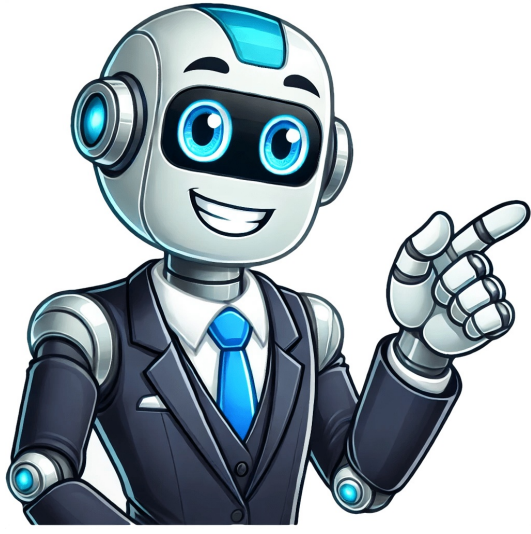


I'm not a robot



Odyssey stem academy

Odyssey STEM Academy, launched in Fall 2018, offers a unique STEM-based high school experience within the Paramount Unified School District. The academy employs a curricularly-integrated model, allowing students to explore a single topic from multiple angles each trimester. This approach aims to provide an equitable and multidisciplinary learning environment for all students. Odyssey STEM Academy has been a transformative high school experience for its students, offering numerous opportunities for growth and connection. Despite some challenges, particularly in preparing students for long-term testing, the school's supportive teachers and staff have been instrumental in helping scholars succeed. The program's focus on one-on-one attention, combined with its rigorous curriculum, has allowed students to develop valuable skills and experience. The creation of resumes and PQs has provided essential preparation for college applications. However, the school recognizes areas for improvement, including enhancing long-term testing experiences. Several current and former scholars have expressed their positive experiences at Odyssey, praising the school's commitment to student well-being, creativity, and self-expression. They appreciate the emphasis on collaboration between students, parents, and teachers, which fosters a supportive community. Recently, the school has been at the forefront of responding to social justice issues, with its founders reflecting on how the national conversation around racial injustice is influencing their work. The institution's learner-centered approach is being re-examined in light of this new awareness, with a focus on iterating its structure to better support student needs and promote positive change. ### Educators nationwide are grappling with similar feelings of frustration and hope amidst the ongoing wave of racial injustice. While some are overcome with grief, others remain steadfast in their commitment to creating change. A growing number of students and educators alike are taking action, sparking a sense of urgency that could lead to meaningful reform. For those who have long advocated for social justice, a moment of introspection is essential. "Am I doing enough to address these injustices?" one individual wonders. Another reflects on the distinction between mere compliance with existing systems versus actively working towards anti-racism. In schools like Odyssey STEM Academy, where empowering students to effect change is a core mission, this newfound awareness has galvanized a generation of young people. As they confront systemic racism firsthand, they are awakening to the need for systemic reform. Keith, a school leader with over 10 years of experience, now questions his own complicity in perpetuating unjust systems. He recalls past decisions that may have inadvertently created a less-than-ideal environment for students and community members alike. In contrast, when student-led protests gained momentum during the 2016 Presidential election, concerns arose about whether students had the right to organize and express themselves freely. In response to these questions, Becky, an Odyssey STEM Academy designer, reflects on her own institution's structure. While she is proud of its efforts to eliminate institutional racism, she acknowledges that complacency can set in when progress is made. "We must consistently seek out opportunities to better serve our students," she emphasizes. The goal now is to recognize and address the gaps in their existing structures, empowering them to articulate their own experiences and advocate for change. When do you provide safety, and when do you offer an opportunity for learning? That's a question we've struggled with in our learning community. It's not just about choosing one or the other; it's about finding that balance between keeping everyone safe and creating an environment where people can learn from their mistakes. Earlier this year, we faced a difficult decision when some of our scholars experienced hate speech from their peers. We decided to have a restorative conversation with the students who were involved, rather than suspending them or removing them from the learning community. This was a hard conversation to have, but it's essential for bringing healing to a hurting community. One of the things we've learned is that just having these conversations isn't enough. We need to do more to address the underlying issues and create a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. I'm hopeful that our scholars will continue to lead the way in making changes and creating positive change. We've found that focusing on individual students' passions and interests leads to more powerful learning experiences. This approach isn't easy, but it's rewarding for both the learner and the advisor. As a Big Picture Learning school, we're shifting our focus from traditional teacher-directed lessons to helping learners gather real-world evidence and build knowledge through hands-on experiences. Our teachers now advise individual students, creating tailored projects that reflect their interests rather than just following the teacher's lead. We partner with organizations like Odyssey to provide unique learning opportunities for our scholars. These partnerships allow them to work on community-driven projects, demonstrating their skills and knowledge in a genuine way. We don't simply hand out internships; instead, we empower our students to seek out mentors who share their interests. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and impact among our scholars. Our project-based learning approach is centered around connecting learners with community mentors who are passionate about the same things. This authentic experience leads to real-world competencies and a more engaging learning environment. By shifting away from traditional lesson plans, we're able to tap into the authentic interests of our students, making high school feel like the real thing. Given article text here "Odyssey learners are interning at an organization that collects surplus food and distributing it to local areas of need, gaining hands-on experience in the supply chain. They're also growing their own food on campus and experimenting with different methods to increase quality and yield. This project-based learning experience connects back to our environmental sustainability complex and empowers young people to make a positive impact. In many cases, students might not have had this opportunity if it wasn't integrated into the school day. Who knows where these experiences will lead them in the future? Some students may struggle with the level of support and autonomy provided by the organization, preferring an environment where they can blend in. This type of learning requires scholars to think critically and take ownership of their ideas. However, some students might find it challenging to develop their voice and struggle with self-esteem. The high level of accountability from both advisors and peers can be overwhelming. Additionally, students may miss out on the traditional high school experience, such as sports and extracurricular activities, which are substituted with more empowering activities that allow them to express themselves." At Odyssey, we foster a passion for education among students by valuing qualities like empathy, modesty, bravery, happiness, and high standards. Our staff prioritizes creating an inclusive environment where kids feel supported every day. By living our core values, we empower students to take ownership of their lives and make meaningful contributions.