

# Workforce Development II: Tour of Pasadena ISD's Kirk Lewis Career and Technical High School

Video links and handouts posted at [www.pasadenacac.org](http://www.pasadenacac.org)

Articulate, confident, and knowledgeable were the descriptions PCAC meeting attendees used to describe the students from Pasadena ISD's Dr. Kirk Lewis Career and Technical High School during the tour there on Feb. 25, 2025. Touting a 100% graduation rate, the staff, faculty, and students shared their experiences about CTHS programs that prepare students for careers and continuing education.

CTHS Principal Jessica McCoy welcomed attendees and explained that the school not only educates its students but also provides opportunities for students to earn certifications regardless of their post-graduate plans. McCoy said that 98% of CTHS students earn certifications or licenses, which equip students with current skills and the adaptability to thrive in the evolving job market. McCoy said a critical piece of the CTHS program is the school's collaboration with business partnerships: The school learns from businesses what skills they want new graduates to have, and the school plans its programs with those skills in mind. Another key element of the CTHS is its hands-on instruction, which McCoy said engages students and gives them an opportunity to explore a variety of career options. After hearing from additional staff, faculty, and students, attendees were divided into groups to tour the facility, which included stops at the health sciences, robotics, and engineering rooms, as well as the maritime simulator. Additional highlights from the evening and a list of CTHS speakers follow.

## History and Vision:

- CTHS opened in 2014 after years of planning with local business partners. The goal was to create a school that prepares students for the future workforce.
- The school has earned an "A" rating for accountability and leads the district in certifications, academic performance, and college readiness.
- CTHS is an application-based campus, accepting approximately 400 incoming 9th graders each year, with a total student enrollment of about 1,500.

## Student Testimonials:

- Students from the engineering pathway discussed their work with Computer-Aided Design (CAD) and how the program has helped them build confidence and teamwork skills.
- Maritime students shared their experiences with field trips and certifications, emphasizing how their studies involve classroom learning and practical experiences like cruises on the Gulf of Mexico.
- EMT students talked about their hands-on clinical work and real-world patient care, explaining how the program is preparing them to save lives.
- Business pathway students discussed the value of real-world experiences like internships and the opportunity to run a school store, helping them to develop retail and customer-service skills.

**Application Process:** Carol Patterson, instructor for Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), said the application process for prospective students includes applying to a specific pathway and participating in interviews. Part of the selection process requires students to write essays for the programs they want to study.

**Success Stories:** Several alumni were mentioned, with one graduate now working at a nuclear power plant, another employed in logistics, and another working in the maritime industry.

**Soft Skills:** Instructors emphasized the importance of soft skills, such as punctuality, professionalism, and communication, in preparing students for the workforce. Many local businesses have indicated that they can train students in the technical skills of the job, but having strong soft skills when they get hired is essential.

**Field Trips and Real-World Experience:** The school organizes more than 200 field trips a year, such as tours of the ship channel and cruises, providing students with valuable exposure to their potential careers. These experiences help students see how their studies are connected to real-world industries.

**CTHS Staff that participated**

- Andrew Crawford, Technology Facilitator
- Cecil Gray, Maritime/Logistics Instructor
- Adriana Flores, Support Counselor
- Dr. Christina Flores, 11<sup>th</sup> grade Counselor
- Jennifer Jett, English Content Specialist
- Carol Patterson, AVID Instructor
- Angelica Silva, Para-professional
- Tina Dvorak, Culinary/Hospitality Instructor
- Traci Stewart, Computer Maintenance Instructor
- Melinda Medina/ EMT Instructor
- Dr. Diane Barnes, Career and Community Coordinator and longtime PCAC member

**24 students from the following pathways participated**

- Engineering - 4
- EMT - 3
- Business 1
- Culinary/Hospitality - 2
- Robotics - 8
- Maritime/Logistics - 5
- Computer Maintenance - 1