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**La Salle College High School's new Concentrations Program helps students discover their passions, focus on goals, and prepare meaningfully for college and beyond.**  
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# A Spark of Inspiration

**LA SALLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL'S NEW CONCENTRATIONS PROGRAM HELPS STUDENTS DISCOVER THEIR PASSIONS, FOCUS ON GOALS, AND PREPARE MEANINGFULLY FOR COLLEGE AND BEYOND.**

**BY MATT COSENTINO  
PHOTOS BY ALISON DUNLAP**

**It's** no secret that teenage boys tend to lose their focus, which is why the educators who are tasked with getting them back on track are constantly in search of new ways to motivate them. An inspired student can reach dizzying heights, but one who is struggling to see the purpose of his studies may end up mired in complacency.

La Salle College High School, an all-boys' Catholic institution with a storied history of bringing out the best in young men, has implemented a forward-thinking program to provide students with a unique opportunity while addressing that concern with a new initiative known as the Concentrations Program. Similar to a college major, the program enables students to choose among three concentrations—with more to come in the future—and discover a path toward realizing their passion and purpose.

"What jumped out at me about specialty programs at La Salle, like Robotics, Band, and IT Lab Managers, is the commitment from the students and the amount of learning they get when they dive in and they are fully invested," says Principal Jim Fyke, who helped develop Concentrations with the full support and guidance of Brother James Butler, the school's president. "It's far superior to traditional models that are just concerned with testing and telling kids what they're going to need in college. When students commit to something, their level of involvement and engagement, and what they get out of it, is just unbelievable."

The Concentrations Program, which kicked off in September, is open to all students starting in their sophomore year, although they must meet certain requirements and maintain a B average in the core courses. The three initial areas of study are engineering and global business—based on popular college majors for many La Salle graduates—as well as information technology, which already had a strong existing foundation at the school.

Through the program, students take core courses and interesting new electives. They also participate in related clubs and activities, create professional portfolios, complete capstone projects, have opportunities to earn credentials and certifications, and engage in



off-campus internships. The process is heavy on experiential learning and giving students a chance to take an active role in their education.

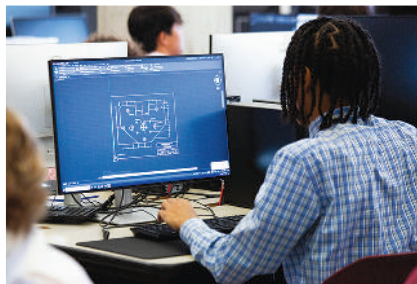
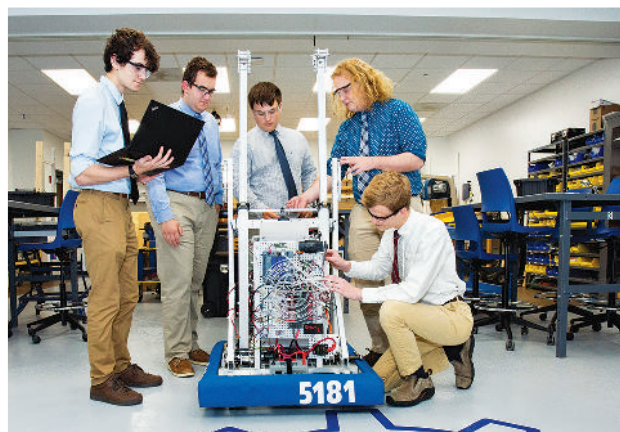
“A lot of people talk about experiential learning, but not many people do it,” says Dan Cipolla, a longtime physics teacher at La Salle and chair of the engineering arm of the Concentrations. “That’s the idea, to combine classroom learning with experiential learning. I think for a lot of these guys, the opportunity gets them excited about it possibly being a career for them and gets them motivated to do even better.”

Brother Tony Baginski, chair of the global business concentration, is new to La Salle this year after serving as principal at Central Catholic High School in Pittsburgh. He was drawn to La Salle in part because of this groundbreaking program, which he feels not only sparks intellectual curiosity but also gives students a better understanding of what it will mean to major in these fields in college and pursue a career in them.

“La Salle College High School is one of the gems of our Lasallian network, which includes almost 50 high schools in the United States and schools in eight countries,” he says. “Having a number of these concentrations and not being exclusionary, but trying to offer something that will engage and excite almost every one of our students, is the strength of this program.”

Fyke expects that students who participate in the Concentrations Program will focus better in non-core classes such as English and history, while honing skills such as public speaking and writing that they will surely need later in life. Meanwhile, electives in a chosen concentration, whether it’s advanced computer-aided design in engineering or East Asian studies in global business, will give them a leg up should they continue on the same track in college.

“On the one hand, this will expose students to a certain field or career path, and they can pursue it in college and have a headstart,” Fyke says. “But the other thing that’s interesting is some students will do this and realize that maybe a certain field isn’t for them and they’re not going to major in it, which is probably just as valuable. You don’t want to spend two years in college,



spend all that money, and then end up switching majors or transferring schools.”

The internships, which are still being developed, will take place at various times, but ideally in the summer before the student’s senior year.

“We are working with some of our alumni, and we actually met with our board of trustees to get a sense of the skills they would be looking for if they were hiring kids for a two-week internship, or even a summer internship,” Cipolla says. “They said it was a really great concept and, if the guys had certain skills, it would be a win-win situation.”

Baginski is also counting on La Salle’s vast network, whether through alumni, parents, or staff, to provide valuable resources in the classroom. Having members of the network speak with students about their personal experiences can provide valuable context that drives home lessons learned from a textbook.

“For example, we’re having a retired

alum who spent a number of years overseas in China, India, and Japan,” he says. “Just talking to him briefly, you get this idea of what it means to be in international business. It can spark both interest and questions, and the more that we can get our alumni and supporters in front of our students, and the students in front

of them, the more it’s going to pay off immensely.”

La Salle already has a renowned music program, and that will be one of three new concentrations starting next year, along with multimedia communications and health sciences. Three more will be added the following year, with nonprofit management and data analysis and statistics under consideration. Fyke is grateful to the school’s leadership team for committing to the program, allocating funds, and hiring new faculty to teach these courses. He is also optimistic about the future of the Concentrations Program and the way it will impact future students.

“When high school boys don’t have a goal or a plan, they’re notorious for floundering,” he says. “They don’t see the point to some classes, and when they don’t see the point, they don’t seem to perform. I hope this helps them see the point.

“My focus is always on the students we have, the quality of their education, and their seriousness of purpose for it,” he continues. “But there’s no doubt that this is going to attract families who will recognize this is an amazing opportunity for their sons, and it can help with the college application process as well.” ■

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