

Dulce Diaz

Graduate of Lindsay Unified School District
Lindsay, California

“More students deserve access to the kind of education that I had.”

Personalized Learning: What Every Student Deserves

When Dulce Diaz chose to pursue her Master’s in education policy at the University of Washington in Seattle, she was driven by the belief that “more students deserve access to the kind of education that I had.” As a high school student, Diaz had the opportunity to learn how she learned, to make meaningful connections to what mattered most to her, and to demonstrate what she knew in more ways than just taking a test.

“Everybody learns differently, and I’m putting a lot of that into my work now,” said Diaz, who hopes to transform the education system to make it more student-centered, as her high school experience was. “In the traditional education system, you can get good grades without knowing things. We need something that lets us tailor the classroom and our teaching skills to meet students’ needs and get them really engaged in what they’re learning and why.”



Diaz graduated in 2011 from Lindsay High School in Lindsay Unified School District (LUSD) in Lindsay, California, a learning community that has embraced competency-based education. Unlike the traditional education system which is focused on seat-time, competency-based education, sometimes called proficiency-based, mastery or standards-based education, is student-centered. In a competency-based classroom, students must demonstrate mastery of learning objectives before moving on. Supports are personalized and teachers and learners work together to build a classroom culture that empowers students to make meaningful connections between what they're learning and what feels relevant to them. Learning outcomes are transparent for everyone: teachers, students, parents and community members.

When asked about her high school experience, Diaz regrets that she didn't have the opportunity to be a part of a competency-based education model longer, as the district didn't fully implement until her junior year. Because for Diaz, her education at LUSD "wasn't just about memorizing something prior to an exam." Along with her peers, Diaz was given the opportunity to generate her own projects and to feel confident that her grades weren't just an

average of scores derived from tests, but based on what she really understood and knew how to do.

"We're so used to having our grades determine how smart we are, but that's not always the case," Diaz said. But Diaz knows she was fortunate, and she wants the same for all learners. The first in her family to attend college, a Gates Millennium Scholar and ultimately the recipient of more than \$250K in scholarships, Diaz also learned so much that wasn't going to come through on any transcript: how to collaborate with peers, how to communicate about what she was learning, provide constructive feedback, to manage her time and to take the initiative.

Diaz insists more time in a competency-based environment would have even better prepared her for college, as she'd have had more time to get to know herself as a learner, and to practice making connections between what she was learning and what she cared about.

"Rather than just being in class, looking at a textbook, I felt really engaged with what was happening," Diaz said. And if she gets her way, that's how every student will feel.



GRADUATING COLLEGE READY AT LINDSAY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

At Lindsay Unified School District in Lindsay, California, the focus is on growing learners as a whole, and their practices reflect their commitment to what learners need to know, understand and do in order to thrive. Students learn:

- › to be self-directed, reflective, and to self-assess
- › to be deeply aware of their own strengths and opportunities for growth
- › critical thinking
- › to collaborate with others
- › time management
- › to embrace diversity
- › adaptability

KnowledgeWorks is focused on ensuring that every student experiences meaningful personalized learning that allows them to thrive in college, career and civic life. We develop the capabilities of educators to implement and sustain competency-based and early college schools, work with state and federal leaders to establish aligned policy conditions and provide national thought leadership around the future of learning.

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