



# **Halton District School Board**

## **Questions for High Tech High**

1. At end end of documentary, the students reflect in front of their teachers who ask them specific questions about their growth (a personal reflection). Are those questions structured differently per student? What are the ways that the staff create the emotional safety to have all students get up and be vulnerable enough to say in front of peers and teachers things like “I was shy” or “I didn’t believe in myself as a leader”.

**Use of student prompting by teachers; presentation times and format differ for students based on their need; teachers know what questions to ask upfront; audience varies (i.e. present only to teacher, in front of a friend, all parents etc); lots of opportunities to succeed and build up student confidence in order to eventually present in front of a larger audience. Students know that presentations are a big part of the culture at HTH, so if that is not their “thing” they don’t apply to come here.**

2. The video seems to highlight the great moments of learning for students - are there students who fall behind or who don’t shine through this process? (it seems that students who were naturally motivated and curious rather than the disinterested ones who were highlighted). How does staff work with the other students?

**Despite the portrayal in the documentary, there are indeed reluctant learners and student misbehaviour at HTH - though perhaps not as much as other schools because kids opt/want to be here as expressed through their lottery application. As well, kids who don’t “tow the line” are disinvited. Kids are kids, and we would work with these students and try to engage them just like any other teacher, in any other publically funded school.**

3. I love the idea of project based work, and less emphasis on marks, but marks are expected in our system. My question is how is the evaluation done so that it is meaningful, and useful, but also to satisfy the needs of the educational expectations of the system? I would love to see specifics on the evaluations.

**There is a wide and differing approach to this amongst the teachers at HTH. Some staff use rubrics, some do not. Having different approaches to A/E is allowed. Teachers get to assess and use the best evaluation approach that meets the needs of the kid. We don’t all have to assess the same way (i.e. we all do projects or we all do paper and pen tests), as long as we can back up the approach taken and the grading applied. Most teachers have a balanced approach to A/E, and yes we still use paper and pen tests. Just walking the halls at the school, one can see the variety of projects that are used for assessment. We have a little more flexibility in how we deliver curriculum and assess achievement because we are a charter school.**

4. The focus of the documentary was on grade 9 students. Is the same learning platform used in all grades? If not, how does the learning differ in other grades?

**Yes, the same learning platform applies. There is no bell, but there is still a schedule by period we (students and staff) follow. Some teachers use technology (i.e. google g-suite), some use very little technology.**

5. The push in project based learning was to develop students 'soft skills', how can we incorporate the evaluation of these skills into our assessment and evaluation practices?

**Grade soft skills in addition to qualitative feedback for improvement; use of peer and self assessment. There is a strong student reflective component in what we do.**

6. At the end of the documentary, the videos states that 98% of students at High Tech High went on to college/university. Is there any preparation being done at High Tech High directly correlated to college admissions (ie. SAT tests)?

**College counsellors have explicit dialogue with students regarding their post-secondary plans. HTH provides SAT test-prep sessions for students to attend outside and in addition to their scheduled classes. Students and parents are still concerned about SAT scores and university admission. Our students do just as well at university as any other school, and they are not at a disadvantage when they leave here because of our approach to curriculum delivery.**

7. I noticed that all students had some sort of intrinsic motivation to learn, and didn't care about marks. Assuming this isn't a function of careful editing, did the students come to HTH with this skill, or was it developed in them by the teachers. And if the latter, how did the teachers do this?

**This was a result of careful editing. Some kids are not as motivated as perhaps we would like them to be, despite offering them a choice of projects to pursue.**

8. How did staff build emotional resilience in their students. Regarding the part where the boy didn't have his project finished in time for the showcase, it was clear that he was upset, but I imagine many of my students would have been completely devastated by this (especially those who suffer from anxiety and perfectionism).

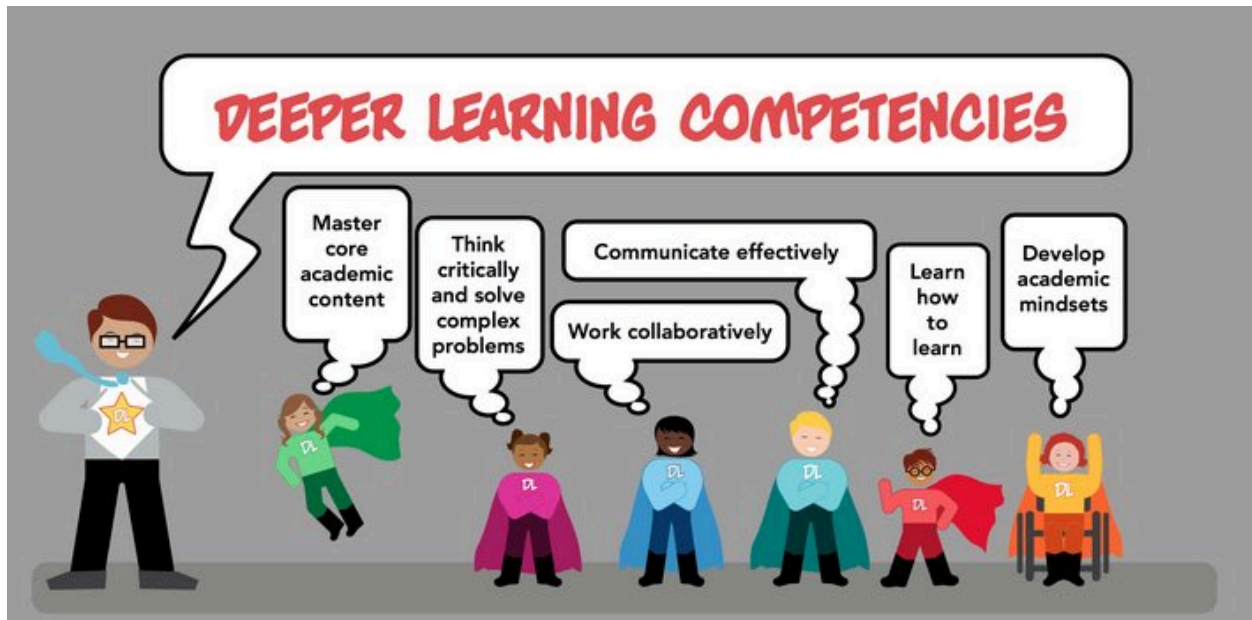
**This is a tough one to answer as we do see a rise in anxiety and other challenges with student resiliency. We do our best to coach kids along, and monitor and track their progress carefully.**

9. What programs / resources / activities are used to support student well-being - emotionally, physically, cognitively, mentally?

**Many programs exist, much like in Halton/Ontario. Teachers and students were open about saying that, like us, there needs to be more programs to assist with student well being. They are seeing more of a need for these programs in their schools as students struggle with anxiety, depression, etc. Social Media seems to be a driving factor for and increase in anxiety among students.**

10. What explicit skills can we focus on to help students develop the ability to think critically, analytically and creatively. To help students design their own solutions to complex problems.

**High Tech High and Deeper Learning would say these skills:**



11. What is the role of (a) reading for leisure and learning, (b) libraries, (c) books/information databases, etc. and (d) the information professionals who can guide students in their learning at this type of school? Do they have a library? Do they subscribe to published digital content? Do they have novels and graphic novels? Or do students at this type of school get that elsewhere? How do students validate and/or analyze their learning/conclusions in light of the larger body of knowledge that already exists?

**We never saw one central “library” and the teachers we talked to never mentioned a librarian. That being said, we could have missed it. Teachers and students mentioned an Online Library that the school subscribes to, so potentially there are lots of opportunities to access electronic information. English teachers do purchase novels for classes to conduct Novel Studies. Students do access Graphic Novels for some of their work. There were lots of book shelf “installations” throughout the school.**



12. If “preparing students for the 21st Century Economy” is perhaps a repeat of the Committee of Ten, how can your graduates be helped to shape the world, not just try to find a job in the world?

**While the students didn't have a direct answer to this question, we saw a lot within the school and from the teachers and students that leads us to the answer on this. Students at HTH are being taught to be resilient, creative, thoughtful, and connected to the world. They are being taught how to collaborate with other students on large projects and questioning and empathizing the world around them and making connections. All these skills are transferable to a changing job market, yes, but also develops people who can shape the world in positive ways, which is why this rethink goes beyond fulfilling an economic need.**

13. In the documentary, students learn about Ancient Civilizations in a variety of chosen ways (amazing!). How is this central theme/topic decided on?

**Themes/Topics in the school seem to span several years based on what is popular or in the news. Recent themes for learning include Refugees, Water, Access to Food. Topics are often decided by the teaching teams but sometimes driven by student voice.**

14. The documentary focuses a lot on the group who is developing the play, specifically the girl who directs the play. Is this their whole program for that semester? How are other content areas like mathematics, science integrated for that group?

**Students still have periods for subject instruction (“Math Class”), with time set aside weekly to work on “Projects”.**

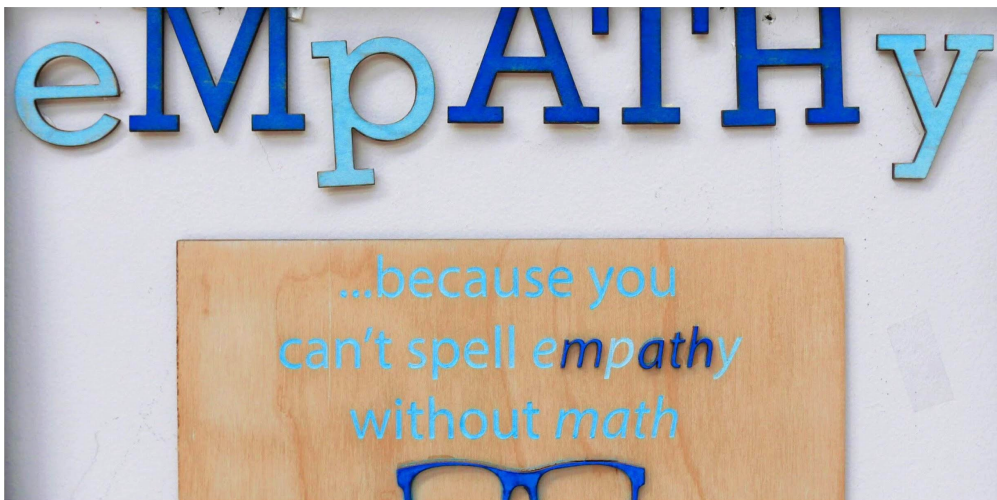
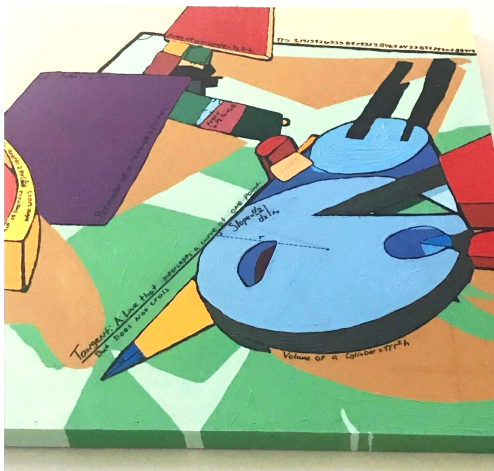
15. How do students document and reflect on their learning journey throughout the process (e.g., journals,

**Students are expected to create their own Digital Portfolios or a Student Website to showcase their reflections. At the end of a project cycle students are expect to exhibit their own work for staff, students and parents.**

16. In the doc, students appear to be using the Creative Process, which we use in Halton. Since there is an awareness of the need for creativity in school, how much emphasis do they put on the Arts subjects? Do student only need one course throughout their school career as they do in Ontario?



Hard to tell at times, but if we had to guess we would say “a lot”. Many rooms came equipped with tools and supplies to create prototypes of projects. Lots of the projects on display had a flare for the artistic. There appeared to be deep integration with the arts in the many ways that students are demonstrating their learning.



17. How do you deliver subject specific content? Was it front loaded? What teaching practice styles are being used?

The same way we do in Ontario. Students had classes for different subjects. There are a wide wide variety of teaching practices used.

18. How is repetition avoided among subjects? How are teachers on the same page?

The school and teachers keep a master list of all projects. Lots of collaboration between teachers.

19. How could you deliver this program in our current 5-period system? How do you allow team teaching in our current system?

We had some ideas in the [past](#).

A hand-drawn alternative timetable on a grid. The columns are labeled 'mon', 'TUES', 'WED', 'THURS', and 'FRI'. The rows represent time slots: 8:40-9:40, 9:40-10:45, 10:45-11:50, 11:50-12:50 (labeled 'LUNCH'), 12:50-1:50, 1:50-2:55, and 2:55-3:55. The cells contain letters representing classes: A, B, C, D, and Flex. A Sharpie pen is visible on the right side of the grid.

	mon	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI
8:40-9:40	A	A	A	A	A
9:40-10:45	A	B	B	B	B
10:45-11:50	B	B	Flex	C	C
11:50-12:50	LUNCH				
12:50-1:50	C	C	C	C	D
1:50-2:55	D	D	D	D	D
2:55-3:55					

20. What does a student timetable look like? What choice do they have in course selection (from what grades?) What does their transcript look like? How many courses are they taking in a semester?

Picture of the “unbell” schedule here. Students still have curriculum they have to meet and standards they need to demonstrate. Streaming in the states seems to start in Elementary school, so there is some choice. Our impression was that in High School students were taking several courses over a semester.

A printed schedule titled 'HTH UnBell Schedule 2016 - 2017 School Year'. It lists the schedule for Monday, Friday, Tuesday, Thursday, Wednesday, and 1/2 Day. Each entry includes the time period, the period number, and the duration in minutes. The schedule is organized into sections for each day of the week.

Monday, Friday	Period	Duration
8:25 - 9:30	1	65 min
9:35 - 10:40	2	65 min
10:45 - 11:50	3	65 min
11:50 - 12:30	LUNCH	40 min
12:35 - 1:05	ADVISORY	30 min
1:10 - 2:15	4	65 min
2:20 - 3:25	5	65 min
Tuesday, Thursday	Period	Duration
8:25 - 9:30	1	65 min
9:35 - 10:35	2	60 min
10:40 - 11:40	3	60 min
11:40 - 12:20	LUNCH	40 min
12:25 - 1:25	4	60 min
1:30 - 2:35	5	65 min
2:40 - 3:25	X - BLOCK	45 min
WEDNESDAY	Period	Duration
8:25 - 9:40	1	75 min
9:45 - 10:55	2	70 min
11:00 - 12:10	3	70 min
12:10 - 12:50	LUNCH	40 min
12:55 - 2:05	4	70 min
2:10 - 3:25	5	75 min
1/2 DAY	Period	Duration
8:25 - 9:10	per 1	45 min
9:15 - 10:00	per 2	45 min
10:05 - 10:50	per 3	45 min
10:55 - 11:40	per 4	45 min
11:45 - 12:25	per 5	40 min

20. How are teachers' processes assessed? What is the assessment criteria for teachers to be hired back?

Teachers admitted that the assessment process and their one year contracts made much of what they do “stressful”. It was easy to demonstrate success when projects were mounted on walls that everyone could see. Harder to demonstrate teacher success when some projects were of a more presentation nature, such as a play or spoken word poetry night.

21. Are the courses streamed or are all academic abilities work collaboratively?

**All students of all abilities work together, collaboratively.**

22. How many discipline issues to they see? If any? What are their discipline/consequence measure?

**Similar to Ontario with respect to discipline issues. The school uses restorative practices when dealing with misbehaviour. Overall they see less issues when the classroom is engaging and the culture is strong. Community Building with the students is done continuously.**

23. How are they using cell phones meaningfully? How do they tackle the personal overuse of the phones?

**Cell phones are sometimes used for learning, sometimes used for research. Teachers try to instill in students that technology is a tool that can be used to make things better, if it is used well. Elementary/Middle school students have rules around when phones can be out and used. In high school these rules are relaxed.**

24. How do they integrate special needs, IEPs into their collaborative work, instructional practice and assessments?

**Like we do. Very little difference here.**

25. How do they bring in community connections throughout the process?

**This is done from day one and continues all year long. The school is a safe space where everything (even mistakes) is celebrated. Students support the community through their projects and the community supports the school through their involvement in exhibition nights.**



26. What are teachers getting paid? Is it contractual to work summers, after hours or is it extra curricular? How do the teachers model work/life balance?

**Never enough! We actually didn't feel super good about asking these questions. Canadian teachers, for the most part, get paid better than our American counterparts. We heard about one state that had a pay scale that would take 24 years to top out on. Teachers participating at the conference were being paid for their time. Work/Life balance is a struggle. Experienced teachers have a bigger bag of tricks and are sometimes not there as much as a brand new teacher to the school.**

27. Do they have extra curricular clubs and sports?

**Yes. There are some High School and Middle School sport teams. Robotics (The Holy Cows) is a very big club at HTH. There is a LBGTQ club, video game club, etc. Many are driven by student need and voice. Overall, however, the teachers and students feel that "the learning is more important" and focus their time on curricular activities.**

