POD

City Neighbors High School

Pod is an enhanced advisory model within which learners experience a variety of activities that promote belonging and develop learners' skills.

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OVERVIEW

Pod is an enhanced advisory model developed by City Neighbors High School (CNHS). Often considered the heart of the school, Pod is frequently described by students and advisors as a "second family." Pods serve three core purposes: providing academic support, providing safe social-emotional spaces, and building community. All students belong to a Pod with no more than 17 others, and each Pod sticks together with its advisor through all four years of high school. A Pod is also a reserved meeting, working, and living space for students. Pod becomes a place where students feel at "home away from home" in school, and it strives to ensure that every student is "known, loved, and inspired."

The Pod model entails some common activities while also leaving *ample* space for teacher autonomy and student voice. Activity blocks, special programming, and Individual Learning Plans are important parts of the Pod experience. City Neighbors offers site visits and a resource toolkit to support schools in implementing Pod.

What Makes This Model Innovative?

Connection & Community

Pod serves as students' "home away from home" where they deeply connect with their advisor and one another through structured and unstructured time.

Whole-Child Focus

A variety of activities during Pod time are designed to support students' social, emotional, and physical growth, from circle to getting into nature, to SEL lessons.
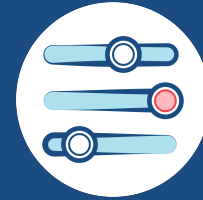
Customization

While Pod does offer guardrails and guidance, for the most part teachers and students make decisions around the experience to ensure it truly reflects their Pod's unique makeup.

DESIGN

Goals

The values below describe critical mindsets for learning, growing, and living a fulfilling life in our world. All City Neighbors graduates are expected to embody these values and demonstrate these qualities in all they do. To that end, these values are nurtured and developed in each student both inside and outside of Pod.

Compassion	Develop empathy and show concern for others. Be mindful of others' needs.
Collaboration	Communicate and cooperate effectively with others. Make positive contributions.
Curiosity	Pursue interests and remain open-minded toward learning new things.
Self-Direction	Take independent initiative and be responsible for managing yourself.
Diligence	Work carefully and persistently through challenges and toward the best results.

Experience

While the Pod model offers a general approach and some common activities to be done across all Pods, core to the model is the idea that teachers and students have voice and choice. There is no "one right way" to do Pod. It is meant to be a safe space for learners that provides just what they need and want, which means the activities and the structures that take place on a given day will be unique to each group of students. At a high level, CNHS suggests that adopting schools honor the experiences and support structures detailed in the following sections—though how that looks will be up to the different Pod members.

Consistent Routines

Opening and Closing Routines: Each day, Pod begins with a short block for announcements and intention setting. The goal is that students become aware of CNHS community events, opportunities, and individual needs on a daily basis.

Circle Time: Pod circles are essential to creating a strong Pod community. Circles can be centered around many topics including current events, social-emotional issues, and student- or teacher-led interests. They take place weekly—often to begin the week on Monday and to close out the week on Friday—though Pod advisors may also add short circle times at the beginning or end of each period as well. 🖥 Pod circles

Electives and Intensives: Electives and intensives are opportunities for students to participate in learning in an area of their interest. They happen at a regular cadence during particular times over a student's time at CNHS (e.g., intensives might happen every Wednesday during Pod time for all juniors). Many of these activities are created by students or with feedback from student interests. The elective process started with students and staff advocating for more interest-centered opportunities. 📊 Sample Elective list 📊 Sample Intensive list

Study Hall: Study Hall takes place once per week. Students can work in small groups or individually on class assignments or programs such as Khan Academy or Quill. During this time, advisors offer support and conduct 1:1 check-ins around current student grades and assignments that are due. The following two routines happen during Study Hall:

- **Individual Learning Plan Time**: Each learner at CNHS creates an Individualized Learning Plan 📊Example ILP . An ILP is the place where students record their academic scores and monitor their progress over time. Advisors carve out time to develop and reflect on ILPs (they can decide which cadence is right for their Pod) with the minimum being at the beginning and end of each semester. Armed with ILP data, students set meaningful goals in the ILP that keep them focused and accountable. These goals are geared toward three outcome areas: academic, self-management, and social-emotional. At the end of the quarter, learners reflect on their data and their goals and record their thoughts in the ILP.

Finally, ILPs are also a placeholder for a student's professional documents—like an informal portfolio—including things like resumes, letters of recommendation, and more.

- **Photo Journal Prompts**: Photo journaling is used to provide students opportunities to reflect on a variety of prompts. Creating journal prompts that all teachers can use helps maintain consistency in the pods across each grade level. Through photo journaling, they also infuse writing in their advisory program. 📑 Photo Journal Prompts

Flexible Activity Blocks

Beyond the consistent routines mentioned above, the bulk of Pod time is spent in activity blocks. Activity blocks are meant to provide learners with time to focus on either social or academic topics, or sometimes both. Each Pod session consists of three blocks—one of which is lunch. That leaves teachers (and often students) with choices to make around how to spend the additional two blocks. CNHS offers several different types of activity blocks, and Pod members make choices around which activities to engage in on a given day or in a given week. 📑 Example Pod Schedule Furthermore, any block can be changed to meet the needs of a specific Pod—meaning that there is no one way to do a circle or conference block.

In general, activity blocks tend to focus on topics like:

- **Reading**: Pods read a selected book together and participate in discussions around the book.
- **Community Building and Collaboration Activities**: Students participate in games or activities designed to build community and collaborate with their peers. 🖥 Pod Activities
- **Nature-Base Exploration**: Students can participate in nature journaling or a nature-based activity. 📑 Nature Education & Environmental Literacy Project Suggestions are provided by a teacher.

One thing that is mandatory is the incorporation of grade-level initiatives or lessons concerning academic and social-emotional development. For example, for Pods with 11th and 12th graders, the grade team may together decide for all Pods to incorporate college and career readiness. In cases like this, there may only be one activity block given the depth of what students are engaging in.

Supporting Structures

An important aspect of Pod is that teachers and learners work together to customize the experience in ways that work for their unique group. There is flexibility around scheduling, routines, activities, culture, and more. However, CNHS does provide guidance and structure to support schools and educators in implementing Pods.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

While teachers ultimately make decisions around curriculum and assessment, Pod requires adherence to certain guidelines.

Activity blocks (detailed above) make up most of the "curriculum" of Pod, which gives teachers and students choice over what they do in Pod. However, some standard activities are expected of all Pod advisors and should be implemented periodically. A few examples of this are journaling, conferences, and team building. Additional Pod requirements may be given at the grade level of the students, and this is decided by each grade-level team. Teachers have the option to use a planning template for Pod meetings. 📓 Pod Lesson Plan Template The CASEL standards are used as guidance toward the activities that are created within Pod. 📓 SEL Standards from CASEL

Across all Pods, this is a credit-bearing, graded course. It is not, however, a traditional academic course. Grading Pod should be manageable, humane, and collaborative. At CNHS, the approach to grading is grounded in Steve Peha's "Real World Grading" scale. 📓 3 Ps of Grading Teachers are encouraged to use simple daily tracking of the ways in which students are upholding school values. For example, Pod members uphold three principles: present, positive, and participating. A teacher might quickly track behaviors on a role sheet, then review the marks periodically to assign a daily or weekly grade according to the extent to which each student upheld the principles. 📓 Pod Rubric 📓 Values Plan by Grade Level Students should also conduct self-evaluations in these areas and reflect upon growth alongside their advisor. 🖥 Grading Pod

SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

Pod requires diverse student groupings and a culture of presence, positivity, and participation.

Pods are created with intentional diversity across a variety of identity markers like zip code, race, ethnicity, gender, and more. The goal is to make each Pod as diverse as possible, which is an important aspect of Pod culture. The culture of Pod is also one in which students should see as a time to make themselves better

people and where they can trust that the different activities done in Pod will help make them better individuals. It should also be clear that Pod is not a time to hang out and relax.

Being a present, positive participant is required of all Pod members in all Pods. Following these principles ensures that Pod can work for everyone. Presence in mind, body, and spirit helps nurture the values CNHS holds dear. Even more, while everyone has their gloomy moods or rough days, being present with those feelings while staying positive in words and actions helps keep Pod a safe and productive space for all. Participating, of course, is an essential part of connecting with a Pod community and taking advantage of all Pod has to offer. In fact, students commit to and reflect on these principles each day, and if they'd like, teachers can track students' adherence to them to use for feedback and accountability.

Pod advisors plan activities and must assume ownership of student safety and success.

Teachers and other support staff can serve as Pod advisors. As the adult responsible for the pod, it is their job to help the students grow as individuals and as a cohesive group. It is the advisor's job to plan activities for the group during pod time.

ADULT ROLES, HIRING, & LEARNING

A crucial part of the advisor role is getting to know the students and consistently assessing the needs of the group. A strong Pod leader cares about students, sets a good example of character, maintains clear expectations and boundaries within the Pod, and plans for success every day. Pod leaders support the whole child, working to ensure that each student:

- Enters school healthy, and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
- Learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for all.
- Actively engages in learning and connects to the Pod, school, and world.
- Accesses personalized learning and is supported by caring adults.
- Is challenged academically and prepared for postsecondary success.

You can learn more about how advisors support learners on the Pod website. 🖥 Advisor's Role

SCHEDULE & USE OF TIME

Pod requires about two hours of dedicated time in the daily schedule.

To fulfill its mission, Pod should meet for about two hours each day. At CNHS, this includes a 30-minute lunch embedded in that time. Pod should be a regular slated period on student and staff schedules. At CNHS, Pods meet for one hour and 45 minutes. It begins with announcements, then one to two activity blocks, and a closing. While this is consistent, there is variation as to how time is scheduled within Pod. First, teachers and students have voice and choice in Pod activities, so no two Pods will likely be experiencing the activities at the same time. Secondly, during certain semesters, Pods might be engaging in Electives or Intensives on a specific day each week. Finally, different grades may experience special programming. For example, older students may engage in an internship every Wednesday rather than typical Pod activities. 📊 Sample Weekly Schedules

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Pod advisors must forge strong relationships with students and their families.

Pod is one of the major ways in which relationships are forged between the school and students, as well as their families, to ensure the developmental growth of students and their success as individuals. The goal of having students assigned to one adult is intentional. It allows for the school to be in open communication with families. Having high family involvement helps push students to their full potential and ensures that the school is doing all that it can to best support students. This reflects the belief that families are an important aspect of the students' learning team.

Since Pod advisors are parents' first connection to CNHS, the advisor regularly communicates with families about school-wide activities and students' individual progress.

SPACE & FACILITIES

Pod space must be warm and welcoming, and it can be designed by students.

Because Pod is a "home away from home," the space should be warm and welcoming. To promote this feeling, students should be involved in the design of the space. It should also provide students with a space to store their belongings, eat their lunch, and relax. Each Pod is assigned a space somewhere in the building where the group will meet regularly, and that space should stay consistent throughout the group's time at the school.
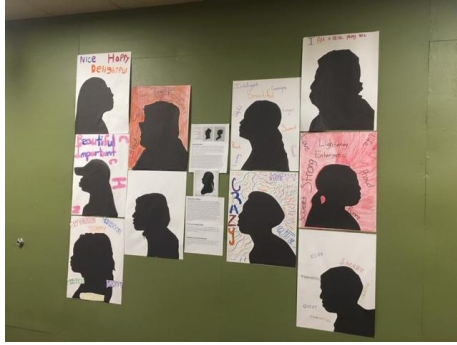
1:1 technology is required for certain Pod activities.

In 2019, the CNHS team began working toward all students having their own device. In 2020, all students were provided with a Chromebook computer. Advisors use technology in a mindful way in the Pods, including for postsecondary prep or working on Individualized Learning Plans. CNHS also has a state-of-the-art Fabrication Lab that Pods use to create various projects.

TECHNOLOGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Pod requires a small allocation of financial resources.

Each Pod is allocated a small budget of $150 for supplies. CNHS also provides a budget for students to go on one Pod trip per year.

BUDGET & OPERATIONS

To keep Pod aligned with student and staff interests, schools should appoint a Pod working group.

City Neighbors High School consistently works toward improving. Each year, the school identifies summer work groups. Many of the awesome developments within the Pod program are due to the staff collaborating during this time. CNHS also continues to improve the Pod program and adjust it to the changing requirements and student and staff interests.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

City Neighbors High School offers the following support to help you implement its approach to Pod.

Site Visits
Free

CNHS welcomes visitors to see its Pod program in action.

Get in Touch

Consulting and Coaching
Cost Associated

CNHS leaders and staff are available to consult and coach anyone interested in implementing a structured advisory program (Pod). Costs would be based on the agreed-upon MOU.

Get in Touch

Reach

1	420	93%	42%
School	Students Served	Students of Color	FRL

Impact

The support and climate at CNHS, including the Pod model, have helped make the school a place where students want to be:

- CNHS graduation rate is an average of 86% over the last 5 years (even with the pandemic).
- Attendance rate is over 90% every year and was 94% before COVID-19.
- Dropout rate is lower than 5%.

- Parent, student climate data is always highly favorable. In 2021, 93% of parents were satisfied with the culture and academics at CNHS.

CNHS has also collected anecdotal data from students to demonstrate the direct impact of Pod:

> " *My favorite thing about Pod would be getting a chance to know everyone. Pod helped me feel better, my pod members would make me laugh so it helped me a lot. [My Pod advisor] helps me a lot. She's someone I can talk to when I'm not feeling myself."*

> " *Pod has been a great opportunity for me to think about what I want to do after high school... my Pod advisor helps me work through my problems and encourages me when I am down."*

> " *Pod helps me stay on top of my grades and set goals for each year."*

> " *My favorite memory of Pod is the first trip that we took together. Pod has helped me feel comfortable with some of my peers, and succeed in academics. My POD advisor...has helped me with my academic progress by teaching me strategies and helping in keeping me motivated."*

Contact

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RESOURCES

Pod circles
A short description of Pod circles and a link to more resources.

Electives 2016-17
During the school year students will participate in an elective during Thursday Pod time. Please review these with students and have them choose their top electives.

Poetry/ Spoken Word (up to 18) Williams

Sample Electives List
This list details the electives offered during Pod time in a particular semester. Students choose which course to take.

_____ CRIMINOLOGY INTENSIVE (Mr. Toops): Why do individuals commit crimes? In this course, we will review, analyze, and evaluate case studies of a variety of criminals to determine the factors that led to criminal behavior. (IF YOU WERE A PART OF THIS COURSE LAST YEAR, **YOU MAY NOT REPEAT)**

_____ HISTORY OF JAZZ MUSIC (Mr. Hunter): Students will discover the importance and impact that Jazz music played on creating American pop culture. Through analysis of world history, music, dance and film, students will explore the connections between art and life and how these came together to create Jazz music and popular culture in America as we know it.

_____ ART IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY (Ms. Jess): This is an advanced level art course that will explore contemporary art history and art making. The course will shift from predominantly technique-driven instruction to idea-driven instruction. Many artists do not work in a single medium or technique and instead try to explore an idea, event, situation, or question through multiple media and visual strategies. The course will focus on the creative process; visual thinking skills, idea development and communication, as well as the development of technical craft used in all art projects.

Sample Intensives List
This list details the intensives offered during Pod time in a particular semester. Students rank which courses they'd like

to take.

9th Grade	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Quarter	1	2	3	4	Overa
GPA		3	2.7	Anyone	3.4
Absences		0	0	0	0
Tardies		1	0	2	0
Referrals		0	0	0	0
Grades	Algebra 1	68	65	71	
	English 1	88	92	87	
	US History	92	88	85	
	Biology	91	90	89	
	Health	85	85	84	
	Fine Art	88	87	85	
	Pod	90	91	89	

Example Individual Learning Plan
Learners can use this ILP template to track their progress over time.

1. WHAT IS A POD-JOURNAL?
   A **POD journal** is a record (usually done weekly) of what you have experienced over the course of a school year. Just as in regular journals, the entries depict both routine and extraordinary occurrences. Unlike regular journals, the emphasis is not only on writing, but also on capturing an experience using photography and using writing to support and explain what is being depicted. These photos can not only show what happened, when, and where, but also opinions and emotions.

Photo journal prompts
The what and why of photo journaling, plus a ton of prompts for each grade level.

Sample 9th Grade Pod Schedule

Monday 10:03 - 11:03 a.m.	Tuesday 10:03 - 11:03 a.m.	Wednesday 12:15 - 2:00 p.m.	Thursday 10:03 - 11:03 a.m.	Friday 10:03 - 11:03 a.m.
Circle Time	Art Block	Pod Activities & Pod Celebrations	Wellness Block	Nature Block
Reading Block	Study Hall *Photo Journals*		Reading Block	Study Hall *ILPs*

Example Pod Schedule
An example 9th grade Pod schedule and a description of the associated blocks.

Crowd Source
Visit the crowd source link to leave this page and find even more resources, or share your own. You'll even need to log into your City Neighbors Google account.
Visit Crowd Source

Back-to-Class Bridge
Help us all avoid the fifth period blues by getting students ready to return to class. Choose from several ideas for the last ten minutes of pod.
Learn More

Minute to Win it!
Credit Brynn Toops with sharing these easy and fun games. Pick from tons of ideas, and then get ready to laugh. This one's a real crowd pleaser.
Learn More

Pod Activities
A list of sample Pod activities and descriptions to support teachers.

Nature Education & Environmental Literacy

Nature Education & Environmental Literacy Project
Slides to build conviction around getting into nature plus outdoor activities to engage in.

POD Lesson Template
Topic : _____ Instructor: _____ Date: _____
CASEL Competencies:
Self-Awareness   Self-management   Responsible Decision-Making   Relationship Skills   Social Awareness
Learning Target or Goal for the Day:

Pod Lesson Plan Template
Teachers can choose to use this template to plan their Pod time in advance.

SEL Standards from CASEL
A list of the CASEL standards, which CNHS designs activities toward.

The 3P Grading System
An Easier, Faster, Better Way to Evaluate Students and Their Work

3 Ps of Grading
Steve Peha's book can be used to learn more about the approach to grading that CNHS has taken with Pod.

Participation: _____
I am a present, positive, productive participant who follows procedures...
A: all of the time
B: most of the time
C: some of the time
D: a little of the time
F: never or hardly ever

Pod Rubric
Daily and general Pod rubric templates designed around the 3 Ps.

Values by Grade

Focus	9 Inward-Aspirations	10 Inward to Outward Shift-Examination	11 Outward-Community/Internship
Compassion	Show compassion by supporting others in pod.	Show compassion by supporting others in school community and encourage others to do the same.	Show compassion by supporting others, in the outside community and encourage others to do the same.
Collaboration	Consider how your behavior impacts others.	Demonstrate ability to adjust behavior to contribute to group success.	Work with larger community to contribute to group success.
Curiosity	Keep an open mind toward learning something new.	Explore others' ideas and interests with an open mind toward learning something new.	Assume attitude of inquiry and discovery for deeper learning.
Self-Direction	Exercise self management with guidance from advisor.	Manage self with minimal guidance and perseverance.	Exercise self-discipline in pursuit of personal goals.
Diligence	Embrace challenge. Push oneself to achieve individual goals. Celebrate successes.	Embrace self-challenge and begin to develop a growth mindset and an ethic of excellence.	Accept challenge and encourage others to attain a growth mindset and excellence.

[Values Plan by Grade Level](#)
This is a rubric for assessing student progress on values at each grade level.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
10 min.	Welcome Routine	Welcome Routine	Welcome Routine
20 min.	Circle	Pod Project	Circle
10 min.	Down Time Routine	Down Time Routine	Down Time Routine
20 min.	Conference & Work	Pod Project	Conference & Work
10 min.	Back-to-Class Bridge	Back-to-Class Bridge	Back-to-Class Bridge

[Sample Weekly Schedules](#)
These sample schedules can help teachers make choices about the cadence of Pod.

Grading Pod

[Grading Pod](#)
A web page to support teachers with how to think about and plan for grading Pod.

Advisor's Role

[Advisor's Role](#)
A web page explaining the role of the advisor including how to support students through academics, social-emotional learning, and community building.