

# Success Story

## Sacramento Academic & Vocational Academy (SAVA)

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

**Grades:** 7–12

**Model:** Hybrid blended learning

**Time Period:** 2012–2017

**Reach:** 1,000 students across 4 campuses

**Goal:** Help struggling students thrive while attending school and after graduation

**Impact:** Increased graduation rates and 75% of students go to college or begin working after graduation

## Hands-on Career and Technical Education Program Reinvigorates Students

Reengaging students who have lost interest in school is challenging, so the Sacramento Academic & Vocational Academy (SAVA) designed a robust career and technical education program that allows students to pursue their interests while preparing for life beyond the classroom.

### REACHING STRUGGLING STUDENTS

Eleven years ago SAVA opened with the mission of educating kids who don't get the support and services they need in the traditional school setting. The average student at SAVA reads four years below grade level, is a full year behind where they should be in school, and has attended at least two other schools before enrolling at SAVA. Many of these students need more than a typical school and district can give them.

As one of Gateway Community Charters' nine schools in the Sacramento region, each of which has a particular focus, SAVA offers a robust, hands-on CTE program. Students can enroll in 1 of the 10 pathways that they offer, covering everything from the performing arts to food service to fashion design. Students complete their core courses online using Edgenuity®, and have access to labs where they can do the hands-on work required for their particular pathway.



As soon as students begin attending SAVA, the first goal of the faculty is to make them feel welcome and a part of the community. They do this by [Capturing Kids' Hearts](#), which is a program that focuses on social and emotional learning and building relationships between educators and students. To the SAVA faculty, the components of this program are nonnegotiable for the success of both the students and the school.

SAVA Principal Morri Elliott says, “We love on kids, so for their first 30 days, the focus is on social and emotional help for kids, and connecting and building a relationship. If they buy into their teacher, they buy into the program as a whole. When kids come into SAVA, they come into a cohort of 3–4 teachers so you really build a small community here. With that community, they’re going to do well.” The SAVA community has embraced this program so much that it was named a Capturing Kids’ Hearts National Showcase School in 2017 and 2018.

### MEETING STUDENT NEEDS WITH FLEXIBILITY AND ENGAGING CURRICULUM

Once the students have bought into SAVA and its faculty, the real fun begins. SAVA uses a hybrid blended learning model, so students do some of their work at home, and some at school. Because of the unusual schedules of many students, SAVA is run similar to a university, which gives them the flexibility they need. To help bring students up to grade level, many of them use [Renaissance Star 360®](#) to assess where they are, and the individualized learning paths in [MyPath™](#) to catch up in English Language Arts and math.

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Each career pathway consists of 3–4 semesters’ worth of hands-on CTE courses, including a capstone course, and when a student completes a pathway, they also earn professional certifications and/or college credit. The hope is that they’ll either begin working in the industry after graduation, or go on to get a higher degree. And after five years of having these defined pathways for students, SAVA has seen 25% of their graduates go on to work in the industry they studied, and an astonishing 50% of graduates go on to college.

On campus, they have state-of-the-art facilities for each of the different pathways, giving students lots of opportunities for hands-on experience. Culinary students receive instruction from a working chef, and cook in full, professional kitchens and prepare food to serve to the other students. The full vehicle repair shop at SAVA enables students in the transportation pathway to get their hands dirty diagnosing problems, repairing damaged cars and repainting them, and more. Students in the construction pathway learn the basics of working on a job site, and go on to build tiny houses for homeless veterans. Other pathways have similarly robust facilities, giving students abundant opportunities to actually apply what they’re learning in a real way.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR STUDENTS?

Vice Principal Ashley Madden had this to say: “CTE classes spark their interest in school again, and I think that’s the first step. When they see that these courses are related to their lives, it gives them a path to do something that they want to do. They were met with discouragement throughout their academic careers, and I think [SAVA] reinvigorates them a bit.”