

Whittier Union High School District

Serving the communities of
Whittier, Santa Fe Springs and
portions of Norwalk, La Mirada,
and La Habra Heights

Winter 2011

A Legacy of Excellence

Whittier High School Wins Golden Bell Award

Whittier High School received the prestigious Golden Bell Award from the California School Boards Association (CSBA) for its innovative daily schedule that provides students with tutorial time (embedded support) during classes, thus increasing students' academic success.

"As a result of our embedded support within class periods, students get the teacher time and assistance they need to succeed and receive a clear message that they will not be allowed to fail," said Whittier High School Principal Lori Eshilian. "Student success has soared!"

Whittier High School's vision is to support all students in completing the courses required for entrance into the University of California and California State University systems, known as the A-G college entrance requirements. In 2006, Whittier High School's faculty identified the need for addi-

tional intervention time for those students who were not successful.

Faculty also expressed the need for time to develop effective Professional Learning Communities that would continue to align curriculum to state standards, develop common assessments across all curricular areas, and conduct thorough data analysis in order to improve teaching practices and increase student success.

Through a collaborative brainstorming session, the administrative team came up with a creative adaptation of a traditional blocked bell schedule that has added 20 minutes of embedded support time to every class period, Tuesday through Friday, as well as a 90-minute common teacher planning time on a Monday "late start" schedule.



Whittier High School administrators with the school's CSBA Golden Bell Award. From left, Dean Randy Castillo, Assistant Principal of Guidance and Attendance Devon Monson, Principal Lori Eshilian, Assistant Principal of Business and Activities Nicki Buchholz, New Horizons Director Chris Cortez and Assistant Principal of Curriculum Bill Schloss.

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Whittier Union Awarded \$500,000 Competitive Federal Grant

Whittier Union recently was awarded a \$500,000 grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT) Competitive Grant Program.

Whittier Union won the grant based on its proposal to use the federal funds to further the District's efforts to increase students' readiness for college and careers by expanding its current use of technology in the classroom and in its analysis of student performance data, school officials said. Only 28 out of the 99 Los Angeles County districts or charter schools eligible for the grant received funding.

"We are determined to further increase our students' readiness for college and careers and the Enhancing Education Through Technology grant will help us in this endeavor," said Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson.

"A successful comprehensive high school education creates readiness in both college and careers. Strong academic skills in literacy, mathematics and critical thinking skills will prepare our students for whatever career they choose. Technology is an important tool in helping us accomplish this goal."

Whittier Union is uniquely qualified to make good use of the one-time funds because it already has 14 career academies in place on its campuses that are directly connected to the curriculum and career internships. The District also utilizes computer technology extensively to collect and analyze student achievement data and then uses that information on an ongoing basis to continually improve classroom instruction.

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Whittier Union High School District

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Superintendent's Message



Sandra Thorstenson
Superintendent

The fall semester has been a whirlwind of activities and accolades for our students and schools in Whittier Union. Our latest student achievement data show that we continue to climb to new heights in our California State Academic Performance Index (API) and other measures of student success.

The District's overall API has reached 765. Our students are mastering the state standards at more advanced levels and reaching higher levels of success in their classes. And more of our students are completing the course requirements necessary for entrance in to the University of California and California State University systems.

We know that this has been possible through the dedicated efforts of all Whittier Union teachers, staff and administrators who continue to work collaboratively to build on the foundation of reform that we began eight years ago through our Whatever It Takes initiative. We're excited that Whittier High School's Golden Bell Award recognizes one of the most significant innovations of our reform effort – block schedules that provide tutorial time within class periods and have helped our students succeed.

While our students' success is always our greatest reward, it has been encouraging and gratifying to share our work with those who want to learn more about how we have implemented our initiative with such positive results.

Recently, I was asked to make a presentation on Whittier Union's work to the Board of Directors of WestEd, a non-profit, multi-state agency dedicated to promoting excellence and equity in education through research and development. Whittier Union was one of eight school districts in the state selected to present because of its long-term high performance, and we were the only high school district included among these districts. I was grateful for the opportunity to represent Whittier Union and share our story.

Also, Ray McNulty, who is a noted educational researcher and President of the International Center for Leadership in Education, came to observe our classrooms and analyze our data to find out

more about Whittier Union's work. The confirmation of our efforts by outside experts, such as Dr. McNulty, who enthusiastically endorse our strategies, breathes important energy into our system.

As you will read in this newsletter, we recently received a \$500,000 federal grant to increase our students' readiness for college and careers. These funds will assist us in refining and expanding the work we began eight years ago. Now it will be easier for us to deepen our initiative efforts with professional development sessions that identify the most successful instructional practices through the careful analysis of our District's student achievement data. We will also be able to place more technology in the classroom and at the fingertips of our teachers and students whose learning will accelerate as they use these powerful, educational tools.

That said, we continue to face the state fiscal crisis, which has certainly hurt with the loss of \$17 million during the last four years. While the state budget outlook remains uncertain, more cuts to public education seem inevitable. Our mission, however, has not wavered. We remain dedicated to saving as many jobs as possible and cutting expenditures through every other means. While state budget cuts have hurt us, they have not depleted our passion for our work and genuine commitment to our students. Our dedicated team of Whittier Union teachers, staff and administrators stand united and resolved to continue to do the very best for our students.

DISTRICT WEBSITE ADDS INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

The District has launched a new Parents section of the WUHSD website and a new Parent Portal. The Parent Portal gives parents secure access to their students' grades, attendance, transcripts, teacher gradebooks, and more.

The Parents section of the website provides parents with important WUHSD parent resources in one convenient location. There is also a grow-

ing library of helpful outside resources for parents. This area will continue to expand over the next couple of years and updates will be made often, so parents are encouraged to check the site frequently.

For more information on these exciting new features, please go to <http://www.wuhd.org> and click on the Parents tab at the top of the website page.

Laurie Atkinson Chosen Teacher of the Year

Each year, the District chooses one teacher who personifies the spirit and achievement of Whittier Union to be named Teacher of the Year. For the 2010-11 school year, that teacher is Laurie Atkinson, Chair of the Physical Education Department at Whittier High School.

"As department chair of Physical Education, Laurie is the soul and the strength of her department," said Whittier High School Principal Lori Eschilian. "She provides the organization, structure, and consistency of the department's practices and procedures. She leads by example and demonstrates the highest work ethic and professionalism. She works well with her team of teachers, and is highly respected by students, parents, and faculty."

As chair of the P.E. Department, Atkinson developed and directed a systematic program for providing physical fitness education within Whit-

tier High School's innovative block schedule, which has had a dramatic impact on the students' completion of course credits required for graduation. Her efforts have also resulted in students' improved fitness levels.

In coordination with Whittier High's "writing across the curriculum" program, she has also instituted common writing assignments for all students in P.E. to support students' mastery of content standards. She has been consistent and reliable in maintaining the standard for writing within Physical Education.

"We greatly appreciate the tremendous difference Laurie has made for her school and the students at Whittier High," said Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson. "She has helped specifically with providing student support and collegial planning for the Physical Education Department. Student grades and physical fitness in Whittier High's

P.E. Department have improved significantly under Laurie's leadership."

Atkinson says that it was with the help of her department staff, as well as the Whittier High School administration, that she was able to change the P.E. program at Whittier.

"I love teaching P.E., I love the kids, and I love the people I work with," said Atkinson. "I am extremely honored to be recognized as the Teacher of the Year and continue to enjoy doing what I do."



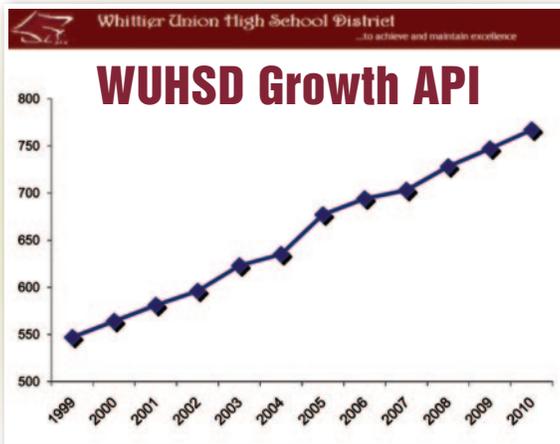
Laurie Atkinson

Students Achieving Higher Levels of Excellence

Whittier Union students' state test scores continued to soar in 2009-10. The District's scores on the California State Academic Performance Index (API) have increased steadily by more than 100 points over the last eight years, with the current overall API now at 765, according to the California State Department of Education (CDE).

La Serna High School students achieved the biggest gain in 2010, with an increase of 22 points for an API of 821, propelling the Lancers over the state target of 800; the first WUHSD school to reach that milestone.

Santa Fe High School students' scores raised the school's API by 15 points to 786. California High School had an API of 775, which is 4 points above last year's API. Pioneer High



School's API rose 16 points to 715, while Whittier High School posted an API score of 762, a 16 point improvement from last year's score.

Whittier Union administrators attribute students' steady rise in academic achievement to the District's "Whatever it Takes" initiative that began eight years ago. The initiative involved creating Professional Learning Communities, where teachers work together to develop common assessments and then share data from those tests to determine what teaching strategies work best in order to improve classroom instruction. In addition, each school provides comprehensive student support services and uses an alternative bell schedule to allow for required tutorial time during the school day.

Pioneer High School Celebrates 50th Anniversary

Pioneer High School marked its 50th Anniversary with a week of festivities that culminated in a daylong celebration at the campus that included a rededication of the school, lighting of a new Titan Torch, campus tours, food booths and a fireworks display.

More than 200 alumni, teachers, administrators, students, staff and community leaders gathered on the school's new quad for the rededication, which included performances by the Pioneer High School Marching Band and National Championship-winning Drill Team.

In his welcome, Gilbert Castañeda, Jr., president of the Pioneer High School Alumni Association, noted that when the school opened in September of 1959, there were 900 students, sawdust on the floors and no doors on the classrooms. But it was the first Pioneer students who established the Pioneer traditions still celebrated today, such as the Titan Torch, and annual Titanette Review, he said.

"This is a momentous occasion during which we can celebrate Pioneer's successes of the last 50



Pioneer's Championship Winning Drill Team performed for the school's 50th Anniversary celebration.

years," said Castañeda. "We commend our alumni and ask current and future students to uphold our traditions for the next 50 years."

During the ceremony, Whittier Union High School District Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson, who began her teaching career at Pioneer High School, remarked upon the beauty of the remodeled campus.

"But what is even more remarkable is what is happening inside the classroom as a result of the hard work and dedication of the teachers, staff

and administrators at Pioneer," Thorstenson said. "We are pleased with the accomplishments the school continues to make."

Pioneer Principal Monica Oviedo commented on Pioneer's historic past and its promising present marked by a continuing rise in academic achievement.

"Titans' connects to our nation's historical roots and its exploration into space. Pioneer's first principal, Mr. Jack Jines, joined us from national service as a member of the Atomic Energy Commission, numerous alumni are and have served in all branches of the armed forces, and six students – two each from the classes of 1964, '65, and '66 – made the ultimate sacrifice by giving their lives in the Vietnam War," Oviedo said.

The new Titan Torch, designed by Doug Christian of the class of 1963 when he was a senior, was lighted by his brother, John Christian, because he could not attend the ceremony. Former Pioneer Principal Jerry Haines and Pioneer Drill Team Director Marilyn Littlefield joined John Christian in the lighting of the torch.

Santa Fe High School Named Top AVID National Demonstration Site

Santa Fe High School was recently re-validated as a National Demonstration School for AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a college-readiness system designed to increase the number of students who enroll in four-year colleges.

"We are proud that Santa Fe High School has again been named one of the top AVID programs in the nation and will continue to be a role model for other AVID programs," said Santa Fe High School Principal Kevin Jamero. "While we currently serve about 250 students through AVID, we use AVID strategies schoolwide in order to create a college-going culture."

AVID has existed at Santa Fe High School for almost 20 years and was first selected as a National Demonstration School in 2007. After observing Santa Fe's AVID program in December, the AVID committee decided that Santa Fe should maintain their status as a demonstration school for three more years – the longest term possible. Santa Fe High will continue to serve as a model for teachers and administrators from schools across the country that are in the process of implementing or refining AVID programs at their sites.

Although AVID serves all students, it focuses on the least served students in the academic middle. The formula is simple – raise expectations

of students and, with the AVID support system in place, they will rise to the challenge.

AVID students are enrolled in their school's toughest classes, such as Advanced Placement, and receive support in an AVID academic elective class taught within the school day by a trained AVID teacher. In the accelerated elective class, AVID students receive support through a rigorous curriculum and ongoing, structured tutorials. AVID elective teachers support AVID students by providing academic training, managing their tutorials, working with faculty and parents, and by helping students develop long-range academic and personal plans.

Today, AVID has been adopted by nearly 4,500 schools in 47 states, the District of Columbia and 16 countries/territories, and serves approximately 400,000 students in grades 4-12. Within Whittier Union, Whittier and Pioneer high schools also offer AVID.

"Being named a National Demonstration School provides an opportunity for both Santa Fe High School and our District to showcase the outstanding work that is being done for our students," said Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson.

California High School to Open Remodeled Quad

Modernization Update

Whittier Union's schools now benefit from beautifully remodeled Quads, updated classrooms with access to technology, new cafeterias, and multipurpose areas. This work will continue as the District completes the projects funded by Measure C and begins more work with funds designated for this purpose under Measure W. As required, these funds can only be used for construction projects that improve campus facilities and cannot be used for instructional purposes. However, providing clean, beautiful, safe and positive campuses conducive to learning is essential to overall student success.

California High School students will soon be enjoying a completely remodeled large Quad featuring brick pavers, amphitheater-style seating and a stage for school events as well as all new landscaping accented by a row of tall palm trees. The school's new cafeteria is now open and running and features food-court service, a brand new kitchen with walk-in refrigerator and freezer, improved ADA access and new tables and chairs.

Work is also completed on a gleaming, new Associated Student Body room and offices for the Assistant Principal of Business and Activities. The Guidance office has moved to Building J and the old space has been converted into classrooms.

Construction has begun on new administrative offices near the new student entrance and will be completed in 2012. Contracts have been awarded for the remodeling of art, music and other classrooms.

Pioneer High School now boasts a beautiful, modernized Quad with the Titan logo in the center entrance made from terrazzo, a new Titan torch, pep stage and covered eating area. Under Measure W funds, plans are in the works for an innovative new athletic stadium that will serve spectators of football, baseball and other events utilizing the same facility and its amenities. The west side of the building will feature seating stands facing the football field, while the north side will provide seating for baseball games. Both Pioneer and Santa Fe high schools will benefit from this project. California High School's stadium will also be remodeled using Measure W funds.

Santa Fe High School now has four remodeled classrooms. Two will be used as computer labs and the other two as art classes. And construction will begin soon on the school's new science building that will feature four, high-end science labs. That



California High School's Quad nears completion.

project is set to be completed by February, 2012.

La Serna High School will be converting its weight room and exercise room into four large classrooms to serve the campus' main level. Classrooms featuring an enviroplex design will be built on the upper athletic field level for the weight room, exercise room and bathrooms for more convenient access.

Whittier High School will soon sport a new practice field on south campus as demolition of Building T is now complete. The project will feature new wrought-iron fencing and landscaping and is part of an ongoing beautification project for south campus.

La Serna High School's Water Polo Team Honored

La Serna High School's Boys Water Polo Team and its coaches recently received special recognition from the Board of Trustees for winning the school's first CIF Championship in the sport.

"We are so proud of Coach Jeff Padgett and all of the boys for their accomplishment," said La Serna High School Principal Drew Passalacqua. "They are the first CIF Water Polo champions La Serna has ever had."

The La Serna High School Aquatics Program has historically been strong in Boys Water Polo.



La Serna High School's Boys Water Polo team

The team has played in seven CIF championship games, winning the Division 5 title in November with a 17-9 decision over Pasadena Poly.

Padgett was also voted CIF Boys Water Polo Coach of the Year and La Serna team member Aaron Valdes was chosen CIF Boys Water Polo Player of the Year. Padgett said the team goes through rigorous training throughout the year, including 5:30 a.m. workouts.

"They deserve the honor of being the first La Serna Water Polo team to win a CIF title," Padgett said.

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As a result, the A-G completion rate has increased from 27.1% in 2006 to 44.9% in 2009. Whittier High School's "on target rate" to graduate has also increased from 77.2% in 2005-06 to 91.3% in 2009-10, which is the highest school wide on target rate in the District. Over this same

period of time, Whittier High School's API scores have increased by 63 points and its similar school ranking has moved from a 5 to a 9, school officials said.

The block schedule quickly became a model for the District. Today, all of the District's comprehensive high schools have an alternative bell schedule that provides for daily embedded support for stu-

dents and weekly professional collaboration time.

"We're thrilled that Whittier High School received the Golden Bell Award for its pioneering efforts," said Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson. "Our teachers came together to solve a problem and came up with a creative, innovative and positive solution that benefited not only Whittier High School, but also all of our District schools."

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"One of the main keys to our success with our 'Whatever It Takes' initiative has been our use of student performance data to define and share successful teaching strategies" Thorstenson said. "The grant will allow us to deepen our efforts in this area and take our initiative to the next level."

As required by the grant, 25% of the federal funds will be spent on training teachers. Funds may also be used to buy digital equipment and materials. The District will also be able to provide students with access to University

of California-approved online courses that will assist them in completing college-required courses.

"We will now have the funds to train more teachers in more subject areas on how to use current and new technology to develop strategies that help our students successfully complete college-required coursework," said Carlye Olsen, Whittier Union's Director of Accountability, Staff Development, and Education Technology. "We will also be able to incorporate technology such as interactive white boards and student response systems into more classrooms to ensure that all students are learning at high levels."