

Innovative Staffing to Personalize Learning: NAVIGATOR SCHOOLS

GILROY AND HOLLISTER, CA

This case study is part of a series about schools that use non-traditional staffing arrangements to personalize learning. All schools profiled have demonstrated noteworthy student achievement results.

Navigator Schools is a charter school management organization that operates two elementary/middle schools located in Gilroy and Hollister, California, serving a high population of English language learners. The network uses a combination of three roles to provide personalized instruction for its students: **Teacher**, **teacher-in-training**, and **small-group instructor**. This staffing creates an internal teacher pipeline that provides teachers with frequent coaching from school administrators and aims to ensure that all students receive consistent, high-quality instruction and support tailored to their learning needs. Navigator pays its staff through enrollment-based state funding, and uses grants for non-recurring costs such as starting a new school.

Educator roles and responsibilities

- **Teachers:** Lead whole-class instruction in specialized content areas (humanities or STEM); lead small-group centers; mentor and coach teachers-in-training
- **Small-group instructors:** Provide small-group instruction to supplement a teacher's whole-class instruction
- **Teachers-in-training:** Serve as substitute teachers as needed; co-teach whole-group instruction with mentor teachers; provide small-group instruction

Key instructional practices

- Whole-group & small-group instruction; individual tutoring
- Small groups adjusted monthly based on data; grouped by same learning level
- Teachers differentiate work for each student through assignments & adaptive software
- Students help set learning goals
- Students do some work in peer teams
- Teachers coach students in social & emotional skills

Technology use

- Blended learning: **Station Rotation**
- Provides students with differentiated content instruction; assesses student mastery
- Provides teachers with digital data system so they can individually & as a team track each student's progress, & adjust instruction & student groupings as needed

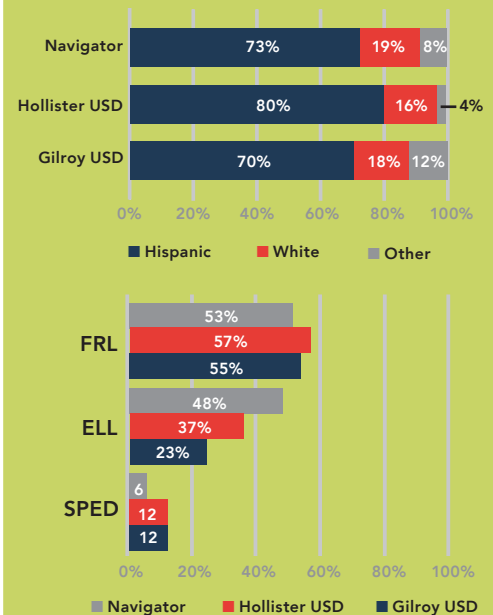
SCHOOL PROFILE, 2017-18

Campuses: 2

Grades: K-8

Enrollment: 837 total

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

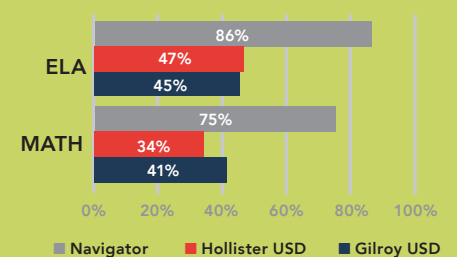


FRL: Free & reduced-price lunch recipients

ELL: English language learner students

SPED: Special education students

STUDENT PROFICIENCY



Note: Hollister Unified School District and Gilroy Unified School District are the districts in which the two Navigator schools reside.

THE NAVIGATOR TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Agricultural communities across the United States struggle with achievement gaps among their non-English-speaking student populations. Frustrated with the low performance of students in their California schools, a group of educators and parents led by former principal James Dent decided to create their own proof point for achievement among Hispanic immigrants in towns south of San Jose. To start, they visited the best schools in the country and identified what they saw as five pillars of successful schools: strong student and staff culture; data-driven instruction; a strong coaching model; a multi-tiered system of support for all students; and pervasive use of technology to enhance learning. The group based its new California charter management organization, Navigator Schools, on those pillars, opening a school in Gilroy in 2011 and another in Hollister in 2013. In 2017–18, Gilroy serves students through eighth grade, while Hollister is a K–6 school with plans to expand through eighth grade.

Staffing model

Core to Navigator’s approach for its elementary grades is a staffing model designed to ensure that all students receive consistent, high-quality instruction and support tailored to their learning needs. That begins with strong, subject-specializing **teachers**. By teaching just humanities (English language arts and social studies), or STEM (math and science), teachers can focus their planning and professional development on fewer subjects and reach more students with their subject expertise. Teachers reach about 60 students a day, providing instruction to half the students at a time, twice a day. They split that time between direct, whole-class instruction and small-group centers that they lead with small-group instructors. Some teachers also help develop the Navigator talent pipeline by mentoring teachers-in-training.

Two years after the founding of Gilroy Prep, when California adopted the Common Core State Standards, Navigator’s team saw the need to address each student’s writing needs to succeed in the new English language arts (ELA) standards. They hired **small-group instructors (SGIs)** to work with students in reading and writing centers. They quickly realized that SGIs needed to become a core part of the staffing model, because after the first year, students showed strong ELA growth, which then highlighted a significant gap between ELA and math scores. The next year, when Navigator had SGIs start to facilitate math center time as well, the gap disappeared. One SGI per grade supports both of the grade’s subject-specialized teachers by facilitating small-group centers with one teacher while the other teacher provides whole-class instruction. During small-group centers, SGIs lead instruction for about 10 students who are grouped by learning needs. Most SGIs have no formal teaching credentials or teaching experience, but are overseen by the full-time SGI coach at each school who helps improve their instruction.

Navigator also relies on its **teachers-in-training** role for instruction and to create an internal teacher pipeline. At the end of Gilroy’s first year, Navigator’s leadership recognized a need for substitute teachers who could maintain consistent instructional quality when teachers were absent. By bringing in student teachers, Navigator could create a team of substitutes who also formed a pipeline of new teachers trained in Navigator’s values, methods, and culture. Teachers-in-training are full-time employees

FIGURE 1A. WHOLE-CLASS TIME

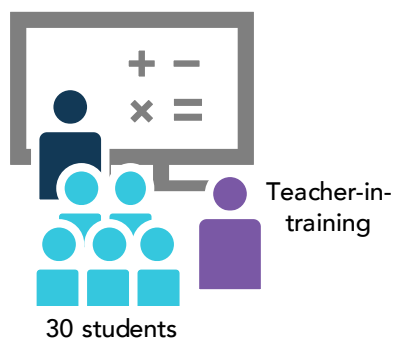
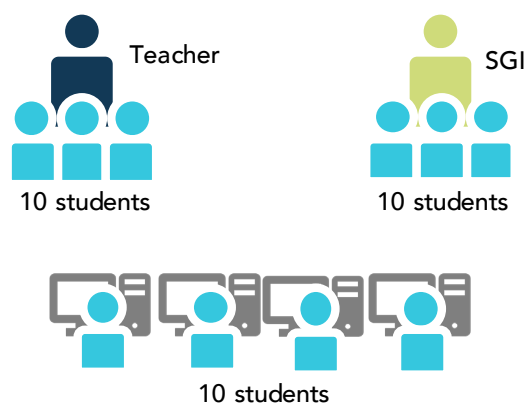


FIGURE 1B. CENTERS



working alongside an assigned mentor teacher for six-week periods, switching among teachers to experience a broad range of teaching styles. Teachers-in-training spend a majority of their time in the beginning of the school year observing, receiving coaching, and co-teaching with mentor teachers. As their confidence grows and they develop classroom management techniques, they observe their co-teachers during the first whole-class lesson of the day, then lead that same lesson with the mentor teachers' second group of students. By October, "you would think they had already been in the classroom for five years, because they have all of the classroom management, the routines, the structure [of the other teachers and staff] at the school," says Dent, now Navigator's chief academic officer.

Coaching is a core part of Navigator's approach. From teachers-in-training through school leaders, everyone involved in instruction is coached. Teachers-in-training receive on-the-spot coaching from their mentor teachers as well as formal coaching from the administrative team. SGIs receive weekly, 30-minute observations of their centers by the school's full-time SGI coach. Teachers receive daily observations from one of the school administrators—the principal or one of each school's two assistant principals. They also meet weekly with their coach during one of their prep periods to discuss action steps to work on during the week between coaching sessions. Principals and assistant principals spend about 70 percent of their time coaching teachers. Assistant principals, in turn, receive coaching from the principal, and principals and other staff, such as the technology director and director of community outreach, are coached by Navigator's CEO.

The student learning experience

In the elementary grades, a typical Navigator student alternates between **whole-class time** and **small-group centers** for both humanities and STEM. Teachers or teachers-in-training provide two 90-minute blocks of **whole-class time** each day to two separate groups of about 30 students each. Depending on the lesson, whole-class time may include direct instruction, independent work, working with partners, and whole-group guided practice. Three times each week, students spend half of a whole-class block participating in PE classes or visiting the school library, which gives teachers time to prepare lessons and meet with their coaches.

During **small-group centers**, students are divided into three groups based on learning needs to rotate through stations. An SGI leads one group using lessons prepared by the teacher; the teacher or teacher-in-training leads another group; and students in the last group engage in independent work, usually with online learning software. The groups rotate every 30 minutes.

Wednesdays at Navigator have a different schedule that allows for additional personalized instruction and gives staff members more planning time. Instead of attending whole-class time and small-group centers, students spend one hour each with their humanities teacher and STEM teacher. During these periods, teachers have all their students work online with software that provides personalized practice, while teachers and SGIs provide targeted instruction to individual students as needed, based on biweekly formative assessments. Following these core-content blocks, students have an hourlong enrichment course—such as art, music, sports, dance, or social skills—led by an SGI, teacher, or teacher-in-training. Students are released early on Wednesdays, at 1 p.m., so teachers can meet with their SGIs and the other teachers for their grade to discuss student needs and plan accordingly. Teachers also connect during this time via video chat with their subject-area peers at the other Navigator campus to co-plan units and lessons.

FIGURE 2. SAMPLE STUDENT SCHEDULE

Min.	Content	Led By
90	Math/science direct instruction	Teacher
Recess		
90	English centers	Teacher/SGI
60	Lunch	
60	Library or PE	
90	Math centers	Teacher/SGI
Recess		
90	English/social studies direct instruction	Teacher

Technology use

Navigator students spend about 45 to 60 minutes a day using online programs that let them learn at their own pace during their independent work portion of small-group centers. Students use **Lexia** or **Reading Plus** for ELA, and **ST Math** to practice math skills. These adaptive programs adjust the activities students see according to their learning needs and mastery. Navigator's teachers also developed a set of common formative assessments that students take roughly every two weeks through **Illuminate Education**, an online assessment platform. Teachers use the student learning data gathered by Illuminate to quickly intervene when students are struggling and to target their unit and lesson plans to the needs of their students.

Compensation and funding model

Navigator pays its SGIs, teachers-in-training, and mentor teachers using enrollment-based state funding. SGI starting pay ranges from \$15 to \$18 per hour, and about half of the SGIs work 30 or more hours per week, making them eligible to receive full benefits. The starting salary for teachers-in-training is about \$37,000 plus benefits, while a new teacher's salary begins at about \$51,000 plus benefits. Navigator teachers who mentor teachers-in-training also receive a \$1,000 stipend. In comparison, the average teacher salary in California in 2016 was \$77,179, and starting pay on the Gilroy Unified School District certificated salary schedule is \$50,743.¹

In contrast with other charter schools, which often pay their teachers less than they could earn at district schools, Navigator aims to make its teachers' salaries comparable to salaries they could earn elsewhere. When Navigator hires experienced teachers, it strives to match the salaries they received at their previous schools. If strong Navigator teachers find higher-paid teaching opportunities at other schools, Navigator strives to match that pay. Navigator also gives its teachers annual raises based on professionalism, leadership, and strength of their classroom instruction as noted during weekly classroom observations.

To make that financially sustainable, Navigator's administrators try to be frugal elsewhere, such as by adopting lower-cost curricula, getting furniture donated by local businesses, and maintaining good relationships with the districts that provide their facilities. For non-recurring costs, such as those to start a school or expenses associated with documenting practices, Navigator has received grants from Silicon Schools Fund and the U.S. Department of Education.

Endnotes

¹For California salary, see table C-5 in: National Education Association. (2017, May). *Rankings & estimates: Rankings of the states 2016 and estimates of school statistics 2017*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/2017_Rankings_and_Estimates_Report-FINAL-SECURED.pdf; Gilroy salary from the Gilroy Unified School District's certificated salary schedule for 2016–17, retrieved from <http://gusd-ca.schoolloop.com/file/1216320361781/1389424725424/6848859133212328531.pdf>

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