

# Rialto Teachers Differentiate Instruction with Vocabulary.com.

SUCCESS STORY: Rialto Unified School District Rialto, CA



## Rialto USD at a glance (2014-2015):

Enrollment	26,225
Limited English Proficiency	26%
Race/Ethnicity	82% Latino, 11% African American, 2% Asian, 1% White, 2% Other
Free/Reduced Price Meals	82%

### CHALLENGE:

*Find ways to make vocabulary instruction practical and efficient for teachers to boost student literacy.*

In an article for the International Literacy Association's online magazine, Literacy Daily, Jennifer Johnston, an English teacher at Rialto High School, laid out the challenges that face teachers when they rely on inefficient traditional word-learning methods for their students.

"In the past, students practiced vocabulary based on words pulled directly from texts that were being studied and all students were expected to learn the same words, at the same pace, in the same way," Johnston wrote. "This method was clearly ineffective. Over the last eight years, the student mastery of vocabulary and reading comprehension has been declining as fewer students learn, retain, and use new vocabulary taught in the classroom."

### SOLUTION:

*Implement Vocabulary.com to meet new literacy standards.*

As an early adopter of Vocabulary.com, Jennifer Johnston created a new word-learning program using Vocabulary.com, in anticipation of her school's adoption of the Common Core standards in the fall of 2014. "I needed a way to support student achievement and mastery of difficult and unknown words," she said. "This was not only a necessity in my regular classes but also in my Advanced Placement classes."

Johnston was hoping for measurable improvement. What she ended up with was a dramatic change in the way her students learn, relate to, and use new words. In turn, her success inspired fellow teachers to use Vocabulary.com to make sure students were getting the vocabulary practice they needed to meet the new literacy standards.

## RESULTS: *Vocabulary.com generated instant results and made teachers' lives easier*

Rialto High School students rose to the challenge immediately. In the first month alone after Jennifer Johnston implemented her word-learning program, 200 Rialto students mastered more than 30,000 words on Vocabulary.com.



“The most effective method for my students with the program is the class challenge aspect,” Johnston said. “Competition aside, my students love the flexibility of the Vocabulary.com game. They can practice words from any subject they want at any time, complete an English assignment, and prep for a biology test all at once. They like being in control.”

Johnston said students got more engaged with word learning immediately. “They are using the words they are learning, making reference to new words, and asking questions.”

Other teachers agreed that Vocabulary.com made the job of teaching vocabulary more efficient. “What I really love about it is the opportunity for RTI (response to intervention),” said Nicki Wilson, American Literature and AP Language teacher at Carter High School. “If a kid doesn’t get something the first time around, Vocabulary.com shows us how to intervene to help him get that on the second time around.” Wilson added that Vocabulary.com offers “the opportunity to retest and reteach for those kids who are still struggling.”

Vocabulary.com also saves teachers’ time in finding learnable word lists that match student needs, and in creating their own. As Caroline Collins, a ninth-grade English teacher at Carter High School, explains, “I use the lists that go along with the readings we use or if I can’t find one, I make one.” When the students are learning the words, Collins finds that the students are using them right away in conversation. “It’s really cool to hear them use that vocabulary,” she said.

## CONCLUSION: *Districtwide rollout of Vocabulary.com brings a new, efficient approach to vocabulary instruction for all Rialto teachers.*

Rialto High School, with a student population of nearly 3,000, was the first to pilot Vocabulary.com. Based on the success of Rialto High, Rialto Unified School District agreed to roll out the Vocabulary.com Educator Edition to all schools at the elementary, middle and high school level, so that all students from fifth grade and up can take advantage of the vocabulary-learning program.

With the Educator Edition, all teachers will have the means to track students’ progress through an easy-to-use dashboard. As Jennifer Johnston of Rialto High said, “Vocabulary.com offers everything I need and more. I am able to track student progress, assign lists, custom-build learning goals, and create class challenges.” Caroline Collins of Carter High says of the teacher dashboard, “I can look at the percentages and target my instruction – that’s what’s really helpful. I don’t have to waste class time on words they already know and then have them get bored.”