

Learn More

Struggle Less

Pivot Charter School North Valley offers unique options for students



Pivot at a Glance

● How does it work?

Pivot Charter School North Valley is a tuition-free public school, open to all students grades 6 through 12 in Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Plumas, Sutter, Tehama and Yuba counties.

Current enrollment is about 150 students at its Chico campus. Also known as the resource center, the campus has a very low student-to-teacher ratio, about 10 students to each teacher or Educational Coordinator.

All teachers are fully credentialed. Pivot is fully accredited and its units are transferable to University of California and California State University systems, as well as other colleges. Pivot Charter School North Valley is one of four Pivot schools in California managed by a not-for-profit organization. This network allows each school to remain small while having access to the assets it needs to be successful.

Pivot's Governing Board includes former school superintendents, city managers, entrepreneurs, public finance experts and higher education experts. Together, they ensure a strong and stable foundation for Pivot's success.

● Our mission

Pivot Charter School North Valley was purposely established to serve students who are slipping through the cracks in traditional school programs, who have not met success in a traditional school and who need more support to perform to their ability.

Like all public schools, Pivot Charter School enrolls all students who complete an enrollment packet. The program can be successful for so many different students; those who have gaps in their academic skills, those who lack confidence and feel lost in large schools, those who want to graduate early to begin their post-secondary interests, and those who have to work or help support the family. Pivot determines what the individual student needs and helps turn them around, or "pivot" their attitudes toward school, their future and learning.

Taking the Struggle Out of Learning

Pivot uses unique approach to help every student succeed

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON

By design, Pivot Charter School North Valley provides a unique experience for every student.

"We meet students where they are at – working at their own pace," explains Pivot Charter School's Executive Director Jayna Gaskell, a longtime educator. "At Pivot, we do things differently and some kids need different."

Pivot creates options for all students with custom curriculum and collaborative resources. One student at a time, Pivot helps define success, develop confidence and change lives.

"No matter what happened in your past, everybody deserves a fresh start and a chance to succeed," Gaskell says. "Our program provides a catalyst for change. Parents notice what a change it makes; like our name says, we're pivoting kids' lives. Students go from 'I hate school' to 'I want to go to school, I want to study.' For some kids, it literally saved them."

Pivot is designed for "pretty much any student for whom their previous setting wasn't working, for whatever reason," Gaskell says. "We have a great mission – to get them back on track. 'Students come to us with chips on their shoulders. We whittle away on those chips. It could be a student who takes A.P. (advanced placement) classes who was bored in a prior school. It could be a student with dyslexia who struggles in school.' Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2020, Pivot helps each student reach their goals through blended learning, a combination of online courses and in-person instruction. Every student gets a totally individualized approach. Designed to pinpoint and close gaps in their academics, this approach allows every student to learn more while struggling less.

"Our challenge is to create a really strong blended learning program differently, uniquely, for every single student," Gaskell says.

To accomplish that, Pivot's Educational Coordinators (credentialed teachers) work hard to get to know their students as people.

"Just as Pivot attracts a different kind of student, it attracts a different kind of teacher, too," Gaskell says. "It's a very, very different kind of teaching job and takes so much energy. We really make connections with our students. We look at what's happening in [students'] lives and made them seek an option like Pivot. By creating connections, we can figure out what they need to be successful.

*"At Pivot,
we do things
differently and
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Jayna Gaskell
Executive Director



"I've never been in such awe of faculty and staff," she adds. "I've never worked with a more dedicated group of educators and support staff. They truly believe in what we're doing every day. It's heartfelt."

Via online courses, students can get their education anywhere there's an internet connection. But Pivot also provides a well-rounded and full educational experience. "It's not just online on your computer all day," Gaskell says. "Our students have opportunities to be kids and have fun. They take field trips, participate in clubs. We even held our own prom. We try to get the kids off the computer and do interesting things with other students."

In addition to the classes offered at Pivot's resource center in Chico, students also are encouraged to participate in concurrent enrollment at Butte College where they can obtain college and high school credits. At Pivot's Chico resource center, five-day, two-day and one-day a week programs are offered on campus. Pivot combines what kids like about school with highly individualized learning.

"Our small size allows us to get to the root of what every student needs to be successful; they feel welcomed and supported and know Pivot is a place they can be themselves," Gaskell explains.

"We're passionate about this," she adds. "Pivot is like the universe. Every star is different. We meet the needs of so many different stars."

Zev Parsons and his mother, Diana Vargas-Thelander, found the environment he needed to succeed at Pivot.
PHOTO BY MICHELLE CAMY

Turning the Corner

Students learn to believe in themselves in a warm, nurturing culture

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Pivot Charter School North Valley is one of many strong educational options for Chico and the surrounding communities. Many students who seek alternatives to the traditional school systems are doing so because something at their prior schools was just not a perfect fit for them.

Take Zev Parsons, for example, who started at Pivot in ninth grade and is now a senior. “He was bullied a lot,” recalls his mother, Diana Vargas Thelander. “So by eighth grade, he crashed – he didn’t want to go to school anymore. There was no good day.”

As an employee of Chico Unified School District, VargasThelander had worked in an independent study program for 10 years. But the district closed the program by the time Parsons was old enough to need it. “I was so disappointed,” Vargas-Thelander says. “They made miracles happen there. They made young adults believe in themselves. I never thought I’d find that again, but then I discovered Pivot.”

In fact, a family friend told her about the school, and she immediately enrolled Parsons. “But it took awhile,” she says. “He was withered, like a tree. The teachers cultivated the soil around him, weeded, and told him, ‘There’s so much more in you.’ As a parent, you can tell this to your kids, and you wish they’d believe you. But they think you’re just saying that because you’re their mom. Then they get



to Pivot and hear it from these teachers – ‘You can do this; it’s in you’ – and they do believe it.”

Jack Daverson, also a senior this year, had a similar path. He attended another charter school through eighth grade, but began to struggle in high school. “He has an IEP (individualized education program) and he began failing all of his classes and became truant. He needed something more personalized,” says his mother Karin Daverson.

The Daverson family found that at Pivot. “All the teachers and administrators have such a great rapport with their students,” says Karin. “They are direct and use their humor to draw the kids in. That personal touch was key to Jack feeling a part of things.”

Similarly, Vargas-Thelander says she often arrives to pick up Parsons at 3 p.m. and he isn’t ready to leave yet. “He’s visiting with the teachers,” she says with a laugh. “He calls them his ‘friends and family.’”

Both boys’ families consider their upcoming graduation nothing short of joyous.

“Without the connection to his teachers at Pivot, their support and encouragement, I don’t think Jack would be attending school at all,” says Daverson. “Pivot has been a great place for Jack.”

“All the teachers and administrators have such a great rapport with their students.”

Karin Daverson
Pivot parent

Academy programs hone pre-college skills

To prepare students for college or other options after graduation, Pivot Charter School North Valley offers two academy programs: University Preparatory and Liberal Arts.

“It makes it clear what courses they need and gives them choices,” explains Educational Coordinator Jenny Maiorano. “All students just want to get through high school. Unless you have constant conversation about college or life after high school, they have no idea what they want to do.”

“When they come to Pivot, one of the first conversations we have is: What do you want to do after high school? Having that conversation early with students is important.”

University Prep Academy focuses on the requirements students need to be accepted to four-year colleges such as the University of California or California State University systems.

“U. Prep is designed for students who plan to attend these colleges immediately after high school,” Maiorano says. “It gives them a framework with very specific standards and electives. These are rigid standards and requires higher grades, at least a C or better.”

Liberal Arts Academy allows a little more freedom of choice and it also allows students to go to many four-year colleges, just not the University of California or Cal State schools straight out of high school.

“Students get everything they need to graduate high school,” Maiorano says. “They’ll have the requirements they need to attend community college or a career tech program. But there are a lot more choices of electives. For example, a student may take creative writing to fulfill an English prerequisite instead of English 11 or English 12.”



Pivot Students Go Places

Pivot Charter School North Valley regularly hosts field trips and gears these off-campus explorations toward student interests. These outings also are an opportunity to combine learning and camaraderie. They're a shared experience and a highlight of each semester. Parents often want to come along, too.

"It's rare for a school our size to offer such a range of field trips," says Pivot Executive Director Jayna Gaskell.

A regular highlight are outings to San Francisco. Each year, Pivot students attend the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. Another highlight: Camping in Yosemite National Park.

At least one field trip is planned every month. Other excursions include visits to Butte College and California State University, Chico. Students tour Burney Falls, Shasta Caverns and Old Sacramento. They take hikes in Bidwell Park and on Table Mountain.

Besides these field trips, Pivot also makes time for kids to be kids with weekly Fun Fridays, pajama parties, rollerskating, bowling, barbecues and other get-togethers.

Parents can have fun, too; chaperones are always needed.



Eighth grader Tara Withnell enjoys the personalized attention and comfortable environment at Pivot Charter School North Valley.

PHOTO BY MICHELLE CAMY

Outside the Traditional Box

Hands-on learning experiences help students thrive

BY ANNE STOKES

For Tara Withnell, Pivot Charter School North Valley is the best of both worlds: She gets the support she needs from teachers while being able to work at her own pace.

"I sent my daughter because I knew the education students are getting at this school is a great education," says her mother Katy Withnell. "They're getting the same education kids at a traditional school are getting, but with a smaller group, they're learning more because teachers can be more hands on with everything."

Withnell's older son attended Pivot because he got lost in the shuffle moving from a small middle school to a high school with thousands of other students. Because of his positive experiences, Tara's parents enrolled her in Pivot at the start of seventh grade.

"Most definitely she's thriving at the school she's in," Withnell says. "She just seems more excited at Pivot. I don't have to struggle to get her out of bed, at least most of the time."

One of the things Withnell finds appealing is Pivot's flexible learning model, which fits a lot of different learners' styles and needs. Students can work anywhere with internet access, but still can also rely on in-person help from teachers.



"She can text any of the teachers at that campus and get exactly what question she needs answered in order to finish an assignment," Withnell says. "She doesn't have to go on campus, we just choose to take her because we know occasionally she'll need a little help with an assignment and she's already there."

It's that comfortable environment that Tara says makes it easier for her to learn.

"The teachers are kind of amazing," Tara says. "They're not just teachers, they try and be your friend, but the moment they need to be your teacher, they will be your teacher."

Field trips provide a lot of hands-on opportunities, as well as the chance to socialize and build friendships. Tara has enjoyed trips to San Francisco, Sunsplash water park, Ashland's Oregon Shakespeare Festival and more. Withnell says Tara went on more field trips in one year at Pivot than throughout all her elementary school years.

"I love the fact that she literally has the choice to go once a month on a field trip," Withnell says. "They don't have recess time and they're only there for three or four hours a day. That's their bonding time with other students, that's their time to really make friends."

"Most definitely she's thriving at the school she's in."

Katy Withnell
Pivot parent



Cadence Steenson (left) and Anthony Guzman are members of Pivot's camera club, one of several extracurricular opportunities.

PHOTOS BY MICHELLE CAMY

It's a Family Affair

Coming to school feels like coming home

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

High school students are nothing if not brutally honest, especially when it comes to evaluating their academic experiences. So at Pivot, when students tell you the school has changed their lives, they mean it.

"I switched to Pivot in eighth grade," says 15-year-old Cadence Steenson, who is now a sophomore. "The bullying at my middle school became so bad, I would hide out in the bathroom, avoid social contact and wait in the car until I absolutely had to go to class. I knew I had to find change. I needed encouragement, safety and a place that felt like home. Coming to Pivot has been one of the best decisions of my life."

The change in culture helped Steenson morph from a good student to a great one, she says. "I went from C's and B's being good enough for me, to striving to get an A in each of my classes. It has given me a perfect structure to fit exactly what I need and want into my education."

Anthony Guzman, a 19-year-old senior who is finishing up his last few units this fall before joining the Navy, has had a similar experience at Pivot. "I was at another charter school my freshman and sophomore years," he says. "But I switched

to Pivot because I heard you have more one-on-one time with teachers and they help you more than at a traditional school."

In the two years he has been here, Guzman has found that to be true, and feels it is the reason he has been successful, both academically and personally. "I struggled with science and English," he recalls. "And I was also really

shy — just sort of sat by myself. But the teachers asked me my name, wanted to hear about me. You realize you don't have to be alone, not in a cave by yourself, but you can be out there, 'collabing' with other students and teachers."

Guzman also feels the teachers are having as much fun as the students. "They're not just doing their jobs," he says. "They become more than teachers — they're family, like uncles and aunts."

Not only did Guzman catch up academically, he began to zoom ahead, helping to create a yearbook elective and

photography club — where he was able to earn units

to graduate by shooting student photos — and getting involved in Shakespeare and art workshops. "You come onto campus and you don't want to leave," he says with a laugh. "You're just having a great time learning so many new things."

"You come onto campus and you don't want to leave. You're just having a great time learning so many new things."

Anthony Guzman
Senior, Pivot Charter School
North Valley

Clubs let students explore interests

Each semester, Pivot's Educational Coordinators ask students about what they like to do — or want to do. Then, they find ways to make it happen. Sometimes that starts with a club.

"Our choice of clubs always is student generated," says Educational Coordinator Jenny Maiorano. "It's different from a traditional school that may have the same clubs year after year. Our clubs come from students first."



This semester, for example, Pivot will host clubs devoted to:

- Minecraft and video gaming
- Sewing
- Photography
- In coordination with the photography club, Pivot has a club that creates an annual school yearbook.

"It's something fun to do away from the computer with other students and staff who share their interests," Maiorano says.

New this year, the sewing club started with student requests.



"We have three sewing machines that were donated by staff or friends of the school," says Maiorano, who will mentor the club. "I'll be teaching kids to cut patterns, make their own garments and accessories. I'm really looking forward to it."

Sewing is an art as well as a practical skill, she notes. "It's a way for students to express their individuality and creativity."

Interest in sewing and fashion design is on the rise with such cable TV shows as "Project Runway."

"I love 'Project Runway,'" Maiorano says. "We'll have our own runway show at some time, so students can show off their creations."



Educational Coordinator
Travis Bennett works closely
with students.
PHOTO BY MICHELLE CAMY

Changing Lives

At Pivot, teachers are uniquely instrumental in their students' success — and their jobs are deeply meaningful as a result

BY THEA MARIE ROOD



Before coming to Pivot Charter School in 2012, Travis Bennett spent seven years teaching math in a traditional high school in Sacramento's Natomas neighborhood, where he and his colleagues often counted the days until a school break.

"I'd hit the 'doldrums' and start asking, 'When's the next three-day weekend?'" he recalls. "Here, I get up every morning and don't even look at a calendar. I'm so excited to come to work. This is my career and my passion."

Bennett says he arrived at Pivot with a curiosity about its alternative approach to education, something he saw as the wave of the future. Its blended model of online independent study — combined with a site-based Chico program — provides options he believes many kids need.

"We don't like to say we're better than other schools, but we're just very, very different," he says. "It's completely student-driven, with teacher and parent support. [As teachers], we provide a key missing element: one-on-one attention."

That can mean specific subject matter help for students, with individual tutoring and small workshops on fractions or essay-writing. But even more important is the personal connection that is formed.

"We see what's missing — what makes that kid tick," Bennett says. "For me, it's not about math — it's about me as an

educator. If you can believe in me, if you can trust me, we can go anywhere academically."

Bennett describes the culture at Pivot as "relationship-driven," and it starts with something as simple as teachers' first interactions with a new student. "Instead of us saying, 'Hey, you're not doing your work,' we say, 'How are you?'" he explains. That sets the tone. "We try to get to know a kid as much as we can. 'How's it going with that boyfriend?'"

The relationships also extend to parents, looping the entire family into how things are going through daily and weekly reports. The connections are also long-term: A teacher — or Educational Coordinator, as they are called at Pivot — often works with a student the entire time they attend the school, which could be until they are caught up enough to return to a traditional Chico high school or — if they choose to stay — until they graduate from Pivot.

"What I share a lot is that at the culminating event here — graduation — there are a lot of happy tears," Bennett says. "And a lot of kids who didn't think they could have made it without Pivot. It's the most fulfilling educational experience I've ever had."

*"It's the
most fulfilling
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Travis Bennett
Pivot Educational
Coordinator

Educational Coordinators

Even the teachers' title at Pivot shows it's a different kind of school: **Educational Coordinators** are mentors or coaches who build long-lasting, one-on-one relationships with students, rather than lecturing in front of a classroom.

"Each Educational Coordinator has a caseload of 25 to 30 kids," says Travis Bennett, who is the site administrator and an EC at Pivot. "Kids come in struggling and our job is to pivot them back. For some, that means going back to a traditional high school; some stay here and want to graduate."

While at Pivot, students have assigned carrels or workspaces, as well as seats in computer labs, and ECs walk the floor, attending to kids' needs. ECs also collect a lot of data, so they can quickly set up a "breakout workshop" in math or English when several students are challenged by an academic skill.

"We lean on our credential every day," Bennett says. "But we work one-on-one or in small groups."

Top 10 reasons Pivot is the right choice for you

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON



1. We purposely remain small in enrollment and size, so we can ensure a nurturing, safe, family-like environment.



2. Pivot's teacher/student ratio is very low, so our Educational Coordinators can concentrate on individual attention to each student. Their primary focus is student success.



3. Our Chico campus is a resource center, a unique learning environment that offers one-on-one help and small group instruction as well as a place to do fun hands-on projects.



4. Our Educational Coordinators are a very different kind of teacher. They tailor their approach to each student and create connections to fit individual needs.



5. Collaborative courses combine what students like about a classroom situation with our online curriculum. The Educational Coordinator teaches the online curriculum in a classroom situation.



6. The diversity of our curriculum is unmatched with more than 260 classes available. Our career tech courses range from anthropology to veterinary sciences. Choose from 11 Advanced Placement courses including chemistry and statistics.



7. The flexibility of our online curriculum fits individual student needs. Students work at their own pace; they can catch up, get ahead and even graduate early. They can get their education anywhere there's an internet connection.



8. Pivot is part of a strong network of charter schools with a solid foundation and broad-based support. That allows individual schools to remain small, but still have access to the assets students need to be successful.



9. Our high level of accountability applies to both students and teachers. Individual assessment and remediation help close any gaps and students thrive.



10. Pivot creates opportunities as unique as every student. Build the skills to struggle less and be successful going forward.



Let Pivot Meet Your Needs

Pivot Charter School North Valley puts students first. Pivot recognizes that learning styles differ and it is the institution's job to ensure learning is achieved in a way conducive to each student. Through individualized online classes for grades 6 through 12, our school helps students learn in alignment with their personal needs instead of a generalized practice that frequently leaves children behind. However, an individualized educational method does not mean students are left to their own devices. In fact, to help motivate and support students in their online coursework, Pivot offers various programs through our school resource center where students choose how often they come on campus to meet with teachers for tutoring, feedback and inspiration.

Get Connected



Pivot Charter School North Valley

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Pivot Charter Resource Center

Brittany McElroy
bmcelroy@pivotcharter.org

The resource center is open for students Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, with an additional program time on Tuesday and Thursday from 12:30 to 3 p.m. The center is open every day 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. to schedule a visit.

Learn More:

With such a unique educational experience, Pivot Charter School North Valley is aware questions may arise, so call us and schedule a tour or visit us online.



Visit www.pivotnorthvalley.com/how-it-works/faq/ for details on everything from how a student's courses are chosen to their graduation ceremony.



Take a look at the online curriculum Pivot students are offered at www.pivotnorthvalley.com/north-valley-resource-center/courses/



Find the forms for enrolling your child today at www.pivotnorthvalley.com/forms/