



The Place To Be!

INSIDE

Discover how students are excelling at Clayton Valley Charter High School as they prepare to lead in the Bay Area and beyond!

From Traditional to Charter

Why Clayton Valley Charter High School changed its educational model

BY MATT JOCKS



Clayton Valley Charter High School is spread over a 40-acre campus but still provides an intimate education for each student.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAYTON VALLEY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

When Clayton Valley first opened its doors in 1958, it wasn't as a public charter school — it operated as a traditional district school.

Over 50 years later, the community decided to make a change, transitioning the school into the highly sought-after institution it is today — Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS). The journey to becoming a charter is a compelling one.

Neil McChesney, a graduate of and former administrator at Clayton Valley, helped enact the change.

"A colleague showed me a newspaper article about Granada Hills Charter High School in Los Angeles,"

McChesney said, now Executive Director at the Contra Costa School of Performing Arts. "Their conversion to a charter model resulted in more teaching innovation and improved academic outcomes."

Recognizing the benefits, McChesney researched bringing the concept to Clayton Valley.

Since 2000, test scores and college eligibility rates under the traditional school model had remained stagnant. Community feedback suggested the "norm" for education wasn't moving the school forward — Clayton Valley students deserved better.

"Compared to other schools, we weren't doing that badly," he said. "We were still pretty good. But we were all painfully aware of our capacity for greatness and we wanted a better model."

That greatness likely wouldn't be realized in a traditional model. So in 2011 the community banded together to pursue autonomy, accountability and academic success.

Small meetings grew into a massive and comprehensive petition for conversion. As co-lead petitioner, and later the governing board chair, McChesney knew all along the group would face strong opposition from the school district. He wasn't disappointed.

"You're saying to the district, 'You're not doing your job. Give us the kids and the campus. We can do it better,'" McChesney said.

The vision called for significant change: more academic freedoms and greater operational flexibility. Rather than allowing the school district to determine

outcomes and priorities, the new educational model would put community members and educators in control.

Despite risks to their union contracts, more than 80 percent of the school's teachers supported the conversion. High turnout at community meetings solidified the momentum for change.

The school officially reopened in fall of 2012 as Clayton Valley Charter High School — and the results were immediate. In the first year, the school's state Academic Performance Index scores jumped dramatically, spreading a new enthusiasm for educational greatness.

Since its conversion, CVCHS has repeatedly made the U.S. News and World Report's national top schools list, while earning California Department of Education's Gold Ribbon School Award and International Center for Leadership in Education's Model School Award.

That recognition is also reflected within the community.

"The local realtors are the happiest in the world," McChesney said. "Parents call the school and say, 'I know there is a preference for students in the old school boundaries. But if I buy or rent tomorrow, can I get my kids into CVCHS?'"

What is a charter school?

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools that are run independently of school districts and typically offer greater flexibility than traditional public schools. They are known for rigorous curriculum and innovative educational approaches for students. Whereas traditional schools must meet strict district regulations, charter schools are able to determine their own budgets, classes and school size. Charter schools remain open based on their performance, and must be renewed in California every five years to ensure they are producing positive academic results and adhering to their agreed upon goals and methodologies.

"We wanted a better model."

Neil McChesney
Co-lead petitioner for CVCHS
conversion petition

Teachers Taking Action

Teachers given greater flexibility to ensure student success

BY THEA MARIE ROOD



Since making the change to charter, teachers Katie Nolan (left) and Sarah Lovick (right) have seen nothing but positive improvements for their students.
PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR.

Among the biggest advocates for the school’s new charter model are those who taught at Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS) prior to its conversion.

“Clayton Valley is my home,” explained Katie Nolan, an art teacher and Visual & Performing Arts Department Chair. “My five siblings and I graduated from Clayton Valley, and my three children will graduate here. I’m fortunate to live in a great community and teach in a learning environment that gives me the flexibility to impact student success in my own classroom.”

Before the conversion, many teachers were growing restless with the school district. Rather than create higher standards to succeed, the district chose to ease graduation requirements and cut necessary programs like summer school.

Nolan and other teachers didn’t agree with this strategy. Student achievement began to decline, and Clayton Valley began gaining a reputation as the school that was “easy to graduate from.” Discipline issues arose, and the campus took on an unflattering appearance.

“It was always dirty with trash on the ground,” recalled Sarah Lovick, an Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher. Lovick, also an alum of Clayton Valley, began her teaching career at the school but left in 2006 to stay home and support her growing family.

“When I decided to return to teaching, I was hesitant about Clayton Valley,” said Lovick. “I spoke with former colleagues and learned how the school had remarkably changed. I went to an information night and I was sold.”

“Clayton Valley is my home.”

Katie Nolan
Art teacher, Visual and Performing Arts
Department Chair

When the charter model was officially adopted in 2012, administrators and staff took action. Paint work orders were approved and new desks were bought — projects the district had delayed for years. New technology brought new learning opportunities for students when CVCHS purchased state-of-the-art computers and enhanced its technology network so students could use their own devices.

CVCHS also brought back summer school, after-school tutoring and study programs such as “Cookies and Cram” to help students better prepare for finals and graduation. AVID

replaced an outdated curriculum to provide students with the improved social and academic support they need to succeed. Additional guidance staff and counseling resources were created for students — especially those who will be first in their family to attend college.

Teachers were also empowered to develop support programs, which directly impact students. For instance, when Lovick looked into giving students more information about college admissions, financial aid and college campus tours, her idea was able to grow into an entire platform. CVCHS’s charter model gave her the support she needed to support students.

“It was amazing! Within a week, I had everything needed to support our students,” Lovick said. “If done through the district, it would have taken a year. I’m excited when teachers bring new ideas to bolster academic outcomes and student support. It’s all about the charter model here at CVCHS.”

Seeing Success

By returning its focus to student achievement, Clayton Valley Charter High School is excelling under its charter model — just see for yourself! Look below to see how the school has changed since converting to a charter school in comparison to the previous traditional model.

Student Enrollment

Charter model:	2,200
Traditional model:	1,850

Graduation Rate

Charter model:	98%
Traditional model:	83%

A-G Eligibility

Charter model:	65%
Traditional model:	41%

The Strongest Link

How students create valuable relationships from the start

BY THEA MARIE ROOD



Alex Roth wasn't sure if she was ready for high school as a freshman, but Link Crew helped her conquer those fears and make lasting friendships.
PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR.

The summer before freshman year can be an anxious time for any student, especially if they're heading to a big and unfamiliar campus — it's easy to imagine being lost in maze-like hallways, late to class or sitting alone at lunch. That's why Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS) starts a student's high school experience off right with Link Crew.

Link Crew runs a program to welcome incoming freshmen to their new campus and help them understand the social, extracurricular and academic climate of CVCHS.

"The Summer Transition Program is a one-week summer program before the academic year begins," said Alex Roth, an 11th grade student and Link Crew Commissioner who also participated in the program herself as a freshman. "As positive role models, Link Crew leaders are motivators who guide freshmen to discover what it takes to be successful at CVCHS and in life."

CVCHS offers this unique transition program to connect upperclassmen with underclassmen. Effective training and additional methods of support make these relationships meaningful so new students can better focus on school, rather than wondering if they're going to fit into their new academic environment.

Over the week-long program, new students participate in a variety of academic and social orientation activities that promote student safety, a sense of wellness and improved communication among peers. Most importantly, students are encouraged to think about their path over the next four years

and what will come after.

"CVCHS can be a fresh, new start," said Alex, noting this often makes for a better four years of high school. "They show you how to successfully start — and to finish — high school."

The transition program is a graduation requirement for all incoming CVCHS students, but Link Crew continues throughout the entire school year with a variety of supplemental activities. For example, Link Crew leaders visit freshmen physical education classes monthly to hold a diverse mix of

fun and experiential team-building exercises, all based on the Character Counts curriculum. Character Counts is a widely used program and at CVCHS all freshmen complete weekly lessons in their physical education class in between Link Crew visits.

"Link Crew is a bridge between freshmen and upperclassmen," Alex said. "If you're struggling with something, sometimes you don't know the adult

to go to. For younger kids, it can be really important to have someone who's not quite an adult and not quite a friend."

Alex feels like she is paying forward the support she received to the younger student population at CVCHS. As an upperclassman, she has assisted in dance classes and worked as a cheer coach for many years in addition to her leadership role in Link Crew.

"I came from a small school — not one of the two or three big schools that feed into CVCHS," she said. "I really needed Link Crew. It was my way to meet people and feel welcome here at CVCHS."

"CVCHS can be a fresh, new start."

Alex Roth
11th grade student, Link Crew Commissioner

Connecting Students

Clayton Valley Charter High School allows younger and older students to meet and mentor each other in shared interests through a variety of clubs on its campus. Clubs can be formed year-round and vary in scope, from those that are local chapters of national organizations to clubs that are solely student-generated and based on fun.



50+ clubs

exist on campus each year



400+ students

get involved in campus clubs

Popular clubs include:

- Anime
- Astronomy
- Black Student Union
- California Scholarship Federation
- Gardening
- Girls Who Code
- Lawn Chair
- Mock Trial
- Pétanque
- STEM
- Spikeball
- Travel
- Women in Science and Engineering

Study What You Love

Academies help students turn personal interests into amazing careers

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Exploring a new passion can turn into a profitable career path for dedicated students. However, those who attend traditional schools often have to wait until graduation or college to explore a hobby or career that fascinated them early on, losing years of opportunity in the process.

At Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS), there's no more waiting — students are able to apply to one of the school's five academies, in addition to completing the general curriculum. Each academy is focused on a separate career field and offers skills and coursework that will give students a leg-up in related college programs and jobs.

"I'm in the Public Service Academy (PSA)," said Sydney Skow, a senior at CVCHS.

"I've grown up very involved in my community through swim team, leadership in middle

school and an annual Halloween costume drive I host each year. I wanted to continue to be involved in the Bay Area through service, which is exactly what I've been able to do in PSA."

Sydney first began helping less-fortunate children when she was just a seventh grader. Because she was able to pursue that passion, and was given additional skills through PSA, her costume drive now receives more than 300 donations for local shelters and low-income organizations.

"I like to think of PSA as a business academy," she said, "because we learn proficient time management, communication and leadership skills that can be used in our future careers and personal lives."

Academies are also able to expand on classroom learning in a way that standard curriculum does not.

"PSA has given me the opportunity to be part of something bigger at my high school," said Sydney. "Real life experience has led me to meet and network with many different people and dive deeper into my interests in politics and law."

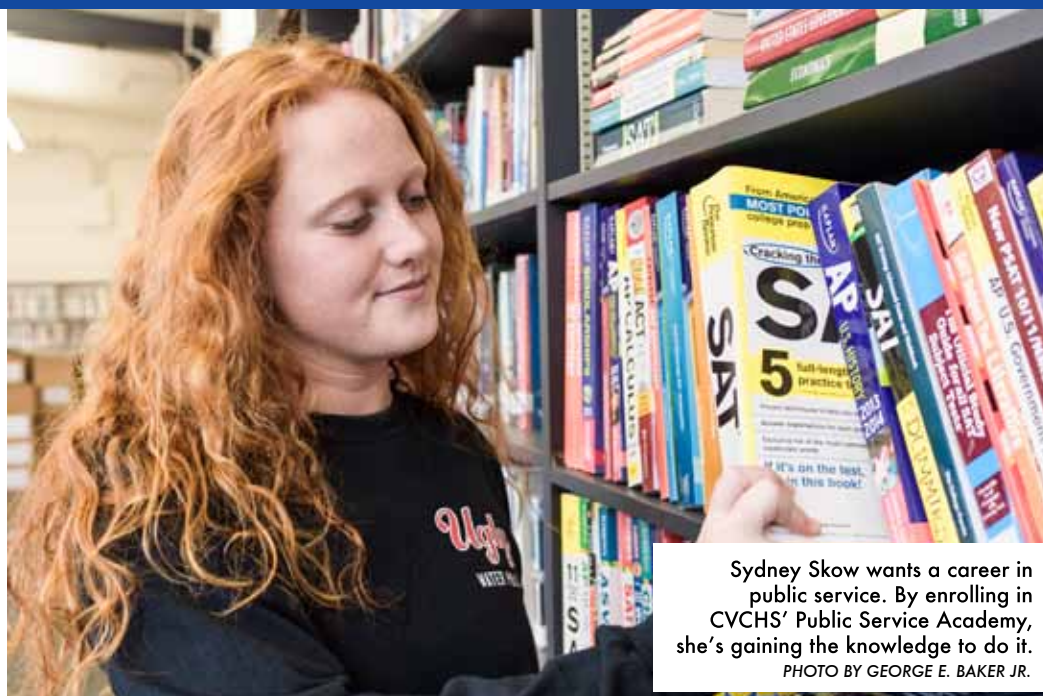
Sydney also found that enrolling in an academy led to many close peer and mentor relationships.

"[My academy] has given me the opportunity to be part of something bigger."

Sydney Skow
12th grade student

were written by PSA teachers, who she felt knew her best. In fact, Sydney said that her work with PSA has shaped her into the person she is today.

"Each day, I'm reminded of the importance of community and of giving back to the community you are a part of," she said.



The Academies



Clayton Arts Academy

Provides a creative avenue with intensive, in-depth training in a student's area of artistic interest, and prepares students for the professional world through technology.



Digital Arts and Technology Academy

Composed of imaginative students who are dedicated to achieving both creatively and academically. Students focus on graphic design, animation, game design, coding and web design.



Engineering and Design Academy

Provides a firm educational foundation in the areas of math and science, enhanced by problem-solving and engineering applications.



Medical Careers Academy

Prepares students for biomedical careers with an educational foundation, community mentorships, leadership training and hands-on skills in this field.



Public Service Academy

Structured around dedicated and collaborative teaching that emphasizes academic success by instituting a project-based service learning curriculum.

Cade Young wanted to improve his grades so he could excel in school and continue to play football. Clayton Valley Charter High School's resources allowed him to meet both goals.
PHOTO BY GEORGE E. BAKER JR.

All On The Same Team

Students can get back on the right academic track before it's too late

BY MATT JOCKS



On a football field, it's hard to get lost amongst the players — make one mistake and the coach's feedback is immediate. In a large classroom, it's different. Those who struggle often do so in silence and have a hard time recovering on their own.

Cade Young, a member of the Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS) varsity football team, may have been lost at a traditional school when he ran into academic challenges, but Clayton Valley is different — Cade was not alone.

"Knowing somebody was there for me made a big difference," Cade said. "It showed somebody cared about how I was doing."

Cade said his academic issues ran deeper than just the strain of playing a competitive sport.

"Sometimes I just had problems staying focused," he said.

When his grades fell, Cade took advantage of CVCHS's academic intervention programs to get back on track: the Saturday credit recovery programs, teacher office hours, peer tutoring and summer school. He also became part of a targeted case management program so an administrator could monitor his grades and guide him to other interventions as needed.

"Cade is smart and has the aptitude to consistently perform well academically," said his father, Greg Young. "However, due to lack of focus and discipline during parts of his academic tenure, Cade has had to leverage some of CVCHS's resources to ensure his grades remained at an acceptable and satisfactory level."

Cade said each of the programs had unique benefits.

"The Saturday credit program felt more personal. Being in a smaller setting, there was a lot more one-on-one time," he said. "The teacher hours was something I took advantage of the most. It really gave me the chance to work on the specific things I needed to."

Cade also appreciated peer tutoring. He said it was great to have someone to talk to and get help from student peers for his work.

"It's a lot more enjoyable going to class when you're doing well."

Cade Young
12th grade student

Team Young has also stayed involved at home.

"We have met with his teachers in each of his classes over the years to check up on his progress and ask them what are some of the resources that Cade should take advantage of," Greg Young said, noting they also followed up with Cade to make sure he took advantage of those same resources the school suggested.

The payoff has been dramatic.

Cade maintains a solid overall 3.2 grade point average (GPA), which is well above the 2.0 GPA required to participate in athletics at CVCHS. He even posted 3.6 for a quarter as he tries to increase his overall GPA and open doors for himself beyond high school.

"It's a lot more enjoyable going to class when you're doing well," said Cade. "It's hard to actually learn the subject when you're just worried about your grades and trying to stay afloat."

Intervention Programs

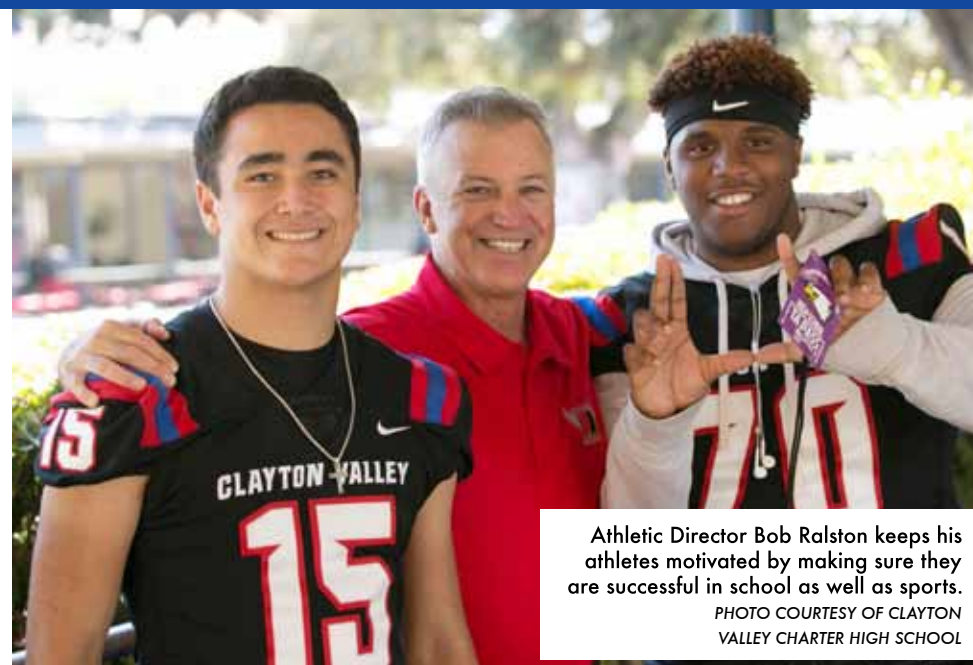
Students who need help getting back on track have more than one option at Clayton Valley Charter High School. They have many opportunities to get the support they need.

- **Office hours:** All teachers have availability outside of the classroom twice a week. Students can attend individually or in groups.
- **Homework Help Center:** A peer-to-peer program held in the library after school, Monday through Thursday. Help tables are organized by subject.
- **Credit Recovery Program:** A 10-week program offered in the fall and spring to students who want to improve their grades. If students meet attendance and performance requirements, their grade can improve by 10 points.
- **Targeted Case Management:** A California Gold Medal winning program that assigns a case manager to students with grades of D or lower. Managers — teachers, counselors or administrators — meet with a student every other week to monitor their progress.
- **StrongMind:** An online program that can be used for credit recovery.
- **Math Café:** Offered 7-8 a.m. on weekdays to get students motivated and moving. Hot chocolate and doughnuts are often included.

More To Offer

A few reasons why Clayton Valley Charter High School stands out

BY MATT JOCKS



Athletic Director Bob Ralston keeps his athletes motivated by making sure they are successful in school as well as sports.
PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAYTON VALLEY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

How do parents enroll their student?

Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS) is open to all California students. Parents may enroll their student online or by visiting the front office. If there are more applications than school capacity, enrollment is determined by a public random drawing. Currently, preference in the drawing will be given in the following order: 1) Prospective students who reside in the former attendance area of Clayton Valley (pre-charter), 2) siblings of current students, 3) those who reside in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District and 4) all others residing in California. The past several years have seen hundreds more students applying than CVCHS has available spots, leading to wait lists sometimes as long as 500 students after the drawing.

When I walk on campus, what changes will I see?

Since converting to a charter, the Clayton Valley campus has seen a number of improvements and has many more on the list. The famed and feared black turf of the football stadium and the multiple murals are visible to all who drive by. In addition, alumni will notice upgrades to the library, multi-use room and science labs.

However, perhaps the most notable change for the campus since going charter is the cleanliness of the campus. Despite adding 400 students, the grounds are cleaner than ever. This is a reflection of the staff's commitment to offering students a clean, safe environment in which to learn, and also shows that everyone — from the principal to new freshmen — takes responsibility for leaving the school cleaner than they found it.

How does CVCHS empower students to make good decisions?

High schoolers have many decisions to make, both daily and longer term. It is important that schools support students so they can think through the choices they face. One example is

Challenge Day, a program that gives students an opportunity to learn and talk about the challenges that teens and young adults are facing. Rather than bullying someone who is different, it's an effort to get students to consider the hardship that each individual may be dealing with. It teaches students how to be respectful and empathetic. Afterward, staff offers counseling and support to anyone who might need it because of what was shared.

Why are students more likely to succeed at CVCHS than at a traditional school?

Students need to have relationships, and the teachers and counselors here build those with all students. Their goal is to know the name and need of every student.

Teachers who taught under the traditional model recall talking to students at the end of the first year after the conversion about the change in their education. When asked what changed the most, they all said the same thing: That they felt the teachers cared. Before, if they were getting D's and F's, they felt they could get away with it. Now, students don't want to let down their teachers.

What is an immediate goal for the future of CVCHS?

CVCHS is striving to improve its college and postsecondary enrollment, persistence and completion figures. The school always looks to improve its own practices by learning from others and to share what has worked for its students with other schools.

Helping Athletes Succeed

If athletes at Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS) see Athletic Director Bob Ralston as "The Grades Guy," it's a title he doesn't mind.

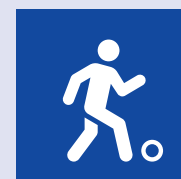
CVCHS's award-winning Targeted Case Management program assigns a teacher or faculty member to work with students who have received grades of D or lower. For athletes, that manager is Ralston.

Ralston and the high number of on-campus coaches monitor their athletes to identify those who may need assistance early on.

The impact has been significant. By the end of the first quarter in the 2018-2019 academic year, just five athletes across all the fall sports were below the 2.0 grade point average eligibility standard. The football team, highly successful on the field, was carrying a cumulative 3.2 grade point average.

"The main focus for me is ensuring our athletes understand that student comes before athlete, and they can — and should — be playing sports if they have taken care of business in the classroom," Ralston said.

The athletic department and school counselors also keep an eye on prospective college athletes by holding parent nights to inform everyone of the requirements for participation in athletics and college, and to discuss any eligibility issues students may face who want to compete in college.





How to Enroll



Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS) isn't just another high school — it has the specific structure and environment needed by students in order to thrive!

CVCHS can give students the support they need, whether it is classes targeted to their interests or more opportunities for tutoring, assistance or peer mentorship.

A community institution since 1958, CVCHS has improved upon its initial structure by becoming a stronger and more innovative school under a charter model. That's why students who want a leg up in preparing for jobs of the 21st century are finding their answer at CVCHS!



Open Enrollment

Begins: Early November
Ends: Last Wednesday in January of the new year



Apply At

www.claytonvalley.org



Who Needs To Enroll

Every student who wishes to attend CVCHS must complete an enrollment form.



Availability

If more applications are received than school's capacity, students are enrolled by public random drawing (lottery). Look online at www.claytonvalley.org for how preference is given in the drawing.



Questions?

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Concord, CA 94521
925-682-7474
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What People Love About CVCHS

"Clayton Valley Charter High School (CVCHS) benefits our community because of its improving rise in the rankings of schools in California. This prestige leads to more and more people desiring to move into our community to take advantage of the natural draw to CVCHS for their children's education. This increases property values and leads to a more cohesive community because the charter model allows more parental and civic input and involvement. This community was behind the conversion to a charter from the outset and continues to be behind what is rapidly becoming one of the best schools in the state of California."

David T. Shuey

Founding Steering Committee Member
Founding Charter Parent
Past Mayor, City of Clayton

