

To: The School Reform School Board and Stacey and Larry

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Subject: Creating ownership in schools through Student Leadership Opportunities

High Tech High and School Culture:

High Tech High is a project-based learning environment where students learn by doing and creating. There is no ability grouping, so all students learn in the same class. This helps to address segregation of social class at the school. The school focuses on three guiding principles; personalization, adult-world connection and common intellectual mission. Personalization is the foundation of how we build character, encourage positive school culture through relationships and develop student leadership opportunities. High Tech High has the potential to be more student-run which will create more ownership amongst students and greater buy in amongst parents. Trusting students and giving them voice will greatly improve the school culture.

School Reform Proposal:

Expansion of the Ambassador Program already existing in High Tech Schools will allow for greater student voice and opportunity to lead. It may also give students an additional role in the community while giving them a platform to express concerns and facilitate change. The ambassador program will become more inclusive, decreasing the problem of anonymity and social class segregation by allowing students to take a greater role within their community. Students feel more connected to their schools when they are the ones addressing the major issues, and are able to articulate what they need from the staff to support them in developing solutions.

Statement of Purpose: To create more student ownership in the culture of our school through student leadership opportunities.

Problem: We spend a lot of time as educators working on building school culture, but we are not involving the people we are building the culture for.

Goal: To use the Ambassador Program as a catalyst for the changes our students wish to see and for the community they want to foster.

Essential Questions:

How do we create a more student led environment where all students have a voice?

How can we focus on school culture in addition to other Ambassador Duties?

What can we do to create and foster a positive school culture through this program?

The Ambassador Program at High Tech High

Where We Are:

Currently our Ambassador program is a group of student leaders who are essentially the "face of High Tech High." Their roles as Ambassadors are to help lead informational sessions about our schools and lead school tours for visitors. Our Ambassadors are strong school leaders and they want to do more for our school culture. Throughout the year, they have been taking on more and more responsibility. They have been hosting shadows. Rather than helping with informational sessions, they have been leading them. At our last info session, a parent came up to me and said "I appreciate that the kids are really running the show here. It seems like the teachers are here to support them rather than them supporting the teachers." Recently, a

group of students came to me with a proposal. They asked if they could take lead on various aspects of our Ambassador Program. They thought we had "room for improvement" and they could "make it happen."

Starting an Ambassador Successful Student-Run Program:

I. Gain Student Interest

- Talk to the entire student body about student ownership and how they can be representatives of their school.
- Have a process where students anonymously nominate other students, teachers anonymously nominate students and students can and students can nominate themselves. This process will help students who may not initially stand out as leaders get the opportunity to lead.
- Hold group interviews where student leaders ask the majority of the questions

II. Empower your Students and Give them Voice

- Hold an initial meeting where students pitch ideas and define goals for the program

III. Establish Student Leadership

- Encourage students to take on leadership roles within the program
- Encourage students to lead Ambassador Meetings
 - Assign student-led team builders for each session
 - Start a sign up process where students volunteer to lead meetings

IV. Set Goals

- Example: Put together a training program in which the upper-class man show Freshmen and Middle School Ambassadors how to lead

Where we are Going:

Gaining school wide support from teachers and students:

Ambassadors although being necessary representatives of our school are oftentimes unnoticed and unheard of by both staff and students. The ambassador program has to gain more notoriety in order to facilitate the changes it deems necessary for our school's functioning. Ambassadors are hoping to expand their role to include the following:

I. Collaborate with teachers during study group and staff meetings

- Ambassadors will be included in the agenda and be given the opportunity to lead staff meetings

II. Present their vision and function to the school wide body at community meetings and grade level check- ins

- Ambassadors will have the opportunity to lead community meetings; including the agenda and what is discussed

III. Propose any MAJOR changes in school functioning

- Ambassadors will have the opportunity to propose changes in structures like P.O.L.'s, Student Led Conferences, Advisory

IV. Ensure representation from all advisories

- Advisories will each nominate an ambassador to represent their voices, concerns and feedback

We believe that once staff and students are aware of our student ambassadors, they will have a greater platform in which to address change.

The Sky's the Limit:

Implementing change within the school and modeling the change beyond our school. Once the ambassadors have presented ideas and shared them with the student body and the faculty, the vision is that they will now be empowered to enact some of the proposals for changes that they see fit, based on these conversations with the entire school.

Ambassadors could potentially take on some of the roles that traditionally were led by staff, in an attempt to become more of a stakeholder in their own education and their community. These roles are not limited to, but could include taking on the following leadership initiatives traditionally designed by staff:

- I. Develop a new calendar of events that they've created and plan to implement.
- II. Lead advisory classes and introduce the core curriculum and activities for the year.
- III. Host the community meetings
- IV. Peer-mentor
- V. Be a liaison between students and staff through meetings
- VI. Plan community-wide service opportunities
- VII. Parent Association liaison
- VIII. Communication of School Culture
- IX. Summer bridge

As we review our essential questions;

How do we create a more student lead environment where all students have a voice?

How can we focus on school culture in addition to other Ambassador Duties?

What can we do to create and foster a positive school culture through this program?

What can the Ambassador program do and where can it go from here? Many students feel the need to be empowered, not just the students at High Tech High.

By coming up with solutions to some of our own questions at our own schools, we can work towards collaborations with other schools and help them develop their own Ambassador programs.

The Ambassador Program can extend into the following possibilities:

- Ambassador Training
 - Develop a leadership retreat for Ambassadors
 - Sustain leadership through development training sessions throughout the year:
 - Anti-defamation League
 - Jessie Program
- Ambassador Program Dissemination
 - Help Ambassadors lead others and inspire the next generation of Ambassadors

