

Riverview High School: School profile

December 2020

Riverview High School serves 90–120 students in grades 7 through 12. Many of these students have left their assigned schools due to disciplinary reasons or are transitioning out of juvenile detention or residential treatment centers. The school comprises two educator teams: a junior high school team with four educators serving 30–40 students, and a high school team with seven educators serving 60–80 students. Teams are also joined by Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College teacher candidates, a counselor, social work interns and licensed therapists.

Introduction

Riverview High School is a small, alternative high school within Mesa Public Schools that endeavors to inspire change one student at a time. Most students attending Riverview have been removed from their previous schools for disciplinary reasons, or are transitioning from juvenile detention or residential treatment centers. Enrollment periods tend to be six to 12 months, resulting in significant fluctuation in the student population. Yet Riverview educators' commitment to supporting the whole child ensures students are seen and known during their short time at the school, and their commitment to leveraging technology in service of personalizing students' learning experiences has opened the door to meaningful and significant academic growth.

Teams of educators with distributed expertise

Riverview High School comprises two teams: a junior high school team and a high school team. Four educators serve on the junior high team. Each specializes in a single content area (English Language Arts, math, social studies or special education). All four educators teach all 30–40 7th- and 8th-grade students. Seven educators serve on the high school team along with one MLFTC resident. Likewise, the high school educators each specialize in a single content area (English Language Arts, math, social studies, special education, physical education, art, and credit recovery) and teach all 60–80 9th- through 12th-graders enrolled in the high school. A single school counselor works across both teams.

Teachers: At Riverview, teachers co-plan interdisciplinary, inquiry and project-based learning experiences that will engage all students served by the team, regardless of their specific grade levels. Each teacher works closely with one other member of the team for the full duration of the quarter, co-planning and co-teaching on the same block schedule and in the same learning space. To co-plan effectively, the educator team meets twice a day: once before school and then again after school. In addition to co-planning, educators use these times for professional learning and for thinking creatively about team- and school-level innovations that will help team members better meet students' needs.

“ Team meetings are all about the students, what they are learning, the progress they are making, and problem-solving any issues that arise within the team and roster. A lot of what we do is really grass-roots and comes from the teachers, and it works really well.

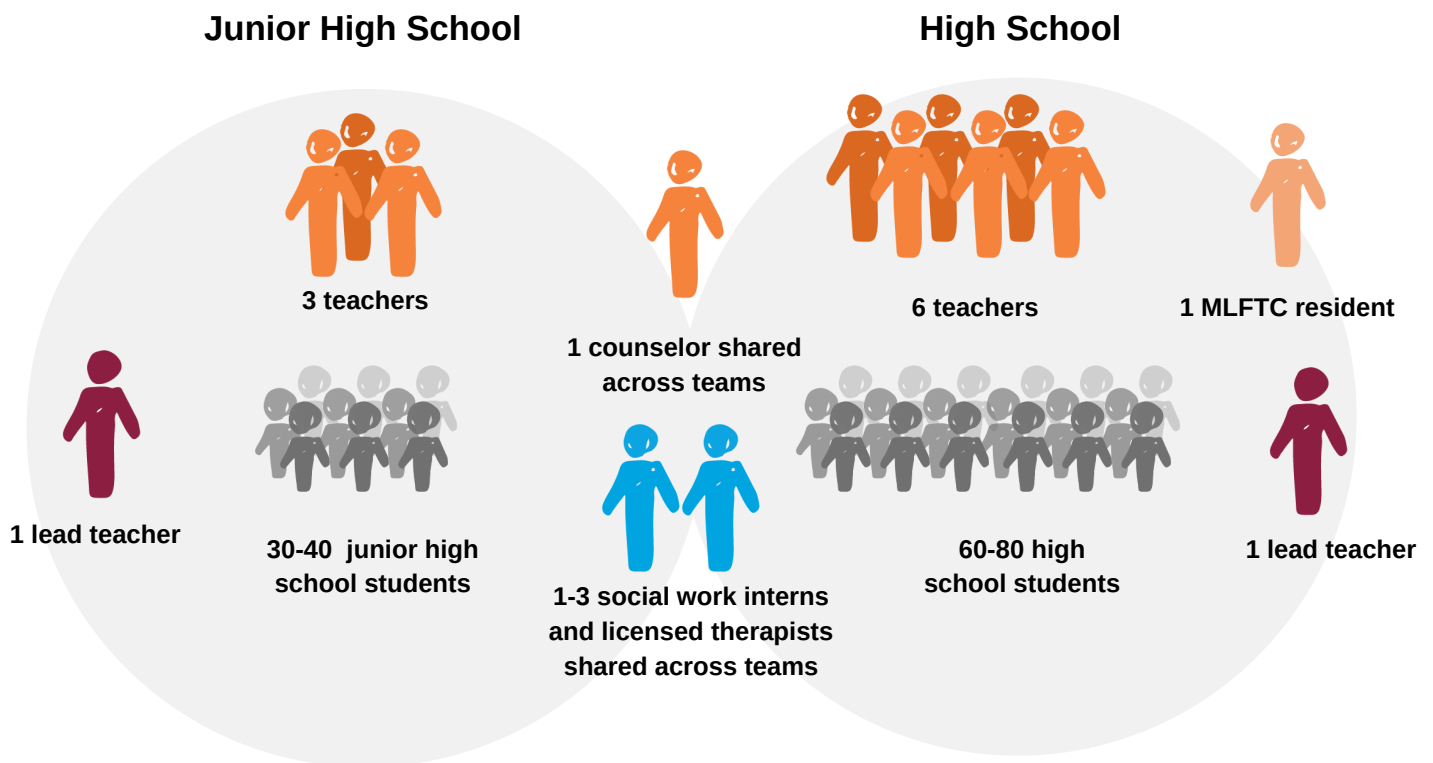
- Principal, Riverview High School

Lead teachers: One educator on each of the two teams serves as the team's lead teacher. In addition to teaching a full schedule, that educator is a member of the school's leadership team, supports the school and team in goal-setting, plans personalized professional learning for team members and facilitates team meetings.

Counselor: The school counselor attends all team meetings and works closely with all teachers across both teams. They handle crises, monitor students' attendance and academics, and coordinate district-level services for students and families.

MLFTC teacher candidates: Currently, one MLFTC resident supports the high school team, and Riverview is looking forward to welcoming two residents in the spring of 2021. Residents gradually assume increasing responsibilities. From designing lessons and building courses in the school's learning management system (Canvas) to leading content bursts and administering assessments, Riverview's residents are immersed in all aspects of the work. Previously, MLFTC interns (college-level Juniors) have also joined Riverview teams. Embedding for a day each week, the interns supported the teams and students by facilitating one-on-one learning, scaffolding for individual students, and co-teaching content bursts.

Members of community-based organizations: Staff from community-based organizations join both teams to support educators and students. The school has created partnerships with two community organizations in an effort to ensure students have access to wraparound services. Everybody Matters is a Phoenix-based organization committed to matching vulnerable students with social work interns. Each year, the organization sends two interns to Riverview to complete their fieldwork while being overseen by a licensed social worker. Everybody Matters interns meet with students in small groups and individually as needed, sometimes as often as three times a week. They also meet weekly with the educator teams. Additionally, the school has a partnership with Southwest Behavioral & Health Services, which sends licensed therapists to the school weekly to engage students in more intensive one-on-one counseling. The school-based counselor serves as the liaison between both community-based organizations and the educator teams.



Deeper and personalized learning

Riverview educators prioritize planning deeper and personalized learning for students in several ways, including:

- Taking interdisciplinary, inquiry and project-based learning approaches
- Taking a flexible approach to scheduling that supports students' individual learning goals
- Leveraging technology to personalize at scale.

Below, read on about each approach.

Interdisciplinary, inquiry and PBL approaches

At Riverview, teachers co-plan interdisciplinary, inquiry and PBL experiences with a different team member each quarter. For example, if the high school English Language Arts teacher co-plans and co-teaches with the math teacher during the first quarter, the two would craft a series of research question-driven, interdisciplinary units that would engage all students in grades nine through 12. In the second quarter, however, the English Language Arts teacher might instead co-plan and co-teach with the social studies teacher, the math teacher with the art teacher. This approach pushes the educator team to identify real-world connections across their content areas, which in turn helps students to understand the relevance of their learning. Additionally, it provides a unifying theme for the multi-grade classes that invites collaboration between students across grade levels.

Flexible approach to scheduling

While there is structure to the day—set blocks for morning and afternoon instruction, with set rosters of students—Riverview teams have the autonomy to make real-time changes in service of personalizing student learning. And since all educators meet together in the morning, co-teach together during some or all of the day, and meet again together in the afternoon, the team has adequate time to plan for a more fluid approach and to communicate with each other.

At the start of each block class period, Riverview students check in with their teachers to collaboratively identify their personalized goals for the day and how they will meet them. While all students in a given class will drive toward answering a shared research question, students have significant latitude in determining the specific concepts they will research under the broader research question, the classmates with whom they will collaborate, and the means by which they will demonstrate their knowledge. This level of personalization is especially important given rosters are multi-grade, and students come to Riverview with varying credit recovery needs.

Leveraging technology to personalize at scale

Riverview educators leverage technology to scale personalized learning for students. The teams of educators have adopted [ALEKS](#) adaptive learning program for mathematics, [Beagle](#) for English Language Arts and social studies, and [Canvas's](#) learning management system for hosting all content. Most students who enroll at Riverview require credit recovery in science, so the school has elected to leverage both [Pearson's](#) and Mesa's distance learning courses to meet this need, and students engage with this self-paced content during the credit recovery period.

Thanks to these programs and learning management systems, educators at Riverview have greater visibility into student learning in real time (e.g., number of attempts, incorrect responses), whether students are learning in the classroom, in an adjoining classroom, or from home. Students, meanwhile, have far greater flexibility with respect to how and when they engage with learning activities. A student who meets the day's credit recovery learning goals before the class period is over, for example, might spend the remaining time engaging with ALEKS to make progress toward their math learning goals. They might do this without ever leaving their credit recovery classroom, obtaining help through the chat feature as needed from their math teacher, who is able to monitor the student's work through ALEKS in real time.

“ If a student is capable of doing one research cycle well in a unit, that might be enough to meet the standard. That's what they do, and that's what they're graded on. But a student who can do three or four cycles in a week will have the freedom to do that. [...] Students can work at their pace as individual learners. This has helped to shift educator perspective to what kids can do as opposed to what they haven't done

- Principal, Riverview High School

Specializations and advancement pathways

Each of Riverview's two teams has been developed with experienced educators, new or novice teachers, a special educator and a shared counselor; and each team has a lead teacher who helps to support, develop and lead the team in addition to serving as the liaison between the team and the school principal. Responsibilities are distributed accordingly, with experienced educators demonstrating leadership in pedagogy and innovation and newer educators receiving more feedback from team members and taking on fewer campus responsibilities. Additionally, a member of the high school team serves as the school's Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports coordinator across the campus. Looking ahead, Riverview plans to develop the school's leadership bench depth by rotating leadership roles and identifying lead planners for key areas like technology and inquiry.