

WE ARE TR!

Spring
2018

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A GREAT PLACE TO GROW

These 5 programs are helping students achieve

TwinRivers
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



What have you learned from your experience as a student school board member?



"It's a good opportunity. It really helps show how I'm a leader at my school, how I can represent and be a good role model. It gave me a lot of confidence also to speak with and communicate with others."

Valeria Perez

Senior, Creative Connections Arts Academy



"It gives you the opportunity to be the voice for students who have a strong voice and the voice for students who have a weaker voice ... and it gives you the opportunity to explore different problems and different solutions."

Alexander Grandinetti

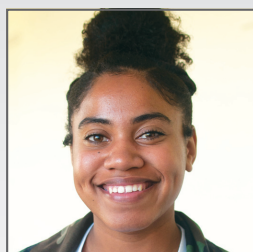
Junior, Rio Linda High School



"On the student board, I've learned a lot — how the district runs, what I can do to help my school and the different voices you can hear. ... You get to learn how to implement those ideas and how you can possibly change something that can help students."

Romeo Anderson

Senior, Highlands High School



"I learned how to listen more to what people need from me and how to be there for people. For the students, I learned what I needed to report and what I needed to communicate so that the Board members know what they need to know."

Delilah Williams

Senior, Grant Union High School



"Being the voice of my peers has always been big for me and being on the Student Board has given me a wider audience to talk about and get what's going on at my school out to everybody who's listening."

Tyus Carey

Sophomore, Foothill High School

Cover Photo by Anne Stokes



A FRAMEWORK FOR ACHIEVING OUR GOALS

When you think about it, nothing is constant except change. Like every community, our community is constantly evolving and changing. So the education system must evolve as well. The release of the California School Dashboard has signaled a new time of change for education, much like March 11, 2018 will signal the beginning of daylight saving time.

Sometimes change is fast, but more often than not, change is slow and only occurs when people do something meaningful and different.

Under the leadership of the Board of Trustees, Twin Rivers Unified must change how we approach our work and how we prioritize our work on behalf of our students. We need to focus intently so that we can make the most of the time we have with your children.

In this article, I will hopefully explain Twin Rivers' methodology to accomplish our goals so that we increase the learning potential of all students. Sometimes change is fast, but more often than not, change is slow and only occurs when people do something meaningful and different. Thus, to provide clarity for our school district and the communities we serve, I have outlined the work we do for our students and community into three categories:

- 1) Improvement,**
- 2) Accountability, and**
- 3) Foresight ("what if" – i.e., being ahead of the curve)**

Improvement: This category is the everyday work being done in Twin Rivers Unified — teaching and learning, school supervision, maintaining school facilities, transportation, budgeting, building capacity of all of our employees, leadership development, and parent and community outreach. Certainly, I could have mentioned many more areas. This strategic and long-term work, when done correctly and with urgency, will be the force that will sustain districtwide improvement for years to come. Improvement requires a commitment to continuous reflection, analysis, and relentless pursuit of professional and personal growth to

provide opportunities that support our students today and in the future. Rest assured, many Twin Rivers Unified employees exercise these habits every day, always perfecting their craft to deliver what our students deserve. To those employees, I say thank you.

Accountability: This category has changed with the new statewide Dashboard for all school districts throughout the state. While I will not get into all the specifics regarding what the Dashboard contains, I will say that as a school district we need to be mindful of the indicators represented in the Dashboard. For example, absence rates are one indicator on the Dashboard; therefore, I expect that school sites, parents, and district officials will work in collaboration to address this indicator. Strategic plans will be developed to address areas of improvement on the Dashboard by asking the following three questions:

- 1) Is what we are doing working? If it is, why? If it is not, why not?
- 2) Are we supporting all students?
- 3) What do we need to do differently, so that we get different outcomes for students?

Foresight: This is the "what if" category. In other words, each department and school site will identify one or two issues that, if not resolved, might become a larger concern later. These are the small issues that are easily resolved if addressed early, but create extensive problems if neglected. I think of it like this: A small pebble in the shoe of someone who is running a marathon is not an issue for the first 12 miles, but for the last 14.2 miles, that same small pebble makes finishing the marathon impossible. This last category ensures that we position our students and Twin Rivers staff in systems to maximize results and effort.

I hope this framework helps you to visualize how we identify the meaningful work being done at the school sites and district office every day to support the children of the district and our community.

Together we are making a difference by creating the right conditions for success!

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



Sixth grade teacher Tony Wood's students take weekly quizzes and assessments that give him an idea of how they will do on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress.

Photo by Melissa Uroff

HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE

District employs strategies to improve test scores

by Gail Allyn Short

Across Twin Rivers Unified School District, teachers and administrators are working together to boost learning and help students make the grade on standardized tests like the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP).

The CAASPP is a standardized test that measures students' academic performance in grades 3-8 and 11. The goal of CAASPP is to make sure students are on track to becoming college and career ready.

At Westside Elementary School in Rio Linda, sixth grade teacher Tony Wood says he is using several strategies to prepare his students for the CAASPP.

Besides his weekly quizzes, Wood says his students also take periodic district assessment tests, which help him keep tabs on how they are progressing academically.

There's also after-school tutoring twice a week throughout the year to provide extra help to students who are struggling or need a good place to work.

TRUSD has also invested heavily in Professional Learning Communities where teachers from each of the District's 52 school sites gather to analyze their students' assessment results, share ideas and explore ways to enhance instruction.

"They look at the results of the students in their class and compare them across teachers," says Lori Grace, Assistant Superintendent of School Leadership for Secondary Education at TRUSD. "Based on how their students performed, they're then able to share practices that led to students being more successful on the tests."

In the three years since the District first implemented the Professional Learning

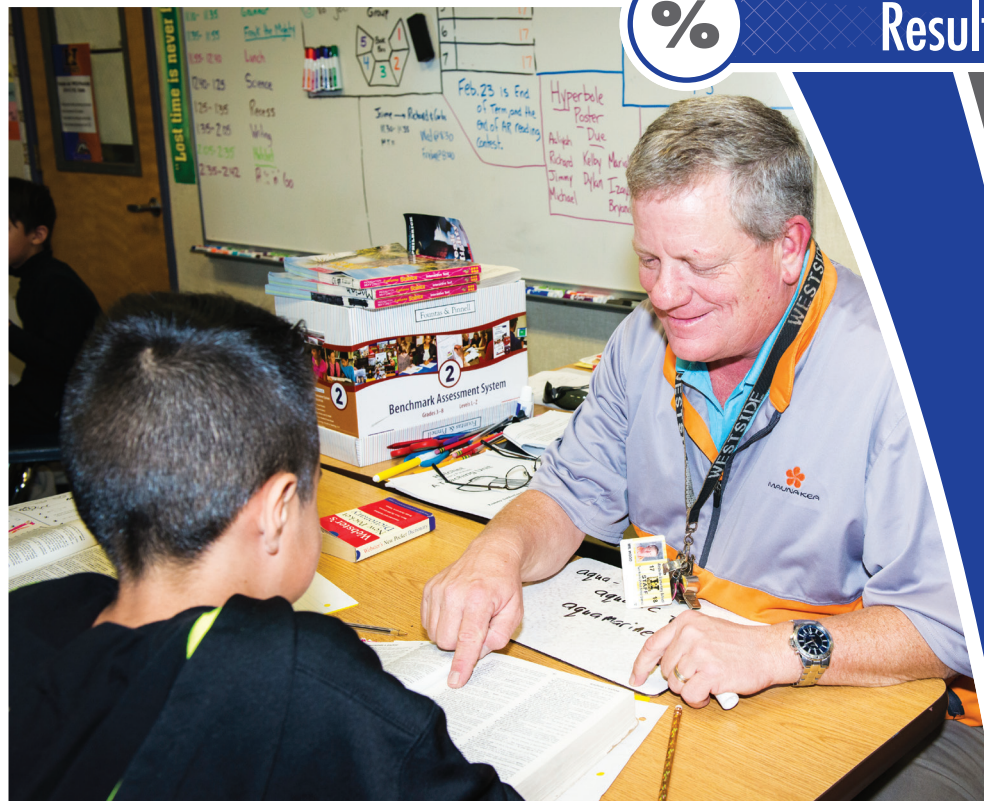
Communities, Grace says they are already seeing better test results in the English language arts.

Wood says the supports at his school have taught his students close-reading practices to help them read at a "far deeper level."

"This has, in turn, helped build the comprehension and inferencing skills that will be necessary to succeed in year-end testing and in life," he says.

With all of the teacher and student supports, Dr. Anne Zeman, Assistant Superintendent of School Leadership for Elementary Education, says TRUSD expects to see high achievement among its students.

"We're anticipating that the fruits of our efforts will pay off," she says.



Results

TESTING TIPS

With spring assessments just around the corner, you may be wondering how you can help your child prepare to do their best.

- **Discuss the tests** with your child — make sure he or she is not scared or anxious.
- With older children, explain that the tests were created to help him or her **better prepare for college and career**.
- Explain to your child that the tests will be **challenging for them**, especially the first few times they take them.
- Tell your child that you and his/her teacher have high expectations and that you are both **there to help them every step of the way**.
- Make sure your child gets a **good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast** before testing.
- **Review test results** with your child, bringing your child's teacher into the discussion as necessary.
- Please check with your child's principal for testing dates. **The testing window is: April 16-May 25.**



HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE



Program spotlight: GEO Academy at Grant Union High School

by Anne Stokes



Grant Union High School students, from left, Jovana Grano and Eric Thao work on the GEO Academy garden on campus. Through GEO Academy coursework, students gain a deeper understanding of how to manage natural resources.
Photo by Anne Stokes

Grant Union High School's GEO Academy shows students there's work to be done and careers to be made in natural resources. Coursework combines academics with real-world projects and industry internships, giving them the chance to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty ... literally.

"Hands-on experiences allow students to see how their knowledge in the classroom is relevant to the real world," says Ann Marie Kennedy, Agriculture and Natural Resource teacher. "It's meaningful and authentic — they're going to remember it and they're going to have a deeper understanding of these issues."

Kennedy is part of a team of educators who prepare students for careers in natural resources: nutrition services, agriculture entrepreneurship, landscape architecture, city planning and sustainability management, just to name a few. Student-run projects like redesigning the campus quad and running businesses that sell seasonal produce and salsa

made from locally grown ingredients, provide them with direct experience with landscape architecture as well as entrepreneurship. Internships offer students the chance to

"These are real experiences that are going to support students in creating a career, no matter what they do."

Ann Marie Kennedy
Agriculture and Natural Resource teacher, Grant Union High School

learn alongside working professionals and see what those types of jobs involve.

"We work really closely with the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, who have their

state offices right here in Sacramento," says Kennedy.

"Students don't really realize that 20 minutes from here you can get a job working as an environmental scientist or an accountant for the Bureau of Land Management."

Senior Juan Ochoa says that he wouldn't have looked into a career in natural resources without his experience in the GEO Academy.

"I didn't know there were so many careers out there," he says. "I want to pursue a career in preserving wildlife ... either with Fish and Game or the forestry department."

For Kennedy, the goal is to show students why good environmental stewardship practices are important, whether they opt for a related career or not.

"It's real work and these are real experiences that are going to support [students] in creating a career, no matter what they do," she says.

GUIDING STUDENTS TOWARD THEIR DREAMS



Spotlight on Guidance Counselors

by Gail Allyn Short

Not long into his freshman year at Highlands High School, Romeo Anderson realized he needed help. He was agonizing over what classes to take because he wasn't sure what careers he was interested in.

So he turned to Highlands High School Guidance Counselor Maryam Sabet for advice.

After talking with Anderson, Sabet recommended that he enroll in Advanced Placement courses.

"She put me in the classes I needed," says Anderson, now a senior who plans to

become a surgeon one day. "Otherwise, I would have taken worthless courses. Without the counselor, I would have been lost."

Sabet, who has been a guidance counselor at Highlands High School for seven years, says most freshmen are more hesitant to ask for help.

"During freshmen year, our students are usually shy and don't know who high school counselors are or what they do," says Sabet. "But typically, by their second or third year, our students are very familiar with us, and they do come and see us often."

Counselors like Sabet help students reach their career goal. For instance, Sabet says she will guide students toward courses that relate to their potential major in college. She meets with all students individually at least once to complete a four-year plan for high school graduation.

Additionally, she helps college-bound students fill out financial aid applications, find scholarships and complete their college applications and essays.

She also informs students about experiences outside the classroom that can help them become college and career-ready,

"Without the counselor, I would have been lost."

Romeo Anderson
Senior, Highlands High School

such as job shadowing and internships.

Anderson says that so far, he has landed offers from Sacramento State and the University of Kansas and is waiting to hear from other universities.

"Now I know what I want to do and what I have to do to pursue my dreams," he says.

PREPARED TO BE GLOBAL CITIZENS



Spotlight on World Language Program

by Anna Quinlan

There are over 46 languages spoken within the Twin Rivers Unified School District, and the district views this diversity as one of its strengths. In addition, students who are bilingual are at a tremendous advantage, both for interacting with fellow students and staff now, as well as for becoming global citizens in the future.

The district's World Language Program was developed with this goal in mind. It offers a Seal of Biliteracy to students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. This knowledge is attractive to future employers and college admissions offices, which recognize the need for global competency in business and diplomacy.

"Our World Language courses are a healthy mix of students who are learning a second language for the first time, as well as others who are studying a second language that is spoken in their family's home or by their relatives," says Andrew

Withers, Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Professional Development Departments.

During the past four years, TRUSD has graduated 475 students with the Seal of Biliteracy honor, acknowledging fluency in languages including Russian, Hmong, Spanish, French and German. "We are a diverse school district that is

proud of our students and families," notes Withers.

As students work toward fluency in a second language, they are also exposed to a broader cultural education, learning about

the heritage and traditions that surround the languages they learn about.

"Our programs have opened doors for all participants and have also allowed them to connect with their family heritage in an academic setting," says Withers.

"Our programs have opened doors for all participants and have also allowed them to connect with their family heritage in an academic setting."

Andrew Withers
Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Professional Development

EXTRA SUPPORT HELPS STUDENTS ACHIEVE



Spotlight on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

by Gail Allyn Short

Studies have shown that young children who fall behind in school academically often have a tough time catching up. In fact, a 2011 study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that third graders who lag in reading are more likely to fail or drop out of high school.

To help struggling students in the District to get back on track, TRUSD recently implemented an initiative called Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). MTSS works by assigning students to different levels of instruction based on their needs:

- Tier 1 is regular classroom instruction
- Tier 2 is additional instruction in a small group
- Tier 3 is more intensive one-on-one instruction

Students receive instruction from their teacher or MTSS intervention specialists, who are veteran teachers with at least five years of experience as well as specialized training in various subject areas.

In the small groups and one-on-one instruction, the teacher or an intervention specialist reteaches the lesson or uses another teaching method to help reinforce

important concepts the child might have missed.

The district currently has 10 intervention specialists assigned to 10 schools. One of them is Laura Sandeen, who works primarily with second and fourth grade teachers at Oakdale Elementary School. She uses diagnostic tests to identify the children who are struggling and she teaches small groups.

"Teaching a small group helps me to identify issues a child may be having in reading right away," says Sandeen. "When you have just six kids, it's much easier to figure out where the issues are and address them."

This is the second year TRUSD has used MTSS. Christine Moran, the district's MTSS Coordinator, says early data indicates academic growth is occurring in areas like phonics and vocabulary at MTSS-targeted schools.

"We recognize in education that we need to support students," says Moran, "and this gives us a very structured way of providing the support and making sure that we're doing everything we can for students to be successful in class."

CREATING A POSITIVE CULTURE ON CAMPUS



Spotlight on Activity Directors

by Amanda Caraway

In 2016, Twin Rivers Unified School District took steps to expand student activities by appointing a full-time activity director at each junior high and high school.

"The activity directors support a positive campus culture, advise student clubs, give out achievement awards and coordinate major events," says Craig Murray, Executive Director of Student Engagement for Twin Rivers.

Heather Coburn, Activity Director at Norwood Junior High, says her primary role is to support and guide the student leadership class.

"I work with the leaders to create good experiences for all students, especially those typically less involved," says Coburn.

Student Body President Keishaun Balque says he ran for student government because he wanted to make a difference.

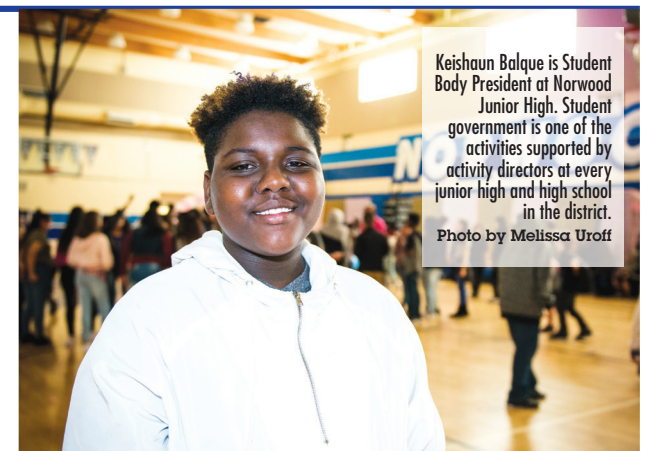
"I felt like there were a lot of things that needed to change," says Balque. "I decided instead of complaining about it, why not do something about it?"

Balque's favorite activity is when the leadership brings a DJ a few days before school dances to play music during lunch. This allows all students to dance and have fun without the pressure of finding a date.

"It's a good time," he says. "Everybody gets along, and there are no arguments."

Coburn says that 85 percent of students at her school are involved in activities, and this correlates with higher test scores.

Samantha Switzler, Activity Director at Foothill High, has also seen grades improve. One of her favorite activities are incentive lunches, held once per month to reward



Keishaun Balque is Student Body President at Norwood Junior High. Student government is one of the activities supported by activity directors at every junior high and high school in the district.
Photo by Melissa Uroff

students with a GPA of 3.0 or those who have improved their GPA by five points.

Like Coburn, Switzler works with her student leaders to focus on reaching all students, not just a select few. For example, they've started having a video game truck at student dances.

"Some kids don't like to dance and they want to just hang out with friends," says Switzler. "This way, everyone can come to the dance and not worry."



TRUSD students visit the Aerospace Museum of California in 2017.
File photo by Anne Stokes



ENGAGED STUDENTS DO BETTER

Every student gets the chance to shine with districtwide engagement programs

by Amanda Caraway

In an effort to bring enrichment opportunities to all students, Twin Rivers Unified School District has developed an extensive program to help students feel more connected to the school and the material they learn in the classroom.

“Through these programs they get to experience things that they would otherwise only read about,” says Craig Murray, Executive Director of Student Engagement at TRUSD.

Murray credits the Twin Rivers Board of Trustees and the Superintendent with recognizing that all students deserve these opportunities, not just those who can raise the funds or whose parents can pay for it.

“Every student deserves the opportunity to be successful and find a way to connect and engage,” says Teresa Rowan, Director of Co-curricular Activities and Teacher Induction at TRUSD.

Rowan says it’s rewarding to see teachers engage with students who are difficult to reach in the classroom.

“Learning outside the classroom allows students to connect to the content in a much deeper and more meaningful way,” says Rowan.

Engagement programs include field trips that tie into the curriculum for each grade, such as visits to science centers, museums and state historical sites. Sixth-graders have a special opportunity to participate in a three-day, overnight science camp.

“For many students, this is their first time away from home,” says Rowan. “A lot of kids are nervous to go, but they come back with a glow and amazing stories about their experiences.”

As proof that these activities are important to students, Murray received a thank

you note from a student who recently immigrated from Syria.

“In his letter, he told us how much it meant to have these experiences after only being in America for a short time,” says Murray.

“Every student deserves the opportunity to be successful and find a way to connect and engage. Some can do that in the classroom and others cannot.”

Teresa Rowan
Director of Co-curricular Activities and Teacher Induction at TRUSD

TO MARS AND BEYOND: A SAMPLE OF ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Twin Rivers students have access to enrichment programs and activities throughout the school year. These include field trips to the **Powerhouse Science Center** and the **California Museum**, gold-panning and cultural performances like **The Nutcracker**. The tickets are paid for by the district, so that all students can attend.

Some of the District’s biggest engagement events are **Lego Robotics** and **Mars Day**. Junior high and high school students from around the district compete to win ribbons and trophies by applying STEM principles (science, technology, engineering and math) in a fun way. For example, the theory behind Mars Day is to ensure students know everything they would need to know if they were stranded on Mars.

Another favorite program is the **Special Olympics**, which gives special needs students the opportunity to compete and be recognized. This year the district is sponsoring track and field events, and next year they hope to expand and include more events like soccer.



STAR STAFF

Meet 3 TRUSD professionals who are raising the bar for student achievement

by Gail Allyn Short



Janet Weiner
Office Manager, Sierra View Elementary



Favorite TV Show: "Seinfeld"

Favorite Food: Mexican

Favorite Entertainer: Jimmy Buffett

Favorite Hobbies: Reading mysteries, playing Scrabble



Lupe Gonzalez
Sixth grade teacher, Rio Tierra Junior High School



Favorite Movie: "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks"

Favorite Subject to Teach: History

Favorite Foods: Pad thai and sushi

Favorite music: Mexican music



John Kahn
School Resource Officer, TRUSD Police Department



Favorite Authors: Arthur C. Clarke, J.R.R. Tolkien

Favorite Foods: Breakfast and cheeseburgers!

Favorite Music: 1970s Motown

Favorite Entertainers: Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Katharine Hepburn

Janet Weiner is one of the first faces you see at Sierra View Elementary. "I greet our children and their parents," says Weiner, who landed the job as office manager two years ago after working various other positions in the district since 1993. "I enroll new students, and I assist the principal with any tasks she may have."

Her days are busy, but Weiner says she enjoys helping out her fellow staff members, students and parents.

"I love being able to help them whenever they're in a pinch and need something done real quick. But the kids are the highlight of the day," she says. "It's why you do what you do."

Her favorite memory is when a former student, an eighth grader, paid a visit to his old school. Weiner, however, was out of the office at the time.

"But he left a note on my desk," says Weiner, "and he said, 'You were like my mother.' It was so touching to me that he looked at me as that kind of figure who could guide him and be there for him unconditionally. That's something I won't forget."

Watercolor Chinese "tapestries" and shoebox biome models of arctic environments decorate Lupe Gonzalez's sixth grade classroom. Nearby she displays exemplary test scores, which she adorns with smiling faces drawn with red pen. It's through these kinds of hands-on projects and positive reinforcement that she makes learning fun for her students.

"I really like engaging with the students," she says. "I like it when they get excited ... especially when they don't know a lot of the material and all of a sudden they get it and they're like, 'Pick me! I know this this time.'"

While it's important to keep things fun in the classroom, Gonzalez has found that meaningful relationships are just as important to learning. Especially during the turbulent times that all adolescents face, she says it's important to encourage students with positivity.

"There's so much to being a teacher — there's actually teaching in front of a classroom, but it's also building relationships," she says. "My first year teaching, my principal told me, 'Always teach as if parents were in the room.' ... I always keep that in mind. I don't have children, but how would I want my child to be treated?"

John Kahn spends his days making sure students, teachers and other staff members are safe.

Kahn says he works primarily with the Student Services Department's Child Welfare and Attendance team, which helps students who are in foster care and those experiencing problems such as behavior and attendance issues or homelessness. He also works with outside resources and agencies to respond to truancy, welfare or other school-related issues.

"We have several success stories of our students and families," he says. "Watching our students go on to their own achievements is truly a great experience."

He says his duties as an officer also include school site coverage, being on hand for special events, and handling any safety concerns at a school.

After almost 25 years on the job, Kahn says he still loves his career.

"Working for the school district, from the employees to the students, families and other community members, is a wonderful experience in local community involvement," he says.



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