



# SIERRA HIGH SCHOOL



Sierra High School Context Map  
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## Mission and Vision Statement

### **Mission:**

To promote excellence by offering challenging curriculum and programs which enable all students to communicate effectively, become responsible citizens, demonstrate positive relationship and solve problems.

### **Vision:**

To empower all students to acquire positive academic, social, and emotions skills in order to allow them to become productive citizens and lifelong learners.

### **Rationale:**

Producing productive and responsible citizens is at the heart of what our education system should be doing. We often put so much emphasis on our students' ability to pass tests and boost scores, that we forget all other aspects of what makes them, and all of us, human. While we certainly want our students to be able to master the English language and complex math skills, above all else, we need them to be engaged in our society and engage in the discourse that makes it so great.

On top of being a responsible citizen, effective communication is key to students' role as a productive citizen and key to their ability to gain employment in the future. In order to participate in the discourse I mentioned earlier, it is essential that students be able to clearly and effectively communicate so that they may deeply engage in our civil discussions. The more clearly you communicate, the more you can be engaged with. As well, effective communication is key to students' ability to find and keep gainful employment. They must be able to use this communication to solve the complex issue that face the workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In addition, the focus on developing relationships is incredibly important. Another dynamic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace is the ability to develop team, and work in groups in order to solve problem. Students must understand the dynamics of relationships and understand how to foster those relationships in a professional environment.

Finally, the fact that the vision included the small word “all” in front of students is no mistake. The school community is focused on ensuring that all students are successful is as many environments as possible. It is key that the community understand that the schools commitment to excellence does not only extend to a sub-set of the population, but to the entire population regardless of race, ability, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

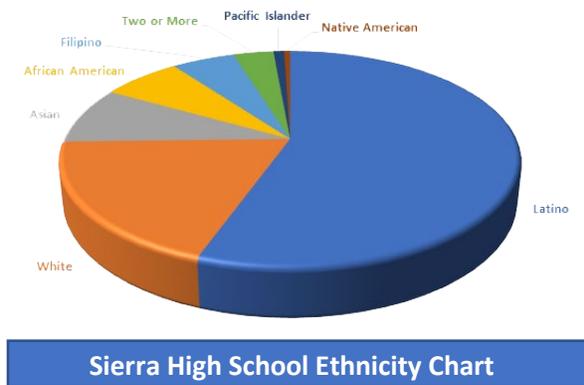
Overall, the focus on not only academics is what makes this mission and vision excellent. The mission and vision encompasses the whole student. As well, the vision end with creating life long learner which is what all educational institutions should be aiming for.

### **School Community General Background**

Manteca, California is a small town in the Central Valley of California. According to the United States Census estimates in 2017, Manteca is home to approximately 79,000 people (Quick Facts, 2017). However, in the last number of years, Manteca has experienced a housing boom with hundreds of new homes being built on a regular basis. Manteca was traditionally a rural agricultural town but more recently has become a mix of agricultural and suburbia. Many have come to Manteca to escape the steep housing prices of the San Francisco Bay Area. This has created a dynamic and continually diversifying community. According to the United States Census, Manteca has a majority White and Latino population with other ethnicities making up smaller percentages of the population. Manteca is home to a sizable Sikh population and is home to rather larger Sikh temple. The median household

income in Manteca, CA is \$64,502 and the median property value is \$274,200 (Data USA, 2019).

According to the United States Census Bureau 83.5% of adults have a High School diploma while only 15.1% hold bachelors degrees or higher (Quick Facts, 2017). The unemployment rate in Manteca, CA in only 3.9%.



Manteca Unified School District serves over 23,000 students across the cities of Manteca, Lathrop, French Camp, and South Stockton. There are 20 K-8 elementary schools, 5 traditional high schools, 1 credit make-up high school, and 1 continuing education high school. Sierra High School is the newest high school within the city of Manteca and was built in 1994. It sits on the southwest part of Manteca and is surrounded by some of the newest neighborhoods in the city. It has 4 feeder schools and a school enrollment of approximately 1,350 students in the 2018-2019 academic school year. One can see the drastic shift in population since the last census when looking at the California Department of Education (CDE) demographic data for the 2017-2018 school year. According CDE, Manteca Unified is 55.5% Latino, 19.1% White, 8.6% Asian, 6.7% African American, 5.3% Filipino, 3.4% two or more races, 0.9% Pacific Islander, 0.5% Native

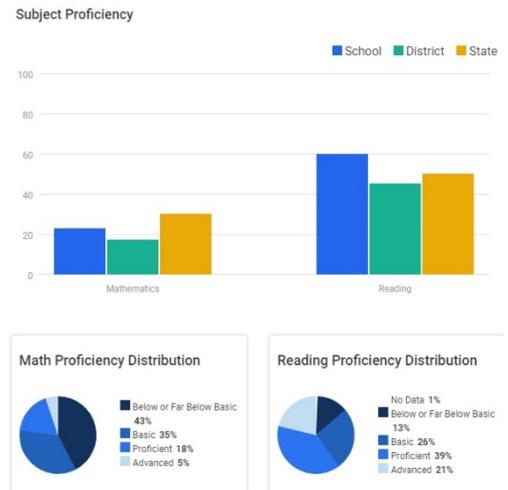
American. The school is an open-air campus with twelve main buildings and a number of portables. The campus is laid out in square with a large quad in the middle of all the buildings. Each building houses a different department with a few outliers in



An aerial satellite view of Sierra High School's campus.

each department out in the portable buildings. It takes approximately 2-3 minutes to walk from a classroom on one end of campus to one on the other end of campus. The entire campus is surrounded by a combination of cyclone and rod-iron fencing with limited entry points for security purposes.

Sierra High School has consistently had the highest academic scores in the Manteca Unified School District for several years. It is due in part to its academic focus. Class time is protected with the utmost importance. Very few rallies and whole school events are held during the regular school day so that teachers can focus on teaching and not have their schedules interrupted. Arguably the two biggest rallies of the



year, the Lobo Gold Rallies, are fully academic focused. Students are recognized for the GPA's as well as for other notable achievements such as community service. These rallies are often seen as a bright spot for students and they take a great deal of pride in them, especially because they are mostly student produced.

In addition to academic test scores Sierra prides itself on its diversity of Career Technical Education courses and programs. It has a wide variety of classes such as Fashion Design, Video Editing, Broadcast Journalism, Wood Shop, Robotics, a wide variety of agricultural classes, the be.connected academy, etc. These programs attract a wide variety of students and help to expose students to a wide assortment of career choices prior to them enrolling in college or a trade school. This exposure is vital since the small community of Manteca does not offer much in the way of these careers so these classes may be their only way to experience things like this prior to leaving Manteca.

## Ethnographic Interview

On a brisk February day, Jeff Greene and I sat-down in my classroom during lunch to discuss the history of Sierra and its shifting demographics. Mr. Greene isn't an administrator or certified historian for the school: He is an alumnus, coach, and teacher at the school. He began his tenure at Sierra as a student from 1999-2003. He was active on the Sierra campus as both an



*While they did not spend a great deal of time together in high school, Jeff Greene and his wife, Melanie, are both graduates of Sierra High School*

Athlete and Student. Once he completed his time at Sierra, he was off to college to receive both his Bachelors and Masters degrees. Once completed with his own education he returned to Sierra to begin his own teaching career. Mr. Greene was selected for this interview due to his status as both an alumnus and a current staff member. As a member of the community, he saw the Sierra community through some of its largest transitions and brings a unique perspective to the conversation.

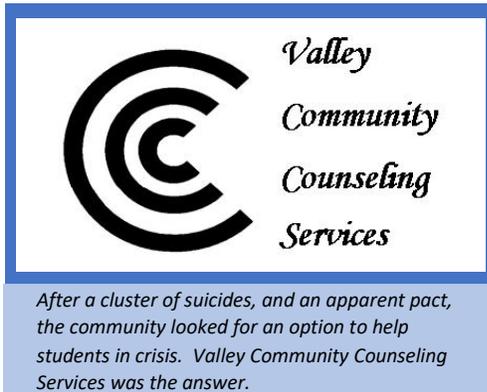
***Q: Tell me about your personal history with Sierra.***

I began my time at Sierra as a student, actually. I was raised in Manteca and was a part of the graduating class of 2003. After graduating Sierra, I went to San Diego State where I graduated in 2008 and then went to California State University Stanislaus for grad school. When I was done there I became a long term substitute in the Library and was approached by the Athletic Director about coaching track. I said yes to that and shortly after, I was asked if I would be interested in teaching here. I had an interest in teaching High School and applied. Now I teach English as well as coach Cross Country and Track.

***Q: Was your application fueled by your time at Sierra or was it just a matter of coincidence?***

There wasn't necessarily a big pull to teach at Sierra specifically. It's not like I had some profound experience here that drew back, things just fell into place and I was at the right places at the right time. Don't get me wrong, it's a great school, and I can't imagine working anywhere else, but it wasn't the main pull.

*Q: What are some important moments in history at Sierra that come to mind your you?*



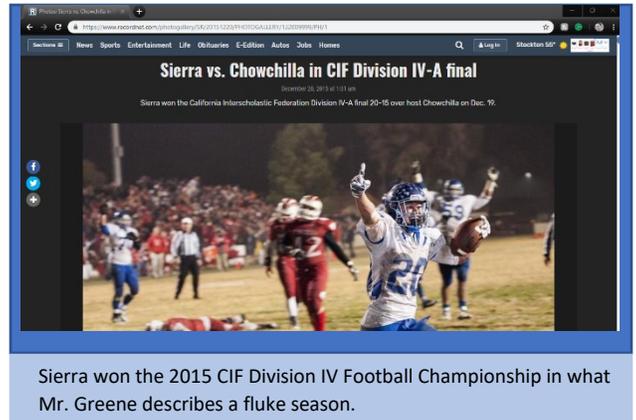
Sierra is a relatively new school, it's only been around for 25 years which as you know, isn't long in comparison to many other California schools. We live in a small town, there isn't a lot of major and important things that happen here. Throughout the years we've had some things that seem big for us, but in the grand scheme of things aren't that big. When we first opened, there was an odd series of accidents and suicides that took the community by surprise. When

that happened, people thought it was somewhat of an epidemic and they brought in Valley Community Counseling into all the high schools, including Sierra so that there was a more robust counseling program for students. I'm not entirely sure how helpful it's been as we continue to have accidents from time to time. Almost every year we lose a student for one reason or another.

“The next big event was the opening of Lathrop high school... Not only was campus a lot less crowded, but Sierra returned to more of a “neighborhood school” feel”

The next big event was the opening of Lathrop high school, and later Weston Ranch High School. For a while there, we were getting larger than we could handle. People were sharing rooms, a lot of fights would happen because everyone was crammed onto campus, and there were a lot of cross-town rivalries happening. When Lathrop opened, it alleviated a lot of that. Not only was campus a lot less crowded, but Sierra returned to more of a “neighborhood school” feel as 99% of the kids who go here are from the neighborhoods that immediately surround the campus.

Finally, the most recent big event was our school winning the 2015 CIF Division IV Football State Tournament. It was actually a fluke season. I think a lot of people hoped it might improve our program or help us to become a larger “football school” but it didn’t. It was just a fluke season and I actually think we went less than .500 the next season. These are the things that are big in a small town!



***Q: There have only been three principals in the 25 year history of the school, do you think that continuity has been good for the school?***

“Anytime you have continuity like that, it makes people feel safe...it also allows us to fall into a rut.”

I think it is both good and bad. Anytime you have continuity like that, it makes people feel safe. They know what to expect, they can form traditions, and they generally like the consistency. On the other hand though, it also allows us to fall into a rut. You’ve seen this since you got here. When we see things that don’t work, we still just keep doing them because “it’s what we’ve always done.” Even if it

doesn’t make sense we get stuck doing the same things in the name of tradition. This is actually a pretty big drawback that I think is a barrier to us moving forward in some areas.

***Q: Have you seen a demographic changed at Sierra over the years? If so, what has shifted and why?***

Yes and no. In the sense that many college programs talk Sierra’s population is shifting somewhat, but it comes and goes in waves. When Sierra first opened, it had a pretty decent mix of students both ethnically and socioeconomically. This was due to the fact that we were pulling in kids from 3 separate cities who have their own distinctive populations. We had kids from the Sierra neighborhoods who were overwhelmingly white, middle-class students. Then we had kids from Lathrop who has a larger African American population and a big

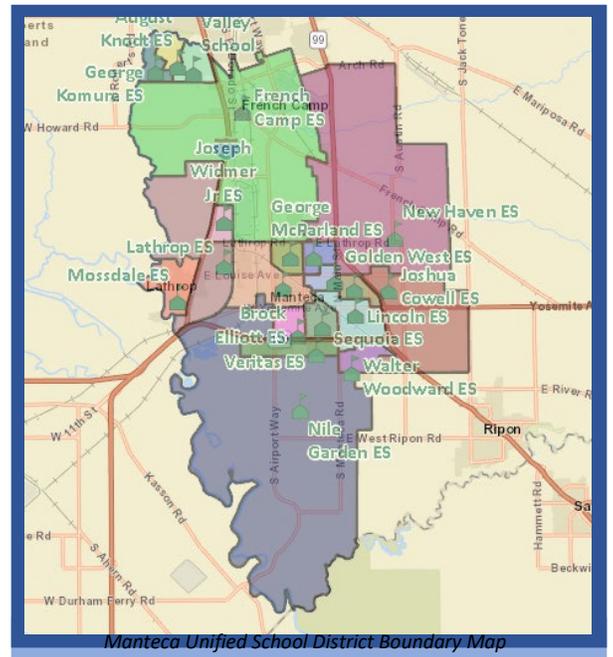
number of Bay Area transplants. We also got some kids from South Stockton, the Weston Ranch area, who were Latino and much lower socioeconomically. When Lathrop high opened, we lost a large chunk of that population and it sort of white washed Sierra quite a bit. We ended up losing a big portion of our students of color and our students who were lower on the socioeconomic population.

Recently, we've been seeing that start to shift again. I think you've even seen it just in your couple years here. Our Asian and Indian populations are starting to skyrocket. I

teach one of our ELD courses here and I've noticed that our Sikh and Indian population are growing quickly. It's an interesting shift. Also, with more Bay Area transplants moving into the new houses being built along the 120 corridor we are starting to see a bit more ethnic diversity on campus as well.

***Q: Does this diversity help or hinder student experience at Sierra at all?***

I think it's sort of a zero-sum. On one hand, diversity always helps students to experience new things and gain perspective. Also, it has led to us having a Black Student Union, Punjabi Club, Hispanic Youth Leadership Club, etc.. But, those club largely exist with just those ethnicities within them so it doesn't prompt any discourse, cross-cultural learning, or conversation among students, it just actually segregates them out more. In class, I hope it leads to a sharing of view points that are different, you have to draw it out of them, but at the end of the day diversity can only help even if it's a little at a time.

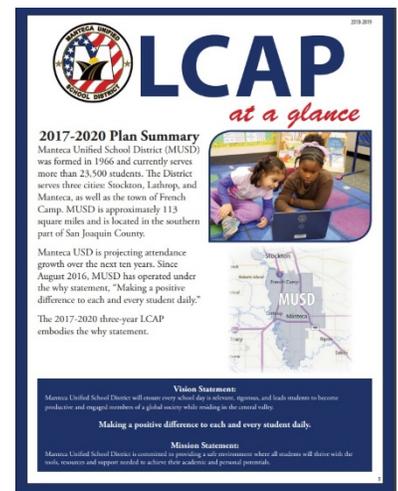


“At the end of the day diversity can only help even if it's a little at a time.”

## Parent Involvement

Sierra High School offers several ways for parents to be involved in the school community. While Sierra does not have a PTA, it does have a School Site Council, Athletics Booster Club, Band and Choir Boosters Club, and English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC), Two Back to School Nights a year (due to it's four by four block scheduling), and they also include parents on their Western Association of Schools and Colleges committees as they happen. In addition to this, there are numerous events for parents to attend such as orientation nights for incoming Freshman, sporting events, and performances.

School Site Council (SSC) plays an integral role at the Sierra Campus. There are currently 17 members and it is composed of parents, teachers, administrators, classified staff, and students. SSC meets once per month to review matters pertinent to the success of the school. They discuss the School Site Plan which includes the budget, the School Safety Plan, as well as discuss and give input on the Local Central Accountability Plan (LCAP) for the school each year. In addition to these documents, they hear presentation from student leaders, administrators, and teachers on what is happening around campus so they may keep a pulse on what is happening in the community. Parents have an opportunity to give input on campus affairs, the budget, and regularly review data alongside school staff in order to give input on the direction of the school. As well, their input on the LCAP allows them to amplify this input and have it put into formal goals for the school which they are held accountable to.



Parents at Sierra High School are also able to participate in the Sierra community through a number of events designed specifically to have parents come and learn about the school and what is happening in classes. These events include: Back to School Night, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Orientation Night, sporting



**SIERRA HIGH**  
http://mantecaUSD.net/schools/high-school/sierra

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**CONNECT WITH US!**

*Sierra effectively uses social media to keep parents connected and informed on how they can be involved.*

events, arts performances, and their Night of the Arts. Before students even begin at Sierra, they and their parents must come to orientation night. At this night they learn about all the sports programs, special programs, electives, and other opportunities Sierra has to offer. The advisors, coaches, and teachers are present for parents to speak to throughout this event. Sierra runs on a four by four block schedule which means they have two back to school nights per year. While the fall Back to School night brings in many parents, the Sierra struggles to get engage as many parents in the Winter. A large draw in the spring is Sierra's Night of the Arts. The Night of the Arts is a showcase of all the work that classes involved in the

visual, performing, and culinary arts completed over the course of the term. Parents can come and view/experience students' projects and it typically has one of the highest attendance rates of any event the school holds outside of sports.

In addition, the school has multiple active boosters' clubs: The Athletics Booster Club, and the Band and Choir Boosters Club. The main purpose of these clubs is to fundraise and promote both sports as well as the band and choir. While fundraising is their main purpose, they encourage other parents and families to join the club so that they may stay up to date on the progress of the teams. There are two main boosters events that bring out a large portion of the community each year: The Athletics Booster Club Dinner and Dance, and the Delicato Wince Social. Both of these event bring out a large number of

parents and staff members so that the clubs can fundraise and the parents can interact with the board or the clubs and staff members.

The final two major points avenues for participation come in the form of oversight committees: ELAC and WASC. The ELAC committee meets on a monthly basis to monitor the progress of Sierra's English Language Learner community. In addition to this, they discuss the services and opportunities that exist for this student population and are constantly looking for ways to improve it. Parents are also invited to join the WASC committee which convenes to oversee the school's goal in relation to their accreditation. This committee convenes less often but again give parents yet another way to be involved in the goal setting process for the school which is used to drive it's mission and vision in educating their student on a daily basis.



### School Board Report

The Manteca Unified School District Board of Trustees is composed of seven elected officials: Board president Stephan Schluer, Vice President Eric Duncan, Board Clerk Kathy Howe, Trustee Michael Seelye, Trustee Marie Freitas, Trustee Cathy Pope-Gotschall, and Trustee Bob Wallace. There are four student representatives on the school board and their attendance to meetings rotates each meeting. The members include: Brooklyn Johnson, Jesse Moebius, Makenna Condit, Yasmin Ballew, and Armando Mendoza.

Of the Board of trustees, all members appear to be Caucasian with the exception of one who is African American. The gender of board members is 4 males and 3 females. The student representatives are three Caucasian students, one multi-racial student, and one Latino student. Of the five students, two

are male and three are female. The Board of trustees is not at all representative of our school’s demographics. Sierra High School’s Caucasian population is just under 25%. What is noticeably absent from the board is any Latino representation which makes up 50% of our school population and 55% of Manteca Unified School District’s population as a whole.

On Tuesday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Manteca Unified Board of Education convened for its monthly regular meeting. I attended this meeting and was pleasantly surprised at its efficiency and civility. Over the years, I have attended many school board meetings and was by far the best one I’ve been to. There were a number of items on the agenda however the items pertaining to direct student learner were low. However, there were quite a few items on the agenda that were driven by the mission and vision, which was refreshing. After hearing a presentation from a district vendor, the board dove into their regular work. The first item was a revision to their mission and vision. The board asked a committee of students to look at the district’s current mission and vision statements and make recommendations. The committee recognized the value of the statement but suggested edits that would allow for more student focused language. After a compelling presentation from the committee the board voted in favor of the new language and adopted a resolution that would officially do so.



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The largest part of the agenda was focused on a bond that is allowing for school upgrades. Many of the district’s facilities are old and in need of refurbishment, especially in the wake of a large influx of people from the Bay Area trying to escape high housing prices. The district is facing an increasing



population and needs to update many of the facilities badly. The facilities team gave updates on these projects throughout a great deal of the meeting. While this topic does not appear to be directly related to student learning it is. Students' ability to feel safe and to be in a clean, inviting, modern facility can affect their motivation to learn greatly. The fact that the board was focusing on these facilities upgrades reports shows their commitment to ensuring the environment students are in is the best to facilitate their learning.

In addition to the facilities upgrades discussion, there was a review of the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) update. The district is in the process of gathering the necessary information needed in order to update their goals for the year. This item was definitely the most directly tied to student learning. The LCAP focusses on engaging student learning opportunities, maximizing individual potential, increasing the progress of our English Language Learners, and boosting our high school graduation rates. District staff updated the board on the meetings that have taken place and stressed the diversity of the population from which it was gathered: parents, administrators, teachers, classified staff, district office staff, etc...

According to the California School Board Association (CSBA) a Board of Education's role "is to ensure that school districts are responsive to the values, beliefs and priorities of their communities" ("Roles and Responsibilities," 2018). In a 2017 report titled "The School Board Role in Creating the Conditions for Student Achievement" CSBA outlines the 5 responsibilities of a Boards of Education in order to fulfil their role: "board member responsibilities are to: 1) set direction for the school district or

county office of education; 2) establish structure through policy; 3) provide support for implementation efforts; 4) ensure accountability through oversight and monitoring; and 5) act as community leaders” (Briggs, Buenrostro, Maxwell-Jolly, Flint, & Macklin, 2017, p. 34). Using this as the definition of what a successful school board looks like, Manteca seems to be running their board meetings well. When looking at the meeting through the lens of student learning the board was doing the right thing. Since they should not be involving themselves in the day to day business, curriculum, etc...then the way they can address student learning is through the oversight given, policy they set, and the resolutions they pass. By addressing issues such as facilities, the LCAP, and the Mission/Vision of the district they are in fact addressing the underlying needs of the district base their decisions on as they think through what is best for students. One thing that I would hope for in the future though, is a board that better represents the community it serves. With a changing demographic, there should be a shift in that demographic’s representation. This way, the board could have more first-hand perspectives on how the students body might be effected by their decisions and policies.

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