

## Friday Reflection

8/16/2019

So much behind the scenes work and preparation was dedicated to opening the 2019-2020 school year. It paid dividends, as we started and ended the first week well. I spoke with countless freshman this week and everyone commented on how this week went far better than they anticipated. Several freshman shared fears that never materialized. It is a scary proposition to attend a school of 2,250 students for the first time. There are so many unknowns. It was comforting to hear their stories about their first week, and to hear how acclimated freshman students seemed after just a few days.

One of the adjustments our counselors made last spring was investing more time with students at the middle schools to get their classes aligned with student plans for high school. It was a lot more work last spring, but we all agreed it helped, as the number of course adjustments seemed to be extremely low compared to past years. Our counselor team is really amazing here at Tustin High School. They are responsive to students, and they are extremely proactive in meeting with students to make sure they are on track and preparing well for life after high school. In addition to all the academic and life planning conversations, they also meet with students to support them through emotional challenges. It is really remarkable how focused, action-oriented and compassionate this group of professionals is here at Tustin High School. Your children are the benefactors.

Although this week felt particularly smooth for a variety of reasons, there were many aspects of the week that built on prior experience and traditions. One example was the Link Crew team and their creative shirts to signal to new students help was available for finding classrooms and asking questions.

While many aspects of our week were similar to the start of past school years, there were some adjustments made to create an even better learning environment. One example is our bell schedule. We added one minute to each passing period, which extended our school day by five minutes. The longer passing periods were intended to not only decrease tardies, but to also provide a less hectic transition from one class to another. Some early feedback from students communicated they liked to extra minute. The bell schedule and adjustments to tutorial are all intended to support our students (more on the changes to tutorial in two weeks).

Speaking of changes and supporting students, we have some critical new additions to our team and the services we can provide students. Because we are a Title I school, we have some additional funds available for supporting some of our more vulnerable learners. I am particularly excited about some of the ways we are using that money this year.

Just to give you an idea, here is a list of some new people we have and how they will serve our students:

- Mrs. Jayme Acosta – Well, this is her second year, but she continues to find more ways to support our English Language (EL) learners. Mrs. Acosta fills a counselor position that

is focused on helping our EL students transition to school now and prepare well for the future. Last year, 100% of her students graduated from high school!

- Mrs. Maribel Herrera-Olmedo – She is leading our “Newcomers Classes”. She is taking students new to this country and teaching them not only language skills, but rigorous academic skills on par with some of our most challenging classes. Watching her class this week was nothing short of inspiring.
- Mrs. Veronica Williams – We are adding an additional counselor that will not have a case load, but she will support us with intervening for students who need additional support. She comes to us from San Diego and she will start next week. We are excited to have her experience and expertise to support our team here at Tustin High School.

(For additional information about our use of Title I funds, our school goals and activities, and how parents can get involved, we will host a Title I Parent Meeting at 6:00 pm on Tuesday, August 27<sup>th</sup> in the Tustin High School library.)

In addition to these new positions, we also have some new members of our team this year. Mr. Art Rodriguez is our new plant manager. He comes to us from Currie Middle School, and he and his team worked really hard to prepare our facilities for opening day. Another new team member is Mrs. Jessica Sotelo, a new counselor, who is taking over for Mrs. Park who now works out of the district office. Mrs. Sotelo comes to us with counseling experience from Samueli Academy in Santa Ana. Mr. Derek Johnson is a new History teacher who has a great deal of experience as both a teacher and a Tiller! Mr. Johnson attended Tustin High School and has previously taught at Tustin High School. Another new teacher is Mrs. Betzabel Villaseca who is teaching Spanish. She comes to us with prior teaching experience, but most recently was taking care of her children full time. We are excited to have all our new team members. Considering who will join our team is a something we take seriously, and we are particularly grateful for these newcomers to the Tiller family.

I made it a point to speak with many students this week in order to gain insight into their experiences during this first week of school. I was struck by the focus and positive intention on the part of so many of our students. I am grateful for a school community that communicates high expectations for our students. Performing well and demonstrating learning is a norm. I also appreciate a school community that is inviting and accepting. We had students transitioning from middle schools, private schools, other high schools, and even home schools. I am grateful for a school community that is intentional about making connections with these students. It is great to be a Tiller.

Go Tillers!

Dr. Jon Tuin

Tustin High School Principal