

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL SYSTEM IMPLEMENTS PRIVATE TRAINING TO ELEVATE AP[®] ACHIEVEMENT

With help from NMSI, teachers are transforming their practice and delivering high-quality instruction



Ensuring students have rigorous learning experiences is vital to their academic and personal success. But just as important as what happens inside the classroom is what happens behind the scenes.

In order to provide rich and engaging learning experiences, teachers need the right training, with opportunities for ongoing mentoring and support that connects them with appropriate resources and instructional materials.

Many would argue that this professional development is the most important component in boosting student achievement because it strengthens teachers' understanding of core concepts and their ability to engage students in meaningful learning.

When [IDEA Public Schools](#) decided to prepare every student for college through access to Advanced Placement[®] courses and a rigorous curriculum, leaders at the tuition-free charter school system knew that its AP teachers would need access to high-quality, sustained professional development. IDEA has partnered with the [National Math and Science Initiative](#) to deliver this training.

A COLLEGE READINESS PARTNERSHIP

IDEA Public Schools, a public charter school network for students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, is centered around its core mission: “College for All Children.” A cornerstone of this mission is the AP® for All initiative, which launched during the 2014-15 school year. This pathway begins in the ninth grade, and by the time students graduate, they will have taken up to 11 AP® courses, depending on their chosen electives.

IDEA’s educational model ensures that more students from low-income backgrounds, students who would be first-generation college students, and those from historically underrepresented groups can achieve their dreams by earning a college degree.

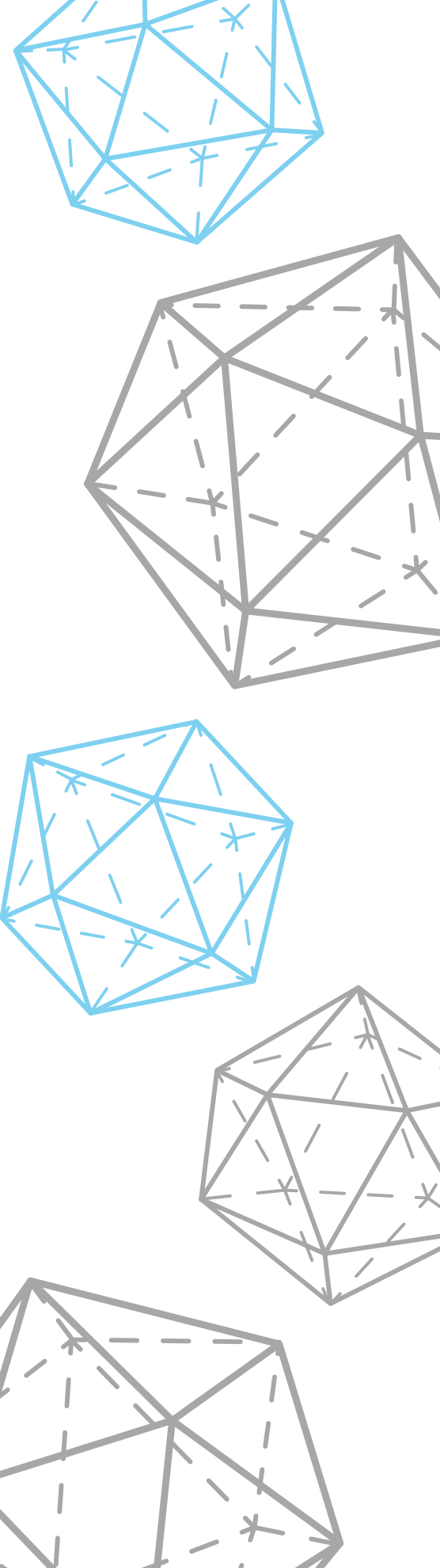
To execute its ambitious vision, IDEA partnered with NMSI, a national nonprofit organization that links teachers to intensive STEM professional development so that students will have access to [rigorous, high-quality learning opportunities](#).

NMSI’s hallmark programs include [Laying the Foundation](#), which helps teachers build and strengthen their STEM subject matter expertise, and the [College Readiness Program](#).

CRP aims to increase enrollment and participation in AP® courses and overall college readiness. The program is based on the premise that all students can master rigorous AP® coursework with the right opportunities and supports in place. These supports can include hands-on teacher training and coaching, instructional resources, administrator support.

NMSI provided training for IDEA teachers throughout the school year, with the goal of building their content knowledge and deepening their teaching practice.

Vidal Hernandez has been with IDEA for 10 years. He first served as an AP® Calculus and Statistics teacher, and for the last three years, he has been a secondary mathematics curriculum manager. When asked about the experience, Hernandez said the NMSI trainings “definitely helped” him become a more effective teacher, and also noted that “NMSI has a strong system for mentors. The people they hire are experts.”



PROVIDING PERSONALIZED SUPPORT

IDEA began its partnership with NMSI in 2014 with six schools in Texas. Now, the program is operating in 49 schools across Texas and Louisiana.

When NMSI initially came to IDEA's campuses to describe the program, Marisol Ayala, the AP® ELA curriculum manager for IDEA, wasn't completely on board.

"At first, I thought, 'Oh, this is something extra that we have to do — more trainings, more Saturday sessions.' I was kind of iffy," she says. "But what really got me excited was the one-on-one coaching and the opportunity that NMSI gave to us with that type of connection. That coach became one of my lifetime mentors; I still talk to her today."

The one-on-one coaching component ensures that staff in NMSI partner schools receive highly targeted, personalized instruction and support.

"It put me in a very good position as a teacher," Ayala says. "Sometimes, in a school district, your supervisor doesn't have that content expertise, especially when it comes to an AP® course. That was very valuable to me, being able to pull the resources, the unit guides, the extra activities, and the abundance of tools we could use."



ESTABLISHING A NEW TRAINING MODEL

When IDEA and NMSI first teamed up, teachers engaged in public CRP training until the 2018-19 school year. Through this collaborative partnership, IDEA and NMSI jointly determined that private training would better fit the school system's growing needs. While teachers in math, science, and English were getting highly targeted professional development, IDEA wanted to extend this training to accommodate more subject areas and specialized teacher needs.

NMSI developed customized supports to meet IDEA's needs through a private training model. Private training gives NMSI partner schools more autonomy, with the ability to customize the training to their specific needs — whether it's addressing a major learning gap, training teachers in specialized subject areas or accommodating a flexible, personalized professional development schedule.

NMSI's private training model helped IDEA incorporate training for Spanish and history AP® teachers as well, courses not traditionally included in its public training options.

Abby Lopez Turan started with IDEA as a Spanish 1 teacher in 2005 and has since worked as an assistant principal and Spanish curriculum manager. Lopez Turan now focuses on AP® Spanish Language and Literature.

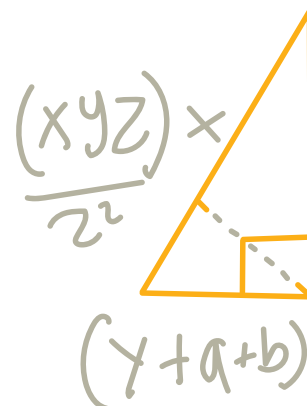
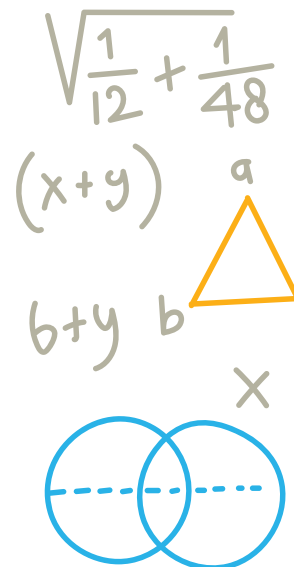
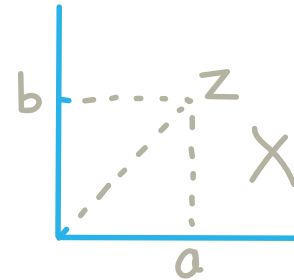
"I was introduced to NMSI as a teacher, but at the time, they didn't have support for AP® Spanish courses, so I was able to view it as an outsider," she says. "I saw all the resources and support they offered for [other] courses, and it looked great."

NMSI began piloting support for [AP® Spanish Language and Culture](#), and IDEA quickly took advantage.

"Our teachers now have a lot of support," Lopez Turan says. "They've developed a really strong relationship with our NMSI coach to the point where our teachers ask for him to specifically lead some of our sessions or come to our school. We've been very fortunate to work with him. He knows our teachers, he knows what our needs are, and it's been great working with him in this capacity. The fact that we've been with the same coach since we started the program has been very beneficial."

$$y^2 = \frac{\sqrt{y}}{x+2}$$

$$x \sqrt{\frac{x^2 - y}{z+x}}$$



AN INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP

During the 2017-18 school year, NMSI and IDEA began holding quarterly meetings in which the two organizations listened to and learned from each other. These meetings have become a space for creativity and innovation to emerge. They have been the starting point for new ideas, such as the AP Fellows project (a “train the trainer” model for IDEA teachers) and an AP Leader workshop for IDEA administrators.

“The impact NMSI has had on our teachers, and how they have grown from it, has been amazing,” Lopez Turan says.

Recently, a first-year teacher was so inspired by NMSI’s specialized trainings and supports that he formed a cohort of teachers in his region to conduct smaller, informal trainings for unit exams and other events. It was a striking example of how IDEA’s partnership with NMSI has transformed the culture within participating schools.

The NMSI training that teachers receive is helping to advance the school network’s core mission: college success for everyone.

“The work that NMSI is doing is extremely valuable,” Lopez Turan concludes.



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