School is in session at the University of Arizona Science and Technology Park.

Vail High School? Check. On board since 1997.

Pima Community College? Check. Introduced two-year degree programs amidst the high-tech research in fall 2008.

University of Arizona South? Check. Offering bachelor's degrees in 11 programs and master's degrees in two programs since 2006.

Elementary school? That's coming too. This fall the newly built Vail Academy and High School will bring K-8 to the Tech Park. That presence will expand the educational impact at the Tech Park from kindergarten through college – or K-20.

Other research parks offer college classes, but the UA Tech Park broke new ground with high school students and will become even more singular with elementary and middle schoolers.

The partnership between the UA Tech Park and Vail School District exemplifies the close connection between the world of education and the world of science and technology.

“It’s certainly unique for a university tech park to have a high school,” said Eileen Walker, executive director of the Association of University Research Parks.

No doubt, the educational experience at each level may stray from the traditional schools and colleges.

Vail High School has 160 students, in contrast to 800 students at Empire High School and 1,800 students at Cienega High School. “It’s kind of like having a private school,” Principal Dennis Barger said. “It’s about choice. We require computer, engineering and business classes.”

Vail High School and the Tech Park have developed an innovative program that offers students real-world business experience through part-time employment, internships and a variety of other special programs with Tech Park companies. On average, six to 15 high school students have Tech Park internships.

Bruce Wright, UA associate vice president for university research parks, said exposing young people to technology is vital. “We have to create talent. Our partnership provides opportunities for even the youngest of students to see science and technology as approachable, understandable and fun. That means our youth have an opportunity that few others in the country do – to see the world of technology not as something that is mysterious and remote, but as a welcoming environment where they can be involved in many different ways,” he said.

Education and commerce are UA South’s most popular bachelor’s programs and the only two majors that are freestanding programs not available at the main UA campus, said Darla Brown, director of UA South for Pima County. “You can get a bachelor’s degree at the Tech Park,” said Darla Brown, director of UA South. “The target is the working adult – people who live in

southeast Tucson." UA South has about 225 students at the Tech Park. About 10 percent are Tech Park employees.

UA South collaborates closely with PCC in their "two-plus-two" program, with a number of UA South students taking PCC general education courses at the Tech Park.

PCC's Tech Park presence, an offshoot from the nearby PCC East Campus, is limited to two-year degree programs in logistics and supply chain management, general education transfer courses in writing and psychology, plus a health and wellness class in yoga.

The course selection changes each semester, PCC East President Charlotte Fugett said. PCC had 100 students at the Tech Park at the start of the year with that expected to grow to 130 in March. "Part of the college's mission is to have education available without constraint of time, place or distance," Fugett said.