



## Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Whittier Union Teachers Learn New Strategies, Share Successes in the Classroom

**WHITTIER, CA** – In anticipation of another rigorous year at the Whittier Union High School District, instructors are spending their summer months attending professional development workshops at the Sierra Education Center, breaking into teams and setting an ambitious agenda designed to continually enhance teacher development and student achievement.

The District-wide summer professional development program involves five week-long district team sessions along with site team planning days. Both the District and site teams work on modifying and refining common assessments, incorporating technology and sharing effective classroom strategies.

This work will help prepare students for the Smarter Balanced tests, which assess students' understanding of content under the rigorous California Standards. All 11th-grade students will complete the exams in the spring.

“The professional development workshops are teachers teaching teachers, evaluating what has worked in the classroom, sharing successful instructional methods and identifying areas where students need additional support,” said Carlye Olsen, Director of Accountability, Staff Development and Curriculum.

The summer sessions, now in their eighth year, are a traditional Whittier Union activity and have proved very effective in helping the District increase graduation rates and close the achievement gap.

As Whittier Union continues implementing the new standards, teachers are continually being challenged to help students reach deeper levels of understanding of the core subjects – social studies, math, science, English and world language.

The sessions provide a blend of new information, independent reflection and open discussion in which teacher groups working across school boundaries assemble to brainstorm ideas, share resources and discuss instructional strategies. Teachers learn from those whose classes or departments showed promising achievement on previous assessments.

“It’s a simple concept: teachers learn more, students learn more,” Olsen said. “We trust the collaboration and have seen amazing results because of it.”

The program is facilitated by Olsen and Dan Esquerra, Coordinator of Curriculum and Assessment, along with a team of teacher leaders, called support coaches, who assist their colleagues with the intricacies of collaborative work.

During a session over English week, teachers sat in small groups, talking animatedly about blending Google Classroom platforms into their curriculum, while researching and creating sample audio questions – the type which is used on the new standardized tests.

“The District really embraces collaboration,” said Martin Mathews, a science teacher at Pioneer High School and a Curriculum Assessment Coach. “We facilitate discussion and disseminate information among the teacher leaders and their teams. They set their own agenda for the week, eager to implement new innovations into their classrooms.”

Though the meetings are not mandatory, the participation rate among teachers is exceptional; last year, Whittier Union High School District teachers spent more than 13,800 hours in these summer sessions, with 89 percent of teachers working at the District with their colleagues for a week

The work will continue during the school year through each department’s weekly course team sessions and District Best Practices sessions held quarterly for each core subject.

“This is a practice that is valued across Whittier Union and has established the foundation for our students’ remarkable academic success at every high school over the years,” Superintendent Sandra Thorstenson said. “The collaborative efforts of our faculty and staff, who are dedicated to improving every facet of our students’ learning experiences, are crucial to helping our students master the skills they need to succeed in their post-secondary endeavors.”

**PHOTO CAPTION:**

**SESSIONS:** Pioneer High School science teacher and Curriculum Assessment Coach Martin Mathews, left, assists a colleague during a Whittier Union High School District professional development workshop training. The sessions have proved very effective in maintaining and furthering the District’s academic goals.

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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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