



TEACHING MATH AT HANNA ACADEMY

A Customized Curriculum

FALL 2023

FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS who may have already missed a lot of school, learning - and teaching - math can prove to be particularly challenging. "You don't need to know U.S. history to comprehend South African history," says Luis Campos, math instructor at Hanna Academy. "Math is completely different. It's all about following a sequence to build a foundation of skills."

Hanna Academy is a non-public school that accepts new students throughout the year, all of whom arrive at different levels of the 'understanding math' spectrum. The students are learning from a new textbook this year, 'Integrated Math,' that introduces a variety of disciplines, which supports Campos' strategy of meeting each student where they are, in terms of grasping each branch, no matter which one it is, so they can successfully move onto the next.

"This textbook allows me to understand exactly where they are, and then my focus is on meeting them there," he says. "I don't want them to repeat concepts they've already learned; I want them to be challenged."

Campos offers the students a unique perspective. "Believe me, I understand 'math anxiety,'" he laughs. A math major at UC San Diego, Campos had always excelled in the subject, largely because he had supportive teachers in high school who built his confidence. College proved to be a very different experience; he struggled in his math courses and with very little support available to him, he grew discouraged and changed his major. "But in my heart," he says, "I knew I wanted to teach math."

Campos arrived on Hanna Center's campus nearly 16 years ago, not as an instructor, but as a residential youth counselor, straight out of college. He enjoyed working with and mentoring kids in this age group, so when a teacher's aide position opened at the high school, he went for it and was hired. Soon he became a valuable addition to the program as he proved to be successful in connecting with the students, coaching them not only in their subjects but with their social skills as well.



Luis Campos, math instructor at Hanna Academy

Continued on next page...



“Everyone learns differently and we can all learn from each other.”

~ Mr. Luis Campos

When the math teacher announced her departure, Campos didn't apply for the position. "She was highly credentialed," he says. "I hadn't even led a class before. Then Jackson (the school's principal) came to me and said, 'You know, I can post this position and many highly credentialed people will apply. And frankly, I've hired highly credentialed people. And many don't last long because they don't get the kids here. You've already connected with the kids. You know math. Let's see what you can do.'"

Four years later, Campos is still enjoying expanding the curriculum and building into the students. While there are two or three faculty members per subject at the school, the math department continues to be a party of one. "Charlie (a teacher's aide) is good at math; so he's always up for working through ideas with me," he laughs.

"My goal right away with each student is for them to understand that I get them," he says. "I also say, 'don't let not getting math right now intimidate you.' But if it takes one full class for a kid to finally say, 'Oh, yeah, that makes sense - I've got it,' that makes up for the entire struggle. I know what an enormous difference encouragement can make in a young person's life, from my own experience. When I had it, and when I didn't."

"Sometimes students will show me a different way of solving a problem, a trick that I never learned," he says. "Those moments are pretty cool for me. I'll say, 'Can you show me on the board,' and they'll go up there, and now they're not only teaching their peers something new, but they're also teaching me as well. Everyone learns differently and we can all learn from each other."



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