

WE ARE TR!



Fall
2015

TwinRivers
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Always Moving Forward

It's no secret I'm a fan of the movie "Rocky." The story of a small-time boxer who takes on a reigning world-class heavyweight champion is among my top inspirational films.

There's an emotional scene in one of the movies where Rocky has a talk with his clearly frustrated grown-up son about life — the ups and downs and how you handle the challenges. I still think about a couple of memorable lines:

"But it ain't about how hard you hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward; how much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done."

Think about that. Now think about our district. Twin Rivers has taken its share of hits. But we keep moving forward. We continue to show growth in a number of key areas the state uses to measure how we're preparing our students for college and career.

Consider a few of our early wins over the course of one year:

- **22% increase** in the number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses
- **13% increase** in the number of students applying to the University of California and California State University
- **2% increase** in graduation rates
- **11% reduction** in student suspensions
- **3% increase** in the CAHSEE pass rate for 10th-graders for English language arts; 1% for math

And there's more. English learners have exceeded their Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) for both annual progress and attaining proficiency. Long-term English language learners exceeded their proficiency target by 3 percent.

A good start! But let's be clear, good isn't good enough for our students. We have a tremendous amount of hard work ahead of us. But I'm enthused

about the days ahead because I believe there's a Rocky in each of us in Twin Rivers. We're highly motivated and committed to pushing hard to get the results all of us want — that all students are ready for college and careers when they graduate from Twin Rivers. There will be some setbacks, but our mission — to inspire each student to extraordinary achievement every day — remains the focus as we strive to provide an unrivaled educational experience for all students.

We Are TR! And the best is yet to come.

—**Dr. Steven Martinez**
Superintendent of Twin Rivers Unified School District



TR Talk



"What are you looking forward to most in the new school year?"



"In special education, we have a lot of new district management this year, so I'm excited for the possibilities that will bring."

Kathi Clark, special needs teacher at Miles P. Richmond School



"I am excited for working alongside secondary teachers as we transition to integrated math, and developing lessons that are more project-based."

Jasmin Patel, Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) at Grant Union High School



"I'm looking forward to my second year of being a TOSA and working with teachers on both Common Core and technology."

Sarah Delap, Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) at Hagginwood, Dry Creek and Westside elementary schools



"I am looking forward to motivating my students with 21st-century technology skills and having them excited to submit to the district media festival in the spring!"

Sara Carson, fourth grade teacher at Regency Park Elementary School

Superintendent of Twin Rivers School District Dr. Steven Martinez says the back-to-school rally is a chance for all the staff to get together and focus on the coming school year.
Photo courtesy of Twin Rivers



News & Happenings

YOUR TAX DOLLARS AT WORK

Twin Rivers Unified School District is continuing efforts to renovate its campuses and facilities. Over the next three years, the district will spend more than \$25 million on 100 different improvement projects, including these which were completed over the summer:

- Roofing repair and coating at Foothill Oaks and Hazel Strauch elementary schools
- Parking lot paving at Rio Tierra Junior High School, Smythe Academy of Arts and Sciences (7-8), Pioneer Elementary School and Woodridge Elementary School
- Pool retiling and plastering at Miles P. Richmond School
- Exterior painting of Norwood Junior High School and Rio Linda Preparatory Academy
- Interior painting of multipurpose rooms, kitchens, poles, trim and doors at multiple sites
- Roofing repair and coating at 19 sites

PROJECTS FOR 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEAR

- Artificial turf replacement at Foothill, Highlands, Grant Union and Rio Linda high schools
- Pool rebuild at Grant Union and Rio Linda high schools
- Kitchen HVAC replacement at Norwood Junior High School
- Grant Union High School walk-in refrigeration replacement

Get Pumped Up!

Back-to-school rally gets everyone excited for school year

by Mike Blount

It's not often that all 2,800 Twin Rivers Unified School District staff are together in the same place, but the annual back-to-school rally provides the opportunity to unite everyone, create a sense of community and focus on the coming school year. This year's theme is the movie "Rocky." Superintendent Dr. Steven Martinez says he chose the theme because it embodies the district's fight to be the best it can for its students.

"We're in the middle of this 12-round fight, and we're acknowledging all the hard work everyone put in to merge the four school districts and get us functioning as one," Martinez says. "But we're all in this for the long run. At times, it's going to be hard, and other times, we're going to land amazing blows. But it's about always striving to go above and beyond what we're doing and working hard to get the desired results that we want."

Over the summer, teachers and administrators attended training sessions to collaborate with each other and discuss best practices. This October, they will come together again to do an in-depth analysis on Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test results and share observations to find other areas for improvement. Martinez says the rally is a good opportunity to communicate the moral imperative of work

they are doing and the impact it has on the community. The rally also features surprise guests who are illustrative of that impact.

"The purpose of this rally is to recharge and refocus everyone about the work we're doing and understand how important it really is," Martinez says. "We're all in this together and all of us play a key role in the time that we have with our students."

"We're all in this together and all of us play a key role in the time that we have with our students."

Dr. Steven Martinez
Superintendent of Twin
Rivers School District

Motivational guest speaker Roger Crawford was chosen because of his uplifting personal story. Crawford, who was born with a physical disability affecting all four of his limbs, became the first and only person in American history to be a United States Professional Tennis Association athlete and play a Division I college sport with a severe disability.

Deputy Superintendent Bill McGuire says Crawford fit the theme of the rally perfectly.

"Roger's message — that our attitudes and actions lead to extraordinary results — is in line with Dr. Martinez's vision for the district, both students and staff," McGuire says. "His combination of energy, professionalism and humor are the right blend for Twin Rivers as we start this year."





Change for the Better

Teachers helping students adapt to new standards

by Mike Blount

As a new school year is just getting underway, both students and teachers are continuing to adjust to the new Common Core State Standards. While a lot of the curriculum covered is the same, Executive Director of Secondary Education Dr. Lori Grace says there are fewer standards taught to a much deeper degree.

"Students are being asked to master content in a much different way than they have in the past," Grace says. "Rather than just regurgitating facts, they're being asked to demonstrate true, deep learning."

Grace says that teachers are also adapting to Common Core State Standards by working diligently and attending several training and personal development courses to support students and adapt their instruction.

"They are utilizing different resources, curriculum and teaching methods," Grace says.

One of the first big assessments for students in the district was the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test, which was conducted on a computer.

"We, as a district, have been lucky enough to implement benchmark assessments that are measured on the computer to help our students get used to being tested on a computer."

The SBAC test results for the district will

be sent out to parents this August and will be used as baseline data to see where each student stands. Grace cautions that those results can't be compared to past test results like the California State Assessment.

"It's apples and oranges, really," Grace says. "We've never done state testing on a computer in the past, and the questions were more aimed at getting students to apply all of their learning. This

test gives us a nice starting point to judge their growth and judge our growth as a district as we move forward."

"Students are being asked to master content in a much different way than they have in the past."

Dr. Lori Grace
Executive Director of Secondary Education



Photo courtesy of Twin Rivers

Measuring Success

New assessment is a tool to help improve student achievement

by Mike Blount

This year, teachers will have access to a powerful new tool to help improve student achievement. As part of the Common Core State Standards, students are regularly tested, allowing teachers and parents to measure student growth in math and English language arts. This fall, the first set of results from the new online assessment by Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) will be available.

Chris Arnold, Coordinator of Assessment and Accountability for Twin Rivers, says the new assessment is an exciting tool for setting learning goals.

"Because this is a new test, we will only be able to see how the district is doing against neighboring counties and districts," Arnold says. "But moving forward, teachers will be able to see where kids are before they enter the classroom and measure their growth."

Arnold says transitioning to an

online assessment also allows for new opportunities.

"If a student is getting a lot of the questions right, it can give them more difficult questions to see how much they understand," Arnold says. "This will let us know where the student really is."

This August, parents will start receiving their student's SBAC reports in the mail, which measure four achievement levels. While Arnold wants every student to meet the standards or exceed them, Arnold says this is a baseline year to gather data, so parents should not be discouraged if some reports show that students still need to make significant progress to be college- and career-ready.

"We want to get an idea of how they are doing so we can help them improve," Arnold says. "Teachers will be able to teach to their strengths and work on their weaknesses."



Photo courtesy of Twin Rivers



Focus on Student Progress

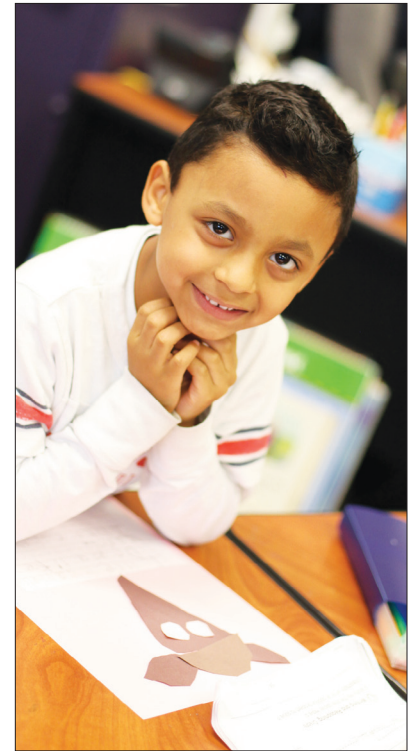
Twin Rivers continues to push academic achievement

by Mike Blount

Using the test results from the SBAC exam to push academic achievement is just one of the ways teachers and administrators at Twin Rivers are committed to making the district better. Here are some of the many undertakings at Twin Rivers designed to improve outcomes for students and teachers this school year:

- **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)** are groups of teachers comprised of the same grade level or department who will meet regularly to look at the progress of students over a period of time and discuss best practices.

- **Early literacy** training is a framework to support teachers in the goal of ensuring every student is reading by third grade.
- **SPARK** training is an initiative to teach physical education at all elementary grades.
- To ensure high quality instruction the first time a lesson is taught, teachers are undergoing **best first instruction** training. If a student doesn't understand a lesson, the teacher will have tools to address it then and there. This could include teaching to a child's strengths or project-based learning to help the student understand.
- Teachers are designing new, engaging curriculum units aligned to Common Core State Standards at the district's **unit development** trainings. This training ensures teachers are teaching to new standards and using best practices.
- **Community Matters school climate training (Restorative Practices)** is an effort to build positive relationships between students and the adults on campus by taking a proactive approach to discipline, rather than a punitive one. By shifting the school culture, teachers and administrators can focus on the underlying issues that cause behavior problems.



An Ally in the Classroom

Teacher on Special Assignment vital in support role

by Mike Blount



Patty Reetz works as a Teacher on Special Assignment at Twin Rivers. Reetz says TOSAs serve a vital role in improving the classrooms in the district.
Photo by Louise Mitchell

As part of Twin Rivers' commitment to improving teaching practices and the learning environment in each classroom, Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) are providing a vital support role. Patty Reetz will be a TOSA at Joyce Elementary, Allison Elementary and Woodridge Elementary schools for the upcoming school year. Though nearly retired after 36 years in education, Reetz found a renewed excitement for teaching in her new role.

Reetz works side by side with teachers to help them develop new strategies for teaching and curriculum that will be engaging and in line with Common Core State Standards. Reetz describes being a TOSA as "boots on the ground" to help teachers better serve their students.

"For teachers who are having trouble with a lesson not going well or questions

about how to teach something, I can give them feedback or brainstorm ways to improve the lesson," Reetz says. "We can co-teach a lesson or they can observe me teaching. We can then debrief and talk about what went well and what worked or didn't work. The goal is to make sure we are meeting the needs of the students."

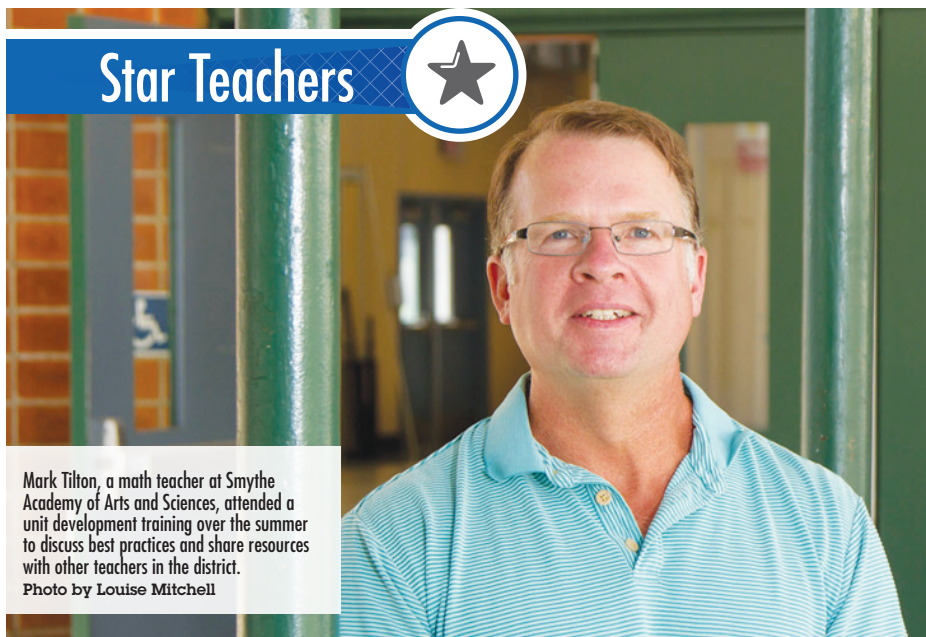
Reetz says she is a perfect fit for the position because of her experience. She's excited about working with seventh- and eighth-grade teachers next year. To her, the TOSA serves a vital role in supporting teachers in the district.

"Most of the teachers I work with appreciate the fact that I have lived

their life and I've dealt with these situations before," Reetz says. "They can come to me and know that I will help them with whatever their issue is and come up with an idea to help their students."

"[Teachers] can come to me and know that I will help them with whatever their issue is and come up with an idea to help their students."

Patty Reetz
Teacher on special assignment



Mark Tilton, a math teacher at Smythe Academy of Arts and Sciences, attended a unit development training over the summer to discuss best practices and share resources with other teachers in the district.
Photo by Louise Mitchell

Getting on the Same Page

Teachers collaborate over summer on best practices

by Mike Blount

While most families were happily enjoying their summer vacation, Mark Tilton, a math teacher at Smythe Academy of Arts and Sciences, decided he would spend part of his break back in the classroom. Tilton attended a unit development training hosted by Twin Rivers for teachers to discuss best practices and share resources. Tilton says he was excited to collaborate with other teachers and learn some new teaching strategies.

"We're in a room constantly and can't go observe others teaching," Tilton says. "During this training, we were able to share some good ideas with other teachers who are passionate about teaching. A lot of teachers hadn't been using technology, so it was nice to hear from a few teachers who were using it to engage their students."

One of the instructors shared that she had digitized a textbook so she could use it on her SMART board and give the students an electronic copy they could write in. Tilton says this kind of training is invaluable because he would have never

thought of that idea on his own. Tilton appreciated hearing how other teachers were using technology in the classroom so he could incorporate it into his teaching.

"I was very curious to see how other teachers were

teaching and talk about what works and what doesn't work," Tilton says. "And for students, it's great because we can engage them more. The curriculum now has fewer problems to solve, but we're getting them to discuss and understand what they are doing. It's more in-depth, so we have to get them talking."

"I was very curious to see how other teachers were teaching and talk about what works and what doesn't work."

Mark Tilton
Math teacher at Smythe Academy of Arts and Sciences

Tech Tools for the Classroom

Training helps teacher make lessons more engaging

by Mike Blount

In the past, students opened their textbooks and read along with the teacher as he or she taught a lesson. In today's classrooms, teachers have access to a myriad of tools to bring a lesson alive. During a 21st-century digital learning training over the summer, Twin Rivers teachers got a crash course in some of the most innovative ways to use technology in the classroom and get their students engaged in learning.

Jeff Freeland, a fifth-grade teacher at F.C. Joyce Elementary, attended the training because he wanted to hear how other teachers in the district were using technology in the classroom.

"The more training I have, the more I'm able to dip into a larger box of tools to get my students excited about learning," Freeland says. "We can present that same

lesson on a chalk board, SMART board or a laptop, but some will work better for a small group or a large group or individual student. It's all about finding the right tools for the right application."

Teachers at the training collaborated with one another on best practices, but also learned about how new software was being used at different school sites. Some of those programs included using Google Docs for students to collaborate on a writing assignment and Google Expedition to take students on a virtual field trip.

Freeland says he's looking forward to implementing some of what he learned at the training in his own classroom.

"Technology is a great way to get students engaged," Freeland says. "Students use it every day, and it's very well received in the classroom."

"The more training I have, the more I'm able to dip into a larger box of tools to get my students excited about learning."

Jeff Freeland
Fifth-grade teacher at F.C. Joyce Elementary



Jeff Freeland, a fifth-grade teacher at F.C. Joyce Elementary, attended a 21st-century digital learning training over the summer to understand how to incorporate technology into his teaching.
Photo by Louise Mitchell

Sharon Kent teaches summer training programs for teachers centered on helping students develop foundational reading skills.
Photo by Louise Mitchell



Focus on Early Literacy Gives Skills for Life

Summer training helps teachers help students by John Flynn

Before you can read “The Catcher in the Rye,” you have to read “The Cat in the Hat.” Twin Rivers has committed to improving early literacy skills during kindergarten through third grade by hosting summer training programs for teachers, sharing proven techniques for instilling foundational reading habits in their students.

“When you just start teaching from teaching manuals, you don’t have all the information,” says teacher Sharon Kent.

Kent now teaches fifth grade, but started with first-graders, and has worked with children of all ages. This summer, she guided some of the teacher programs, emphasizing the practice of holding weekly conferences with students to track progress.

“You need running records, so you know where your students are at all times,” she says. “To me, that’s key. If you don’t know where they’re at, you can’t

drive your instruction. You’re not teaching that love of reading.”

Kent’s fifth-graders have taken to reading on their own, borrowing works from the library. But she says students need to master the basics, like recognizing root words, before they can tackle more advanced books and develop a strong self-motivation to read. And the training isn’t just valuable to teachers of early grades

— many older students have an ongoing need to strengthen reading skills.

“As the words get larger, kids need to learn how to decode those larger words just like they did in first grade,” Kent says.

By targeting lessons and using encouragement, the results can be inspiring.

“It takes a classroom environment where everyone feels comfortable. I had one boy who went from a first-grade level to a third-grade level,” Kent says. “And we all cheered him on.”

“It takes a classroom environment where everyone feels comfortable.”

Sharon Kent
Elementary teacher



News & Happenings

Master Plan Improves Twin Rivers Facilities

Strategy will unify buildings and upgrade learning environments

by John Flynn

Twin Rivers’ schools now have an official look. The Long-Range Facilities Master Plan to address infrastructure improvements and provide a framework for future renovation and construction has recently been finalized.

“[We] took stock of what we have, what’s happening at each individual school, and where there’s any inefficiencies,” says Daniel Savala, member of the Master Plan Committee. “You can’t control what you don’t measure.”

During the surveying process, inspectors found some schools lacking proper air conditioning and pools, gates and sprinklers in need of immediate repair.

“Dr. Martinez wanted to make these things right,” Savala says. “He has already made about a \$25 million investment in the facilities with that first round.”

After a complete assessment of the current and future facilities needs of the district, including community input through questionnaires and town hall meetings, the Master Plan was drafted to provide recommendations that meet the district’s goals and changing needs.

“The ultimate goal is to bring consistency to the district,” Savala says. “We want every school looking great. We want you to know you’re at a Twin Rivers campus.”

One exciting component of the plan is a new Professional Learning Community Center in the Bay D space at the district office. The state-of-the-art facility will be accessible to all teachers, students and the community. The center will provide access to learning technology and include open, naturally lit spaces for collaboration between students and specially assigned teachers and instructional coaches.

Another project will replace campus door locks with digital key cards, improving campus safety and security and saving the district thousands of dollars in fees annually for changing locks.

Upgrades like these will help bring the district together, and into the future.

Twin Rivers invites parents and community members to learn more about the newly finalized Facilities Master Plan at the Board of Trustees meeting on Sept. 15 at 7 p.m. at the district office.



The Professional Learning Community Center is one of the facilities improvements included in the district’s new, future-facing Master Plan.
Illustration courtesy of Twin Rivers

VIEW 4: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION/ BREAKOUT SPACE

Off to a Great Start!

The No. 1 goal of Twin Rivers is to maximize growth in student achievement. At the beginning of this school year, teachers and administrators are geared up to do just that! Training sessions over the summer brought teachers together to learn about effective teaching tools. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test results will help teachers determine where each student stands. This coordinated effort of support for teachers and students will help make Twin Rivers successful well into the future, and so far, the district is off to a great start!

Parents are encouraged to connect with schools and teachers to get involved.



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Visit www.twinriversusd.org for:



List of schools



District news



Parent resources

REMEMBER! NEW EARLY RELEASE WEDNESDAY

Parents, there's an important change to the school schedule this year! Instead of late starts on Wednesday, all students will be **released two hours early every Wednesday.**

A few things to know:

- Research shows students learn better throughout the day when they start early.
- A majority of faculty and parents supported the move to Early Release Wednesday.
- Early Release Wednesday allows for Professional Learning Time for teachers and staff to work together on increasing student achievement.
- Schedules will also shift for bus routes and after-school programs.

Visit www.twinriversusd.org or the website for your child's school for more information on Early Release Wednesday.

PARENTS: GET INVOLVED!

Collaboration between parents and schools improves student performance. Make the most of these opportunities so your children get the most out of their education.

Parent Engagement Kick-off

Learn how to get engaged in your child's school during the 2015-16 year. The event introduces "ParentLink," a new customized mobile app for Twin Rivers parents, guidelines for reading your child's state test results, and much more. Spanish, Russian and Hmong interpreters will be present. The first 180 people to RSVP will receive a backpack fully loaded with school supplies! Aug. 14, 11 a.m. to noon, at the district office.

Parent University

Parenting is hard. Luckily, we have experts who are available to help parents work through thorny issues like helping with homework, controlling back-talk, adjusting to adolescent behavior and communicating effectively with teachers. Parent University classes throughout the year offer support in these areas and more.

To RSVP for the Parent Engagement Kickoff or find out more about Parent University class offerings and schedules, contact Parent Engagement Coordinator Yolanda Falkenberg at 916-566-1600 ext. 50035 or yolanda.falkenberg@twinriversusd.org.

Parent Advisory Committee (PAC)

Got a great idea to improve your child's school? This committee lets you voice that plan and work with other concerned parents on strategies to

improve the district's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and enhance student learning. Open to all Twin Rivers parents. First meeting: Oct. 1, 5:30-7 p.m., at the district office.

District English Learner Advisory Committee

English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) representatives from each school come together to discuss and adjust the English Learner Master Plan and the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). All parents are welcome to attend. Dinner, playcare for children ages 5-12 and interpreters in Hmong and Spanish are available at both committee meetings. First meeting: Oct. 8, 6-7:30 p.m., at the district office.