

# Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council

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## Summary of Thursday, March 26, 2015 Meeting

### PISD CAREER AND TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL: OVERVIEW AND TOUR

*Member comment after touring new school: "I was born too soon!"*

PISD members and guests were treated to an overview and tour of Pasadena Independent School District's new Career and Technical High School (CTHS), which opened for the 2014-2015 school year with 950 students in Grades 9-11 and an additional 300 seniors from other district high schools, who spend part of their school day at CTHS.

Principal Steve Fleming provided an overview over a dinner prepared and served by the school's Culinary Arts students under the guidance of Hotel and Hospitality Director Tina Dvorak. Attendees were impressed with the meal and the service. All food was homemade that day (pulled pork, brioche bun, spicy cole slaw, potato salad, and peach cobbler).

Fleming said the school has 26 pathways from which students may choose, ranging from agriculture to welding. The entire program is driven by the school's mission statement, prominently displayed on a lobby wall: *Empower students to successfully transition to the global community through unique educational experiences.* The 26 pathways are part of 6 academies: Agriculture, Business and Human Service, Health Services, Manufacturing and Construction, Technology and Engineering, and Transportation and Shipping.

CTHS is a school of choice, meaning students must apply. With a goal of 1200 seats for the 2014-2015 school year, admissions staff received 2600 applications. Next year, there will be 400 freshman seats, and they have received 1100 applications.

Entrance criteria include school attendance records, discipline, overall academic performance, state assessment scores, and completion of an essay. Students are interviewed either in person or by phone or Skype by a CTHS instructor. Each of the 5 PISD high school campuses is allotted a number of seats in each of the 26 pathways, based on its enrollment level. Dobie High School is the largest, so it has more proportionately more seats.

Fleming emphasized that the school is not just for students who do not expect to attend college. While it will prepare students to enter the workforce directly, CTHS's "stacked certification" approach also is valuable to those who will move on to a 4-year college. For example, students may obtain a welding certificate at CTHS that is recognized by those who hire welders, making them employable upon graduation. Alternately, a Pharmacy Tech student may obtain a certificate at CTHS and use it to find a job in that field while going to college and

on to obtain a medical degree. The certifications, curriculum, and equipment have all been chosen so they are recognized by industry. The Culinary Arts students who served PCAC included freshman who may already have earned their first certificate, which would allow them to get a job in a fast food restaurant without having to start as a dishwasher.

CTHS welcomes community groups like PCAC to use the building because serving them gives students practical experience. CTHS also emphasizes trips into the community that give the students real-world experience.

CTHS is a unique facility when compared to most schools. Fleming said they train students to collaborate and work as teams because most jobs require that. Fleming said they wanted less “sage on the stage” and more of a facilitated work model. Thus, the school has been designed with a variety of large and small spaces with seating for groups of varying sizes. All students and faculty have tablet computers, and the entire campus is wireless. Students do not have to be sitting in rows of desks in a classroom to work. There are many glass walls and folding walls and walls that can be raised. There is no traditional auditorium. When one is needed, the comfy chairs in the lobby are moved and other seating is moved in.

Fleming said the use of glass facilitates openness and drives up accountability and motivation. In real life, most people work in open settings, so students need to learn how to accomplish job tasks in that setting. People can see whether students are working, but everyone can also see how teachers are teaching.

To produce well-rounded individuals, CTHS requires community service of students, emphasizing “it’s not all about you.”

CTHS partners with San Jacinto College to help students earn some college hours along with their high school diploma and certificate(s). In addition to offering traditional dual credit and Advanced Placement courses, CTHS students may apply for the Prior Learning Assessment Program. Here a CTHS student who moves on to attend San Jacinto College may take exams and demonstrate skills to obtain up to 9 hours of credit in San Jacinto College courses based on this assessment of their prior learning at CTHS.

Fleming said CTHS wants students to graduate with a diploma, one or more certificates, a commitment to give back to the community, and some college hours.

After the overview, attendees were split into groups and taken on tours of the facility. Tour guides included Fleming, Diane Barnes, and Amy Whalen. To say that PCAC members and guests were impressed is an understatement. Their views were perhaps best expressed by a member who said, “I was born too soon.”