

High school learning that fits students' lives

How Sierra Vista Unified School District and ASU are reshaping education in southern Arizona by offering flexibility, honors classes and college credit

By Lisa Robbins, ASU News
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Earning a high school degree doesn't have to look the same for every learner. That's why the flexibility offered by [ASU Prep Global Academy](#) was a key selling point for Buena High School senior Gabe Sulentic and his mom, Christine. He enrolled in the program in his junior year and is in his second semester of courses. He's on track to graduate early, something he also credits to ASU Prep Global.

"All the work is assigned at the start of the year, so I'm trying to complete two semesters of English in one semester," he says. "I'll have all the credits I need to graduate by December."

For Gabe's family, having a job while in high school is important.

"Finding a job in this town can be difficult, so (the program) gave him some flexibility," says Christine.

Gabe works at Culver's and is able to pick up hours during the day — a time when most students are in school.

"I like being able to do schoolwork whenever I'm free," says Gabe. "I can get out of work at 11 o'clock (in the morning) and do an hour of schoolwork if I want to."

He's not alone. More and more, students and their families look for programs that offer dual enrollment in high school and college courses, hybrid models, accelerated instruction and, overall, the ability to pursue their education in a way that guarantees they'll thrive.

(ASU Prep) opens up opportunities that you don't get when you go to school every day.

—

Dana Dillon
ASU Prep parent

When the world transitioned to online operations for much of daily life in the early days of the pandemic, many schools took that moment as a call to figure out how digital learning could be effective for the long term.

Leaders at Buena High School in the Sierra Vista Unified School District in southern Arizona were no exception.

“We had an online program, and (the pandemic) bolstered some of that activity, but it just wasn’t something that we thought was a sustainable program,” says Nicole Young, ’02 BA in history, principal at Buena High School.

“We reached out to ASU, as we knew that it had a comprehensive online platform that could be used,” Young says, “and we started meeting with representatives from ASU Preparatory Academy and toured campuses in Casa Grande and downtown Phoenix, and brainstormed what that could look like here in Sierra Vista.”

Those planning sessions led to the launch of ASU Prep Global Academy at Sierra Vista in spring of 2024.

The flexible, hybrid learning option is open to all Sierra Vista Unified School District students in grades 7–12 and offers specialized pathways to help focus their learning on their post-high school aspirations, including technology, education, sustainability and journalism. Students can tailor their coursework to align with their career interests, gaining valuable skills and knowledge that will prepare them for college and beyond.

“My parents want me to grow more independent as I get closer to 18. That way I’m ready for any of the challenges that come toward me in the real world,” Gabe says. “I feel like ASU Prep is helping prepare me because it’s giving me a chance to manage my time, have more freedom with my work schedule and more freedom to be my own person.”

Gabe plans to join the military and go to college after high school to pursue nursing or business.

Easier access to honors-level coursework

Tomaiyah Dillon is a junior and has been taking online courses through ASU Prep Global for two semesters. For her, the draw to the program was the chance to challenge herself academically.

“When I moved to Arizona, Buena (High School) didn’t offer honors classes (that fit my schedule), but my parents discovered ASU Prep Global did, and that was exactly what I was looking for,” she says.

Tomaiyah is currently taking honors English, anatomy and world history.

“My courses are very self-paced and self-motivated,” she says. “It’s very different from in-person school, and it gives you a different outlook on learning. It teaches you to learn self-motivation.”

Tomaiyah’s dad, Dana, agrees.

“I would say if you have a child who is self-motivated, knows how to plan and structure tackling different tasks, that would definitely play into their favor,” he says.

“It also gives kids time to do other things — extracurricular activities or a job. It opens up opportunities that you don’t get when you go to school every day.”

Being able to enroll in honors coursework while still enjoying the social benefits of traditional high school was exactly the balance Young was looking for when developing the hybrid model with ASU Prep.

“Building community was a big part of the experiences we saw on tours,” Young says. “That inspired us.”

Hybrid students and their families also receive weekly communications from the district so they can take advantage of spirit days, dances, senior meetings, graduation and other community events.

“All of those things make them a part of our campus,” Young says. “We wanted to give the Buena experience to those who may feel overwhelmed by the large crowds.”

Building a connected community of students

The program continues to grow. There are currently 71 Sierra Vista students taking courses through ASU Prep Global.

Students choosing the hybrid model remain SVUSD students, with access to all extracurricular activities, clubs and sports.

They can also attend select in-person classes, including band, fine arts or CTE classes at Buena High School or Joyce Clark Middle School, and can earn college credit through ASU with no financial or GPA risks.

Hybrid students attend in-person sessions four hours per week for hands-on activities, such as project-based learning, lab experiments and additional instructional support.

A dedicated learning space is provided for hybrid students at Buena High School, allowing success coaches on-site to check in with students, help hold them accountable and stay on track toward their goals.

In addition to flexibility and access to more challenging coursework, Gabe’s mom, Christine, noticed another outcome of joining the ASU Prep Global program.

“He’s also a healthier person in general,” she says. “If he needs to sleep in, he sleeps in. If he doesn’t need to sleep in, he wakes up and goes to school. He’s mentally and physically healthier.”

How ASU is helping schools in Arizona and beyond through ASU Prep Academy

K-12 on track to college

74,000

K-12 students enrolled in ASU Prep Academy worldwide

43,000+

teachers trained around the world in related subjects like the use of AI and other innovative methods

75

schools in Arizona including in rural communities

60+

advanced-level college courses, all online, for high school students

5,910

college credits earned in 2024 by ASU Prep students

Source: ASU Prep Academy Networks

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Sierra Vista hybrid students have access to dedicated campus study spaces. Photo by Sabira Madady

Text image(s)



Senior Gabe Sulentic (right) will graduate early thanks to the flexibility of ASU Prep. Photo by Sabira Madady



From left: Assistant Principal Kathryn Wright, ASU Prep student Kaliyah Hernandez and Principal Nicole Young. Photo by Sabira Madady