

Success Story

Mountain House High School

MOUNTAIN HOUSE, CA

Grades: 9–12

Reach: 40 students per year

Model: Virtual program within public school

Impact: Reformat alternative education program to give students the opportunity to learn work skills and recover credits.

Time Period: 2015–2019

Removing the Stigma from Alternative Education

The trend toward alternative education has led to interesting developments in schools and districts around the country. Many have compartmentalized their alternative programs, creating alternative high schools or specific magnet schools, but within Mountain House High School in California, administrators Ben Fobèrt and Karen Perez have created a program within a traditional framework that meets the needs of more students.

RETHINKING CREDIT RECOVERY

Mountain House High School was established in 2014, and after its first year, the administration realized they needed an alternative education option. Karen Perez, Coordinator for Alternative Education, established a self-contained credit recovery lab for students, and saw immediate success. However, she felt compelled to do more for these struggling students, and she worked with Principal Ben Fobèrt to create a career and technical education program for work-based learning. Together, they named it EPIC, which stands for empower, personalize, innovate, collaborate.

Students in EPIC come to school three days a week to complete their coursework in Edgenuity Courseware® using a blended learning model. The other two days, known as “leaving to learn days,” see students leaving campus to participate in job shadows and internships within the



community. The aim is for students to earn all the credits they need for a high school diploma while also preparing to enter the workforce after graduation.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

By partnering with employers in the community, the EPIC program can tailor instruction to the specific skills students need to begin employment. The first few weeks of the semester focus on soft-skills like handshakes, dress code, and communication techniques, and then students are released to the industry partners to begin working. EPIC has established partnerships with many community employers, including restoration management companies, car corporations, and landscape design firms. Many of these employers struggle to find qualified employees, and this partnership enables them to train their future workforce from the bottom up. After completing a job shadow or internship,

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the students reflect on their experience to help understand what qualities they are looking for in future jobs.

REMOVING THE STIGMA FROM ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Before EPIC, Mountain House administrators believed their alternative education students felt ostracized and embarrassed by their lack of success in a traditional program. Part of the reasoning behind renaming the alternative education program to EPIC was to remove that stigma and help these students still feel like a part of the school community. By embracing the fact that all students learn differently, Mountain House High School is creating new pathways to success. And once students are caught up on their credits, they can rejoin the main campus. Through continuous feedback from students, parents, and industry partners, Perez and Fobèrt designed this program to focus on the students’ strengths and values while providing services that are personalized to their needs.

Working within the K–12 public school system gives these alternative students more access to educators and peers who can have a positive influence. And since a main feature of EPIC is the ability to “leave to learn,” it’s essential to have the flexibility offered by online coursework, which can still seem cutting edge to some administrators. However, Fobèrt, Perez, and their team of educators aren’t afraid to “fail forward,” says Fobèrt. “We are learning by doing,” Fobèrt continues, and he insists that by doing things that are “good for kids and research-based, you can’t go wrong.”

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Mountain House High School offers face-to-face, hybrid, and fully online options for students in addition to the EPIC alternative education program. This one-to-one school strives to provide personalized learning options, and “Edgenuity is the vehicle for us to do that,” says Fobèrt. In the future, they hope to expand EPIC and their early college program, which allows students to take classes through the local community college while they complete their high school coursework. The goal is that when students graduate high school, they also receive an associate’s degree, and “Edgenuity and online learning allows them the time to do that,” says Fobèrt.