

WE ARE TR!



Celebrating Excellence

Recognizing 2016 Gold Ribbon
schools and successes
throughout Twin Rivers

Special Issue
2016

TwinRivers
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Proud to Be Twin Rivers Unified

Awards usher in a celebration of excellence

By Shannon Springmeyer



Photo by Anne Stokes

It's a great time to be a member of the Twin Rivers community. Recently, the district has enjoyed recognitions for its efforts to improve achievement for all students.

Eight Twin Rivers elementary schools from across the district have just been honored with the California Department of Education's 2016 California Gold Ribbon Schools Award. Each school underwent a rigorous and competitive statewide application process before being honored with the Gold Ribbon, which recognizes exemplary educational programs and practices. An impressive half of all 2016 Gold Ribbon schools in Sacramento County are Twin Rivers schools.

The success doesn't surprise Associate Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Dr. Jacqueline Perez, who says the district's "laser-like focus on student achievement" is paying off in a big way throughout Twin Rivers schools. Educators

are using the district's Strategic Framework to guide a continuous journey of improvement, focusing first and foremost on high-quality teaching and student learning results.

Half of all 2016 Gold Ribbon schools in Sacramento County are Twin Rivers schools.

The signs of success are evident beyond the eight Gold Ribbon schools, Perez says. Pacific Career & Technology High School has been recognized as a Model Continuation High School for 2016 by the California Department of Education for its effective and innovative practices that increase positive outcomes for students. The district

was also recently honored on the College Board's Gaston Caperton 2015 Opportunity Honor Roll for excellence in creating opportunities for traditionally underrepresented students. Twin Rivers is one of only 130 school districts across the nation to receive the honor.

Superintendent Dr. Steven Martinez says not all districts in the state can boast of such an array of honors, a fact that should make everyone in the Twin Rivers community proud. The awards are a testament to the hard work being done by teachers, students, staff and parents across the district, he says.

"My hope is that we'll take time to celebrate and reflect on the last three years and what got us here, and really get motivated and excited about what's to come," Martinez says.

Keep reading to learn more about Twin Rivers' Gold Ribbon schools and California Department of Education Model Continuation High School.

TR Talk



"What makes your school excellent?"



"I think there's a lot of collaboration between the staff. It's very much a team effort that's checked and perfected over the years."

Sarah Stepanski
Sixth-grade teacher, Harmon Johnson Elementary School



"The teachers, and the principal too, give 110 percent, instead of just 100. They go over and beyond on making us more intelligent."

Noah Hicks
Fifth-grade student, Westside Elementary School



"I think it's good because all the teachers are good – they always want you to do good and they teach you well. We're all a family."

Gyasi Rushton
Fifth-grade student, Hazel Strauch Elementary School



"There's a lot of commitment from the community. Parents want to support their children, and I think we're harnessing everyone's potential and everybody's abilities to accomplish our goal."

Richard Carrazana
Parent, Noralto Elementary School

An Artful Approach

Fairbanks Elementary School



by Anne Stokes

Students thrive when lessons and classroom activities incorporate different teaching methods and a variety of approaches. At Fairbanks Elementary School, Principal Janis Wade gives students the opportunity to learn while letting their creativity flourish by integrating art into everyday curriculum.

“Our goal really was for students to be able to demonstrate their learning in different ways that supported them and their learning styles,” Wade says.

According to Wade, art integration strategies successfully engage and empower students, especially those who struggle with more traditional pencil-and-paper forms of instruction. Students are able to demonstrate that they understand lesson concepts through

artwork, whether it is using historic photographs to better understand a history lesson or creating and performing in a skit about life sciences.

“I think this is the way of the future for teaching.”

Janis Wade
Principal, Fairbanks Elementary School

Since implementing the arts integration program in 2011, Wade has seen small but steady academic improvement in students.

“When we come to state testing

and the benchmark testing, we are seeing growth,” she says. “It also builds problem-solving skills, communication, collaboration — those really important 21st century skills that employers are looking for now.”

That success has earned Fairbanks a 2016 Gold Ribbon Award. Wade is confident that her model is replicable and that by implementing arts integration strategies along with Common Core standards, other schools could see significant growth as well.

“I’d like to see it in all schools. I think this is the way of the future for teaching. We really need to concentrate on the social-emotional part of our growth and the strategies help support that,” she says. “I believe the model is transformative.”



Students at Fairbanks Elementary School work together to demonstrate their understanding of a food web through dramatic theater art integration strategies as part of a life sciences lesson.
Photo by Anne Stokes



“We obviously have an awesome teaching staff, but the support staff [is great] as well. Every person has a very important role, and parents are involved. It’s a community here, and that’s what makes it work so well.”

Amy Wilborn
Parent, Frontier Elementary School



“I love my school because every day when I come to school, every teacher and staff member treats me kind and I always treat them back with kindness.”

Andrew Vang
Sixth-grade student, Fairbanks Elementary School



“If I don’t understand something, they actually sit down and go through it.”

Miguel Carrillo
11th-grade student, Pacific Career & Technology High School



“You get to learn stuff. It’s making you smarter here, it’s helping you understand what’s going on.”

Alyssa Deleon
Second-grade student, Regency Park Elementary School



“There is a positive and nurturing climate that does make a school great. We have a very supportive Hagginwood community. It’s very helpful in making us successful.”

Kiran Bahniwal
Fifth-grade teacher, Hagginwood Elementary School

Photos by Anne Stokes

The Power of Professional Learning Communities

by Kate Gonzales

Frontier Elementary School



At Frontier Elementary School, all the work done to enhance student achievement rests on the foundation of a culture of collaboration.

“We have an English language arts goal and a math goal, and it’s really important that we also have a schoolwide culture goal,” says Principal Ellen Giffin. “The culture includes staff and parents — how we do our work together.”

“It’s really important that we also have a schoolwide culture goal.”

Ellen Giffin
Principal, Frontier Elementary School

At the forefront of this collaboration are Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) — groups of educators, support staff and parents who work together to promote academic achievement and positive behavior on the campus. In the 2014-15 school year, Frontier Elementary had one schoolwide PLC. This year, the school expanded to six PLCs, including a grade-level team, a group focused on behavior, a parent volunteer team and a vertical PLC group that works across grades.

The grade level and vertical PLC teams collaborate on strategies to meet Common Core standards. First, teachers meet with their grade-level PLC and ask questions around what they want students to learn, how they plan to teach those lessons, and what the next steps will be if students do, or do not, learn them.

The answers to these questions guide teachers, who then meet in the vertical PLCs — three groups of kindergarten through sixth-grade teachers that collaborate around the standards. For instance, if the school is preparing to teach argumentative writing, the vertical PLCs work together to ensure there is not overlap between the grades and that they have a common language around the lesson.

This year, Frontier was awarded a 2016 Gold Ribbon School Award for its work to implement Common Core state standards using Professional Learning Communities. While it’s too early to definitely link academic improvements to PLCs, Giffin says teachers enjoy the ability to collaborate creatively.

“[Teachers] love planning time, they love learning from each others’ strengths,” she says.

At Frontier Elementary School, teachers work together in Professional Learning Communities to promote student achievement.
Photo by Roman Rykun



Students at Hagginwood Elementary work together to research topics and create visual representations of what they’re learning.
Photo by Anne Stokes

Students Take Charge in Academics



Hagginwood Elementary School

by Kate Gonzales

At Hagginwood Elementary School, all students take an active role in shaping their own learning.

This year, the school was named a 2016 California Gold Ribbon Award winner for its use of Guided Language Acquisition Design. This strategy, which Hagginwood began using in the 2014-2015 school year, integrates listening, speaking, reading and writing while emphasizing cooperative activities and problem-solving in every grade. Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) is an interdisciplinary approach, so students develop literacy competencies as they study science, math, history and other topics.

The approach does not involve a change in curriculum. Instead, teachers cover the same material in a more engaging way. When teachers begin a thematic unit, or lesson, they ask the students what they already know about the topic and what they would like to learn. As the conversation unfolds, teachers in each class begin to develop a visual representation, or color-coded

pictorial chart, illustrating the topic they’ll study and the academic language they will learn.

Each group in the class gets a research assignment, and together, classmates create their own pictorial chart to display what they’ve discovered. The visual and collaborative approach is particularly beneficial to English language learners.

“We want to see a lot more group and student discussion so the teacher is not the one always driving the whole lesson and providing all the information,” says Principal Alberto Becerra.

In addition to establishing high academic standards, GLAD also promotes good behavior

through three explicit expectations of all students: be respectful, make good decisions and solve your problems.

GLAD is a low-cost yet effective approach to improving student learning — and more Hagginwood students are at or above their grade’s reading level than they were in the 2014-15 school year.

“We want to see a lot more group and student discussion so the teacher is not the one always driving the whole lesson.”

Alberto Becerra
Principal, Hagginwood Elementary School

Teamwork: Achieving More Together

by Anne Stokes



Harmon Johnson Elementary School

Teamwork is a powerful tool. By working together, groups can achieve goals that would be impossible alone. At Harmon Johnson Elementary School, teachers collaborate and share strategies to help each other — and students — navigate the new Common Core state standards. Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, which occur twice a month, ensure teachers are all on the same page when it comes to meeting students' needs.

"We're developing what we call professional capital," says Principal David Nevarez. "As we teach, we examine the results, learn from the results and adjust our teaching practices. The idea is to raise everyone's abilities."

At PLC meetings, educators strategize lesson plans, deciding which standards to

"The idea is to raise everyone's abilities."

David Nevarez
Principal, Harmon Johnson Elementary School

teach and how to help students meet them. Rather than rely on rote memorization, new Common Core standards require more dynamic approaches that promote critical thinking and deeper understanding of lessons. At Harmon Johnson, teachers who want help with new approaches to teaching, assessment and learning can rely on their PLCs for guidance. Those who are successful can in turn share what worked in



Teachers at Harmon Johnson Elementary School meet in Professional Learning Community meetings twice a month to discuss effective teaching methods and their results.
Photo by Anne Stokes

their classrooms.

The program's success garnered Harmon Johnson a 2016 California Gold Ribbon Award. Nevarez says that for his staff, it validated that they are on the right path and he's optimistic the program can be introduced at other schools.

"[One of the teachers] felt

overwhelmed with these new standards and how to teach them because they are literally having to create a new curriculum on their own," Nevarez says. "She said, 'I feel like I'm being supported by my colleagues. If I have any questions they can help me figure out what I need to do and how I can teach this.'"

Giving Students What They Need

by Kate Gonzales



Three times a week, school days at Hazel Strauch Elementary School begin with What I Need (WIN) Time — group instruction in English language arts targeting students' individual learning needs.
Photo by Anne Stokes

Hazel Strauch Elementary School



Every student is different, and at Hazel Strauch Elementary School, educators have reorganized the school day around a more personalized approach. Students get the individualized academic lessons they need through What I Need Time.

"We want to maintain a high level of rigor for all students."

Marlisa Rodriguez
Principal, Hazel Strauch Elementary School

Students begin each Monday through Wednesday with What I Need (WIN) Time — a 35-minute block of instruction that is targeted to students' unique skills and learning needs in English language

arts. Fourth- and fifth-grade students get an additional day of WIN Time. Students are grouped according to their current abilities, most often within their own grade levels.

The goal of WIN Time is to address the achievement gap and promote academic growth across the board by meeting each student at his or her current skill level.

"We want to maintain a high level of rigor for all students," says Principal Marlisa Rodriguez.

That includes the school's large population of English language learners. One of the program's intermediate levels is designed to specifically provide additional English language development instruction.

Every four to six weeks, students are assessed. Professional Learning

Communities — teams of teachers who collaborate on instructional strategies and effectiveness — analyze assessment data and brainstorm best practices. WIN Time groups are fluid, so students can move from group to group when their needs change.

Since implementing the program two years ago, reading levels have improved in every grade, with the greatest increase in first grade. The program also earned the school the 2016 California Gold Ribbon Award.

"We knew within this model ... we could get there in meeting the needs of all students schoolwide," Rodriguez says.

This year, the school has expanded the personalized approach to math instruction in first and fifth grades.

Learning by Doing

Regency Park Elementary School

by Kate Gonzales

At Regency Park Elementary School, learning tools go beyond pencils, paper and books.

Through Project Based Learning (PBL), students actively engage with topics like history and science, learning lessons through a multidisciplinary, hands-on approach. Each grade level — kindergarten through fifth grade — focuses on a different topic. This year, topics included life cycles and Gold Rush history.

“It really becomes a learning experience but it’s also a bonding experience for the students and families.”

Tim Hammons
Principal, Regency Park Elementary School

For eight weeks, students work as classes on projects around their topics, while also completing individual assignments. All the classes in an entire grade work together to plan and practice a presentation. Subjects are blended in these projects, so a student who is working on a science project is simultaneously practicing English language arts. Teachers act as advisers, and students are engaged both physically and mentally in their learning.

The work culminates with the Project Based Learning Night, when students show their work and knowledge to their families. Each PBL Night opens with a 20-minute presentation before parents are invited into their children’s classrooms to see their work. Every grade level has its own night to shine.

The school has used Project Based

Learning for about a decade, and Principal Tim Hammons says it is one reason test scores have improved. It’s also the reason the school was recognized for excellence with a 2016 California Gold Ribbon Award.

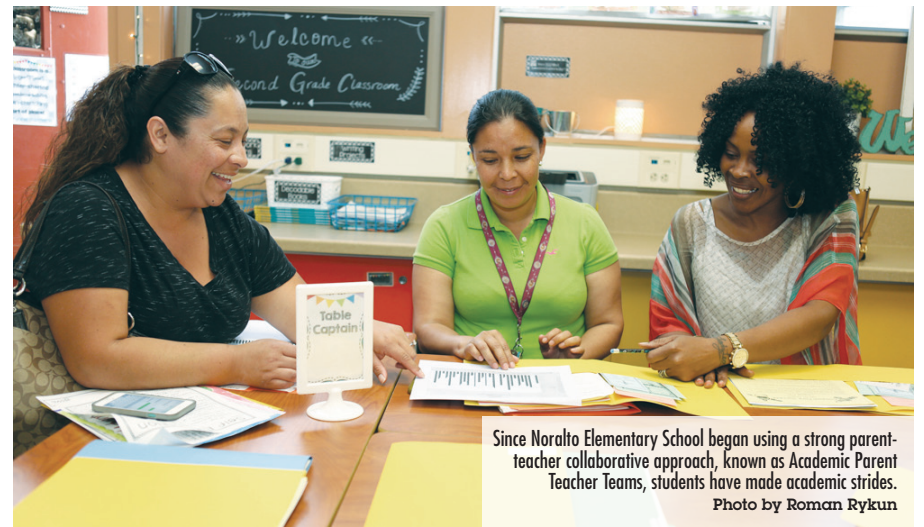
The method is popular among students and their families — with about 95 percent of families attending PBL Nights. One student’s family moved to another school district a week before her PBL Night. The project meant so much to her, she returned to the school to be part of the presentation.

Some parents are even surprised to learn that not every school practices Project Based Learning. PBL is a defining part of Regency Park’s culture.

“It really becomes a learning experience but it’s also a bonding experience for the students and families with Regency Park,” Hammons says.



At Regency Park Elementary School, students collaborate to put together a project based on the topic they’re studying. The Project Based Learning method allows students to be more hands-on and engaged in their learning.
Photo by Anne Stokes



Since Noralto Elementary School began using a strong parent-teacher collaborative approach, known as Academic Parent Teacher Teams, students have made academic strides.
Photo by Roman Rykun

A Collaborative Plan for Student Success

Noralto Elementary School

by Kate Gonzales

When educators at Noralto Elementary School sought strategies and resources to further increase student achievement, they reached out and collaborated with families. The goal was to engage and embrace parents as knowledgeable, active partners over the course of the entire school year.

During the 2012-13 school year, Noralto implemented Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT), a grassroots collaboration between parents and teachers that bridges the gap between home and school. Noralto Elementary hosts three APTT meetings each year, with teams formed by grade level from kindergarten through second grade, and further individualized by classroom. The aim is to make a plan for success for each student, and the school was awarded the 2016 California Gold Ribbon Award for this effort.

Parents start by examining student data provided by the teacher, which shows parents how their child is performing academically. Based on the data, each parent

works one-on-one with the teacher to develop attainable goals for the child, and create a plan to meet those goals.

In each classroom, the Parent Teacher Team practices games and activities to help kids reach their individualized goals. They also brainstorm strategies for parents to use at home to help their children, and share techniques that have worked.

“There’s a lot of opportunities for parents to talk ... and bounce ideas back and forth,” says Principal Brad Allen.

The teacher provides a binder of tools tailored to each student’s needs for the parents to take home. Parents leave empowered with greater knowledge

around academics and strategies to practice at home to help their child succeed.

The APTT model is effective in engaging parents in their students’ learning, and it has produced great results. Noralto has the highest possible ranking of 10 based on the California Department of Education similar school ranking system.

Noralto has the highest possible ranking of 10

It Takes a Village

Westside Elementary School

by Kate Gonzales

At Westside Elementary School, everybody has a role in ensuring each student is successful and cared for.

The school's Collaborative Support for Student Achievement model promotes strong relationships on campus, and embraces families as part of the school's fabric. The model earned the school the 2016 California Gold Ribbon Award.

The elements contributing to the positive campus climate are found every day. Each week, Mondays through Thursdays start with schoolwide physical education. Teachers begin each four-week P.E. session with their own classes, then rotate to lead other sets of students, allowing teachers to get to know every face on campus. Each Friday starts with morning sing and an awards ceremony, where students are recognized for academic achievements and displays of good character.

The Buddies program builds community by linking students in younger grades with older kids for monthly activities and one-on-one academic support.

"If you have good relationships with students and families, then you're going to have good student achievement."

Laura Lofgren
Principal, Westside Elementary School

Principal Laura Lofgren says promoting literacy is a major schoolwide goal. During activities like morning sing and lessons in science, social studies and other areas,

Students are recognized for academics and positive behavior each Friday during a morning sing and awards ceremony.
Photo by Roman Rykun



teachers integrate literacy. The school hosts an annual Literacy Night, where students and their families celebrate Dr. Seuss' birthday.

There are many other ways families are part of the campus community. The school hosts lunch with dads once a trimester, when fathers are invited to have lunch and play with their children afterward. In May, the school hosts lunch with moms, and in September, grandparents are invited on campus to celebrate National Grandparents Day.

Lofgren also makes positive phone calls home to parents. When children have made academic improvements, met goals or showed good behavior, their teacher sends them to the office so the principal can call their parents and let them know their child is doing well.

"It's really about building relationships, because if you have good relationships with students and families, then you're going to have good student achievement," Lofgren says.

An Alternative Path to a Bright Future

by Kate Gonzales



Pacific Career & Technology High School



Students at Pacific Career & Technology High School have opportunities to get on track and make up credits. The school also offers programs like Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, where students can gain new skills.
Photo by Roman Rykun

Pacific Career & Technology High School is committed to providing every student opportunities to excel. The school's efforts to go above and beyond have been recognized by the California Department of Education, as it has been named a Model Continuation High School for 2016, one of only 37 schools to receive the honor statewide.

The continuation high school serves approximately 130 students, who have fallen behind and are at risk of not graduating from traditional high school. Site Administrator Shane Yang says the school offers flexible scheduling, as students can face challenges getting to class.

"We have students that need to help out at the home financially, so some of them work," he says. Others may be teen parents or children in foster care.

Pacific High's CHARGE recovery program illustrates this flexibility in allowing students to catch up on coursework. They can recover credits through online courses available 24/7, from their home or on campus, where each student has individual access to

a computer. Students can also pass CHALLENGE tests, which are the semester finals taken in the district's traditional high schools, to catch up on credits.

The school also offers participation in Associated Student Body, or student leadership, as well as a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC).

Students in the JROTC program gain leadership skills, participate in events and engage in community service.

Pacific is recognized as a Model Continuation High School for the next three years. The CDE has identified Pacific High as a resource for best practices for districts that plan to establish new continuation high schools.

The programs and opportunities to make up credits are definitely one

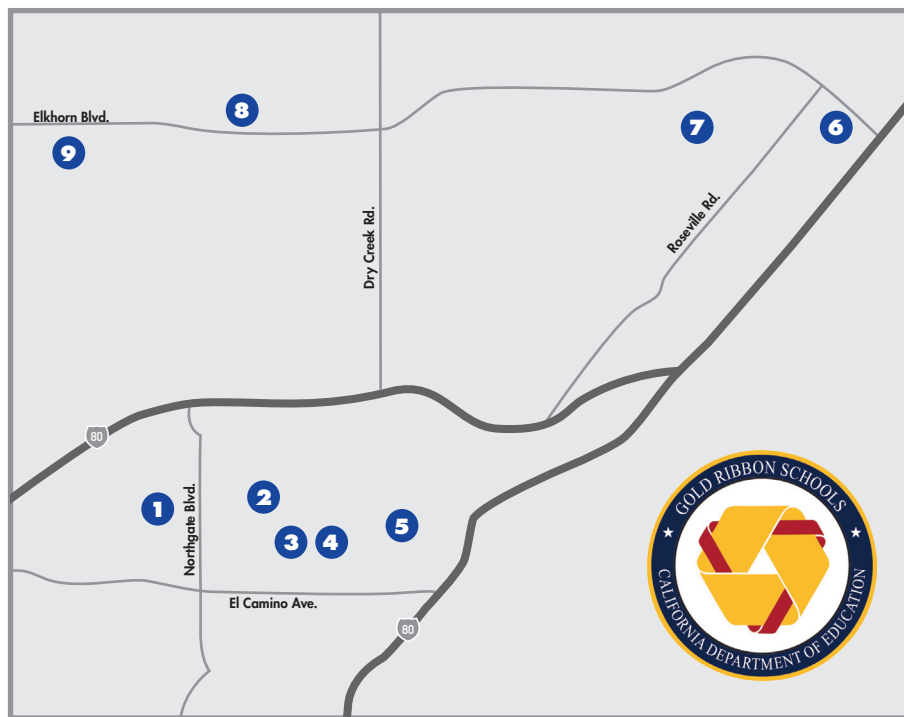
of the high school's strengths, but Yang says there's something more that elevates the students at Pacific High School.

"[We have the] ability to establish a strong rapport with the families and our students," he says.

"[We have the] ability to establish a strong rapport with the families and our students."

Shane Yang
Site Administrator, Pacific High

Discover Twin Rivers Unified's Award-Winning Schools



1 Hazel Strauch Elementary School
Grades PK-5
3141 Northstead Drive
Sacramento, CA 95833
916-566-2745
strauch-trusd-ca.
schoolloop.com

2 Fairbanks Elementary School
Grades PK-6
227 Fairbanks Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95838
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schoolloop.com

3 Noralto Elementary School
Grades PK-2
477 Las Palmas Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95815
916-566-2700
noralto-trusd-ca.
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4 Harmon Johnson Elementary School
Grades 3-6
577 Las Palmas Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95815
916-566-3480
johnson-trusd-ca.
schoolloop.com

5 Hagginwood Elementary School
Grades PK-6
1418 Palo Verde Ave.
Sacramento, CA 95815
916-566-3475
hagginwood-trusd-ca.
schoolloop.com

6 Frontier Elementary School
Grades K-6
6691 Silverthorne Circle
Sacramento, CA 95842
916-566-1840
frontier-trusd-ca.
schoolloop.com

7 Pacific Career & Technology High School
Continuation high school
6560 Melrose Drive
North Highlands, CA 95600
916-566-2715
phs-trusd-ca.schoolloop.
com

8 Westside Elementary School
Grades K-6
6537 W. Second St.
Rio Linda, CA 95673
916-566-1990
westside-trusd-ca.
schoolloop.com

9 Regency Park Elementary School
Grades TK-5
5901 Bridgecross Drive
Sacramento, CA 95835
916-566-1660
rpe-trusd-ca.schoolloop.
com



BUILDING EXCELLENCE FOR ALL!

Twin Rivers Unified offers warm congratulations to the district's eight 2016 California Gold Ribbon Schools Award winners, and to Pacific Career & Technology High School for being named a California Department of Education Model Continuation High School.

These awards are just some of the hallmarks of achievement and improvement throughout the district that every Twin Rivers parent, student, teacher and staff member should be proud of. The entire Twin Rivers community is working hard each day to build the brightest possible future for every student.

Connect with us online to learn more about why we are proud to be TR!



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