



District
City



2,550



59%



94%



57%

CIBOLA HIGH SCHOOL

YUMA, AZ



Ms. Kourtney McClellan



TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

Ms. Kourtney McClellan's teaching career began with a bachelor's degree in biology, as she initially aspired to attend medical school. In college, she found she was skilled in peer-to-peer tutoring and switched directions to a new passion – teaching. Earning a master's degree in secondary education from NAU, she has taught at Cibola High School for the past ten years. In her role, Ms. McClellan brought knowledge and enthusiasm for both freshman and AP Biology, while also serving as a coach for the boys' tennis team and sponsoring her school's student council class and the science club. Recently, Ms. McClellan has received a promotion to work as an Instructional Coach at Somerton High School. In the Fall, she will transition out of the classroom but will maintain her commitment to fostering academic excellence in her community as a mentor and educator.

COLLABORATIVE FACULTY

With a large and diverse student body, located within miles from the U.S.-Mexican border, Cibola High School faces a unique set of circumstances. Ms. McClellan explains that science classes can be large, with an average class ranging from 28 to 40 students. Despite these challenges, the school's science department, comprising of eleven teachers, works collaboratively to develop teaching and instructional strategies. Ms. McClellan works with two other biology teachers and acknowledges the difficulties in coordinating learning strategies among large student cohorts. But Ms. McClellan and her colleagues are dedicated to student success, adapting to new programs like Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) to enhance classroom instruction and facilitate skills essential for college preparedness for high school students.

Cibola High School attracts new talent and welcomes several teachers to its campus every year. Approximately one-third of Cibola's faculty have less than three years of experience, and Ms. McClellan always reaches out a helping hand to new teachers. New teachers receive robust training and mentorship from a staff of experienced educators. Within the science department, Ms. McClellan estimates that she gets one new science teacher per year, and she makes sure to share her expertise and maximize the use of teaching resources to keep all biology class on the same level. Through collective efforts and mutual support, teachers like Ms. McClellan play a pivotal role in fostering a vibrant learning environment where students and educators alike can thrive.

AVID

Advanced Placement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a college readiness program that spans 203 sites across 40 districts in Arizona. The program provides extra support for academic and social skills not traditionally taught in other classes and provides in-class tutoring to meet student needs. Students work together in the AVID program, providing peer-to-peer support so students can learn together and teach one another as they develop skills necessary for success in college. Typically, AVID supports underprivileged students, with over two-thirds being on Free and Reduced Lunch. The program boasts impressive results: 99 percent graduate from high school, and 93 percent of AVID Seniors complete four-year college entrance requirements.

Credit: www.avid.org





"I have learned how to be a teacher who can change a lesson on the spot."

- Ms. Kourtney McClellan, biology teacher at Cibola High School

INSTRUCTIONAL INSIGHTS

Ms. McClellan prioritizes building strong relationships with her students, starting each class with bell work and engaging conversations to connect with students and their interests before class begins. Recognizing that inspiration is an important aspect of education, she engages students in active learning with hands-on, interactive activities that spark students' curiosity. For instance, in her AP Biology classes, students explore the structures of cell membranes and enzymes using different colored Play-Doh, creating a complex model with simple materials that she believes is effective in reinforcing learning through the semester.

In addition to her focus on experiential learning, Ms. McClellan integrates peer-to-peer collaboration into her instruction, recognizing that students can learn better by mentoring and learning from one another. By explaining concepts to their peers, students help create a supportive learning environment while enhancing comprehension and retention of the material.

As an AVID school, Cibola High School provides teachers like Ms. McClellan with the opportunity to experiment with various instructional strategies which prepare students for college. In her classroom, students practice essential data analysis skills by creating data tables and graphs, mirroring how students conduct independent studies and experiments in higher education. Leveraging AVID strategies, Ms. McClellan continually explores innovative teaching methods, such as integrating one-pagers and graphic organizers into her lessons. For instance, during a unit on nutrition, students craft foldables to examine the nutritional content of foods, engaging them in the kind of research project expected of professionals when doing a deep dive on a topic. Deliverables, posters and one-pagers have become ubiquitous in research settings and college classrooms, so keeping lessons up to date with industry standards prepares students to develop the materials they will produce in the field and college classroom. 

"I try my best not to teach something once. I've noticed my colleagues are thankful I taught these kids because they understand what's going on."

- Ms. Kourtney McClellan, biology teacher at Cibola High School