

The College Review

The newsletter of Think College Now, a college-focused small public elementary school

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Banana Slugs, Starfish, Coyotes, and Redwoods

Marin Headlands and Vida Verde trips expand Science Lab learning and environmental awareness

It's noon on Wednesday, and a Think College Now 4th-grader is asking Science Teacher Brenda Tuohy for a slice of apple. It looks like lunchtime, and it is – but for beetles.

"I guess they're vegetarians," says the student, dropping the apple in an aquarium and watching the beetle nibble. It's become a common scene in TCN's Science Lab: Every day, as many as a dozen kids spend their lunch hour with Ms. Tuohy, doing science, even though most have had their hour of science earlier in the day.

During this lunch hour, talk soon turns to the 5th-graders' three-night trip to the Marin Headlands Science Institute. "We did a night walk, went to the beach, and saw coyotes," recaps 5th-grader Christian. He then tosses in a geology term that goes right over the head of this reporter. "We also found the *carnelian* stone, a rock you can make a wish on."



It's a tribute to the Science Lab that kids possess vocabulary like this even before heading to the Headlands. "Before we went, Ms. Tuohy taught us what we were going to learn there," explains 5th-grader Dwight.

"In Marin, we learned all about metamorphic rocks and igneous rocks," adds Daniel. Tuohy recalls a student telling her, "Oh, now I understand sedimentary rocks!"

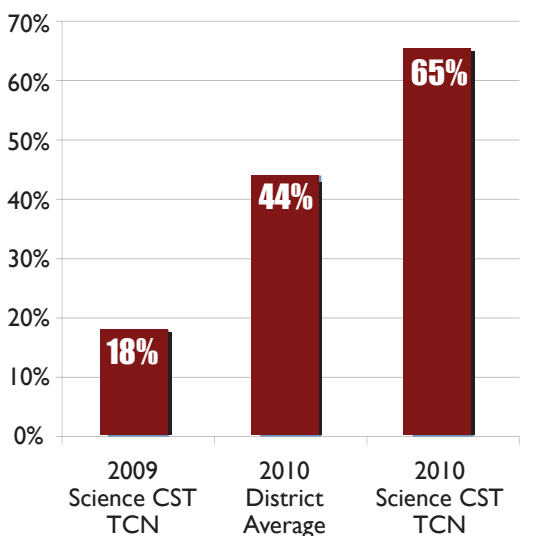
"It's hard when you're only seeing samples in a classroom," says Tuohy. "It's not the same as hiking on cliffs and seeing these things in their natural setting."

"It's different because you get to do hands-on things and see things not just in a picture or a book," reflects 5th-grader Maricela, who speaks of discovering sea slugs and starfish.

"In our group we saw a coyote three feet away from us!" says Rafael. "It's not every day you get to see a coyote," adds Dwight. "You can't just bring one into the school!"

Science Scores Soar!

Thanks to the new Science Lab, Think College Now's California Standards Test (CST) scores jumped dramatically in 2009-10! Sixty-five percent of students scored Proficient or higher on the Science CST, a remarkable 47-percentage point increase over last year.



Opening Doors

The trip also gets them thinking about the future. "Kids start asking, 'How do you get a job at a place like this?'" says Tuohy. "This leads to talking about different careers they might choose, and things they can do when they're older. We tell them, 'If you have a job and your own car, you can go to places like this whenever you want.'"

Due to state budget cuts, staff was forced to limit kids' stay to three nights in 2009-2010 – a compromise not lost on the students. "The past two years, they got to go for a week," says Maricela. "[I hope the kids next year get more time.] It would have been fun to stay and learn more!"

"The trip to Marin Headlands is truly a transformative experience for our kids," says 5th-grade teacher Madeline Noonan. "They go in with a mixture of excitement and nerves, and come out feeling so confident about their ability to be successful outside of their home environment...By the end of our time there, none of them want to leave!"

"It's their house..."

Spending time in the wilderness also underscores the difference between that environment and the urban setting of Oakland. "Kids start to question why there is so much litter in Oakland and why we see so many birds at the Headlands and not in the city," says Tuohy. "They also come back on a mission to change school lunches, after eating fresh food all week in Marin."

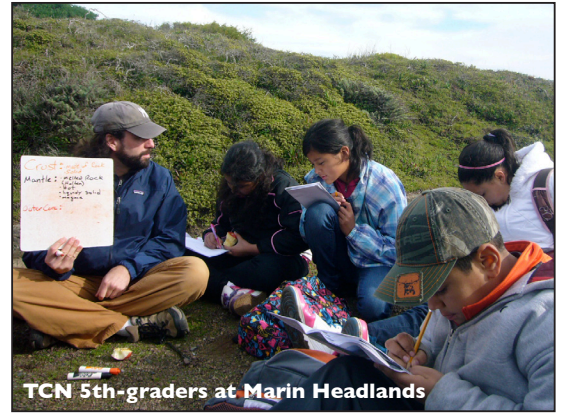
"Eating outside during lunch, you hear kids start saying, 'Don't leave a

crumb! One little crumb can affect the ecosystem," she says. "They really learn to respect the environment."

Similarly inspiring was the 4th-graders' three-day trip to Half Moon Bay for the Vida Verde Nature Education program. Among the non-stop nature activities: tide pooling, searching for salamanders and banana slugs, visiting a farm (including milking a goat), and hiking through the redwood forest.

Like the Headlands program, Vida Verde encourages a deeper respect for nature and our place in it. "I learned that we should treat animals well in nature because it's their house, not ours," says 4th-grader Kimberley.

"If you respect their house, they'll respect us," echoes 4th-grader Brenda. "It's not good to cut that many trees because birds live there."



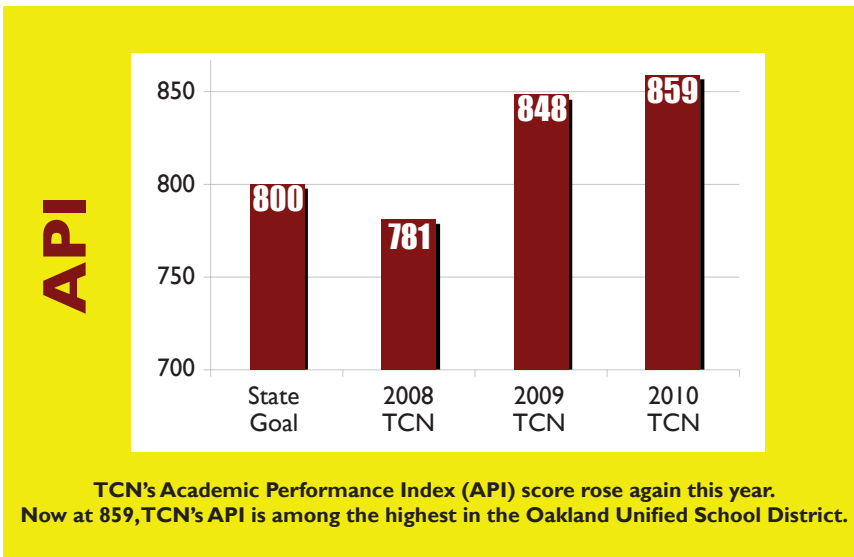
TCN 5th-graders at Marin Headlands

School-wide Science!

There's good news for TCN's youngest, too: This fall marks the expansion of science instruction to all grades at the school, with kindergarteners and 1st-graders also being taught in the Science Lab. (In 2009-10, classes in the Lab were only for 2nd- through 5th-graders.)

"As a 1st-grade teacher," says Caitlin Hanley, "I am constantly hearing the word 'why' from my students: 'Why is that shark in the book so big? Why did our plants in the terrarium dry up? Why is it cloudy today?'...Now, my students will have the chance to explore some of those questions themselves. They will get to touch the animals, they will get to grow the plants, and they will get to learn about the weather. But, perhaps most importantly, they will get to generate even more 'why's.'"

TCN's focus on science reflects a district-wide trend: Starting in 2010-11, all Oakland schools will increase the amount of time they spend teaching science. With its Science Lab and its plan to expand the program to all grades, TCN is proud to be ahead of the curve in this area.



SUPPORT TCN – JOIN TEAM FIVE!

In this time of unprecedented state cuts, TCN needs extra resources – all year long.

As we kick off the school year, we invite you to join Team Five and show your ongoing support!

To join the cause, visit www.thinkcollegenow.org/teamfive and set up a recurring \$5 monthly donation.

As a member, you'll receive a button, be invited to special Team Five events, and have your name displayed at the school.

Most importantly, your contributions will help fund key resources and activities such as the Marin Headlands and Vida Verde field trips.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

As always, you can also contribute to TCN through a regular donation by

visiting www.thinkcollegenow.org/donate or sending a check to "TCN/OSF," P.O. Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620.

