

Twin Rivers Charter School joins Eugene 4J School District

By Justina Coelho Monday, August 22nd 2016

The Twin Rivers Charter School gets students outdoors to learn about the environment. They also learn practical life skills like how to ballance a checkbook and how to manage money. (SBG photo)

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EUGENE, Ore. - Parents now have another option on where to send their teenagers to school this fall. "Twin Rivers Charter School" is now a part of the Eugene 4J School District.

Formerly known as Eugene's Outdoor High school, Twin Rivers is now a public charter school. That means, for the first time, any 4J student can enroll. The outdoor high school offers an alternative education that balances traditional subjects with-hands on learning and a focus on nature. It teaches survival skills like archery and gardening, along with conservation work, community service and life skills.

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"I would never go back to regular school," said 16-year-old Jenaya Elison. She said she likes being outside, working with her hands, and smaller class sizes. "I just felt like I couldn't learn there and the teachers couldn't really give me enough time. And I really needed someone to talk to me and help me with my work, and here they actually do that."

"What you're eating at lunch is what you're growing in the field," said staff member Dante Zuniga-West.

Zuniga-West says this type of hands-on learning is what outdoor school is all about. Zuniga-West teaches Language Arts and survival skills. He leads students on camping trips throughout the year, where he teaches land navigation, compass and map, animal tracking, fishing, there's a budding archery program.

Twin Rivers balances a full high school diploma program with community service and conservation work. The students also clear out invasive species and cut trails. They also learn life skills.

"They teach us about loans from banks and balancing your checkbooks, and stuff you're actually going to need when you're older," said Elison.

Natanya Vonengel is a Twin Rivers parent.

"He was struggling in the classroom environment," Vonengel said about her son, Hayden. "He doesn't do well sitting in a classroom. So getting him outdoors and having a class while he's going on a hike is what spoke to him."

Elison said outdoor school helped her make it to graduation.

"I was afraid I wasn't going to graduate before, but now I'm completely confident that I am going to graduate on time and I'm going to be able to do what I want to do with my life," she said.

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