



## Restructure the School Day to Meet Students' Individual Needs

### HOW & WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

**Alta Loma High School** (ALHS), part of **Chaffey Joint Union High School District**, built the Alta Loma Academy Program as a response to a deep analysis of student achievement data, which showed that the school was not meeting students' academic needs. Alta Loma's Academy Program is ALHS's homegrown embedded system of support that takes place Monday through Thursday during a 28-minute fourth period class. By offering this support during the school day, Alta Loma High School has seen growth in student attendance, GPA, and a-g completion. This redesign also illustrates that it is possible to offer differentiated academic supports during the school day, build a culture of caring, and demonstrate a commitment to ensuring students graduate college and career ready. Now in its seventh year of implementation, Alta Loma High School leaders attribute most of their success to the Academy's focus on ninth grade students.

Every incoming ninth grader begins the year in **BRAVE Academy**, a class with approximately 25-26 students, 5-6 **Link Crew** leaders (see Defining Link Crew), and a teacher. Here students participate in a range of activities that help build positive relationships with teachers and peers, as well as garner valuable information about ALHS. This model allows ninth grade students a space to comfortably navigate high school, learn about supports available to them, and understand the necessary steps to graduate college and career ready. Most impactful are the student-led lessons that are designed and delivered by Link Crew leaders. This helps create a culture where students are both teachers and learners, as well as help build lasting mentorship relationships. BRAVE Academy was particularly helpful for Randy, a ninth-grade student, who explained, "Brave Academy is a great opportunity to get some of my homework done in the middle of the day, since I have sports in the evening. My Link Leaders have helped me learn to be organized, and they encourage me to get good grades."

While ninth grade students are in BRAVE Academy, tenth through twelfth graders have an option between BRAVE Activities, BRAVE Tutorial, and BRAVE Study and Read (see sidebar on back to learn more).

Similarly, to help students succeed in college preparatory courses and graduate college and career ready, **Culver City High School** adopted Link Crew and implemented a model to create a culture where students are encouraged to push themselves academically knowing that they have access to the supports that will help them succeed. The model includes:

- Centaur Plus, a 24-minute intervention program during the school day, which students can also utilize to participate in enrichment activities. Teachers work together to identify and enroll students who would benefit from the additional supports Centaur Plus provides. Students can self-enroll by signing up through

### THE ISSUE

Schools and districts are often constrained – whether by resources or expertise – by gaps in the services they can provide that help students become college and career ready.

### AN APPROACH

Students thrive when they know that faculty and staff at their school care about them<sup>1</sup> and are invested in their success.<sup>2</sup> Embedding relevant academic and extracurricular supports into a students' school day helps students succeed in college preparatory courses and graduate college and career ready.



## Defining Link Crew

**Link Crew leaders are eleventh and twelfth grade students who act as mentors, guides, and tutors to ninth grade students.** To become a Link Crew leader, students submit an application and participate in an interview process to ensure their commitment and that they are the right fit for the program. As part of their training, Link Crew leaders participate in a summer program and have a zero period during the school year that helps them prepare for the BRAVE Academy courses they co-teach. Of her experience with Link Crew, Ana shared, “I moved from a different country in eighth grade, so coming here as a freshman in only my second year I had no clue...I didn’t even know what the SAT was or what classes I was supposed to take. Link leaders helped me know what I really needed to actually graduate. So I wanted to do the same thing when I was a junior.”

## Describing Brave Activities, Tutorial, and Study and Read

**BRAVE Activities** are enrichment opportunities (such as art, dance, piano, and fitness) for students with a 2.5 GPA or above and no Ds or Fs in their semester grades. These classes create a space for students to include extracurricular activities during the school day and for teachers to design courses that they are passionate about outside of their subject areas. This model helps alleviate some of the limitations in funding and curriculum requirements that school leaders often face when they want to include elective courses in their master schedules.

**BRAVE Tutorial** is designed for students who are struggling academically in one subject area (such as English or math) to receive additional help from a teacher in that subject area. Students are referred into BRAVE Tutorial and, if their grades rise to a C or above, they can transfer out of the class at the end of the semester and into BRAVE Activities. BRAVE Tutorial helps offer targeted tutoring and re-teaching opportunities during the school day as opposed to requiring students to stay after school or attend Saturday school.

**BRAVE Study and Read** was created for students who want time during the school day to complete homework assignments, participate in tutoring, study, or read. Unlike BRAVE Tutorial, this time is unstructured (although teachers do utilize common guidelines). Students in BRAVE Study and Read can independently decide what to work on each day.

the school’s app, an option that becomes increasingly important as the school year progresses and students find themselves struggling in rigorous courses.

- A summer bootcamp which is designed for first-time AP/honors takers, who are generally underrepresented students of color and low-income students, and serves as an introduction to the course by the instructor who teaches it during the school year.
- Offering students the opportunity to “test-drive” challenging courses during the first three weeks of school. Although it begins as a “test-drive,” most students choose to keep the course, a decision that is largely due to Centaur Plus and summer bootcamp.

<sup>1</sup> Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999). Academic knowledge and skills generally refers to elements such as cognitive strategies and content knowledge. Nonacademic knowledge and skills, on the other hand, refers to elements such as self-awareness and goal setting.

<sup>2</sup> Leticia Rojas and Daniel D. Liou, “Social Justice Teaching Through the Sympathetic Touch of Caring and High Expectations for Students of Color,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 68, no. 1 (Dec. 2016): 28-40.

## Guiding Questions for Advocacy

- 1 **Does your district/school offer students structured academic supports during the school day? If so, how are these structured?**
- 2 **Does your district/school offer incoming ninth grade students’ orientation or a bridge program to high school? If so, how is this structured?**
- 3 **Does your district/school offer a Link Crew program or something similar? If so, how is it structured?**
- 4 **How does your district/school use the master schedule to align with student needs?**
- 5 **What student supports does your school/district offer to support students’ academic and socio-emotional needs?**



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