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Oasis Early College High
School

Santa Cruz, CA



Oasis High School, located on the Cabrillo College campus in Aptos, CA, is one of the Santa Cruz County Office of Education's Alternative Education programs. All Oasis students work with their parent or guardian, teacher, and counselor to design an educational plan. These plans typically include:

- Weekly one-on-one meetings with an Oasis teacher on the Cabrillo Campus
- Hybrid, online, independent study courses offered by Oasis
- Dual enrollment in Cabrillo College courses, which may be hybrid, online or on the campus
- Career and Technical education courses
- Tutoring with additional subject-specific teachers
- Service, academic, or college major related internships

In addition to their college courses, jobs, internships, and other interests, students frequently work on their coursework at the Oasis campus before or after their college classes meet.

“When I started teaching at Oasis I had been serving as a regional director serving over a hundred California school districts with planning, implementation, and evaluation of hybrid and online learning. During that time, I was embedded at some schools for short periods and found that the best way to help districts improve their effort was to be part of the staff on an ongoing basis. I saw some alternative education settings that had the flexibility to make this type of approach work, because they are outside traditional constraints. I found that it's challenging to transform programs and classrooms as a trainer delivering technology and pedagogy strategies, but by collaborating with departments, and individual teachers and their students, I could find the high impact levers for change. I can identify problems and help teachers see how hybrid and online learning are part of the solution, help them through the ongoing implementation issues, and develop evaluation tools and processes they can continue to improve.

At Oasis, students learn within a school that gives them flexibility and autonomy. They are required to come to campus or meet with their instructor once per week, but most students spend more time here than is required because they like the interaction with teachers and with each other. They are also learning in online courses from home, in college courses on the Cabrillo College campus, and in jobs and internships.

Teaching in this unusual instructional model has helped me continue to evolve my teaching. My thought process continually shifts in how I think about accessing curriculum, delivering instruction, evaluating learning, and using space and time. Initially, we started with figuring out how hybrid and online learning fit into our instructional model. Over time, we started thinking about the most effective way to deliver instruction, and hybrid, online, and in person just became a continuum of options for providing

seamless instruction and assessment. Our students are part of the decision making process about which courses and delivery system best serves their learning goals. This is truly personalized by student. Listening to students articulate their education plan, make informed decisions, and lead parent meetings inspires my continuous improvement focus.

I have many more opportunities to collaborate with other teachers because we aren't in front of 30 students at set times. We can think as a team about what a student needs, and we do this routinely. I am able to invite another teacher who loves British literature into a conversation with my student about how they can demonstrate learning objectives for an assignment in that course. My colleagues will ask me to join their meeting with a student to review their ed plan for alignment to college admissions and transfer agreements. Though each teacher has an assigned roster of students, students appreciate the fluidity of teaching and access to different types of expertise within the school.

When I started my blended teaching journey I wish I had recognized more quickly that hybrid and online learning are more than just solutions for current teaching and learning challenges. These learning experiences prepare students for the transition to

college and career learning models. When a student texted me from college to say they were grateful they knew how to navigate an online course so they weren't scared or frustrated like their peers, I realized we have an obligation to provide those opportunities for preparation. I have noticed students who have completed hybrid and online courses have a stronger sense of self-efficacy when faced with the new state computer based assessments. I have heard those students reassuring students with anxiety and explaining how online assessment work and where to look for tools like menus, clocks, and calculators.

Teaching students how to develop their education plan, determine the delivery model, and set their own pace, more than any other strategies I've seen, get students to take ownership of their learning most quickly and most deeply. Students have often told me this is the first time they have had a say in their learning "Before this I was always told where to be, what teacher to learn from, what to do, when to do it." There was very little room for individualized learning. It's all about ownership.

Students consistently share they are excited about learning again because they feel supported in creating a personalized map for their journey and prepared to navigate the landscape. ■