Welcome to the tour of our school. I am Kiley and I will be your guide.

To begin our tour let me tell you what you’ll see and experience. We call ourselves a Community of Learners. We recognize that everyone, students, teachers, administration, support staff, parents and the greater community, needs the skills to be a life long learner. If we lack these skills we will fail to adapt to our future, no matter how learned we are. All of our experiences here at school reinforce this concept.

Today you will only see a portion of our student body here on campus. We are open from early morning to late evening with classes offered throughout the day. We know that not everyone is a morning person who functions well in a classroom early in the day. Also many of our students feel they study best in the morning and save afternoon or evening for classroom time. This schedule also accommodates students who need to work allowing many of them to be employed in career-focused jobs (rather than fast food, etc.) which are only open on a “9 to 5” schedule. As I’ll detail later, we also offer classes open to the community. Because of all this you’ll see that our classes have enrollment of only about twenty students. As we visit classes you’ll see a wonderful physical environment for learning and notice a great attitudinal environment as well.

Technology is totally infused into our curriculum. Computer terminals connected to our server are available to everyone anywhere on campus. There are connections if needed for personal laptops also. Every student has access to a computer here at school. Most students own computers at home. For those who can’t afford one, we have laptops that can be checked out for the long or short term. The computers and connections have been sponsored by the businesses and service organizations in our community, as well as by some private citizens who want to serve as mentors. All rooms and meeting centers on campus are equipped with at least one multimedia presentation center.

As we wander the campus you’ll also see that the classrooms for graphic design, broadcast media and photography are fully equipped production labs. Auto, wood and computer design students learn on state of the art technology equipment supported by our business partners. Our design lab does both CAD and web design. I mention these areas especially since this is an area utilized a lot by our community. There are classes that are open to parents and staff
and many of our classes are open to the entire community. The community college and the recreation districts are partners with us, which helps defray costs. Some of our classes are self-supporting. The students in graphic design have their own design business. They run it from the classroom with teacher support and guidance. There are also student run businesses in auto repair, web design and computer repair and support. They contract with people in the community and do work for people on campus.

As we visit the classrooms you will see much activity. In the science labs you may see students going out to work on the stream project they’re doing in conjunction with the county. Much of their equipment has been provided by this project. They worked online with a university scientist to set up protocol for the research. Some data is analyzed on campus, while the rest goes to the county labs. Some students are interning there and help with the analysis. They will present their findings to the Board of Supervisors later this year. In all classrooms, you will see students working in a variety of settings. People learn through a variety of modalities. Teachers know this and have taught us these modalities. Thus, they provide us with many ways of learning. They know if we become aware of how we learn we’ll be able to continue to learn throughout our lives. Some students will be on line doing research or communicating with an expert in their field of research. This interaction is a neat way to learn. We can ask questions, even give our ideas and thoughts, to professionals in the field. What’s so great is they respond! They value our ideas and often integrate them in their work. And they keep us “in the loop”. I have several friends who have gone on to work for and study with people they have met this way. Many of us do this research from home, especially if our person is many time zones away. When we work from home, we still log into school, and get credit for being there. We don’t always have to be in the classroom, but I like having the teacher around. Often we research together. I like the guidance and questions my teacher gives. It’s neat when we discover something new together. My teacher gets as excited as I do.

You know, the staff is the best part of this school. I heard that when all this technology was put in schools back in the 1990’s a lot of it just sat around not being used. Well, not at this school. They knew that the teachers had to become comfortable with switching their teaching styles to accommodate the new technologies. They needed to see technology as an essential tool for our learning, just
like things like blackboards and chalk used to be. Time is built into our teachers’ day for collaboration and learning. They teach fewer classes than before and when they’re not in class they have common areas to go to. Here they work with each other on curriculum design. They have small workshops on technology. There is always a resource person there to help them with their design and to facilitate the workshops. Often students and other teachers are there help this person. Teachers are all so comfortable now with infusing technology into the curriculum that it makes it easy for us to learn. They design great projects for us to do. While we’re working on a project we often encounter concepts we haven’t yet learned. We then have to learn that concept before we continue. (Between you and me, I think they plan it that way!) We continue to learn all the same “basic stuff” my parents say they learned from lecture, but it’s so much more interesting. And... it makes so much sense! We also learn how to access all the information out there and what to do with it! There’s so much information that we have to know what’s good and what’s not. I know I’ve done OK because my test scores are high and I’ve been accepted to my first choice university.

I mentioned my parents’ school. They’ve said how much more they like how it is now. I guess money was a big issue when people wanted to do things like put technology in every classroom, give teachers time within their day to learn, and keep school open longer. I don’t know much about this, but I do know that our district decided to cut way back on buying textbooks (we still have small class sets in some classes) and used that money for technology. Since educational funding by the State was removed from the political arena, schools have been able to trust that the funds they’ve been allocated will be there, and not be changed with a changing administration. This had added stability to our financial support. The State has also increased the technology support funds to schools. I’ve mentioned our partnership with the community colleges and recreation districts. I know we get some funding from them. The adults pay fees for some classes, and some of our teachers are paid by the college to teach classes to us. Also, I already mentioned some of our classes support themselves by running a business. One of the biggest problems we used to have was supporting our technology. We now have a repair/support class on campus staffed by several technicians, and run by students. Another thing I mentioned earlier... since we can do work from home now,
when we’re sick or if our parents decide to take us on vacation during school, we still use our computers to sign in and do our work. Since we’re still doing the work each day, the school gets credit for us being there (I think it’s called ADA?) and so they still get the money. This has saved our district a lot of money. Neat, huh?

Well, I’ve talked enough. Let’s go see our wonderful school.