

# The College Review

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

THINK COLLEGE NOW

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## TCN's Science Lab Debuts! New space supports Oakland's budding botanists, chemists, and entomologists

Campaigns for elementary school Student Council positions often involve promises of "longer recess" or "pizza parties," but this fall's election at Think College Now featured a notable exception: One student ran for office on a platform of "MORE SCIENCE." While it's been open for only a few months, TCN Science Lab is clearly making an impact on campus.

The new classroom, filled with living creatures (crayfish, a hamster, beetles, a snake) and growing plants, offers students two intensive science periods a week. "I was really excited about this opportunity," says TCN Science Teacher Brenda Tuohy. Every school has access to FOSS kits, which provide a wealth of materials for teaching science. But, as Tuohy knows from her years teaching 5th grade, most schools must work science into daytime classes, a challenge for teachers already handling English, math, and other core content areas. Thanks to the Lab, says Tuohy, "kids will leave TCN with a very rich background in science I don't think they'd have if the responsibility was placed on their classroom teachers."

"It's really special for the kids to be in a classroom where they have all



4th-grader Diana with crayfish in TCN's new science lab

All photos © 2009 Hasain Rasheed

these things," she explains. "They're passionate about science now." As if on cue, 4th-graders Diana and Daniel rush in - during recess - and pluck two crayfish out of an aquarium. Diana handles the Lab's creatures so often that she carries her own hand sanitizer - or "hanitizer," as she's dubbed it.

"The kids really see themselves as scientists, not just twice a week but as they walk everywhere around the school." Surveying their surroundings with a scientist's eye, students have taken to digging in TCN's planter boxes for insects, using their newfound science knowledge to identify them. They recently found a caterpillar, set up a terrarium for it in the Lab, and went online to discover it was a species not native to California. A week later, they watched it form a chrysalis. "That they're doing that learning on their own is really exciting," says Tuohy. "It's been really inspiring to see just how engaged they are in the learning and how much they can really take on and handle and absorb."

Diana and Daniel can tell you everything there is to know about everything there is to know about pollination and seed dispersal, and they already see the value in a strong science foundation. "In college," says Diana, "if you want to learn about experiments, you have to learn how to do science first."

"You can make these weird creations if you know what science is," says Daniel.

After letting one of the crayfish have a go at typing up the notes for this article - "not strong enough," was the conclusion as it crawled around the keyboard - Diana revealed another benefit of the Science Lab: a sensitivity for other creatures and the environment. "When crayfish die, people eat them like shrimp. We shouldn't eat them because Mother Earth is all around us and Mother Earth is animals and trees. It's not fair for the animals," she says, placing it gently back in the water. "They have to live, not die."

Call 510-532-5500 to arrange a tour of Ms. Tuohy's Science Lab!



Students studying worms from a Foss Science Kit

# BEST FRIENDS AND LEADERS: 5th-Graders Ameerat and Hoai

"You know how they say opposites attract?" asks Ameerat "Well, that's us!" she says, taking a seat next to fellow 5th-grader Hoai. "When we met [as kindergarteners], we had *nothing in common.*" They say these last words in unison, a common occurrence for the two best friends. "But when we started getting to know each other, we were just like magnets," says Hoai.

The pair has made quite a duo through the years, representing the school on ABC7 News, in oratorical contests, and on Student Council. "This school has made me a lot more confident," reflects Ameerat. "Before I used to be shy and I'd sit in the back, but not anymore. TCN has helped me let my voice be heard."

This year, they both won spots on the Student Council - Ameerat as vice-president, and Hoai as publicist. "When I won, I didn't want to show it too much, I didn't want to be too proud," explains Ameerat. But later, she says, out of earshot of her classmates, "I screamed 'Yes, Yes!' I was screaming louder than people watching a football game."

"Representing TCN, I know I have to do a good job," says Ameerat. "It's an honor for them to pick me. In meetings we go to, I feel like - not to say powerful - but like I can do something for TCN." Hoai, as ever, has faith in her friend's role as vice-president: "A lot of people respect her because she respects the position and why it's important." For her part, Hoai plans to serve as publicist with "responsibility and *ganas* (dedication)", two of TCN's core values.



5th-graders Hoai and Ameerat in the library

Both speak of their passion for reading, particularly the *Harry Potter* series. "[Those books] make me adventurous and believe anything is possible," says Ameerat. "[Reading *Harry Potter*], I had chills running up my spine," recalls Hoai. "I like books that give you imagination."

**"TCN has helped me let my voice be heard."**

"My mom doesn't like it," muses Ameerat. "Maybe adults don't have the imagination for it!"

As the pair looks ahead to middle school and beyond, they clearly feel TCN has prepared them well. The school's "electives," designed to mimic college courses, have allowed them to explore a variety of creative pursuits. "I've always wanted to make a website," says Ameerat. "That's one of my goals."

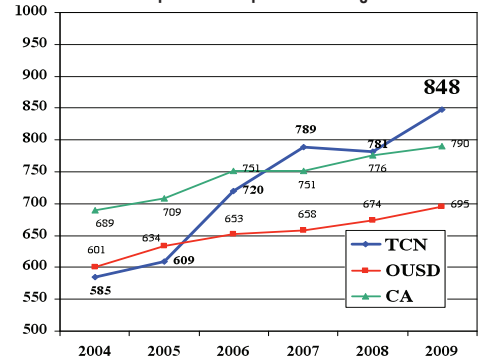
"I've always loved art, so every elective I choose has art in it," explains Hoai. "I really like origami."

"She's like an expert," says Ameerat. "TCN gets you ready for the next level," says Hoai. "It prepares us for middle school and has taught me a lot about college: applications, dorms, studying abroad."

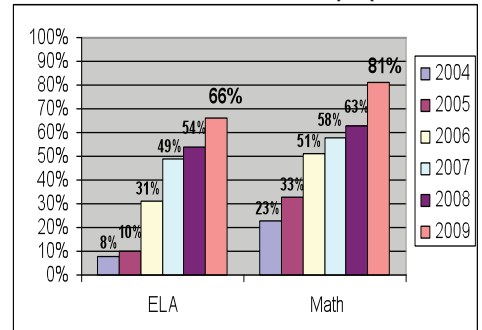
"I made an oath that I would go to college," Ameerat recently told ABC7 News when the school was featured for breaking 800 on the Academic Performance Index (API). "And I plan on keeping that promise."

## WE DID IT! TCN's API is 848!

Since opening in 2003, TCN's API has risen more than 250 points to surpass the state goal of 800



Percent of TCN students who score Proficient and Advanced on the California State Test (CST) over time



## SUPPORT TCN!

Both Hoai and Ameerat are part of the 5th-grade group going to the Marin Headlands Science Institute in January, but due to budget challenges, the trip had to be shortened this year. 2010-11 looks to be even worse, putting this and other horizon-expanding trips in jeopardy. You can help fund these trips through a one-time or recurring tax-deductible donation at [www.thinkcollegenow.org/donate](http://www.thinkcollegenow.org/donate) or by sending a check to

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