

UPCS Design Principle Summary

Design Area 1: Academic Program

An Untracked Academic Program that Prepares Every Student for College Work

- 1) Honors-level program of study for all
- 2) Standards-based curriculum that holds all students to high expectations
- 3) Engaging instruction that emphasizes learning through inquiry
- 4) Academic catch-up program combining basic skills with advanced concepts
- 5) Differentiated instruction that meets the learning needs of each student
- 6) Immersion for English language learners and inclusion for special education students
- 7) School-wide literacy program across the curriculum
- 8) Daily schedule and yearly calendar structured to extend learning
- 9) Scaffolded exposure to college-level instruction and college courses

Design Area 2: School Culture

A School Culture that Won't Allow Any Student to Fail

- 1) Clear student behavioral norms based on professional norms
- 2) Formal induction and mentoring of new students
- 3) Faculty commitment to "break down" complex material
- 4) Multiple modes of academic support
- 5) Consistent adult modeling of core values
- 6) Faculty commitment to motivate and inspire students
- 7) Construction of peer culture that supports each other's success
- 8) Family involvement that supports student success
- 9) University partnership that reinforces college-going culture

Design Area 3: Organizational Practices

Formal Organizational Practices that Support the Academic Program and School Culture

- 1) Data-driven approach to curriculum, instruction, and school design
- 2) Hiring and development of faculty with skills and values to fulfill school mission
- 3) Shared leadership and collective decision-making
- 4) Student role in shaping school direction
- 5) Use of external standards to prevent erosion of internal standards
- 6) Development of common tools to ensure consistent academic expectations
- 7) Multi-faceted staff development that continuously improves teaching quality
- 8) Use of school-wide literacy program to focus staff on achieving school mission
- 9) Formal organizational arrangements that maximize university partnership
- 10) Deployment of staff and other resources in flexible and creative ways
- 11) Leader who serves as "keeper of the flame," reinforcing mission and culture

UPCS Design Principles

School Mission

The mission of UPCS is simple: to prepare every student academically for any college or university. Belief in this mission is so strong that the school makes it an explicit promise to every student and their family: “Every student will graduate prepared for college.” Through constant reiteration, every teacher, parent, student, and community partner understands and embraces the goal of college success for all – and the responsibilities that come with it. The sign above the school’s front door, donated by the class of 2004, reads “University Park Campus School: The School with a Promise.”

Design Area I: Academic Program

An Untracked Academic Program that Prepares Every Student for College Work

The school’s powerful educational program has enabled every student to graduate fully prepared for college work. Beginning in grade 9, all students pursue a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum consisting of all honors classes. At the same time, instruction is individualized to connect to each student’s particular level of development – including English language learners and special education students. There is no tracking. Instead, there are small classes, supportive relationships with faculty, 90-minute instructional periods, and daily homework sessions. The grade 7-8 curriculum focuses on literacy to address the significant academic and English-language skill gaps of entering students and prepare them for the demanding high school program. Seventh graders get a head start on their UPCS education at a month-long August Academy. There are few electives; instead, juniors and seniors can take courses at Clark University, choosing from the entire college catalog.

1) Honors-level program of study for all

A common, core academic curriculum benchmarked to college-entry requirements defines the academic program. All students within each grade, regardless of their entering backgrounds, take the same classes. Beginning in grade 9, all classes are honors classes and focus intensively on the core subjects of English, math, history, science, and foreign languages. Students can elect to take AP courses beginning in grade 10 and enroll in Clark courses beginning in grade 11.

UPCS staff differentiates instruction to meet the needs of all students within a common classroom. Limited academic choices, with no opting out, prevent any avenue of retreat for students from a demanding, college preparatory curriculum. The school focuses its limited staff dollars on core academic instructors, foregoing elective options and providing enrichment opportunities through the university partnership.

2) Standards-based curriculum that holds all students to high expectations

The standards for all students are high. UPCS has developed a vertically aligned grade 7-12 curriculum with learning goals and performance standards for each grade based on state- and district-mandated standards and assessments, supplemented by additional college readiness standards. Expectations go above and beyond state requirements and are modeled on Clark's expectations for freshman-level work. On state tests, the goal is not simply passing, but scoring at the highest level.

3) Engaging instruction that emphasizes learning through inquiry

Teachers introduce students to the distinctive modes of analysis of the core disciplines. In each course, students go beyond content standards and engage in the thought processes of a writer, an historian, a mathematician, or a scientist. Teachers ask students to demonstrate "a mind thinking" by explaining the thinking behind their responses to a questions or problem. Through engaging instruction, which emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving, students develop intrinsic motivation to learn and study.

4) Academic catch-up program combining basic skills with advanced concepts

The curriculum is mapped backwards from AP and college-level work. The catch-up program in grades 7 and 8 enables all students to enter high school with the foundation required to handle a demanding college-preparatory curriculum.

Teachers combine basic-skills instruction with exposure to the modes of analysis and advanced concepts of each discipline to help prepare students to tackle advanced material in high school. Incoming seventh-grade students with low reading levels learn how to conduct a literary analysis using picture books as their text; they learn basic numeracy skills while solving puzzles that anticipate concepts taught in algebra and even calculus.

In order to cover several years of material during the middle grades, the school employs a longitudinal approach to curriculum design. Teachers do not necessarily complete the seventh-grade curriculum during the seventh-grade year. However, because they "loop" with their students, continuing as their teacher in grade 8, they can ensure that all are prepared for honors-level courses by grade 9. Middle-school students also have additional time for learning through the August Academy summer orientation program, 90-minute instructional periods in English and math, and before- and after-school homework centers.

5) Differentiated instruction that meets the learning needs of each student

Teachers at UPCS differentiate their instruction to appropriately challenge and engage all students within a common classroom. Teachers adapt activities to address the specific strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles of each student. They use on-going formative assessment to keep a running record on each student. Differentiation is also supported by an emphasis on group work and the school's culture of collective responsibility in which students support their peers.

6) Immersion for English language learners and inclusion for special education students

UPCS uses a full-immersion model for its English language learners, with English speakers taking an active role in helping their peers to learn English. Special education students are included in regular classes for as much time as possible. Pull-out services are offered to meet the accommodations required by their IEPs and to ensure their academic success at UPCS.

7) School-wide literacy program across the curriculum

Literacy-based activities form the foundation of the UPCS curriculum in all subjects. This program of writing across the curriculum is critical to helping under-prepared students achieve college readiness. If literacy skills were left to the English teachers alone, there simply would not be enough time for students to develop the skills they need. In addition, the emphasis on reading and writing in all classes supports the development of a culture of students as engaged learners and thinkers.

8) Daily schedule and yearly calendar structured to extend learning

The school's original design called for 90-minute instructional periods for all classes and an eight-hour school day. Longer class periods are necessary for teachers to effectively differentiate instruction. The longer day helped the school rapidly move the skills of struggling students up to grade level. In 2003, budget cuts forced the school to shorten its day to the traditional six and a half hours. Classes are now a mix of 60- and 90-minute blocks.

The August Academy – an academic, summer orientation program for incoming seventh graders – effectively extends the school year for new UPCS students by one month. Before- and after-school homework centers offer additional academic time for students as well.

9) Scaffolded exposure to college-level instruction and college courses

In grades 7-10, UPCS students take mini seminars with Clark faculty as an introduction to the expectations of college coursework. Eighth graders typically take an Introduction to Shakespeare seminar with the chair of the Theater Arts Department, who transforms the class into a drama troupe that performs scenes from several plays. In grades 11 and 12, students have the opportunity to take courses at Clark. The experience of succeeding in college courses while still in high school helps students transition to post-secondary education feeling confident and prepared. Clark courses also supplement the narrow elective opportunities at UPCS, enabling students to sample a wider array of courses than a small high school can provide.

In addition, beginning in grade 10, UPCS students are paired with an undergraduate mentor at Clark. This relationship helps UPCS students develop an understanding of campus life and the culture of college that many first-generation college attenders lack when they matriculate.

Design Area 2: School Culture

A School Culture that Won't Allow Any Student to Fail

While the careful design of the academic program at UPCS is important, it is not the sole driver of student success. Achieving the mission depends equally upon establishing a school community in which everyone shares a deep commitment to one another's success. At UPCS, collaboration is the norm. Faculty, students, families, and community partners work together to solve problems and improve results. Teachers and students are empowered to take risks and are not afraid to admit mistakes or ask for help. Such an environment encourages effort and persistence from even the most discouraged learners who enter the school.

This demanding but nurturing culture sets UPCS apart from other schools that provide a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum for underserved students but lose many students who are discouraged by the academic difficulty. UPCS's holding power – its ability to deliver a rigorous college-preparatory program without significant attrition – is perhaps its most noteworthy accomplishment.

1) Clear student behavioral norms based on professional norms

Staff and students make the school's behavioral expectations clear to newcomers from the moment they walk in the door. Expectations are introduced at the informational meeting for applicants and at the August Academy orientation program, and they are constantly reinforced throughout the school year. Modeled after the professional norms that students will encounter in college and in the work place, the rules prohibit swearing and street talk, do not tolerate fighting or disrespect, and expect that students will support each other and value the diversity of the school. The rationale behind these rules — that they will help students prepare for college — is carefully explained and reiterated. As older students come to see themselves as future college students, they take a lead role along with the faculty in enforcing expectations for the younger students.

2) Formal induction and mentoring of new students

Seventh graders begin their enculturation to the school during the August Academy orientation sessions. During that time, academic and behavioral expectations are made clear and routines and rituals are established. Older students at UPCS, along with adults, reinforce behavioral norms for their younger peers through their example. Younger students also are assigned formal mentors through the student council. Mentors help students complete their homework and develop the habits that lead to success.

3) Faculty commitment to "break down" complex material

While it is the student's responsibility to put in the effort to learn new material, it is the teacher's responsibility to make difficult concepts understandable by breaking them down into component parts and outlining steps to attacking a problem. Faculty embrace this responsibility and encourage students to demand nothing less from them. In UPCS classrooms you will often hear students

asking teachers to “break it down.” Teachers are constantly searching for new ways to make the analytic methods of the various academic disciplines more clear to students. Teachers never send students away with homework they do not understand. Rather, they carefully explain each assignment so that no student leaves feeling lost or frustrated.

4) Multiple modes of academic support

By keeping a running record of formative assessments, teachers recognize when students are struggling before they have a chance to fall behind. They don't just wait for students to ask for help. Teachers strongly encourage students to attend before- and after-school homework sessions, having some sign "contracts" to attend and talking with parents to ensure they can make it. Faculty also frequently try creative new ways to reach out to students having academic difficulty. One middle-school math teacher, for example, invited a handful of students whose skills were significantly behind the rest of the class to join a “breakfast club” for extra help and bagels before school.

Clark undergraduates and UPCS upperclassmen add to the supportive culture by serving as tutors. Students also assume a collective responsibility for the success of their peers, supporting each other informally in class and at home.

5) Consistent adult modeling of core values

The core values that UPCS strives to instill in its students – pursuit of excellence, passion for learning, persistence until success, and support for others – are modeled by adults in the building. Teachers instill their passion for their disciplines in their students. At UPCS, veteran teachers mentor their younger colleagues, and all faculty members continually support each other. When students see staff questioning and supporting each other, they are empowered to ask for help as well.

6) Faculty commitment to motivate and inspire students

The role that faculty at UCPS have internalized is not simply teaching students, but inspiring and motivating them to achieve. Teachers are deeply passionate about their disciplines and motivate students to join them in their excitement. An English teacher might share the books she is reading for pleasure, or a science teacher might share the research she has done over the summer. The small size of the student body (231 students) and collaborative culture of the faculty ensure that no student can slip through the cracks.

7) Construction of peer culture that supports each other's success

At UPCS, education is not driven by teachers alone. Students take collective responsibility for ensuring that their fellow students are successful. They support one another to grasp new material in class and at home. Juniors and seniors formally and informally mentor younger students, just as previous classes have done for them. Even friendships within the UPCS community revolve around academic success and support. Many of the basic norms about how students should treat other

students (e.g., no bullying or making fun of other students) were determined by the legacy class during the first August Academy.

Staff deliberately promote and nurture this culture of peer support. They structure classroom activities around group work, reinforce positive behaviors such as reaching out to help a classmate or offering words of encouragement, and most importantly, model this behavior in their interactions with students and other teachers.

8) Family involvement that supports student success

At UPCS, families are partners in their children's education, with the principal telling them, "We can't do this alone." Parents feel comfortable and valued at the school; the principal's office door is open to them at all times. The school communicates with families about successes and challenges that their students face and works with families to arrive at successful solutions.

9) University partnership that reinforces college-going culture

The partnership with Clark University has the power to make the abstract concept of "college" real for students. As early as grade 7, UPCS students walk through the campus and point out their future dorm rooms. They are "little Clarkies," with college IDs to make it official. Upon graduation, students who meet the admission criteria can attend Clark tuition free for four years, eliminating real and perceived financial barriers to college.

The sense of being part of a college community helps students gain the motivation and confidence they need to persevere in demanding academic courses. Students and teachers are on Clark's campus nearly every day, not only using the labs or the gym but also observing and interacting with Clark students and faculty. Mentoring relationships with college students help UPCS students develop an understanding of what college is all about. As they become more familiar with the campus culture, UPCS students begin to see a future for themselves in which college is within reach.

Design Area 3: Organizational Practices

Formal Organizational Practices that Support the Academic Program and School Culture

UPCS has implemented a set of formal organizational practices that support the execution of the academic program and sustain the culture of excellence. These practices allow staff to maintain a disciplined focus on mission and results while building the organization's capacity to adapt to new circumstances and learn from mistakes. Development of these critical practices has enabled UPCS to not only exemplify a well-planned school, but also to serve as a true national model.

1) Data-driven approach to curriculum, instruction, and school design

Monitoring of student progress and school performance is never left to anecdote or impression. Faculty constantly collect and review data critical to achieving the school mission of leaving no

student behind. The principal and teachers also make sure they keep informed of the latest research related to pedagogy and their discipline. All decisions about students and school-improvement strategies, from curriculum design to the structure of the day, are made based on the best available data and research detailing best practices from the field.

This data-driven approach to instruction starts with an analysis of incoming student needs based on their previous test scores and performance during the August Academy. Much of common planning time each week is devoted to a collective analysis of student data, including state test scores and results from a computer-based, value-added interim assessment system, as well as student work.

3) Hiring and development of faculty with skills and values to fulfill school mission

Implementing the UPCS academic program and maintaining the school culture requires great skill and dedication from its teachers. The staff must have a deep knowledge of and passion for their discipline, an unflinching belief that all students at the school can go to college, and a willingness to do whatever it takes to get them there. Teachers also must have a drive to continuously learn and get better at what they do and embrace a collaborative process with students and peers to achieve that goal. Finding and developing such teachers has been critical to UPCS's success.

The faculty is anchored by veteran teachers and complemented by young teachers who quickly develop into veterans themselves. The school opened with a principal and two teachers who had over 60 years of combined teaching experience. Each had a track record of success with underserved students, a deep commitment to the mission of the school, passion for their subject area, openness to learn and grow together, and expertise in inquiry-based, differentiated instructional methods. These veteran teachers served as mentors for student teachers from Clark and younger faculty, helping them rapidly develop into master teachers as well.

The partnership with Clark University's teacher-education program helped create a pipeline to attract and develop excellent young teachers. UPCS faculty teach courses in the university's teacher-education program, ensuring that the approach promoted at Clark aligns with the culture and pedagogy of the school. Many of the current faculty conducted their practica at UPCS, and over two-thirds of the faculty at the school attended the Clark teacher-education program.

3) Shared leadership and collective decision-making

Leadership at the school is shared amongst all faculty. No major decisions are made without first being thoroughly deliberated by the whole group. This shared leadership model creates the shared vocabulary and shared vision that are essential to the school's success.

4) Student role in shaping school direction

At UPCS, student voice is respected and nurtured in several ways. For example, some of the basic norms (e.g., no bullying or making fun of other students) were determined by students. Students also play a role in interviewing candidates for teaching positions at University Park, and they are consulted on other important decisions about the school.

5) Use of external standards to prevent erosion of internal standards

To ensure that students meet college-readiness standards, UPCS gauges its success against several externally validated measures. These include scores at the proficient and advanced levels of the MCAS exam, as well as the number of students taking and succeeding in AP exams and college courses. External standards prevent the lowering of standards and keep the school's "caring" for students from taking the form of misdirected paternalism, a common situation among schools serving students from challenging circumstances.

6) Development of common tools to ensure consistent academic expectations

Through its collaborative staff culture, the faculty at UPCS align expectations across all subject areas and grade levels. Staff use a common vocabulary and portfolio of teaching strategies and tools to ensure that student expectations and instructional approaches are consistent across content areas and grade levels.

7) Multi-faceted staff development that continuously improves teaching quality

On Wednesday morning, the principal holds common planning time with all core academic teachers. The agenda focuses on professional growth, community building, shared best practice, data analysis, and student issues. It is also the time when new teachers are enculturated to the pedagogical approach of the school.

UPCS has an "open door" policy in its classrooms. UPCS teachers are encouraged to spend non-teaching time in the back of a colleague's classroom. (The school lacks a functional teachers' lounge, and there are few other spaces to work.) New teachers glean techniques for classroom management and ideas for new curriculum activities from veteran staff.

Teachers also hold formal rounds, a directed observation process, for their peers and students teachers at the school. Based on the medical school model, teachers hold a pre-round discussion of the planned activities for the day, host observers in their class, and end with a post-round discussion to debrief the student learning that occurred.

8) Use of school-wide literacy program to focus staff on achieving school mission

The instructional design of UPCS is based heavily on research showing that proficiency in basic literacy skills is critical to overall academic success. To that end, all teachers at the school are teachers of literacy, and the culture of the school is one that focuses intently on developing reading and writing. This culture of writing, "showing a mind thinking," cuts across all subject areas and focuses the staff (and students) on achieving the mission of the school, which is to prepare every student for college.

9) Formal organizational arrangements that maximize university partnership

The educational program at UPCS is deliberately planned to help students prepare for college. The partnership with Clark University has the power to make the abstract concept of “college” real for students and support their preparation for college success.

UPCS students and faculty are on campus nearly every day, helping to instill a culture of college in the UPCS student body. The sense of being part of a college community helps students gain the motivation and confidence they need to persevere in demanding academic courses. Beginning in grade 10, UPCS students are paired with an undergraduate mentor at Clark. This relationship helps UPCS students develop an understanding of campus life and the culture of college that many first generation college attenders lack when they matriculate.

The college also supports the delivery of UPCS’s rigorous academic program. In grades 7-10, UPCS students take mini seminars with college faculty, giving them an introduction to college courses. Clark faculty teach upper-level courses at UPCS, helping students adapt to college expectations while still receiving the support of their high school teachers. Many UPCS teachers serve on curriculum teams that engage in careful analysis of data, student work, and classroom practice to support the goal of college readiness for all students in each discipline.

Juniors and seniors can take free courses at Clark. The experience of taking and succeeding in college courses while still in high school helps them transition to post-secondary education feeling confident and prepared. Upon graduation, UPCS students (and all other neighborhood residents) who meet the admission criteria can attend Clark tuition free.

UPCS’s professional development school partnership (PDS) with Clark University’s Hiatt Center for Urban Education provides it with valuable teaching and professional development resources. UPCS serves as a clinical training site for the University’s teacher preparation program, offering the school a pipeline of talented young teachers. All UPCS teachers may take up to 5 courses towards their master’s degree at Clark tuition-free, and many veterans are clinical faculty in the program.

10) Deployment of staff and other resources in flexible and creative ways

At UPCS, staffing and other resources are designed to be flexible and responsive to student needs. The school provides the core teaching staff with common meeting time by arranging a broad menu of enrichment activities for students, offered by people from outside the school. These supplements include art and music classes led by itinerant district teachers, mini-seminars delivered by Clark University faculty, special projects organized by Clark students, and community-service internships.

Teachers visit each other’s classes with coverage provided by the school leader or one of the master’s degree students in the building. A streamlined scope and sequence with few electives and no tracking enables small class sizes of 22 students or less. Nearly all faculty members have dual certifications which enables them to be deployed flexibly in response to student needs. This is especially necessary in math and science where nearly every teacher teaches multiple subjects because of the small size of the school.

11) Leader who serves as "keeper of the flame," reinforcing mission and culture

Sustaining a high-performing school like UPCS requires constant tending by the school leader. Unfortunately, the design elements that have made UPCS successful are not immutable features of the school. A variety of ongoing threats – from budget cuts to district policy changes – have the potential to undermine the delicate balance that leads to success. The school leader must have the savvy to adapt quickly to change, while avoiding serious damage to the school and its mission. At the same time, the leader must be ever-vigilant of the smaller, day-to-day threats to school culture, such as lax enforcement of behavioral norms or slips in the quality of group work in a classroom. The school leader must protect the integrity of these design elements, gauging the quality of their implementation every day through classroom observations and conversations with students and staff – and providing both formal assessments and informal feedback to spur improvement. As "keeper of the flame," the leader must reiterate the school's mission at every opportunity.