



# Strong Strategies, Successful Students

*Implementing strong teaching strategies helped this school go from struggling to successful*

Noralto Elementary School  
Twin Rivers Unified School District  
Sacramento, California

*What were the key things that were implemented that you feel are responsible for your successes?*



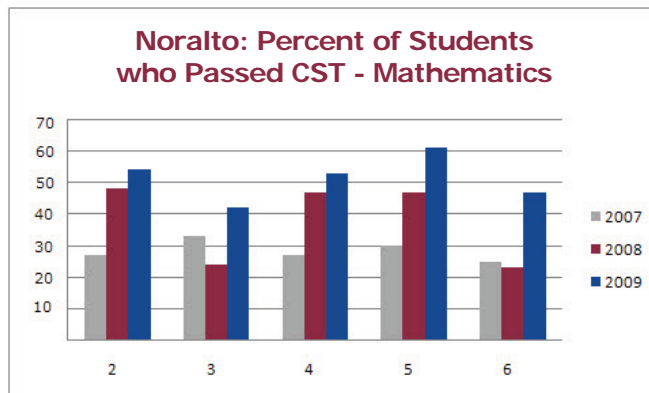
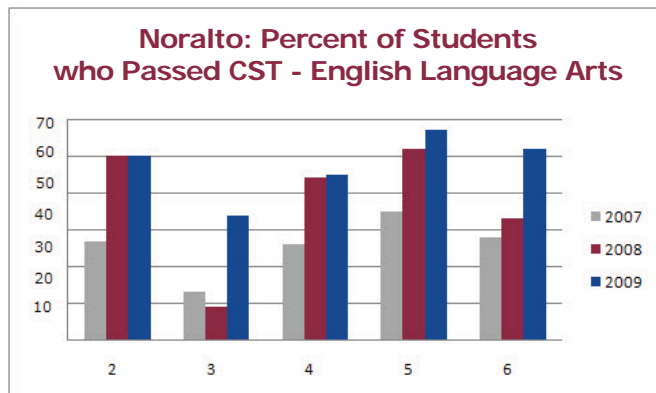
“I heard wonderful things ... about this elementary school and I wanted to come here and just see it for myself and hear about their great success story, how well you are doing with your grades,” said California’s Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger during a visit to Noralto Elementary School in Sacramento, California. Brad Allen, principal of Noralto, and the staff who have been part of the recent improvement of the school attribute the school’s remarkable gains on the California Standards Test (CST) to staff development, re-teaching and enrichment and a commitment to helping their students achieve.

*David Weichert – Grade 5:* “We’re using the Galileo benchmarks and several years ago when we first started, we were P11 (Program Improvement, year one). Back then I didn’t have a good sense of where my students were ... and then we started up with Galileo ... Year after year in fifth grade we’re spending more and more time not just giving the benchmarks, but **we find the vital teaching tool is the review of the benchmark assessments.** The *Detailed Item Analysis Report* tells you question by question, ‘37 percent of your class picked ‘A’ and the answer was ‘D.’ But it gives me a chance to come back to my class and say, ‘What was the confusion?’ ... And that’s **my number one message, that year after year I’ve gotten more and more refined** to where I can nail it pretty much on the head and start looking at the questions before I talk to the students and I’m starting to already predict, ‘This is what they’re going to tell me.’ ”

*Cathie Vail – Grade 5:* “With the benchmarks I find that it helps me to teach the students strategies to figure out where they’re going with questions in connection with the benchmarks and then to use the strategies to take the CSTs and be able to use those strategies to help them and take the questions apart.”

*Brad Allen – Principal:* “[David and Cathie] both know where their kids are inside and out. What they’ve learned, what they need to learn, what they don’t need to teach because they already have that skill down ... there is some incredibly great teaching going on and some very strong strategies in place. **When I walk into rooms, I always see every single student on task and engaged.**”

*Barbara Gebhart – Grade 2:* “I think what we’re doing right is that teachers need to know what an essential standard is. And I think we have a good grasp of what standards we need to teach at our grade level. We pick one standard a week and we focus on it. As we’re doing our regular material we can say, ‘Look! Here’s that standard.’”



**Galileo K-12 Online**

To read the full Q&A with Brad Allen and staff, visit <http://ati-online.com/success/noraltoQA.html>

Continued from front.

Michelle Bird – Grade 6: “[Our training with WestEd] allowed for me to fully understand each standard and how it is being assessed. **It helped make me a better teacher every single day.**”

*How did you identify students needing additional instructional assistance and what are the implemented interventions?*

Brad Allen – Principal: “One of the things we use heavily is the Cycle of Inquiry process. As you can imagine, **for a school to be successful you have to break down the walls.** We are very, very transparent with data walls in our staff lounge that teachers have taken to the student level and even have them in their rooms. **There isn’t a teacher on this site who can’t tell you what’s going on in another teacher’s classroom.** Within our data walls we can look at our subgroups and **make sure that all of our subgroups are achieving and going where they need to be.** We can see what students are struggling. If we have identified students who are basic or below, we have an intervention in place and anyone on staff can look at the data charts that are in our lounge and see what’s in place for those students. So the transparency is huge.”

“... anyone on staff can look at the data charts that are in our lounge and see what’s in place for those students [in need of intervention]. So the transparency is huge.  
-Brad Allen, Principal”

*What is the plan for elevating the achievement of students who are already sufficient or excelling? What kinds of enrichment opportunities are there for these students?*

David Weichert – Grade 5: “We give our formatives on our standards – we teach a standard for a week and then we give the formative that Friday. We separate our students and we have the remedial that need extra teaching. We also have the group that are advanced and we put them in an enrichment group where sometimes we focus on coming standards, we focus on integrating two or three standards, not just learning what a lesson, theme or moral is, but learning to write them yourself. That’s where we get some of our enrichment time for those who passed the formative.”

## School Accomplishments

- Received a rating of 10 out of 10 from the California Department of Education in the 2009 Similar Schools Rank.
- Academic Performance Index scores increased 55 points from 2008 to 2009.
- California’s Governor visited the school to give his congratulations for the school’s remarkable improvement on test scores, use of data to improve instruction, after school programs, and its community partnership.

*Any additional thoughts?*

Brad Allen – Principal: “I want to reiterate that these teachers are knowledgeable and they have the skills to do what needs to be done. They’re true professionals. They go above and beyond in order for our school to be successful. You have to have the majority of your **staff willing and wanting your school to be successful and truly caring about it. It’s very important for our students, parents and community to know that we care.**”

**About Noralto Elementary School:** Within a safe and orderly learning environment, Noralto School staff strives to enable its students to reach their highest potential by providing quality instruction while promoting good citizenship, social responsibility and appreciation of cultural diversity. ([twinriversusd.org/schools/noralto](http://twinriversusd.org/schools/noralto))

**About ATI:** Assessment Technology Incorporated through Galileo K-12 Online provides an easy-to-use, fully integrated instructional improvement system that combines the strength of research and the power of innovation to assist educators in promoting student mastery of local and state standards. Galileo’s patented technology provides customized benchmark, formative, interim/end-of-course, curriculum-based, and placement assessments. Galileo reporting tools coupled with curriculum and instructional dialog tools make it possible to continuously link information about student learning to instructional planning and teaching to promote standards mastery.

## Useful Resources

- Twin Rivers Unified School District [twinriversusd.org](http://twinriversusd.org)
- California Department of Education: [cde.ca.gov](http://cde.ca.gov)
- Assessment Technology Incorporated and Galileo K-12 Online [ati-online.com](http://ati-online.com)
- Government Accountability Offices [gao.gov](http://gao.gov)
- National Center for Educational Statistics [nces.ed.gov](http://nces.ed.gov)
- United States Department of Education [ed.gov](http://ed.gov)
- WestEd’s Local Accountability Professional Development Series [WestEd.org/lapds](http://WestEd.org/lapds)

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