other districts.

In support of its focus, the district created a vision which is unusual in its wording and emphasis: "Happy Kids, Healthy Relationships, on a Path to Gainful Employment." Says Miyashiro, "We try to make sure everything that we are doing supports those three aspects of our vision. Most districts have this big, jargony statement that's their mission statement that nobody knows. Ours is very easy to articulate."

Here's how CVUSD describes its vision, which is based on the work of the [Science of Learning and Development Alliance](#):

- **Happy Kids:** Children develop a strong sense of self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-efficacy based upon the context-rich experiences with their peers and adults who care about them at school and in the community.
- **Healthy Relationships:** Deep connections (strong ties) are formed at all levels—with students at the center—that include parents, district employees, business professionals, faith groups, public service programs, the department of defense, government agencies, and everyone else that we call our community.
- **Path to Gainful Employment:** From the words of our partner [American Student Assistance \(ASA\)](#), "Students know themselves, know their options, and make informed decisions to achieve their education and career goals."



Source: [PR News Wire.com](#)

THE WORLD OF WORK

Cajon Valley is not a wealthy community, for the most part: almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of its students live in or near poverty, and it is home to many refugees. Only a small percentage of students attend four-year colleges. However, the messaging of the education system in the 21st century has emphasized “college for all” which too often has been (mis)interpreted as the sole valued pathway to success.

Superintendent Miyashiro recognized that this view helped create a large gap in the workforce, by stigmatizing the kind of workers needed locally and beyond. Many skilled-labor jobs were going unfilled in the San Diego area—jobs that paid well but did not require a college degree. Local government, the Chamber of Commerce, first responders, and business owners agreed with Miyashiro’s diagnosis and quickly gave their support to the idea of connecting students to a variety of careers and local jobs.

After abandoning an early idea to require computer science at all schools, Dr. Miyashiro in 2016 partnered with Ed Hidalgo, a former Qualcomm executive who had developed a “World of Work” (WoW) curriculum. They created a WoW program for all of Cajon Valley USD’s K-8 students, and Hidalgo soon became the chief innovation and engagement officer for the district. Miyashiro has since received many accolades for his work, receipts of WhiteHouse and U.S. DoE recognition as one of the “Top 35 District Leaders in Personalized Learning.”

“Every child has unique strengths, interests and values that are needed in the world. How does a child aspire to a career they don’t know exists? We had plenty of “What” to do in education and now the World of Work provides the “Why”. We are providing students context when we expose them to the World of Work, every grade, every year.”

— Dr. David Miyashiro
World of Work website



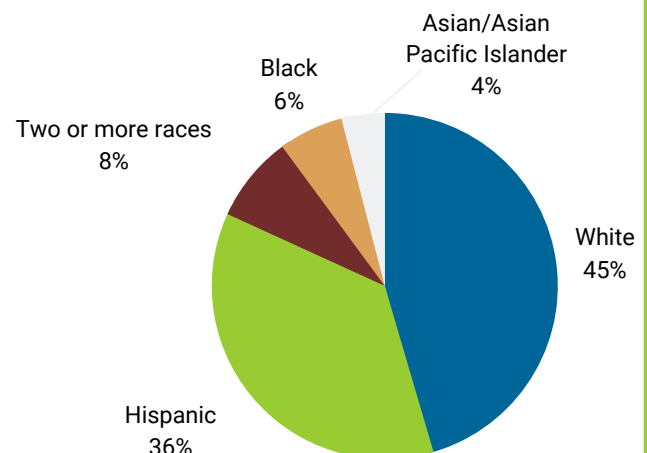
CAJON VALLEY USD AT A GLANCE

STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS:

- ~16,000 students
- 15 elementary schools
- 4 middle schools
- 7 magnet/special schools
- 1 high school

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS:

- 68% Free/Reduced Lunch
- 31% English Learner



Four basic premises underlie Miyashiro's and Hidalgo's vision:

- Students will be more successful—in school and in life—if they build self-awareness, self-esteem, interpersonal and social-emotional skills.
- Students—even in the elementary grades—benefit from systematic career development.
- Students should develop a deep understanding of their strengths, interests, and values.
- Students need to build strong relationships with peers and adult mentors.



The WoW program features a three-step process: “self-awareness, journey, and my story.” In step one, students learn their strengths, interests, and values. Next, they explore careers and their academic options. After they learn and apply skills by experiencing different types of jobs in the workplace, they tell the story of who they are.

The WOW program includes four “levels of integration”:

- **Level One:** Exploration: Each student explores various careers and industries.
- **Level Two:** Simulation: Based on a career they explored, students engage in a simulation that includes the skills and models the values required for the job.
- **Level Three:** Meet a Pro: Students meet professionals and experts—from local park rangers to business owners to restaurant chefs to carpenters—who visit the classroom in person or virtually. Students also use the website [Pathful Connect](#) (formerly Nepris), to videoconference with professionals, who show students their workplace and explain what they do.
- **Level Four:** Practice: Students connect their exploration, simulation, and “Meet a Pro” experiences to practice what they’ve learned by demonstrating their new knowledge and skills.



THE RIASEC TEST

As a key part of The World of Work curriculum, Cajon Valley USD uses the “RIASEC” test to help students explore which careers might be a good fit for them. Based on the work of American psychologist John L. Holland, the test is also known as the “[Holland Code](#)” and contains a set of questions about students’ strengths, values, and interests. Even early-elementary-grade students take a version of the test and can articulate what each of its six themes means. CVUSD’s students can readily explain how their skills and interests connect with one or more of the six profiles shown below:

The Holland Occupational Themes (RIASEC) Model

RIASEC Theme	Traits	I like to...	Careers
Realistic “Doers”	Work with machines, tools, plants, animals or the environment.	• Build and repair things • Being physically active • Be in the outdoors • Work with animals • Operate tools machines	Mechanics, construction, military, nature and athletics
Investigative “Thinkers”	Observe, learn, investigate, analyze, evaluate, and use math and science to solve problems	• Understand why things happen • Research to find answers • Solve problems using math or science • Think deeply	Science, research, medical science, mathematics
Artistic “Creators”	Work in unstructured environments using imagination, art, and creative self-expression	• Sketch, draw, paint • Play a musical instrument • Sing, act, dance • Design fashion or interiors	Visual arts & design, performing arts, writing and culinary arts
Social “Helpers”	Work with others to listen, understand, empathize, inform, help teach or heal.	• Help people with problems • Do volunteer work • Teach or train • Take care of others	Counseling & helping, teaching, human resources, health services
Enterprising “Persuaders”	Influence, persuade, sell, compete or lead people and projects to achieve organizational goals.	• Debate ideas • Persuade people • Start businesses • Sell things	Marketing & sales, entrepreneurs, politics, law
Conventional “Organizers”	Work with data and systems, accurate, organized and follows instructions.	• Find patterns in data • Organize collections • Follow a set plan • Create structures and systems	Taxes & accounting, finance & investing, IT

Source:



Cajon Valley USD uses the [Beable](#) LMS platform, which was [built to align](#) with the World of Work. It connects literacy to career readiness, with a reading program based on Lexile levels appropriate for the student and their career interests.

Ed Hidalgo made this point about the success of The World of Work in Cajon Valley:

“This is about giving every child hope to know that there is a place in the world for them, and that’s something we really leave out of the education process. From the beginning of time, students have said, ‘Why do I have to learn this?’ Helping them see there is a place in the world for them, that really gives kids hope. It makes them want to come to school.”

[\(The Hechinger Report, 4-28-22\)](#)

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For detailed information about teaching practices in the WoW curriculum, see [“Exemplary Teaching Practices: Teacher Case Studies of the World of Work Cajon Valley Union School District,”](#) a report by the Jacobs Institute for Innovation in Education, University of San Diego.

The School Board’s Role

The Cajon Valley USD board has been very supportive of Superintendent Miyashiro’s drive to change teaching and learning. He notes that community and local employer buy-in helped bring the board along. Parent support and improved student achievement—along with local, state and national recognition of Miyashiro’s work—led to the kind job security that allowed him to take bold action.

He says, for example, “Our Board and community have empowered us to abandon some ways of delivering education. While we are still required to administer state assessments and abide by the federal accountability system, we have the flexibility to value those measures less and explore new metrics.”



HOW CVUSD CREATED ITS PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE—AND A NEW HIGH SCHOOL

Cajon Valley was a K-8 district, and its leaders were concerned about what would happen to their students when they left to attend a school in the Grossmont Union High School District, which serves the greater El Cajon area. According to Karen Sapper, then the director of instructional services at CVUSD, the high schools were not interested in adopting a World of Work-style curriculum, as they already had their own career pathways programs.

Accordingly, in 2019, the district decided to create its own charter high school. It began exploring various school models to gather ideas and inspiration. As Sapper describes it, a working group of about 50 people, composed of teachers, World of Work facilitators, district staff (including Ed Hidalgo), business community representatives, and school board members fanned out across the United States on an eight-day “Edu-Tour.” They were already familiar with their San Diego neighbor, High Tech High, and wanted to see more examples of a reinvented high school experience—places that featured a more student-centered program, used project-based learning, and had a robust Portrait of a Graduate.

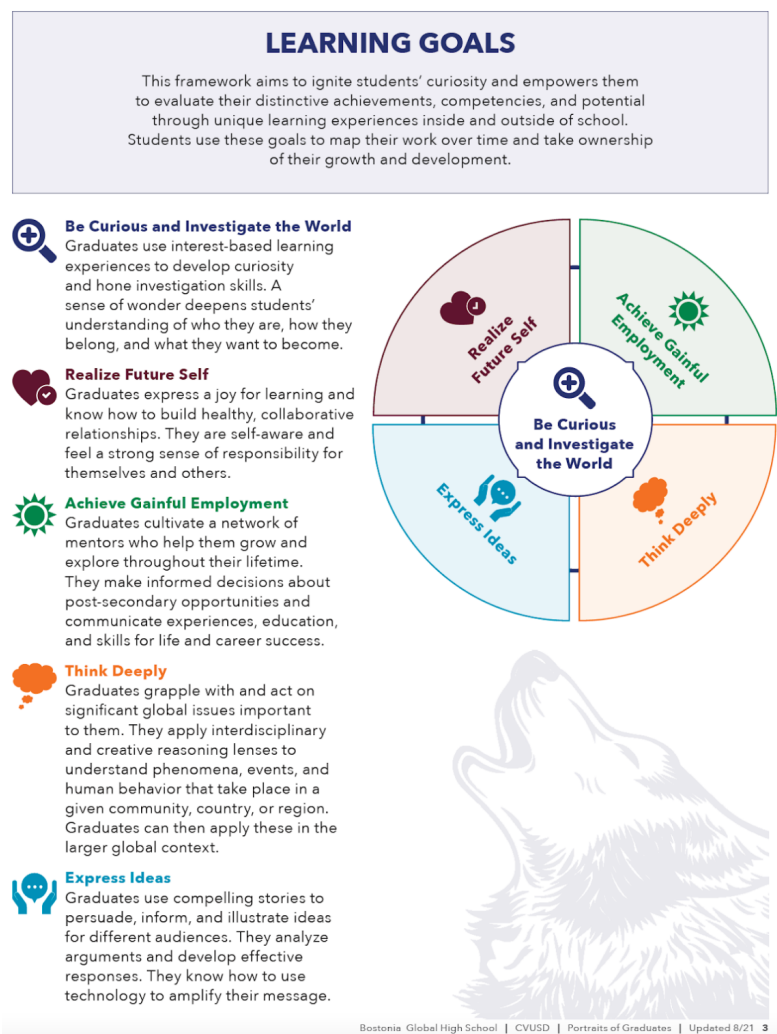
Around the same time the district hired a consultant, [Keith Nuthall](#), to help design the high school along with Nerel Winter, the newly-hired principal-to-be. Nuthall brought a strong background in rethinking high schools, having served as founding principal of [Del Lago Academy](#) in Escondido, CA and [Odyssey STEM Academy](#) in Lakewood, CA. He also consulted for [Big Picture Learning](#), whose focus on a personalized approach to career development with community internships, adult mentors, and real-world projects appealed to Cajon Valley.

In 2020, via video conference meetings over the course of a year, the district’s Portrait of a Graduate (POG) was created by a diverse task force of 25 people. After discussion and input from the community, businesspeople, parents, and educators, a team of teacher-leaders crafted the final language for approval by the group. The POG includes these five components:

Our Graduates Will:

1. Be Curious and Investigate the World
2. Realize Future Self
3. Express Ideas
4. Think Deeply
5. Achieve Gainful Employment

The complete Portrait is below, with descriptors for each outcome.



BOSTONIA GLOBAL HIGH SCHOOL

The CVUSD school board approved the Portrait of a Graduate in June 2021, and Bostonia Global High School opened its doors in August of that year to 130 9th and 10th-grade students. The total population will reach 550 students in grades 9-12. The district envisions a TK-14 program in the future, with the TK-8 Bostonia Language Academy and a community college program added to the high school.

Bostonia Global is a very different kind of high school, in part because its small size allows for a more personalized approach. Students are well known by their teachers, and spend over six hours each week in an advisory class. Instead of typical “core classes,” the school features trimester-long project-based courses as the vehicle for teaching all academic content—which can be converted into a transcript acceptable to colleges and universities. Students explore career interests through the projects they select and community internships/mentorships.

According to principal Nerel Winter, the school is “bridging the gap” between the K-12 sector and the economic sector, by developing the characteristics employers need in future employees. He draws a sharp distinction, however, between what Bostonia Global does and soulless, impersonal job training and career-prep programs. Relationships are given great importance—not just between students and teachers, but with “true mentors” in the world outside of school. Career pathways are tailored to each student, unlike some high schools with specified career academies students must choose from, whether it’s a field of sincere interest or not.

Students Tell Their Stories: TEDx Talks & Elevator Pitches

Bostonia Global High principal Nerel Winter notes, “Students who attend (selective colleges) have high test scores and GPAs, but they often don’t have a story to tell.”

Cajon Valley USD makes sure they do. Prompted by David Miyashiro, it has integrated speaking and presentation skills into the K-8 curriculum as a regular part of classroom instruction, beginning with 30-second TED-style talks by kindergartners. The topic? Themselves, their skills and interests. By the time they reach 8th grade students can deliver polished 18-minute talks, and every year the district hosts a [TEDxKids@ElCajon](#) event. At Bostonia Global High, students prepare well-rehearsed “elevator pitches” they make to employers for potential internships.



ASSESSING AND REPORTING PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE COMPETENCIES

Bostonia High has moved the Portrait of a Graduate from “poster to practice” in its assessment system. Teachers, with support from [Rebecca Midles](#) at Getting Smart, created shared rubrics for each of the five competencies, which they use to plan aligned instruction and guide feedback to students. They also use the rubrics to reflect on and discuss as a team each student’s progress in meeting the competencies. Students use the rubrics to help prepare public exhibitions to teachers and parents - three per year - in which students share evidence from a portfolio to demonstrate their progress. An example of a rubric is shown below:

Competency: Sense of Self: Who am I and what do I care about?				
	Emerging	Developing	Meeting	Advancing
Sense of Self: A graduate explores and develops personal interests, skills, and talents through reflective growth practices.	Demonstrates awareness of how culture and personal experiences influence identity Identifies personal identity and has awareness of other group identities Identifies unique personal attributes Recognizes emotions, thoughts, values, and strengths	Recognizes how culture and experiences influence identity, behavior, and self-confidence Describes personal identity with an awareness of and comfort with membership in multiple groups in society Reflects on one’s prejudices and bias to grow a personal understanding Identifies personal emotions, thoughts, values, and strengths and explains how they influence personal behavior	Articulates an evolving sense of personal identity and considers the effects of different influences Evaluates and understands how different social identities create important and unique aspects of who a learner is Describes and is accountable for personal emotions, thoughts, values, and strengths and explains their origins and how they define personal identity	Explores, selects, and adapts strategies and resources that support personal growth in life, school, and career pathways Evaluates how varied personal social identities impact physical, intellectual, social, and emotional health, and productively reacts to these impacts Considers personal emotions, thoughts, values, and strengths and examines potential circumstances in which they may change

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Cajon Valley USD leaders are serious about the need for profound change in education. Karen Sapper emphasizes the importance of happiness and says, “What we have done forever hasn’t worked. We still had kids who were disengaged, dropping out, who didn’t have a plan for their future. We are encouraged by the data that says what we are doing in Cajon Valley is working.”

Nerel Winter notes, “We realized that we are in the business of human and social capital. That’s an important shift in mindset. And if that’s really the market we are targeting, then we have to completely redefine the system ... Every single human is different and that means their pathway is also different. The beauty of what we do is starting that conversation about understanding self at a very early age. By the time they are in high school, they have a pretty good understanding of themselves. That’s what our Portrait of a Graduate is all about: understanding who you are and where you want to go to, and what does that look like in terms of your own individual pathway. That for me is a powerful shift. And all of that brings other things too. You shift how you approach kids, do behavior, grading...”

David Miyashiro points out, “Before we could ask the question, ‘What do we need to start doing?’ we had to determine what we would stop doing. Innovation most often refers to the practical application of ideas to improve or create goods and services. But, what if the ‘goods and services’ currently in practice in American public schools are poor? What if federal and state education policies have caused our schools to become misaligned with the promise of a brighter future? The answers to these questions are obvious—it’s why so many leaders in K-12 education are asking that we don’t go back to ‘normal’ as we resume post-COVID school.”

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Scaling Student Success is a California partnership dedicated to educating the whole child. With our many partners, we embrace school districts that have engaged their local communities to create a Graduate Profile (or Portrait of a Graduate) as a means of articulating a whole child vision and more holistically and equitably defining student success.

Through our **Community of Practice (CoP)** we support districts to move “from poster to practice,” i.e., fully operationalizing their Graduate Profiles as a promise to their students, families, and communities to move beyond the current outdated metrics of our accountability system and embrace outcomes that better represent the values and priorities of their local communities – its employers, civic and community leaders, educators, parents and students.

Please join us! We welcome any school district, charter school or county office interested in joining the movement to realize its whole child vision and redefine student success. To learn more, please visit our [website](#) and/or see the [invitation](#) to join our CoP.

The **Reimagining CA Schools Innovation Pilot** represents a subset of five (CoP) districts aggressively pursuing a journey to realize their Graduate Profiles, eager to go deeper for greater impact on the student experience, learner outcomes, and systems change. Together, over a period of several years, we are determined to establish proof points to demonstrate to the state – its educational agencies, associations, policymakers and LEAs – the power and potential of a Graduate Profile to drive transformational change in order to more holistically prepare young people for future success.

The school districts involved in the innovation pilot include:

- Anaheim Union High School District
- Cajon Valley Union School District
- Davis Joint Unified School District
- Lindsay Unified School District
- Vista Unified School District

The four **Practice & Policy Briefs** (combined with a [case study of Lindsay USD](#) published earlier this year by NGLC) are intended to tell the real-world stories of California districts participating in the innovation pilot – their journeys to realize their whole child visions, the strategies they have opted to pursue, their lessons learned and challenges faced. Please feel free to share them widely.

In publishing these briefs, our goals are to:

- Embolden school district leaders to pursue a similar vision and path
- Entice policymakers and funders to incentivize these efforts
- Encourage state educational agencies and associations to join the movement

Special thanks to our writer/storyteller, [John Larmer](#), and designer, [Kimberly Rachelle Ranalla](#).

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