



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HANNA ACADEMY

Reflections on the First Semester as a New Nonpublic High School

Q and A with Chrissy Brady

Director of Special Education

What changed when Archbishop Hanna High School officially became the non-public school, Hanna Academy, in the summer of 2023?

Hanna's high school was always a private school, and technically still is. The 'non-public' status means that the Academy is approved by the California Department of Education to accept referrals from public schools. That's the big difference. Regular private schools can accept parent applications from the public school system but they can not have the public school system refer students for their specialized services.

How did the curriculum model change?

Our faculty took the best of what Hanna has always done, kept the elements of trauma-informed care that really work, and added in more elements of support and special education. We built on our existing strengths of differentiation and individualization. The focus changed from a college-prep model to a foundation of building literacy, application, and critical thinking skills in students while honing in and refining special education practices in teachers. What we discovered was missing in the former approach was largely the lack of adaptability skills in our graduates.

What are adaptability skills?

Adaptability skills - or critical thinking skills - are proficiencies used to adjust to new situations and change actions as needed. This involves strategic thinking and being open-minded when encountering real-world obstacles. Unexpected changes, and worst-case scenarios can happen in any environment, and learning how to successfully navigate those situations is key to becoming a thriving adult.

From the point of view of a special education teacher, it's all about positive affirmation and making sure the student understands that it's okay to make mistakes. There's no mistakes, only learning - and that's hugely different from a 'drill and kill' mentality.





Chrissy Brady, Director of Special Education, left, and Michael Giuffre, Education Specialist, far right with Hanna Academy students

How is the Hanna Academy faculty unique?

The attrition rate for special education teachers who leave in the first five years of teaching is 50 percent. Many of our faculty members have been here for ten years or longer, which makes most of us veterans in this field.

Because of the camaraderie we have here as a staff, it's been described as different from other places where we've worked. It's more family-like, but really, I think it's more like a tactical strike unit because we work together as a team. It's very strategic - we go in, we support the student, we get them to where they need to be to get that education, and then we back off so that they can do it on their own.

The old Hanna tagline of "Faith, Education, and Caring" still holds true if you are, like how I am, of the view that faith is the belief in the unseen. And with all educators, it is a cheesy analogy, but it's very, very true; educators do

not see the fruits of their labor. It's like being a gardener. We plant the seed, tend it, care for it, and give it the best possible conditions. But we aren't always around to see it grow or blossom. Sometimes, we'll get to see some growth, but other times, we don't see anything because all that growth is happening underneath.

And that's very similar to the students we work with. So, we have to be the kind of individuals who are okay with not necessarily seeing immediate results. And every single day, many students are going to try to prove that we don't care - and our staff cares. We must believe that what we're doing day in and day out is making a difference - whether we see that difference or not. Our staff is incredibly dedicated to this work.

Not easy work, for sure. But I'm proud of the work we've done so far and excited about how we're now able to impact more students than ever before.

Hanna Center

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