

## PRACTICE & POLICY BRIEF 2023: BRINGING A GRADUATE PROFILE TO LIFE

### DAVIS JUSD: GRADUATE PROFILE FOCUSES CHANGE IN A TRADITIONALLY SUCCESSFUL DISTRICT

“Our school board members are all proponents of innovation and student agency. We have many bright spots, including some schools and many individual classrooms, but students continue to tell us through quantitative and qualitative data that they want a greater sense of agency and belonging, and more relevant learning. Through the [DJUSD Strategic Plan 2023-2028](#) the Board has charged us with increasing student agency, belonging and relevance and we believe that the Graduate Profile will be a critical piece of that work”

– Matt Best, Superintendent,  
Davis Joint Unified School District

The superintendent, school board, and other leaders at [Davis Joint Unified School District](#) see the recent creation of its Graduate Profile as a driver of innovation and change toward a more student-centered approach to education. However, it faces a challenge familiar to many districts across the United States, especially those in relatively affluent communities with highly educated parents. Because it is successful on traditional measures – test scores and college admission rates – many people in the community, including teachers, do not see a need for major change.

Additionally, DJUSD is a relatively small district, with just two comprehensive high schools. One is a highly innovative charter school, Da Vinci High School, which began as part of the nationally-known New Technology Network. The other, much larger school is Davis Senior High, which is seen as a traditionally academic school with an experienced, strong teaching staff. Like many such schools, each classroom and each department is a kingdom unto itself.

Promoting change and reaching consensus about a new direction in such a place is difficult. Three of its four junior high schools are also fairly traditional in their culture, structure, and instructional practices—the fourth, Da Vinci Junior High, is more like its namesake high school.

There is, however, a growing recognition of the need for change in Davis JUSD, which was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The district regularly surveys its students using YouthTruth, which indicates a growing dissatisfaction among students. As superintendent Matt Best points out in the quote at the beginning of this case study, too many students are not satisfied with “playing the game” of traditional schooling. Students do not feel they have much agency in or personal connection to their education. The curriculum is not seen as relevant or important to their lives. Their mental health is of increasing concern, made especially apparent by the COVID-19 pandemic.

And, troublingly, the district has data on college persistence rates showing that almost a quarter of the 82% of its graduates who entered a four-year college did not complete it—most often because they “lacked resilience and the ability to handle adversity” according to district leaders.



# THE BEGINNINGS OF CHANGE: A GRADUATE PROFILE IS CREATED

Davis JUSD began the process of creating a Graduate Profile in the fall of 2017. According to Rody Boonchouy, the associate superintendent at the time who led the effort, the district's priorities had been "all over the map" and unclear. It needed a focus. The school board engaged in study sessions to explore the driving question, "What is school for?" Its members read articles and books about new visions of education and watched Ted Dintersmith's film "Most Likely to Succeed."

Boonchouy and other leaders then reached out to their stakeholders and met with students, staff, parents, and various community organizations and employers, eventually totaling well over 1,000 people. They heard clearly similar comments from all groups about what they wanted from the education system. Parents hoped for "successful, thriving, independent people." Employers wanted people who were "able to learn and adapt to a changing landscape, resilient." Families of migrant students, who were mainly Latino, said the same thing because their children frequently had to learn to adapt to new circumstances.

District leaders also met with people in the admissions department of the nearby University of California at Davis, who told them, "To be successful in college you need to be a strong communicator, adaptable, persistent, and resilient."



## DAVIS JUSD AT A GLANCE

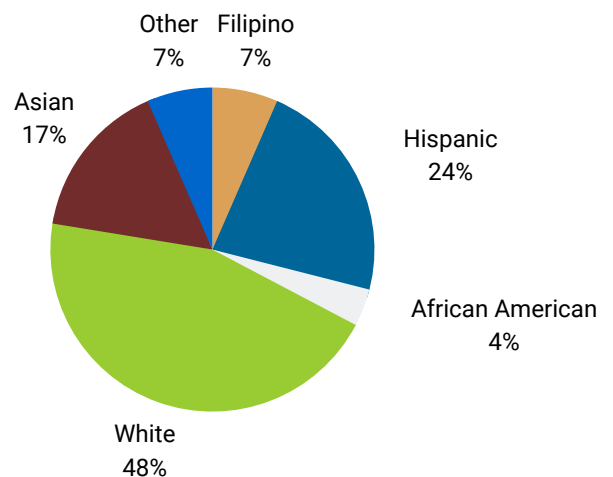
Davis Joint Union School District is located in California's Central Valley, 15 miles west of Sacramento. The city of Davis has a population of over 60,000 that is over 50% white, 23% Asian, and 14% Hispanic, and has a high percentage of residents with college or graduate degrees. It sits in an agricultural area and is the home of the University of California, Davis and its 40,000 students.

## STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS:

- 8,500 students, TK-12
- 9 elementary schools
- 4 junior high schools
- 3 high schools
- 1 alternative education school

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS:

- 19% Free/Reduced Lunch
- 25% Students with first language other than English
- 8% Students receiving ELL services



The last step in creating a Graduate Profile was taken by a team of teachers representing all schools in the district. They were asked to finalize the list by answering the question, “What’s the most teachable and assessable?” In 2018, the district agreed upon and adopted six competencies, which are [detailed on its website](#):

**1 Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:**  
Students reason more effectively in order to identify, define, and solve complex problems and essential questions.

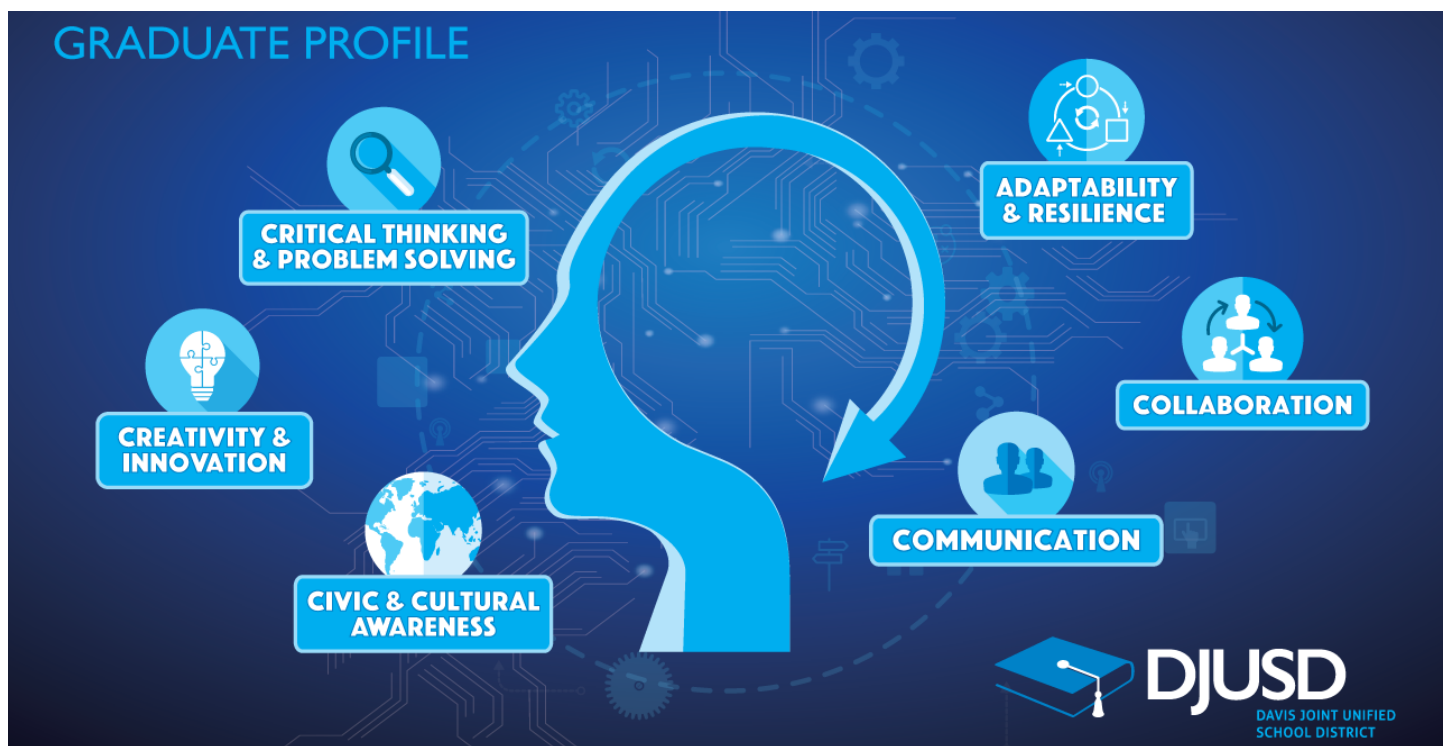
**2 Creativity and innovation:**  
Students take risks, explore multiple possibilities, challenge the status quo, and seek to continually improve processes and products. They deliberate through a design process to solve problems and act on creative ideas.

**3 Civic and Cultural Awareness:**  
Students will develop and establish an awareness of the responsibilities of contributing individuals in a diverse society. They recognize and respect the differences in values that may exist between themselves and people from other countries or from varying social and cultural backgrounds.

**4 Adaptability and Resilience:**  
Students adapt to varied roles, responsibilities, and contexts, working effectively in a climate of ambiguity and changing priorities. They persist to accomplish difficult tasks and to overcome academic and personal barriers to meet goals.

**5 Collaboration:**  
Students work effectively, respectfully, and with empathy in a team of differing opinions, skills, and strengths. Students assume shared responsibility for collaborative work.

**6 Communication:**  
Students speak and write with clarity, listen actively, and read with comprehension. They know their audience, understand the purpose, choose precise language, and when appropriate, incorporate media to enhance ideas.




# BEGINNING STEPS FOR SCHOOLS

As of 2023, according to Superintendent Best, the Graduate Profile remains more as “poster, not practice” in most DJUSD schools, with the exception of Da Vinci High and Junior High, as explained in the following section. Although the Graduate Profile competencies may to some extent be embedded in many teachers’ curriculum and instruction, they are generally not explicitly taught, assessed, or reported on.

However, Davis Senior High is taking steps, says Best, to make “culture moves” aimed at improving student climate, as well as discussing equity issues, grading practices and common standards. The school’s new principal Bryce Geigle is looking to reach agreement with the teaching staff about shared goals that reflect certain aspects of the Graduate Profile, such as the promotion of academic discourse and student agency. He says the school has many innovative and student-centered teachers, but has traditionally been “siloeed,” which was also noted by a recent visit by a WASC study team. Accordingly, Geigle wants to build a vision of “collective excellence” to reduce instructional quality disparities among classrooms.

In the district’s elementary schools, there is a significant structural feature now in place that supports the Graduate Profile. As shown on the figure below, the second page of the “[Report to Parents](#)” used by all DJUSD elementary schools connects learner behaviors to the Profile. (“Communication” is not included because it is seen not so much as a behavior but a competency contained within ELA standards.) Matt Best notes that the report cards are not yet calibrated across teachers and schools and there are no shared rubrics or other sets of criteria, but these are projected next steps.



Learner Behaviors Key

S-Strength   O-Observed   X-Not Observed

Graduate Profile Learner Behaviors	T1	T2	T3
<b>Civic and Cultural Awareness</b>			
Demonstrates respect and empathy for others			
<b>Adaptability and Resilience</b>			
Demonstrates perseverance			
Completes independent work			
<b>Collaboration</b>			
Participates appropriately			
Follows classroom norms			
<b>Critical Thinking and Problem Solving</b>			
Asks questions			
Solves problems			
<b>Creativity and Innovation</b>			
Tries new things and seeks to improve			

Teacher Comments—Trimester 1

Teacher Comments—Trimester 2

Teacher Comments—Trimester 3



## DA VINCI CHARTER ACADEMY: FROM PRACTICE TO POSTER

Davis JUSD is the home of Da Vinci Charter Academy, composed of a high school and a junior high. The high school was founded in 2004 as a member of the New Technology Network (NTN), which began a few years earlier in nearby Napa County. The school program has since evolved as somewhat distinct from NTN, but retains the organization's emphasis on teaching, assessing, and reporting on what it originally called "school-wide outcomes."

Da Vinci's Graduate Profile maps closely with the district's. A [detailed description](#) of its seven competencies can be found on the school's website, along with a rubric and a short explanatory video for each one. An important refinement took place several years ago when the school asked students to capture the essence of the competencies in student-friendly language, as shown below:



As principal Tyler Millsap explains it, Da Vinci High School has moved "from practice to poster." It has been supporting student mastery of the Graduate Profile competencies in a variety of ways since its inception, and created the poster a few years later. The school's practices include:

- Regular use of project-based learning in all grade levels and subject areas.
- Teacher grade books with a percentage score for student achievement of each competency in a course. (Traditional "content knowledge" is embedded within "Curricular Literacy" and to some extent "Critical Thinking.") The grade book was created specifically for the school by a software company that modified NTN's "Echo" LMS.
- School-wide rubrics for each competency adapted from New Tech but customized by the staff in 2021.
- A high degree of teacher calibration around the rubrics and grading practices.
- A report on student scores on the competencies viewable on its website by staff, students, and parents.



## NEXT STEPS - AND THE “WHY?”

Superintendent Matt Best is encouraged by what he’s seen at other districts in the Scaling Student Success network further along in implementing their Graduate Profiles and creating more student-centered approaches. The goal of the newly adopted [DJUSD Strategic Plan 2023-2028](#), he notes, is to prepare students for post-secondary life through their acquisition of the Graduate Profile competencies. This goal will not be without challenge in a community with parents who were themselves successful in a traditional education system.

Tyler Millsap recognizes the need, even at Da Vinci, for growth in explicitly teaching and scaffolding Graduate Profile competencies. He, too is impressed with what he’s seen at schools in the Scaling Student Success network who have developed a 12th grade culminating capstone or portfolio defense—an idea initiated at Da Vinci that was interrupted by the 2020-2022 pandemic.

Asked why he thinks it’s important for education to change along the lines of Da Vinci and a Graduate Profile, Millsap is clear. “It’s more likely to promote students’ success and happiness in life than what we’re doing right now. And it’s far more fun and enriching for educators to teach in these ways, where they view themselves as an ally, a coach, a facilitator of students’ growing and acquiring these skills. It’s SO much more fun!”

“This old game of tell me what I said to you, do the things I tell you to do, I don’t know how we’re still doing that. So when you can position yourself to saying, sure, it’s important students acquire this content—but what I really want to do is help them develop a wide set of skills, so they can be successful, overcome challenges, and be happy in a world that’s becoming nothing but more complicated... I think you’re really doing something that serves them beyond these few years that we have them.”

Millsap notes that students refer to Graduate Profile competencies when talking with potential employers, and points out how valuable the Da Vinci program is for students in the workplace. “They come back and say, ‘I got my first job because I could get in there and I can speak way better than everybody else.’ Or, ‘I got hired and I became the team leader after three months because I knew how to collaborate with these other folks.’ The stories just go on and on about these kinds of accomplishments.”

While colleges have not as yet “signaled interest” in a transcript showing achievement in terms of Graduate Profile competencies, Millsap acknowledges, college recommendation letters from teachers do specifically reference them. He also makes the case that Da Vinci’s approach prepares students well for college. “They often say they have the ability to self-advocate, to access resources, to schedule office hours with a professor to get the feedback they need, to navigate new places and new experiences, to be able to work in teams without any structure or scaffolding being given to them. Or when they’re asked to do presentations, the rest of the room is terrified, and they’re the ones to go first and set the bar.”

## JOIN THE MOVEMENT

**Scaling Student Success** is a California partnership dedicated to educating the whole child. With our many partners, we embrace school districts that have engaged their local communities to create a Graduate Profile (or Portrait of a Graduate) as a means of articulating a whole child vision and more holistically and equitably defining student success.

Through our **Community of Practice (CoP)** we support districts to move “from poster to practice,” i.e., fully operationalizing their Graduate Profiles as a promise to their students, families, and communities to move beyond the current outdated metrics of our accountability system and embrace outcomes that better represent the values and priorities of their local communities – its employers, civic and community leaders, educators, parents and students.

**Please join us!** We welcome any school district, charter school or county office interested in joining the movement to realize its whole child vision and redefine student success. To learn more, please visit our [website](#) and/or see the [invitation](#) to join our CoP.

The **Reimagining CA Schools Innovation Pilot** represents a subset of five (CoP) districts aggressively pursuing a journey to realize their Graduate Profiles, eager to go deeper for greater impact on the student experience, learner outcomes, and systems change. Together, over a period of several years, we are determined to establish proof points to demonstrate to the state – its educational agencies, associations, policymakers and LEAs – the power and potential of a Graduate Profile to drive transformational change in order to more holistically prepare young people for future success.

The school districts involved in the innovation pilot include:

- Anaheim Union High School District
- Cajon Valley Union School District
- Davis Joint Unified School District
- Lindsay Unified School District
- Vista Unified School District

The four **Practice & Policy Briefs** (combined with a [case study of Lindsay USD](#) published earlier this year by NGLC) are intended to tell the real-world stories of California districts participating in the innovation pilot – their journeys to realize their whole child visions, the strategies they have opted to pursue, their lessons learned and challenges faced. Please feel free to share them widely.

In publishing these briefs, our goals are to:

- Embolden school district leaders to pursue a similar vision and path
- Entice policymakers and funders to incentivize these efforts
- Encourage state educational agencies and associations to join the movement

Special thanks to our writer/storyteller, [John Larmer](#), and designer, [Kimberly Rachelle Ranalla](#).

Please feel free to contact us:

Email: [Info@ScalingStudentSuccess.org](mailto:Info@ScalingStudentSuccess.org)

Phone: (510) 265-9198