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By Marijke Rowland  
[mrowland@modbee.com](mailto:mrowland@modbee.com)

TURLOCK -- Water, water everywhere — and now even easier to drink.

Since the start of the 2010 school year, many Central Valley students have wet their whistles — and filled their glasses, bottles and containers — at state-of-the-art drinking fountains that provide chilled and filtered water.

The "hydration stations" are the result of state and federal laws that require free, fresh water to be provided at schools wherever meals are served or eaten.



Modesto Bee - (MARIJKE ROWLAND/mrowland@modbee.com) New "hydration stations" at Turlock High School comply with state and federal laws passed recently requiring free fresh water

At Turlock High School, the water fountains sit under a large "H<sub>2</sub>O" sign and provide a traditional drinking fountain and a hands-free filling station.

When students prop an empty bottle underneath, a motion-activated sensor starts a stream of crisp, clean water.

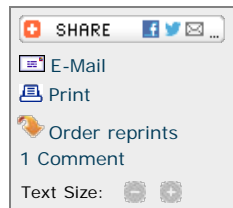
"I use it eight to nine times a day," said Turlock High senior and football player Trevor Wheeland, 17. "It's easy to use and fill up and stay hydrated."

Since it was installed, the two Turlock High fountains have recorded more than 12,000 fills, said Scott Soiseth, director of child nutrition for the Turlock Unified School District.

## More are planned

Next summer, Soiseth said, he plans to install similar fountains at Pitman High School, as well as the junior high schools.

"More and more students are using them," he said. "It's a great option for them. We're excited to get it out there for them. Our goal is to have them in all the schools."



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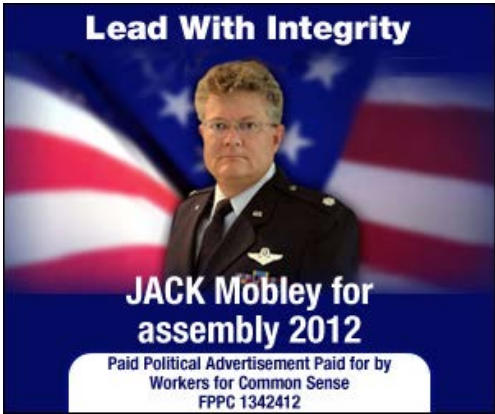
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The California law went into effect in July 2011; the federal law was passed in December 2010.

But a soon-to-be-published survey of California public schools by the University of California at San Francisco found that while campuses such as Turlock High have made changes, one in four schools still does not comply with the law.

The study of 240 randomly selected public schools was conducted from May 2011 to

November 2011 by researchers at UCSF in conjunction with nutrition and health advocacy organizations California Food Policy Advocates and ChangeLab Solutions.

With the state law, there is no punitive language if schools fail to offer free water. They can opt out if the requirements are too financially burdensome.

But under the federal law, all schools that get funds for free or reduced-price meal programs will undergo a review of their water access every three years once the U.S. Department of Agriculture issues regulations. If they fail to follow the law, they may have to comply with a corrective action plan or, in extreme cases, they could lose funding.

Part of remodeling project

Soiseth said the two units at Turlock High cost \$1,300. They were installed over the summer in 2010 as part of a remodeling project funded by the district's child nutrition department.

Turlock High is listed among the case studies at [www.waterinschools.org](http://www.waterinschools.org), a project of California Food Policy Advocates. Also mentioned is the Ceres Unified School District, which installed water stations that dispense chilled, filtered water at three elementary schools.

Based on positive student response, the district has decided to use the machines at the rest of the elementary schools. The lease is about \$25 per month on a unit, including maintenance and installation.

Other area school districts said they already were complying with the new state and federal regulations. Oakdale Joint Unified School District and Newman Crows Landing Unified School District officials said they offer free, fresh water in or next to meal-serving areas.

In the Empire Union School District, Assistant Superintendent Pam Wall said all the elementary schools except Capistrano and Empire had access to drinking water. A water fountain was replaced at Empire Elementary and a water dispenser and cups were purchased for Capis-trano, costing about \$1,500 and \$155, respectively.

Students who use the fountains, such as Turlock High junior Brent Mondragon, 16, said they've become a daily habit.

"I really like these," he said. "The old drinking fountains can be kind of gross. But these are great."

**Bee staff writer Nan Austin and California Watch contributed to this report.**

**Bee staff writer Marijke Rowland can be reached at [mrowland@modbee.com](mailto:mrowland@modbee.com) or (209) 578-2284.**

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