



# BIG PICTURE LEARNING

The Big Picture Learning school design activates deeper student engagement in learning by using interest-driven, real-world contexts as its pedagogical foundation.

Scan QR code with your phone's camera to access this content online.



## OVERVIEW

Big Picture Learning (BPL) was established to challenge traditional approaches to teaching and learning. Big Picture's focus on student-interest-driven, real-world learning reflects the knowledge that students often learn best when school is relevant to their lives, builds relationships with adult mentors and peers who share their interests, and entails genuinely authentic and rigorous work that is situated in the community and workplace.



The BPL school design is based on three core principles: 1) relationships – schools are designed to support student-centered experiences, one learner at a time; 2) relevance – student interests and real-world learning experiences shape the curriculum; and 3) rigor – assessment criteria for exhibitions of learning are aligned to professional standards. More broadly, 10 Distinguishers serve as BPL's signature in the world of deeper learning and work-based learning. [10 Distinguishers](#) [Relationships Indicators](#) [Relevance Indicators](#) [Rigor Indicators](#)

BPL works directly with schools to activate the potential of its students. It does not govern or operate schools but instead collaborates to transform existing schools or to establish new schools as a part of the BPL Network. Through collaboration with families and communities, each BPL school seeks to produce learning environments that are unique to local contexts. To support this, BPL offers deep partnerships, stand-alone professional development, and customized support. Today, there are over 80 Big Picture network schools in the United States and more than 100 schools around the world that utilize BPL's design. [▶ Individualized Real World Learning](#)

## What Makes This Model Innovative?



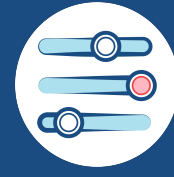
### Relevance

Big Picture Learning was founded on the premise that students should learn by working on “real projects that have a consequence.” Every part of a student’s learning experience is informed by their personal interests and by real-world contexts, particularly internships.



### Connection & Community

Advisory is the core relational structure in BPL schools. It is a space where students find belonging as they explore their identities and purpose. BPL schools also engage parents and mentors to create positive learning experiences for students.



### Customization

The BPL school model is based on the principle of educating “one student at a time.” This principle manifests in personalized learning that looks at students holistically and is interest-driven. BPL schools themselves are customized to local community contexts.

## DESIGN

### Goals

BPL believes that the most important thing students need to know is how to lead lives of their own design. This means they need to know how to reason, problem-solve, and be active members of the community. The BPL model is designed around five learning goals. [Big Picture Learning Goals and Competencies](#)

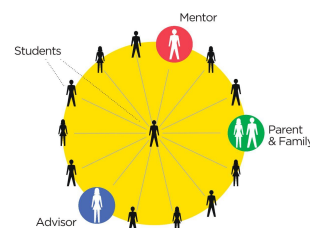
<b>Personal Qualities</b>	Students demonstrate respect, responsibility, organization, and leadership in their behavior. They also reflect on their personal abilities and strive for improvement.
<b>Communication</b>	Students develop skills as writers, readers, speakers, and listeners. They use technology and artistic expression to communicate with an awareness of the audience. They have also been exposed to another language.
<b>Quantitative Reasoning</b>	Students think like mathematicians. They understand numbers, can analyze uncertainty, comprehend the properties of shapes, and study how things change over time.

<b>Empirical Reasoning</b>	Students think like scientists. They use empirical evidence and a logical process to make decisions and evaluate hypotheses. They also incorporate ideas from science into other disciplines.
<b>Social Reasoning</b>	Students think like sociologists, historians, or anthropologists. They apply an understanding of historical patterns to thinking about current political, social, ethical, economic, and cultural issues.

## Experience

At BPL, the vehicle for learning is a highly personalized student experience that is coupled with engagement in the world outside of school. Personalization is rooted in small learning communities (called Advisories) of 15-20 students who work closely with a teacher to create custom learning plans. As much as possible, school work is tied to student interests and real-world contexts. Throughout a BPL education, internships engage students at the intersection of their personal interests and the real world, and students share what they have learned in formal public exhibitions. [▶ Personalized Learning: Enabling Voice & Choice Through Projects](#)

### Our Learning Design



#### The student is the Center of Learning

Here's why it works: **1) The Advisor** works with each individual student in the class to help them discover what interests and motivates them. **2) The Mentor**, a lawyer, engineer, small business owner, etc., guides each student's internship. **3) The Parent** is actively enlisted as a resource to the Big Picture Learning community. **4) The Student** (and fellow students) interact to reinforce each other's passion for real work in the real world. The result is a self-teaching community of learners where no one feels left out, and each helps motivate the other.

## Advisory

BPL's definition of personalization is holistic and is more than differentiation and customization. BPL schools attend to the personal growth of individual students using Advisories, which students often describe as a "second family."

Advisory is the core component of a BPL school. It is a small learning community of 15-20 students that is together for four years and evolves into a space of trust and respect where students are known and find their voice. As a part of their overall learning experience, Advisories help students feel that they are a part of something larger than themselves, which is essential to BPL school culture.



At some BPL schools, students spend most of their time in Advisory engaged in self-directed learning or interdisciplinary workshops while others follow a more traditional schedule that still includes Advisories and internships. Advisory is where Individual Learning Plans are informed by an ongoing dialogue between students and their advisor. The dialogue itself is also informed by input from parents and mentors. [📄 Indicators of High-Quality Advisory System](#) [📄 Sample High School Advisory Guide](#)

## Learning Through Interests and Internships

---

Learning Through Interests and Internships (LTI) is a signature of BPL. It emphasizes the importance of students' interests and integrates internships into a students' total learning experience. LTI is not extracurricular; it is a part of the core BPL experience. Because BPL believes that learning is best accomplished in the real world, students intern once or twice a week for an entire school day. During this time, they gain first-hand experience working with adult mentors. This highlights BPL's "Leaving to Learn" philosophy and helps students develop academic, workplace, and social-emotional competencies. [📄 Indicators of High-Quality LTI Projects](#)

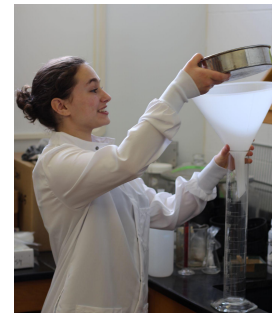
To support real-world learning, BPL developed and uses ImBlaze, a mobile platform that enables schools to curate a set of potential internships for students based on their interests. ImBlaze helps schools navigate all aspects of the overall internship process while helping students make personal connections to mentors during out-of-school learning opportunities. ImBlaze supports measurement of the depth of interest and engagement, the acquisition of skills through real work, and the development of a network of students' professional relationships. [🖥️ ImBlaze](#)  
[▶ Learning Through Internships: Connecting Students' Passions to the Real World](#)  
[📄 Indicators of High-Quality Internship Systems](#)

---

## Exhibitions of Learning

---

Individual Learning Plans culminate in Exhibitions of Learning that are core to the learning design at BPL. [📄 Individual Learning Plans](#) These Exhibitions are attended by staff, parents, peers, and mentors and help Advisors track overall student growth and the progress of individual students. Advisors "grade" students by writing extensive narratives, and Exhibitions are an important source of insight. Students make multiple presentations each year as a part of processing and documenting their learning. The process itself is an opportunity for metacognition and growth. [📄 Sample Exhibition Rubric](#)



## Supporting Structures

Unique needs emerge when students regularly engage in learning outside of school that is aligned to what they learn in school, and earn credit or certification for their work. To support these needs at their schools, BPL has developed a range of policies, systems, and structures.



**Any curriculum can be used within the BPL model as long as it allows for personalization, real-world learning, and authentic assessment.**

To personalize learning, a school's curriculum must be robust and flexible enough to support each student's Individual Learning Plan and off-campus

---

## CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

learning opportunities while still addressing any state standards and competencies that are in place.

BPL students are not assessed by tests unless they are mandated by state requirements. Some BPL schools translate narratives or competency-based systems to traditional grades to meet local requirements or to facilitate the college transcript and admissions process.



## SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

### **Schools that are part of the BPL network exercise exceptional respect for students and place great trust in them.**

To establish a culture in which students form positive relationships and find a sense of belonging, schools must be intentional in giving students voice and choice in learning. They must also be willing to include families and other members of the community at large in the life of the school, knowing that the resulting shared sense of connection is the foundation for support and celebration. [▶ School Culture](#)



## ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

### **Teachers approach their roles holistically and build the habits of lifelong learners themselves in order to model these for learners.**

Teachers at BPL schools have a positive impact on students because they approach their work holistically. They know that they need to do more than deliver content knowledge to be effective: they also need to advise, coach, and facilitate to ensure that all students are known in their classrooms. And, in their own learning practices, they need to self-reflect, connect, and communicate with other adults who support students.

During the hiring process at BPL network schools, candidates are often asked to engage in tasks similar to those they will have to facilitate in their Advisories. This may be a short one-on-one coaching session with a student around goal setting or some other performance-based interview task. The approach is designed to gauge a candidate's ability to problem-solve, their ability to interact with students, and their belief that all students can succeed.



## SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

### **Because all students participate in internships, schools adopting the BPL model need flexibility in their schedules.**

BPL schools develop unique schedules to incorporate internships as a part of their belief in real-world learning. Schools that adopt the BPL model need to be prepared to handle unique issues like tracking attendance across multiple locations in a city. To help address these issues, BPL developed ImBlaze, a platform that schools can use to manage key components of internships. [📅 Sample schedule 1](#) [📅 Sample schedule 2](#)

---

**BPL schools engage families and internship mentors as valued members of the school community because they play proactive roles in student learning.**



**FAMILY & COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIPS**

Whether they are helping to develop learning plans, coaching a student through an issue, or attending exhibitions, families and mentors are integral to student success. As a proponent of out-of-school learning, BPL knows that family and community partnerships are necessary in the effort to create systemic change and champion equity in schools.

BPL encourages parents to play a proactive role in their children's learning by collaborating in the planning and assessment of student work. As an integral part of the network that supports students, parents are welcome and valued members of the school community. Similarly, a series of mentors plays an important role in supporting student growth during the various internships that are a part of the BPL experience.

---

**ImBlaze is a digital platform created by BPL to serve its own schools as they manage student internships, but the platform has now been adopted more widely.**



**TECHNOLOGY &  
INFRASTRUCTURE**

ImBlaze organizes BPL internship programs from the curation of and search for opportunities, to attendance, to overall progress. It allows everyone involved in an internship to effectively interact and collaborate. The platform gives ownership of the real-world learning to students and makes it easier for mentors and teachers to help with goal setting, provide feedback, and make endorsements.

---

**BPL schools recognize continuous improvement as a necessary part of being an effective organization in a rapidly changing world.**



**CONTINUOUS  
IMPROVEMENT**

BPL originated from the principle that learning must have relevance in a student's life. To maintain fidelity to this principle, BPL leaders, teachers, and staff engage in learning that helps to align vision and practice with the real-world challenges and opportunities of students. This learning can take the form of professional development at individual schools, school visits, and annual conferences.

# IMPLEMENTATION

## Supports Offered

[Big Picture Learning](#) has developed a continuum of support and strategic partnership levels to support schools that want to adopt transformative, student-centered practices. This continuum can help schools and districts work creatively within existing regulations that may limit access to external learning experiences while also advancing new policies to support such experiences.

### School Design Partnership

*Cost Associated*



BPL partners with school teams that want to adopt its design whether they are in early development, implementation, or need to refine their efforts.

BPL's partnership strategy centers on helping schools strengthen their internal capacities through coaching, school site visits, and participation in communities of practice.

[Express Interest](#)

---

### Custom Learning Opportunities

*Cost Associated*



To be responsive to the needs and interests of the community to be served by a school, BPL's support strategy can be customized. BPL has helped grow student-centered, project-based learning practices around the world by aligning its work to local contexts.

[Express Interest](#)

## Reach

275

Schools

28

States

30,000

Students

70%

Students of  
Color

## Impact

Multiple studies along with accolades from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and President Obama serve as evidence for the positive impact of the BPL school model.

BPL students demonstrate academic and postsecondary success. [📄 Learning Policy Institute Study, 2019](#)

- BPL students scored higher on state assessments in math and English language arts and graduated from high school at higher rates than their district counterparts.
- 95% of students were accepted into 2-year or 4-year institutions; 88% of those who did not enroll in college secured full-time employment facilitated through an internship experience.
- BPL graduates are equally likely to enroll in college, regardless of their race, gender, or parents' level of education.

BPL schools foster a strong sense of connection, self-awareness, and workplace readiness. [📄 Findings from The Big Picture Learning Longitudinal Study, 2020](#)




- Students and alumni report being deeply connected to peers and adults at BPL. They also report that BPL schools excel at helping students know who they are.
- Alumni report that the BPL Learning Through Interest/Internship program helped them learn how to navigate the world of work and become more confident in the workplace.

## Contact

**Sonn Sam**

National Director of Partnerships  
sonn@bigpicturelearning.org

# RESOURCES

 <p><a href="#">10 Distinguishers</a> A series of videos that explains BPL's signature characteristics.</p>	 <p><a href="#">Relationships Indicators</a> A poster that explains how the BPL community engages in meaningful interactions.</p>	 <p><a href="#">Relevance Indicators</a> A poster that explains how BPL creates purposeful</p>
--	---	---





## Rigor Indicators

A poster that explains how BPL designs and incorporates appropriate challenges into learning.



## Individualized Real World Learning

A video introduction to core design features of Big Picture Learning schools.

## learning.

### Big Picture Learning Goals and Competencies

At Big Picture Schools, we believe that high school graduates must know how to reason, problem solve, and be active members of the community. At Big Picture Learning Schools, there is no cap of information that all students must learn. It is a world where available information is growing exponentially, we believe that the most important thing a student needs to know is how to learn. What is the Big Picture Learning design are the Learning Goals, a framework for looking at concepts, skills, and abilities and a guide for creating personalized curriculum.

#### The Five Learning Goals are:

- Personal Qualities
- Communication
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Critical Reasoning
- Social Reasoning

Big Picture holds very high standards for our students. We have designed our educational program from the end goal backwards – meaning, we have a clear vision of the skills, knowledge, and personal qualities that will help lead our graduates success and fulfillment. However, we also know that to truly educate one student at a time, our goals for student learning must be flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of student needs and personal aspirations. Our assessment system is based around two sets of goals – the school-wide Learning Goals and each student's own personal goals. We view throughout all of this goals is the belief that learning should be authentic and meaningful, as well as a connection that each student should become a lifelong learner.

The Five Learning Goals set tools for problem solving and offer a framework for seeking out the real-world knowledge and skills necessary to being a successful, well-rounded person. They are not content oriented curricula, nor are they completely distinct categories. Each goal focuses on aspects of reasoning or reasoning behavior. Student learning and project work will often incorporate many overlapping elements of the Learning Goals. Associated with the Learning Goals on the following pages are clusters of competencies aligned to Common Core State Standards and the admission expectations of four-year colleges in Washington and beyond.

## Big Picture Learning Goals and Competencies

A document outlining intended outcomes.



## Personalized Learning: Enabling Voice and Choice Through Projects

A video about BPL's approach to personalized learning.

**BIG PICTURE LEARNING INDICATORS OF A HIGH-QUALITY BIG PICTURE ADVISORY SYSTEM: DESIGN PHASE DRAFT FOR REVIEW**

**Overview:** Advisory is the core organizational and relational structure of a Big Picture Learning school. Its heart and soul, often described as a "second family" by students. Students stay with an advisor and a group of fellow classmates for multiple years, building close personal relationships that last a lifetime. Please use indicators and descriptors below to review/generate/reflect upon the school's design and design process.

It is important to note that while the four indicators listed below are essential to high quality advisory systems, the descriptors might show up in different ways and at different times in the development of a school. We do not expect to see evidence of all descriptors on any given observation as some may occur outside of advisory, some can only be observed over time, and many can only be surfaced through dialogue.

Possible uses of this tool include:

- **Coaching Conversations:** The coach and principal review the indicators and descriptors to generate and reflect upon the school design highlighting high-priority descriptors according to the school's vision.
- **Design Team Planning: "Pressure Test"** the school design against the indicators and descriptors below noting areas of alignment, potential blind spots, and ideas for consideration.

INDICATOR #1: Student Interests Drive Instruction	Coach's Notes:
<b>DESCRIPTORS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students and advisors share leadership and students make decisions about</li> <li>• Learning plans, project work, and assessments reflect the unique interests, passions, and needs of each student.</li> </ul>	

## Indicators of High-Quality Advisory System

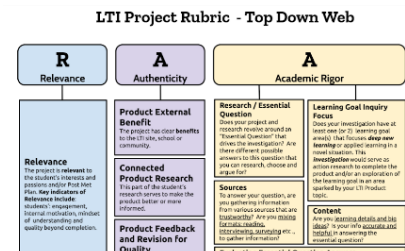
A document outlining characteristics of a strong advisory program.

### Our High School Advisory Guide

Guiding Questions	2
Outcomes	3
Success Indicators	4
Advisory Universal Practices	5
Our High Advisory Benchmarks	6
Quarter 1: Who am I? Who are we?	7
SEPTEMBER	7
OCTOBER	10
Quarter 2: Who could I be? Who could we be?	14
NOVEMBER	14
DECEMBER	17
JANUARY	20

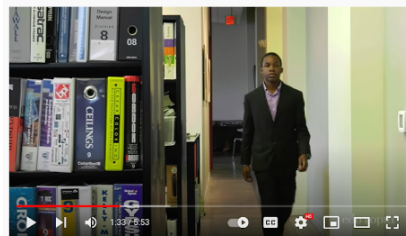
## Sample High School Advisory Guide

A document that explains various aspects of a BPL advisory program.



## Indicators of High-Quality LTI Projects

A rubric to assess Learning Through Interests projects.



## Learning Through Internships: Connecting Students' Passions to the Real World

A video that follows students through internship experiences.

### BIG PICTURE LEARNING INDICATORS OF A HIGH-QUALITY BIG PICTURE INTERNSHIP SYSTEM

Overview: Big Picture Learning's mission is to activate the potential of Schools, Systems and Education through student driven real-world learning. In this effort, internships play a central role to students learning in the real world. As early as 9th grade, students are appropriately prepared and genuinely encouraged and supported to pursue their passions. Students will be matched with industry leaders and engaged in learning that nurtures academic, industry and social-emotional growth. Advisors and mentors will facilitate the learning process while students will be in the driver seat. Student work should be anchored in student passion/interests, drive for multiple competencies, while adding value by solving problems and going back to the internship site. Please use the indicators and descriptors below to review/generate/reflect upon the school's design and design process.

It is important to note that while the four indicators listed below are essential to high quality internship systems, the descriptors might show up in different ways and at different times in the development of a school. We do not expect to see evidence of all descriptors on any given observation as some may occur outside of internships, some can only be observed over time, and many can only be surfaced through dialogue.

#### Possible uses of this tool include:

- **Coaching Conversations:** The coach and principal review the indicators and descriptors to generate and reflect upon the school design highlighting high-priority descriptors according to the school's vision.
- **Design Team Planning: "Pressure Test"** the school design against the indicators and descriptors below noting areas of alignment, potential blind spots, and ideas for consideration.

INDICATOR #1: Relevance / Interest	Coach's Notes:
<b>DESCRIPTORS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internship Work and Projects Connect to Students' Goals for Learning. (P. Not using) Learning Plan to be used for</li> </ul>	

## Indicators of High-Quality Internship Systems

A document outlining characteristics of a strong internship program.

Met School Learning Plan 2022-23

Student Name: Marie | Advisor: Michelle Makelis | ELL: Bremer

Student Grade: 12 | Trimester: 1 | Mentor: Hans

Learning Experiences	Learning Objectives	Final Products/Outcomes
<p><b>Senior Readiness Skills Review (Prerequisite 2 - Final Assessment)</b></p> <p>Micro-credential: Senior Transition   Micro-credential: Senior Transition</p> <p><b>Real World Learning (RTL)</b></p> <p>(Title)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define the functions of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)</li> <li>The student will analyze how DACA affects the country's economy.</li> <li>The students will evaluate why DACA is important to immigrant students.</li> <li>Develop a link between criminal and civil law and how it affects DACA's process to migrants.</li> <li>Describe the total process for DACA.</li> </ul>		

[Individual Learning Plans](#)  
A sample template for Individual Learning Plans.

**10<sup>th</sup> Grade 20 Exhibition Evaluation**

This quarter the main focus of the exhibition is student's internship (LTI). Use this evaluation rubric as a guide to help you with your exhibition when it **starts** **your** **internship**.

Exceeds (4)	Meets (3)	Approaching (2)	Below (1)
<p><b>Reflection:</b> The student is able to reflect on their growth and learning through the project and demonstrate the impact of the project on their life and the community.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Student can demonstrate the impact of the project on their life and the community.</p>	<p><b>Reflection:</b> The student is able to reflect on their growth and learning through the project and demonstrate the impact of the project on their life and the community.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Student can demonstrate the impact of the project on their life and the community.</p>	<p><b>Reflection:</b> The student is able to reflect on their growth and learning through the project and demonstrate the impact of the project on their life and the community.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Student can demonstrate the impact of the project on their life and the community.</p>	<p><b>Reflection:</b> The student is able to reflect on their growth and learning through the project and demonstrate the impact of the project on their life and the community.</p> <p><b>Challenge:</b> Student can demonstrate the impact of the project on their life and the community.</p>

[Sample Exhibition Rubric](#)  
A sample rubric used to assess public exhibitions of learning.



[School Culture](#)  
A short video explaining key elements of the culture within BPL schools.

**San Diego Met High School**  
2022-2023 Daily Schedule

**Monday/Wednesday/Friday Schedule**

Period	Start Time	End Time
1	8:30 AM	10:00 AM
Advisory - 2	10:05 AM	11:40 AM
3	10:45 AM	11:40 AM
Lunch	11:45 AM	12:15 PM
4	12:20 PM	1:15 PM

[Sample Schedule](#)  
The weekly schedule from BPL San Diego Met.

**Draft Weekly Schedule**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30 Pick Me Up				8:30 Pick Me Up
9:30 Advisory				9:30 Advisory
10:00 Integrated Curriculum	Integrated Curriculum	Integrated Curriculum	Integrated Curriculum	Integrated Curriculum
11:00 Independent Work Time	Independent Work Time	Independent Work Time	Independent Work Time	Independent Work Time
12:30 Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch

[Sample Schedule](#)  
The weekly schedule from BPL El Centro.



[Big Picture Learning](#)  
The official website for the Big Picture Learning organization.



[BPL: Spreading Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor One Student at a Time](#)  
A report about how BPL implements deeper learning and spreads its approach.



[Findings from The Big Picture Learning Longitudinal Study, 2020](#)  
A summary of recent research about BPL's impact.