



Press Release

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Whittier Union Freshman Fresh Start Offers New Students a Smooth Transition to High School

WHITTIER – The transition from middle to high school can be difficult for students who are having trouble acclimating to the new academic rigors. Sierra Vista High School, Whittier Union’s independent study campus, provides a bridge for these students through the Freshman Fresh Start program.

Launched in 2013 by Sierra Vista teachers Larry Neberman and Jenn Useda, Freshman Fresh Start is designed to support ninth-graders who are behind in credits, have poor attendance or need one-on-one teacher support. Students are recruited primarily from the Whittier Area Community Day School.

“There are many reasons that students fail to connect in middle school,” Useda said. “They don’t have the best social navigation skills or they feel they aren’t academically inclined. We let these students know that they have a place to go at Sierra Vista. We’re not concerned about their past, only what they can achieve in the future. Freshman Fresh Start is exactly that – a fresh start.”

The program, which can accommodate up to 35 students a year, includes a-g college prep courses and teaches the same curriculum as what is taught at the comprehensive high schools.

“I honestly believe that Fresh Start will help me gain credits and go back to my regular high school,” Sierra Vista freshman Jonathan Barradas said. “The teachers are nice.”

Students attend one homeroom class, where Neberman and Useda teach four core subjects (English, math, biology and physical education) and two electives (living skills and child development). Classroom distractions are kept at a minimum and the personalized learning approach helps students bolster their academic and social skill sets. About half of the students return to their home schools or stay at Sierra Vista to study independently.

“Fresh Start is helping me catch up on my work and helping me understand that school isn’t supposed to be fun time,” Sierra Vista freshman Humberto Perez said. “It’s supposed to be about getting your work done and finish what you need to do.”

At the end of each school year, Neberman and Useda go to the Day School and introduce themselves to students and parents, offering their support to those who are struggling academically and socially.

“On the first day of school, we meet with the students and tell them, ‘You are smart,’” Useda said. “For many of our students, just the idea that they can have success in school is a tremendous boost to their

confidence. For parents, we have an open-door policy. They are welcome on campus at any time and we invite them to join their children in the classroom if they want to.”

The result for many Sierra Vista freshmen is better social skills, better grades, a restoration of confidence and new friends.

“Freshman Fresh Start is an invaluable resource for the Whittier community, helping to change the lives of students who are in danger of falling through the cracks and putting them on the path to being lifelong learners,” Sierra Vista Director Nicki Buchholz said. “Larry Neberman and Jenn Useda have done an amazing job of identifying these students, bringing them into the program and working hard to help them achieve their academic goals.”

PHOTO CAPTION

111618_WUHSD_FRESHSTART: Launched in 2013 by Sierra Vista teachers Larry Neberman and Jenn Useda, Freshman Fresh Start is designed to support ninth-graders who are behind in credits, have poor attendance or need one-on-one teacher support. The result for many Sierra Vista freshmen is better social skills, better grades, a restoration of confidence and new friends.

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The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

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