

Josh Bocock, Lead Facilitator at Warrior Tech, began the day by giving each of us (a group of 12 adults) a slip of paper. He invited us to hand it to any student of our choice as we took our tour, and said that these students would then join us after the tour for a panel discussion. We were a bit surprised by this approach! Given that the student body of Warrior Tech mirrors that of Magna Vista High School in its demographics and diversity, some of us found it unusual that the students we would be speaking with wouldn't be "hand-picked" by teachers or administrators. We chose talkative students, quiet students, students from multiple grade levels, and students who we thought might have a variety of backgrounds and experiences based on what we had observed in their classroom. In short, our student panel was a mixed bag. And they were clear, articulate, and focused. And they were awesome.

What follows may not be verbatim; it comes from my hastily scribbled notes. "VASCD" indicates questions from our Board members, and WTS (Warrior Tech Student) shows the students' responses.

VASCD: What made you want to attend Warrior Tech?

WTS: This program gets you ready for college. I have friends who go away to college, and when they come back home they say they're really struggling. But what we are doing here is more like what we will do in college, so we'll be ready.

VASCD: You're in ninth grade. You're not taking college classes, are you?

WTS: No, I'm taking regular ninth grade classes. But I'm learning how to work with a team and collaborate well, and I'm learning that sometimes you have to push yourself, work hard to meet a deadline. When our teachers say something is due by 5 PM on a certain day, they mean you'd better have it there by 5 pm. We have a lot of work and it's not always easy to get everything finished on time, but we learn that we have to make ourselves do it. I'm not watching much TV or playing as many video games as I used to! And those are the same kind of work habits I will need in college.

VASCD: What do you think problem-based learning means? How is this kind of learning different from regular school?

WTS: For one thing, a lot more of the work is on us. We have to be responsible for finding a lot of the information we need. And we work on real problems that come from the world instead of made-up ones out of books. So it's interesting and it applies to our future.

VASCD: What about the SOLs? Do you think you're learning them? Do you feel prepared for the test?

WTS: We know we are prepared. When we do projects, we have to learn a lot of the same facts that other kids learn from worksheets. And I think because of the way we learn them, we get more out of it and know it better. We are learning the SOLs, but we are learning more- it's in there. The test can be hard and sometimes there's

stuff on it that we don't know, but mostly we can look at the test and say "we got this!"

Imagine being a teacher with an SOL- based pacing guide for your course. And now imagine that instead of using that pacing guide as a checklist for covering "bulleted" SOL content at predetermined times, you instead used the pacing guide as a beginning point for your planning. You and your colleagues would combine SOLs across content areas to connect with real-world issues and current problems in your community. You would apply skills from one subject area in learning content from another. You would ask yourself, "How can I frame this content so that my students see its relevance to them?" You would plan in the same ways you wanted your students to learn- collaborating, communicating, designing, and trying out new ideas. Your instructional units would still capture the Standards of Learning, and you too would say "We got this."