

VISTA GRANDE HIGH SCHOOL

A brief description of the school

- Free and public, open to all students, chartered by Taos District in January 2006.
- Scheduled to open for 120 students in grades 9-10 in Fall 2007. Eventually will have 60 students in each grade 9-12 for a total student body of 240.
- All graduates are prepared for college or other post-secondary education.
- Founded upon the rich cultural, ethnic and economic diversity in Taos County that is mirrored in school leadership, in the student body, and in the curriculum.
- School culture based upon a common code of conduct shared by faculty and students.
- Fieldwork, service and outdoor adventure are integrated with academics at each grade level. Learning environments also include internships, mentoring, and “real world” projects with authentic audiences who care about the quality of student work.
- Affiliated with the nationally-acclaimed Expeditionary Learning school design model.
- Standards-based curriculum is taught each semester through thematically-linked, project-based interdisciplinary learning units called “Learning Expeditions”
- Character formation is an integral part of the curriculum. Subjects are infused with ethical content. Each graduate is prepared to be a responsible and capable global citizen who is able to articulate a coherent moral philosophy.
- Project-based learning offering real-world challenges that integrate head, hands, and heart.
- Student portfolios and teacher narratives in addition to grades and standardized tests.
- Located in central Taos to attract students from all parts of Taos County.

Our mission

Our mission at Vista Grande High School is to nurture and prepare high-school youth in a highly personalized, "hands-on" learning environment so that each student may become a self-confident, competent, respectful and contributing member of our society.

At VGHS, we accomplish this mission by maintaining a strong sense of community and creating a compelling, project-based educational environment. The majority of our curriculum is taught through engaging and integrated thematic units. Major intent is put toward intellectual development, practical skill-building, affective learning, character formation, community membership and moral growth.

Goals for our students

We expect our students to come from a wide variety of economic, cultural and educational backgrounds throughout Taos County. We believe that all of our students can learn and succeed in high school, provided they experience a learning environment that is motivating, compassionate, appropriate and challenging. Expeditionary Learning, our school model, provides a framework to create that kind of environment. Vista Grande can motivate students who previously have been unsuccessful in traditional schools, while also challenging successful students to gain deeper meaning and richness in their learning. Below are some performance benchmarks signifying the kind of student success we expect to achieve at Vista Grande by our *fifth year*:

- All upper-level students score at or above grade level on literacy and math measures, or show substantial yearly progress toward that goal. All upper-level students display proficiency on required state exams.
- All students demonstrate high quality work through public presentations and portfolios, each student displaying best effort and working toward identified next steps.
- Ninety percent of students graduate from high school or attain a GED.
- Student attendance at or above 90 percent.
- All graduates meet specified character and community measures and meet schoolwide Expectations of Student Proficiency.
- All students meet fitness and health standards set by the school.
- All students prepared to enter college or another post-secondary educational setting.

Goals for the school

If we are doing our job by successfully motivating and challenging all students, then the school as a whole looks different, feels different. These differences flow into the whole school community, and show up as measurable outcomes as well. The following are some benchmarks we intend to achieve in our *first five years*. These benchmarks will signify that Vista Grande is meeting its goals and displaying school-wide success:

- Student performance exceeds regional averages with regard to:
 - Attendance, Graduation, Retention and Reduced Student Mobility
 - Performance on state-required assessments
- School is highly ranked by parents on the NM Quality of Education survey
- School is at full enrollment and has a waiting list of applicants
- High degree of parent and community voluntarism and participation
- Ninety percent or more of graduates being admitted to college or another post-secondary educational setting
- School is judged by external review to be doing an exemplary job implementing the Expeditionary Learning model

Our staff, our schedule, our structures

- A team of core teachers for 60 students in each grade (9-12)
- Extensive shared planning time is made weekly for each team of core teachers
- Flexible block scheduling used to support project-based learning and fieldwork. Scheduling policies reflect what is best for learning, rather than what is most efficient or cost-effective.
- Classes in grades 9-10 are planned to be limited to 24 students
- Students are organized in crews of no more than 15 students
- Instructional Guide coordinates semester-long learning in and out of classroom
- School uses a fleet of vehicles for field work and outdoor expeditions

Our curriculum

- Thematically-linked, project-based, multi-week “Learning Expeditions” will integrate core subject areas, providing engaging learning while meeting state standards
- Learning Expeditions act as “core curriculum” for all students, allowing for few electives
- 2-3 weeks of wilderness expeditions per year for 9th and 10th grades

Funding sources (estimated)

- \$1,300,000 annual operating budget from NM Public Education Department (SEG)
- \$450,000 from Federal Stimulus Grant (\$150,000 per year for first three years)
- Walton Foundation planning (\$20,000) and possible implementation (\$180,000) grants
- Additional government monies for special education, technology, bilingual education

VISTA GRANDE High School

A new public charter school for Taos County

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vghs.org