

*And I got my heart set on what happens next*

*Now I'm finally where I belong*

*I've got a brand new mindset*

-- from This Is Home, by Switchfoot, our school orientation trip theme song

*We do things differently here.*

*This is home.*

-- Da Vinci Science school slogan

Da Vinci Science is an award-winning, innovative public charter high school that is known for its differences. With no textbooks, hands-on projects, a focus on collaboration, required Engineering classes, college in high school programs, student led exhibitions, bi-annual presentations of learning, grading on mastery instead of natural ability, and a small student body with half of its members coming from low income households, it's obvious that we do things differently. But these things that set us apart from other schools bring us all together, making Da Vinci our home away from home.

Perhaps the most unorthodox thing about Da Vinci Science is that we are family. From the overnight orientation trip for ninth graders, to the mixed-grade advisory groups who meet several times weekly and stay together from ninth grade through graduation, Da Vinci students and teachers bond together in a tightly knit, accepting, supportive community, with teachers acting more as mentors, and the traditional lines of communication transformed. When you take that student body and condense it into a team, you get something truly special.

The Vitruvian Bots were named after the diagram of the ideal man done by Leonardo Da Vinci, archetypal Renaissance artist, scientist, and engineer who learned by doing. The idea is to use the skills we learn in our engineering curriculum to make the ideal robot: the Vitruvian Bot.

This is our fourth year as part of FIRST. We have amazing support from the school, financially as well as emotionally. Even though we have a sports program, we are truly the school's #1 team since we represent what our school stands for. We've brought our family spirit from Da Vinci to our robotics team, and multiplied it a hundred-fold through hours and days and weeks of collaboration, design, prototyping, and building. Not to mention the singing and dancing – our dance team never fails to brighten up the mood when energy is low, and the drill bit is broken yet again.

(Our team is able to be successful because of the family-like environment) This family feeling is what makes our team succeed. This environment enables us to be comfortable working together and expressing our ideas. Getting the best ideas out there, and improving them through strong communication. Contributing our strongest areas....getting tired here, trying for something like lack of hierarchy by grade or status, learning from each other. In part because of our mixed grade advisory, and because of our family-like values of the oldest grades helping the youngest, and the youngest wanting to emulate them, we have good and strong relationships among the grades. Then something like, this wealth of collaboration and openness enabled us to do multiple rough prototypes of each of the units of the robot, making the design both efficient and beautiful, helping us win the Highest Rookie Seed Award. And this family culture pulled us through when “dad” – lead robotics teacher Aaron Tostado or “Toast” – had appendicitis and needed to take a little break for hospitalization and surgery at the height of the build season. “Uncle” Fuzz – lead mentor Fazlul Zubair – stepped in and everyone pulled extra duty to get us through the season successfully. We didn't lose hope, but instead

leaned on each other to succeed, and have high hopes for this year and future competitions.