

RIEHL: Trade Tech High lives up to charter school promise

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We once took pride in our nation's comprehensive high schools. While other countries divided their students at an early age into either academic or vocational training streams, our schools prepared students both for college and for jobs that paid a living wage.

Now, after a decade of obsessing over standardized test scores, vocational/technical education has been largely abandoned. What's been left behind is a lingering achievement gap between the haves and have nots and little interest in measuring skills required for jobs of the future: learning how to learn, becoming a self-starter, creative problem-solving, collaboration, teamwork, and leadership.

Not many charter schools live up to California's 1992 Charter School Act, requiring an "emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils who are identified as academically low achieving." Parental choice has resulted mostly in giving up on neighborhood schools as the great levelers of educational and economic opportunity.

Vista's North County Trade Tech High School is an exception, a charter school that lives up to its promise. The school's success with a diverse student population of 120 students (60 percent nonwhite, 66 percent disadvantaged), is a model of what charter schools were meant to do.

Doreen Quinn, Trade Tech's chief executive officer, and Principal Bryan O'Donnell explained how the school delivers on its mission statement by implementing the new three R's --- Relationships, Relevance and Rigor: "to graduate students with a strong blend of academic and workforce competencies necessary for future success in post-secondary education and in the building and construction industry."



Trade Tech High junior, Fernando Agraz, hones his CAD skills using Autodesk® Revit® architecture building design software.

You read that right. It's a voc/tech high school, with state-of-the-art classroom technology, which also offers courses required for admission to the state's two public universities. Those not headed to a university may complete courses yielding community college credit. The school's affiliation with local building and trade unions offers opportunities for non-college bound students to enter paid apprenticeships directly from

high school.

The school attracts many students who may have felt like losers before discovering Trade Tech High. O'Donnell told me, "Many, if not most, of our students have had attendance problems at previous schools." Their average daily attendance is now 93 percent. As Quinn put it, "There are many ways to win here."

If you measure success by test scores, Trade Tech's project-based learning is working. This year's Academic Performance Index score (API) rose by an astonishing 159 points, nearly 30 percent higher than last year's score. Success on the high school exit exam is even more impressive, with 87 percent of 10th graders passing in English Language Arts, higher than the passing rates of the district, county and state.

This charter school takes us back to the future to what a truly comprehensive public high school should be.

This is a reprint of an article published by North County Times on October 7, 2011 by RICHARD J. RIEHL. Richard Riehl writes from Carlsbad and can be contacted at fogcutter1@yahoo.com. [Click here to access the originally published article in the North County Times.](#) Copyright North County Times, 2011, all rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.