

San Miguel High School



Focus and Preparation

At 7:00 a.m. on any given day, 25% of the student body at San Miguel High School in Tucson, AZ, is gathered in the school's all-purpose room for their weekly assembly before leaving for their internship for the day. The atmosphere is calm and professional. Students are dressed appropriately for a day at work—no jeans, T-shirts, or flip-flops. The students are joined by their work coordinators and van drivers.

On this particular day—only the third day of the corporate internship program for this group of students—the topic is van safety and the drivers participate in the lesson. They emphasize the importance of everyone taking responsibility for the group's safety to and from school. The groups are composed of students from each grade, so the seniors serve as peer mentors for the younger students in their group.

The discussion is lively and includes many examples of good and not so good behavior. Of particular interest to anyone who's ever worked with adolescents is the discussion about gossip. Students giggle but get the point when the work coordinator imitates a typical "he said, she said" teenage interchange and the resulting distractions. The emphasis is on having respect for one another. When the lesson is over, the students leave the room and depart for work.

The students will return to school after eight hours on the job.

The corporate internship program is a cornerstone of the education that students receive at San Miguel. Four students share one job, so each student works for a corporate partner outside of the school every fourth day. The money they earn is used to help defray the cost of their education, and the experience is valuable to their overall education.

After the students leave for their internships, the school day begins for everyone else. The sense of purpose that marked the internship group carries over to the entire student body. All students are dressed in work attire and eager to get to class. Teachers are at the classroom doors to greet them. Instruction begins immediately. The lessons are engaging and focus on what students are learning. As a ninth-grade student said, "I've learned to ask questions when I struggle with the material. The teachers always help me learn."

After a recent summer professional development training, the teachers adopted common language to describe skills that apply to both the classroom and the work site. Consensus was that using a common language to articulate the skills that students should have would clarify the school's expectations for students. These





Professional dress is a reflection of the attitudes that students have toward their work and their education.

desired skills are:

- Persistence with new tasks
- Teaming and collaboration
- Productivity and self-direction
- Complex reasoning (compare, classify, analyze, construct, and support)
- Precision and accuracy.

Teachers weave these concepts into their lessons so that they can reinforce the school's mission of preparing every student for college and career on a daily basis. The connections between teachers and students and students and their goals are clear. Tenth grader Fernando spoke for all the students when he said, "The teachers want you to succeed.... They will help you with your work. And when you work with successful people, you will be successful." This attitude of self-confidence and determination permeates the school, making the mission a reality.



A Culture of Collaboration

Br. Nick Gonzalez, the principal, was asked about the obstacles that San Miguel had to overcome to achieve student success. His response emphasized the need to break down the barriers of isolation among the teachers to establish a collaborative community.

The community at San Miguel High School has begun to overcome a number of obstacles individually and collectively. The students of this community face the brutal realities associated with low socioeconomic status: unstable home environments, poor health care, and low educational expectations. San Miguel cannot change what happens at home, but it can provide a consistent, disciplined, and safe environment for all students. To that end, it participates in the federal free and reduced-price lunch program to provide basic services and it strives to inspire all students with a clear vision of being college-bound with a focused four-year program designed to ensure that all students can meet that goal.

The teachers at San Miguel are mission-driven professionals and people of faith. They have evolved beyond the typical Catholic-school mentality of independent fiefdoms to a culture of collaboration. We have all come to realize that love is not enough to save the students. Individual labors are insufficient; the most productive effort is a collective one through a culture of consistent reinforcement of skills for success. Each teacher is now open to sharing ideas and working together to improve student learning. Faculty members now own the Lasallian mission. The generic and largely innocuous Catholic identity has given way to passion and curiosity about our Lasallian history and lived mission.

Personally, I have progressed a good deal in my understanding of my role in this community. Initially, I presumed that the key task was to hire very talented and independent professionals and then to stay out of their way. That meant minimal classroom visits. Although there were individual pockets of excellence, there was also mediocrity. The leadership



vacuum was filled with loud faculty members who browbeat the well-intentioned. Gradually, I realized that I must risk becoming the educational leader: the principal teacher. New faculty members were hired on the basis of their belief in and experience with collaboration, which meant hiring mostly public school teachers. I found my voice and developed a management style based on collaboration through encouragement.

Collectively, San Miguel grew into an educational community through the strategic planning process. Bringing together students, faculty, staff, parents, and community members resulted in a careful examination of the school's mission and identity. A clear direction and measures of success were methodically developed and embraced. Participation in the Catholic Lasallian Assessment Process, the Western Catholic Education Association/North Central Educational Association accreditation process, and the Cristo Rey Network Educational Initiative were experiences of synchronicity. The San Miguel community begins its sixth year with a wholesale commitment to transforming the lives of its students by preparing them for college.



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Planning to Succeed

Although there is a unique context at San Miguel, the leadership team knows what other schools might learn from them.

A variety of programs make San Miguel unique. We are especially proud of our corporate internship program that gives students real-world professional work experiences as part of their schooling. But perhaps the most important strategy is that we are truly a community effort. A feasibility study was done before we even began to measure the support of families, neighborhoods, and businesses. Tuscon area businesses partner with the school to hire students or to sponsor their jobs at nonprofits, and faculty members train our student workers and regularly reinforce workplace skills in their classrooms. In six years, we've created an incredible support network that employs and mentors our students.

Not all our unique programs translate to other campuses, but some will help other schools achieve their goals. The school underwent a strategic planning process last spring. It brought all stakeholders of the school together,

including external partners and donors, to envision where the school should be in three years. The plan is already being implemented and will also be reviewed, assessed, and revised on a regular basis.

Part of that plan is a detailed goal-setting process to develop academic curriculum documentation that defines the desired learning outcomes for each subject at each grade level, then works backward to describe the activities and learning experiences necessary to achieve those outcomes. With those documents in place, every teacher, substitute teacher, parent, and student knows what is supposed to be learned and can assess whether or not that learning has been accomplished.

Another strategy that is employed by our school is that everyone is encouraged to identify and actively practice the Lasallian values. Even during our admissions process, parents and students are introduced to the five core values: faith in the presence of God, respect for all persons, inclusive community, quality education, and concern for the poor and social justice. Throughout our student leadership activities, classroom activities, and internship procedures, these values are clearly delineated as the basis for our decision making. When the staff, parents, and students of a school can articulate and share common core values, they will be able to communicate better and support one another through stressful or difficult times.

A third strategy that has helped the school to maintain a safe and friendly campus culture is the school's belief in an inclusive, equitable community. Students are encouraged to help one another with their studies. The peer tutoring program is one specific example of this kind of student-to-student support. Staff members make it clear that upperclassmen and students who are performing at the highest achievement levels are expected to orient, mentor, and help underclassmen and those students not performing on grade level. This expectation has been paramount in developing a sense of community and pride among



San Miguel High School

TUSCON, AZ

Principal
Br. Nick
Gonzalez



Grades
9-12

Enrollment
350

Community
Urban

Demographics
84% Hispanic, 10% American Indian, 2% Black, 1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% other; 80% free and reduced-price meals eligible



Key Elements

- Common instructional language
- Five core skills of success that relate to school's mission
- Teachers who are certified in subject areas
- Collaborative instructional practices
- *Breaking Ranks* framework in core areas of collaborative leadership; personalization; and curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Corporate internship program

It is clear from the performance of the majority of our students that if they know what is expected of them, no matter how difficult, they will strive to achieve it.

San Miguel students, reducing instances of bullying, and improving retention rates, as students develop a sense of responsibility to our school. Faculty members are busy and any time to work together is appreciated. We have restructured the year's professional development calendar to allow for Lasallian formation, grade-level work, and department work.

Another major strategy that we feel has strengthened San Miguel as a learning community is our clear, high expectations. We tell students every day:

- This work is important
- You can do it
- I won't give up on you.

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Coupled with setting high expectations is a commitment to caring for each student by a dedicated and well-trained staff member. Many of our students tell us that the level of sincere concern that they receive from every staff member on campus is what has made the difference in their ability to perform at San Miguel and is one of their strongest reasons for staying at San Miguel, despite the high expectations we have of them. **PL**

Corporate Internship Program

Through the Corporate Internship Program, students are prepared for success not only in the classroom but also in the workplace. Every student spends five days each month working in an entry-level position in a professional setting. This four-year work-study program helps students broaden their horizons and develop practical workplace skills. In return, corporate partners compensate the school to help offset the cost of student tuition, and families pay only a modest portion. It is a unique opportunity to gain valuable work experience and to pay for the majority of their education. The corporate employers benefit by strengthening their clerical staff and receive the satisfaction of knowing that they are directly helping students who are in need of an excellent education.

San Miguel students attend an extended schedule of classes four days a week and work for their corporate employer on the fifth day. On a rotating basis, a team of four students shares one full-time entry-level position in a professional setting. The work study program trains the students; transports them to and from their jobs; and handles employers' responsibilities, such as payroll, workers' compensation, and insurance.

San Miguel is a member of the Cristo Rey Network that began in 1996 in Chicago and now encompasses 19 schools throughout the United States with the goal of putting college preparatory education within the grasp of young people from families of limited financial means so that they may achieve their potential. More than 96% of Cristo Rey graduates attend college.