

Access of Responsibility

Alternative pathways provide personalized educational experiences

Chatter and the smell of coffee fills the air as thousands of students pour into Paly, rushing into classrooms to begin the school day.

But through Palo Alto — instead of the four concrete walls of the 800s building — some start their days in grand lecture halls at Foothill College, white hospital rooms and the Futures Café.

Sam Lilly, a 2024 Paly grad, spent his junior year at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, where he continued his coursework despite leukemia.

"The whole reason for hospital school is because things are not going particularly smoothly, in the sense that no one wants to be there because they are sick," Lilly said. "Hospital, school is not something people choose, right? So it's more like a last resort that people go to."

Although Lilly couldn't attend Paly while being treated for leukemia, he was able to work independently and take assessments through the Hospital School system.

While not all PAUSD students who take additional educational pathways share the same experience, they have all found ways to further their education outside of the traditional four-year high school setting.

Newly elected school board trustee Rowena Chia, whose daughter is a sophomore at Middle College — a partnership between PAUSD and Foothill College that allows students in grades 10-12 to earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree simultaneously — said Palo Alto students have varied backgrounds and needs.

"There's a wide diversity of students in the district," Chia said. "That doesn't just mean academically, but also, socially, culturally, economically."

To support this wide diversity of students, the district has a number of educational pathways available, including Middle College, The Hospital School and the Futures special education program.

Creating Culture: Middle College

Senior Tilman Karcher enters his calculus class. Instead of high schoolers, he's surrounded by college students. Instead of a 30-student classroom, he learns in a lecture auditorium.

That's because Karcher isn't a student at Paly. He studies at Palo Alto Middle College.

Middle College students like Karcher take three high school classes: English, history and then either a math or science elective. The rest of their A-G high school requirements are taken at Foothill College.

Middle College senior Hana Thakur, who previously attended Paly, said while his initial transition from a traditional high school to Middle College was jarring, it has taught him how to navigate a new environment.

"It's hard and scary because you're leaving normal high school, which you've been part of for so long," Thakur said. "Then, you're going to college 20 minutes away. You don't always know everyone (but) I got to challenge myself in my courses and meet new people. Learning how to get to meet new friends is also a skill that a lot of people forget."

Chia said students who struggle to find a community within Cam or Paly may be better suited for additional educational programs.

"Kids who feel they don't belong or are lost in the sea of a large high school can find it intimidating even though there are incredible programs where you can find your niche," Chia said. "There is something about a very different experience, or even a smaller experience of Middle College that I think is very important."

In a message to the Palo Alto community on Nov. 1, Superintendent Don Austin said the novel learning environment at Middle College also allows students to escape the competitive culture of traditional high schools.

"These students picked courses they wanted to learn about and the pressure to take a class melted away," Austin said.

Karcher agrees and said the diversity of courses offered at Middle College allows any student to explore their passions and thrive.

"I think any student could really succeed at Middle College," Karcher said. "One of the benefits of Foothill is there is a super wide range of classes."

Although Chia's daughter initially joined Middle College for academic reasons, Chia said she loves Middle College for the freedom it provides.

"At the age of 15, she feels that she's being treated as a young adult," Chia said. "She has a lot of choice about where she's spending time and how she's organizing her day. She really loves the autonomy and choice that she has at Middle College, and she felt that she had less of that in the larger traditional model."

Garrison said the partnership between PAUSD and Middle College also gives students access to extensive opportunities outside of the classroom.

"Our students have access to all resources, services, activities and clubs at Foothill," Garrison said. "There are over 60 clubs and activities that students can be part of. It's very unique to be a part of two schools, two campuses and two worlds."

Looking forward, Garrison said Middle College hopes to expand to ninth grades.

However, Austin said some Middle College students oppose this proposal because increasing the number of students in the program could weaken Middle College's tight-knit community.

"Part of my hope was to expand it pretty rapidly," Austin said. "What I heard from the students and the staff was, 'Don't. An expansion too fast could destroy what's great about it.'"

Garrison said next year, the school will cap enrollment at 30 students per cohort, with two cohorts per grade.

"I am continually impressed by our students," Garrison said. "They're really trying to develop a different kind of culture here that is not about competition. Even though many of our students are very academically driven, our school is really about enjoying the journey."

Adapting to Change: Hospital School

Scott Souter was teaching art class when one of his students came up to him and asked if he wanted to see the student's laptop.

When Souter said yes, the student showed him a picture of them holding up their own laptop which had been removed prior to a long transplant the student was recovering from.

That student was one of many who have been enrolled in the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital School. Opened 100 years ago, Hospital School is available for any student hospitalized at Lucile Packard for three or more consecutive days.

"I will see students ranging from kindergarten through 12th grade, and they can come if they're up for it (and) can stay for as long as they want," Souter said. "If they show up, we have a number of projects in mind."

Teachers at Hospital School also coordinate with the student's previous school district to ensure the student continues their education.

Lilly, the 2024 Paly grad said the program was centered around helping students continue learning in a new environment.

"The basic idea was for you to get assigned a teacher to meet about five hours a week (or) one hour a day to discuss coursework or questions," Lilly said.

Lilly with this support in place he was able to keep up with his classes at Paly by working asynchronously.

"I was taking AP Lang with Ms. Launer, who sent me the material to my hospital teacher, and I got the material through her," Lilly said. "The hospital teacher provided whatever tests I had to do for Paly."

Hospital School teacher Elena Melendez also said Hospital School gives students flexibility.

"Medications or conditions can make you feel nervous or sick, and it's really hard to concentrate," Melendez said.

"In those cases, you're just trying to provide other services."

"(The program) is very responsive to their needs."

And Souter said the teachers at Hospital School do their best to make the environment nurturing and encouraging.

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

Futures serves students with moderate to severe needs from sixth to 12th grade at all secondary sites in the district, and its curriculum equips students with practical skills while also integrating them into the community.

"Everything we're doing in the classroom is going to be as functional and appropriate for their learning needs ... we're teaching them how to take care of themselves, to achieve as much independence as possible," Gallicio said.

ESN teacher Lisa Juergal said the program is tailored to each student's Individualized Education Program, and through the Palo Alto Technology Collaboration Hub, students have access to Paly equipped with specialized accessibility tools, from text-to-speech to digital worksheets.

"It helps (balance) the field," Juergal said. "Everybody's equal."

Gallicio said the program also provides opportunities for students to attain real-world experience, such as running a cafe for staff on Fridays.

"We clean up the student center every day after lunch and brunch," Gallicio said. "We deliver mail every campus. We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

"We have our cafe that we run on Fridays for the staff. We also have a job on Tuesdays and Thursdays where we're picking up lunch and other delivery orders from Tamen and Country for staff across campus."

Not all students learn at the hospital. Amy Qing, a student at Project SEARCH, worked in food service.

"The first time I tried to do the food service ... I didn't know how to do it," Qing said. "I'm hoping that I will continue to build my confidence (and) challenge myself more and more."

Adjusting to Adulthood: Adult Programs

Students who are no longer a part of Post-Secondary or Project SEARCH have the opportunity to participate in a variety of adult day programs that offer them support. These programs offer a wide range of activities, including further education, vocational skill training, recreational activities and volunteer opportunities.

However, students who need more extensive support have limited options, Hall said.

"It's more difficult for students that need more support, one-on-one support full time, (because) adult day programs require one staff to three students," Hall said.

"It's a tough world out there for our guys that need the most support."

Alternatively, the Self-Determination Program, allows the families of people with disabilities to create their own programs by choosing which support workers to hire, how to purchase services and where their family member will live.

Hall said only about half of Post-Secondary students qualify for the day programs.

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"We had three students exit my program that are doing this Self-Determination Program, but it's really hard to get funding that way," Hall said. "They basically haven't had a program since they've graduated, which is tough."

"They've been advocating to a district that isn't willing to listen to them."

However, Austin said the decision to move special education classes from Ohlone and Escondido to Nisam was based on a recommendation from special education teachers.

"We've called everyone who had a student in the program, and we have not had that feedback at all," Austin said. "We called every family in the program. So (it) sounds, again, like this is a campaign issue, and that campaign (is) over, so I'd rather not talk about it anymore."

Let's agree, she said parents were not consulted in the decision.

"Our case was very extreme," Lee said. "Families that were removed from Ohlone and Escondido were told on a Zoom call, and the teachers also found out the same day, so the teachers weren't even in the loop about what news was coming down. In that specific situation, there was, like, there was no discussion, there was no transparency."

Newly elected school board member Josh Salzman, who is a parent of a student with special needs, also said the future of his son's education is uncertain.

"One of the things that I feel as a parent is a sense of tremendous uncertainty about what things will look like for him at the middle school level and the high school level," Salzman said.

Despite some community doubts, Gallicio said the district is moving in the right direction.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

"If there were any glaring issues in the past with these programs, I think there has been a concerted effort to really ramp up the special education services," Gallicio said.

PAUSD Budget:
\$30,000
per student

PA Middle College Projected Enrollment

	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Grade 9	25	25	50
Grade 10	25	50	50
Grade 11	25	50	50
Grade 12	50	50	50

I had to do for Paly."

Hospital School teacher Elena Melendez also said Hospital School gives students flexibility.

"Medications or conditions can make you feel nervous or sick, and it's really hard to concentrate," Melendez said.

"In those cases, you're just trying to provide other services."

"(The program) is very responsive to their needs."

And Souter said the teachers at Hospital School do their best to make the environment nurturing and encouraging.

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"They are an incredibly creative, very talented at problem solving, improvisational team that work around amazing obstacles," Souter said. "They are very dedicated to providing the students or patients with continued academic enrichment or a little bit of something other than their current situation."

"I'm very grateful for the fact that my son is growing up in today's world and not the world I grew up in."

Josh Salzman

On the Job: Project SEARCH

During post-secondary, students have the opportunity to join Project SEARCH, a separate program that offers students a full-time paid internship program primarily located at Stanford's Lucile Packard Children's Hospital.

To get into the program, Lang, a Post-Secondary teacher and the head of Project SEARCH, said students must go through an application process.

"If they're motivated, they've demonstrated the drive to make it out there on their own through their work over the last couple of years, that's all we're looking for," Lang said.

Hall said the hospital internship allows students to learn a variety of tasks with the help of job coaches.

"The goal is for students to become independent with these job skills so that they're able to get jobs after they leave the program," Hall said.

"The goal is for students to become independent with these job skills so that they're able to get jobs after they leave the program," Hall said.

"The goal is for students to become independent with these job skills so that they're able to get jobs after they leave the program," Hall said.

"The goal is for students to become independent with these job skills so that they're able to get jobs after they leave the program," Hall said.

"The goal is for students to become independent with these job skills so that they're able to get jobs after they leave the program," Hall said.