

WE ARE TR!

How Common Core
is transforming **ALL**
of our classrooms

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Winter 2015

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UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Common Core Brings Big Changes

I'm absolutely thrilled to be part of what I can only describe as an incredible new era in Twin Rivers Unified School District.

Through the carefully thought-out actions of our school board and employees, we have made remarkable progress in transforming the district into a learning organization to ensure better outcomes for all students at every grade level. The board has adopted several new initiatives to build a foundation for what matters most — student success. With every action there's a great deal of change, and successfully managing change is an important part of all improvement efforts in Twin Rivers.

We see that with the Common Core State Standards. They represent one of the greatest shifts in public education since the adoption of the California State Standards in 1997. The transition to the new standards will ensure that all students in Twin Rivers will leave high school not only as

proficient readers and writers, but also as critical thinkers and solvers of complex problems.

The new standards are at the heart of what we believe as a district — that all students should graduate ready for college and career. Common Core standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in the real world.

These standards are internationally benchmarked, ensuring students are prepared to succeed in a global economy and society. Through a consistent message of what students are expected to learn, teachers and parents are now given clarity around what they need to do to help their children succeed. While teaching the newly adopted standards comes with challenges, please know that Twin Rivers is committed to providing every teacher with all the support necessary to become proficient in teaching with Common Core. We are committed to developing the professional capital of all teachers to benefit every child in the

district. In fact, we are investigating innovative models to provide our teachers with professional development to meet their diverse needs, anytime, anywhere.

We have much to do, but what an inspiring journey it will be for all of us! The board and our staff have worked together every step of the way, sharing the same goals and vision for providing students with a quality education. It's not surprising to me that we are attracting national attention from renowned educators, such as Michael Fullan and Peter Senge. These partners are now working with us to study and document the improvements we are making in our district. As a district (the board, families, staff and community), we will continue to move forward in a collaborative manner to place the success of all children first.

We are TR — working together as one!

-Dr. Steven Martinez

Superintendent of Twin Rivers Unified School District



Superintendent Dr. Steven Martinez visits students at Dry Creek Elementary School. Photo courtesy of TRUSD

TR Talk



Students from Rio Linda High School answer the question, "What is your favorite subject and why?"



"Leadership is my favorite subject. We have 50 hours a semester of community service, and I like that because I can help my community. Recently, we went to Freedom Park to pick up trash."

Dominic Smith, 12th grade



"I have two favorite subjects: art and leadership. I like art because you can express yourself in many different styles, and I like leadership because you can help people in your community."

Michaela Finley, 9th grade



"My favorite subject is science because we learn about the way that we connect with the world. It's just fascinating how science has developed things that make our lives easier."

Vahyer Vang, 12th grade



"My favorite subject would have to be peer support because we help other students by talking with them one-on-one to help them with problems they are having, such as bullying."

Bianca Gamboa, 11th grade



"English because I'm good at it. English is important because you need to know how to write and communicate with people."

Westley Jacob, 12th grade

Mario Soto wants to be the first person in his immediate family to graduate from college. He says he is prepared because of the AVID and the Early Exit Bilingual programs at Twin Rivers Unified School District.
Photo by Louise Mitchell



Student Spotlight

Looking to the Future

Student prepared for college because of TRUSD programs

by Mike Blount

Mario Soto, 17, wants to be the first person in his immediate family to graduate from college. The Highlands High School student is well on track to achieve that goal. He currently has a 4.0 GPA and is already looking into colleges in Southern California. While Soto has worked hard, he wouldn't be as prepared for the future without the support of two Twin Rivers Unified School District programs. Both have equally changed his life.

Growing up in a Latino household, Soto mostly spoke Spanish when he was not in school.

He was enrolled in the Early Exit Bilingual program in the first grade as an English language learner. The program helps students who speak a language other than English as their first language to transition gradually to an English-only environment. By fifth grade, Soto was reclassified as proficient in English. Soto says the program gave him a foundation for success.

"That program really helped me, because I was able to learn English while I was still speaking Spanish at home," Soto says.

He hopes by next year he will qualify for the Seal of Biliteracy, an award given by the district to recognize students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. Graciela Garcia-Torres, director of the English language learner (ELL) programs at TRUSD, says Soto is a great success story.

"He's taking Spanish classes in high school, so he can maintain those skills, and he's working toward being fluent in reading and writing in both languages," Garcia-Torres says. "Being bilingual is an important skill to have, and he is what we want to see come out of this program."

Soto also credits the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program for motivating him to live up to his potential. Transitioning to high school was difficult for Soto because he felt unprepared. Garcia-Torres says the AVID program taps students who have potential, but may not have the tools to succeed.

"I was having trouble with math and geometry," Soto says. "I just kind of gave up. A teacher said I would be a good candidate for AVID, so I applied for the program. It changed everything for me."

Through the AVID program, Soto was able to catch up through collaborative learning with his peers. He went on field trips to university campuses, which he says made him excited about attending college in the future. He got involved in more school activities. He also made some new friends through the program.

"The AVID program really pushed me to do better," Soto says. "The teachers do anything they can to help you. It made me start thinking about my future and what I want to do. It has just been a great experience for me."

"The AVID program really pushed me to do better."

Mario Soto
Highlands High School senior

**SETTING
KIDS UP FOR
SUCCESS**

Twin Rivers Unified School District has many programs and initiatives to help students achieve academic success. Here are two programs that helped Highlands High School student Mario Soto excel in school:

EARLY EXIT BILINGUAL PROGRAM

The Early Exit Bilingual program serves students who are identified as having limited proficiency in English and another language. Instruction is initially given through the medium of the student's first language, Spanish, Hmong or Russian, with the goal of transitioning to learning strictly in English. The program allows students to keep up with their peers academically while simultaneously acquiring English skills.

AVID PROGRAM

The Advancement Via Individual Determination program is dedicated to helping students live up to their potential and be prepared for college. AVID students learn in a collaborative environment that leads to increased student participation and success. Instructors create an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and that promotes positivity, hard work and determination.



Danielle Bliss, sixth-grade teacher at Sierra View Elementary School, helps her students.
Photo by Louise Mitchell



Teachers Transform Classrooms

Common Core allows teachers flexibility to meet their students' needs by Brittany Wesely

Traditionally, teachers would typically stand at the front of the classroom and lecture as the students sat quietly and listened. With the implementation of Common Core standards, the classroom is much louder as teachers are taking a step back and students are now doing more of the talking.

"[Common Core] encourages students to really have discussions about the problems rather than being more passive receivers of information from teachers," says Lori Grace, executive director of curriculum and instruction at Twin Rivers Unified School District.

When a student is composing his or her own thoughts aloud and is listening to the ideas of others, the classroom is much more engaging, Grace explains.

Solving real-world problems

Part of engaging students in the classroom is giving them problems that apply to real life, not just a textbook. For Danielle Bliss, sixth-grade teacher at Sierra View Elementary, this means coming up with problems that her students can relate to.

During her morning math lesson, Bliss helps her students navigate fractions and percentages with an activity about purchasing a soccer ball that is on sale.

"We started with the concept of percentages then we moved on to finding a whole," Bliss says. "This puts everything together in a real-world problem, helping kids solve problems that they'd be solving in real life."

Problems like this that are relevant to daily life are at the core of student achievement and fully embody Common Core standards, according to Bliss.

Different paths to the same solution

Bliss' students work in groups of four to complete the activity. They refer to a worksheet, which has the problem written multiple ways. This Common Core standard helps students visualize the problem in a way they can each understand, and solve it in a way that makes sense to them.

Freedom to customize education

Before the implementation of Common Core, Bliss did not feel that she had much say as a teacher to customize lessons to better suit her students. With the new standards, Bliss feels she has more flexibility to find ways to get students engaged.

One way Bliss has done that is by including more literature in the teaching of language arts. This year she chose the novel *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen. She says it was a big hit.

"Students actually cheered when I said, 'OK, take out your *Hatchet* book.' That never happened when I said, 'Take out your language arts textbook,'" Bliss says.

Resources for collaborative teaching

Grace says that the district has been very proactive in supporting teachers through the new standards. The district encourages teachers to connect with other instructors who teach the same grade or subject at their school. Teacher partners review the most pressing needs for their students and together they develop the most appropriate and effective strategies to meet those needs.

"We rely on one another to develop the perfect lesson plans and to support the needs of all students," Grace says.

"Students actually cheered when I said, 'OK, take out your *Hatchet* book.' That never happened when I said, 'Take out your language arts textbook.'"

Danielle Bliss
Sixth-grade teacher at Sierra View Elementary School

THE COMMON CORE LOWDOWN



WHAT IS COMMON CORE?

Common Core is a new set of academic standards for students. It gives students across the country consistent educational goals with benchmarks in English/language arts and mathematics.

WHY WAS COMMON CORE CREATED?

Before Common Core, educational standards were developed by each individual state. With many different standards, it was difficult to tell how well students were performing in school. Common Core was established so that expectations are consistent across the country and to ensure those goals measure up to international standards.

WHY ARE EDUCATORS EXCITED ABOUT COMMON CORE?

The new standards identify what students should know in order to be college and career ready, but they allow educators more flexibility on what and how to teach. Common Core gives students more options to learn concepts in ways they understand.

KEY SHIFTS WITH COMMON CORE

Here are some key ways the Common Core State Standards are changing instruction in your child's classroom

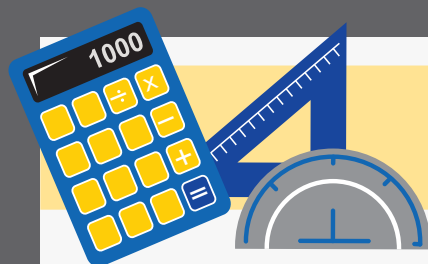


ENGLISH/ LANGUAGE ARTS

Kindergarten – third grade: Content-rich nonfiction fuels young children's interests in the natural world.

Fourth – sixth grade: Common Core focuses on students' ability to read, write and listen carefully to grasp information and ideas based on evidence in the texts.

Seventh – 12th grade: Students independently build knowledge through core standards for literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects.



MATH

Kindergarten – third grade: Drawings and models help students visualize numbers and recognize spatial concepts.

Fourth – sixth grade: Common Core allows students to use many different methods to solve a problem and requires them to think critically about how they achieved their answer.

Seventh – 12th grade: Integrated courses incorporate algebraic and geometric thinking to help all types of learners understand the math concepts.

Supporting Education at Home

How parents can enhance their child's learning
by Brittany Wesely

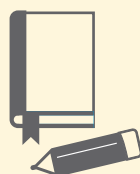
A child's education continues beyond the walls of his or her classroom. With the help of their parents, children are able to apply real-world experiences to the lessons they learn in school.

Some things you can do at home to support your child's learning include:



Blanca Palma helps her son Nicolas Dominguez with his homework assignments. Dominguez attends Michael J. Castori Elementary School. Photo by Louise Mitchell

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS (GRADES K-6)



Modeling reading and writing in any language

Finding math and literature in daily routines — at the grocery store, during a car trip, etc.

Allowing children to witness you figuring out a challenging problem

Listening to your child read and reading to your child daily

Assigning a consistent time and place for your child to complete homework

Building time in your daily schedule to play with your child

SECONDARY STUDENTS (GRADES 7-12)



Getting to know your child's counselor and meeting regularly

Helping your child learn money management skills

Encouraging your child to participate in extracurricular activities

Finding time to have dinner together regularly

Maintaining open communication and finding balance between being approachable and maintaining your authority as a parent

To discover more ways you can support your child's education, consider attending a Parent University workshop. For more information, contact Yolanda Mayoral-Falkenberg at 916-566-1600 ext. 50035 or email Yolanda.Falkenberg@twinriversusd.org.



Kori Olson demonstrates an instructional strategy for a teacher in the classroom. As a special education TOSA, Olson works with teachers throughout the district to find new ways to get students excited about learning.
Photo by Louise Mitchell

TEACHERS SUPPORTING TEACHERS

Teachers on special assignment, or TOSAs, serve outside of the traditional classroom setting and provide support and expertise to classroom teachers in the Twin Rivers Unified School District. TOSAs collaborate with instructors at several different school sites throughout the year with the goal of helping improve student achievement in each classroom. This can be achieved by introducing new instructional strategies, mentoring and coaching teachers, providing model instruction and supporting the classroom in any capacity needed. TOSAs build relationships and maintain a continuous focus on the growth and development of the teacher's content knowledge and instructional skill.

Star Teacher



Building a Better Classroom

Special education TOSA helps teachers keep students engaged by Mike Blount

Kori Olson is helping improve the learning environment for students in Twin Rivers Unified School District, one classroom at a time. As a special education teacher on special assignment (TOSA) for kindergarten through sixth grade, Olson works with teachers throughout the district to find new ways to get students excited about learning. While she may not always be in front of a classroom, she is there working behind the scenes to help teachers keep their students engaged.

"Once I'm invited into a classroom, my job is to support the teacher in any way I can," Olson says. "It's more about the teacher wanting us there and building a relationship with them to really make a difference in their classroom."

Because each special education student has different needs, Olson helps teachers identify the best way to teach each student in the classroom. That's where her expertise can really make a difference.

"After college, I took a teaching assistant job working with emotionally-disturbed children in 2000, and that's when I knew that I wanted to work in the realm of special education," Olson says. "I wanted to make a difference and give them the tools to succeed in the classroom and in life."

Olson received her teaching credential in 2001, and has worked with special education students with a range of learning challenges. Along with 13 years of experience, she brings to each classroom a knowledge of countless instructional strategies and

techniques. With the move to Common Core, Olson is also helping teachers navigate the new standards.

"A focus of Common Core is cooperative learning, so a teacher might introduce a think-pair-share technique so the child becomes engaged by learning through their peers," Olson says. "We can also observe other teachers using a different strategy to see what it looks like in practice.

Unfortunately, as teachers, we don't always get to see each other and how other classrooms are run."

Olson is quick to say she doesn't have all the answers, but she enjoys the process of working with teachers to find what works for each student. Although she is relatively new to her role as a TOSA, Olson says she is excited about the future.

"What I enjoy about my job is seeing the results of teachers working and collaborating with us, and seeing that pay off in the classroom," Olson says. "I can already see examples where we are making a difference. And most teachers have never had this kind of support before, so they appreciate me being there to help. It's all about building relationships."

"What I enjoy about my job is seeing the results of teachers working and collaborating with us, and seeing that pay off in the classroom."

Kori Olson
Special education teacher on special assignment



Photo courtesy of TRUSD

TR Happenings

News from
around the district
by Brittany Wesely



James Van Buren,
Director of Grant Drumline
Photo courtesy of TRUSD

Grant Drumline gets big surprise on Jimmy Kimmel

When the Grant Union High School Drumline was invited to play at the 2015 Independence Day Parade in Washington, D.C., the group knew they needed to do a lot of fundraising in order to go on the trip. James Van Buren, teacher and director of the Grant Drumline, began booking performance gigs to raise funds. When ABC News Anchor Robin Roberts heard of their efforts, she knew she could help. Roberts asked the group to play at a private industry function in Hollywood, but the event was a hoax. The drumline's tour bus dropped them off at the studio of television host Jimmy Kimmel, who asked the group to perform on his show that night. During the performance, Roberts further surprised the group with a check for \$20,000 and free hotels for their trip to Washington, D.C. The ABC Thanksgiving special, "Thank You, America!" featured the story.



Tiffany Shepard,
Grant Union High
School English teacher
Photo courtesy
of TRUSD

Twin Rivers educator selected as Outstanding Teacher of America

Grant Union High School English teacher Tiffany Shepherd was selected to receive one of five 2014 Carlston Family Foundation Outstanding Teachers of America awards. Honorees were nominated by former students who are currently enrolled in or have graduated from a four-year college or university. Shepherd was given a \$15,000 cash reward and a \$5,000 grant for her school. She is the second teacher from Grant Union High School who has received the prestigious award. Fellow English teacher Brooke Nicolls was honored in 2009.



Fiscal services staff received an ASBO
Meritorious Budget Award for 2014.
Photo courtesy of TRUSD

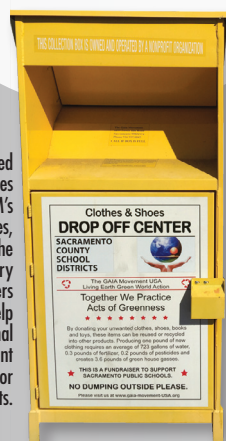
District budget wins major award

The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) has awarded Twin Rivers Unified School District its Meritorious Budget Award (MBA) for excellence in budget presentation for the fifth consecutive year. The award is conferred only to school districts that have met or exceeded the MBA criteria. The award would not have been possible if not for the dedicated and knowledgeable Fiscal Services staff. They are instrumental in coordinating the budget process and creating a document that is thorough and reader-friendly. The district's budget document explains how resources are generated and allocated for the benefit of all students.

FIND OUT ABOUT MORE
NEWS AND HAPPENINGS AT
www.twinriversusd.org

YOU CAN MAKE DREAMS COME TRUE

Donate used clothing and shoes to Project DREAM's big yellow boxes, located on the campus of every Twin Rivers school, to help fund educational enrichment opportunities for students.



Students in our district need your support, and there's an easy way to help. Project DREAM is a community-based nonprofit organization, and the only educational foundation that supports all schools in Twin Rivers Unified School District. Project DREAM provides funds for academic enrichment activities outside of the classroom, such as science camps, college field trips, theater productions and museum tours, including destinations like Sly Park, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

Project DREAM's work is simple: to seek funds and to award those funds to teachers so they can inspire each student to extraordinary achievement every day. Since the

beginning of the school year, Project DREAM has approved more than \$55,000 in funding requests from teachers, benefiting nearly 900 students at 24 schools.

One way you can get involved is to donate your unwanted clothes and shoes to the BIG YELLOW BOXES located at all Twin Rivers schools. In 2013-2014, your donations generated nearly \$25,000 for Project DREAM. The goal this year is to double last year's donations to enhance the educational experience of ALL students.

Project DREAM is an all-volunteer organization with no paid staff. The nonprofit relies solely on tax-deductible contributions. During the past six

years, Project DREAM has funded \$479,433 in grants providing students with opportunities for important educational experiences that truly make a difference.

Find out more about how you can impact a child's life with Project DREAM.

Visit www.dreamtwinrivers.org
Email project.dream@twinriversusd.org
Follow at www.facebook.com/supportprojectdream

**Project
DREAM**

At the Core of Student Success

The mission of Twin Rivers Unified School District is simple: to inspire each student to extraordinary achievement every day. With the implementation of Common Core State Standards, TRUSD is able to provide students with a well-rounded education that prepares them for college and career. To do so, the district focuses on:

- **Standards-based instruction that is effective and engaging, and**
- **Preparing students to think critically, communicate effectively and work well with others.**



GET INVOLVED

Student success depends on strong relationships between families and schools. Help foster respectful partnerships with your child's school by visiting a parent resource center or attending a parent workshop. Further your participation by getting connected to a parent involvement group or committee.

Visit www.twinriversusd.org for:



GET CONNECTED

Upcoming ways to participate with TRUSD

For more information on upcoming parent events, please contact Yolanda Mayoral-Falkenberg at **916-566-1600 ext. 50035** or by email at yolanda.falkenberg@twinriversusd.org.

PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC)

Quarterly district meeting with parents and various school representatives
Twin Rivers Unified School District Office
5115 Dudley Blvd.
McClellan Park, CA 95652
Feb. 5, 6 – 7 p.m.

DISTRICT ENGLISH LEARNER ADVISORY COMMITTEE (DELAC)

Meetings with English language learners and elected ELAC representatives from each school
Twin Rivers Unified School District Office
5115 Dudley Blvd.
McClellan Park, CA 95652
Feb. 5, 7 – 8 p.m.

PARENT UNIVERSITY

Four-week workshops on a variety of topics to help parents support their child's education

Michael J. Castori Elementary
1801 South Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95838
Feb. 4, 11, 18 & 25, 10:30 a.m. – noon

Fairbanks Elementary
227 Fairbanks Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95838
Jan. 16, 23 & 30, 8:30 – 10 a.m.

Hazel Strauch Elementary
3141 Northstead Drive
Sacramento, CA 95833
Feb. 2, 9 & 23, 8:30 – 10 a.m.

Sierra View Elementary
3638 Bainbridge Drive
North Highlands, CA 95660
Jan. 14, 21 & 28, 1 – 2:30 p.m.

Westside Elementary
6537 W. Second St.
Rio Linda, CA 95673
Feb. 3, 10, 17 & 24, 8 – 9:30 a.m.

Woodridge Elementary
5761 Brett Drive
Sacramento, CA 95842
Feb. 3, 10, 17 & 24, 1 – 2:30 p.m.

Additional Parent University sessions will be held at Foothill Ranch Middle and Harmon Johnson Elementary schools. Dates to be determined.