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Just for the Kids–California High School Best Practice Study, 2004-05

Bolsa Grande High School, Garden Grove Unified School District
Central Union High School, Central Union High School District
Cleveland High School, Los Angeles Unified School District
El Monte High School, El Monte Union High School District
Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District
Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District
Middle College High School, West Contra Costa Unified School District
Selma High School, Selma Unified School District
Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District
Southwest High School, Central Union High School District

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Just for the Kids—California

High School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The Study

The California High School Best Practice Study was part of a larger national research study to investigate the practices of schools that consistently outperform their peers. Research teams studied schools in 20 states to identify key practices of consistently higher performing schools in a variety of policy contexts.

In California, research teams investigated 10 consistently higher performing and five average-performing high schools to determine the differences in practices between higher and average-performing high schools. Schools were identified through an in-depth analysis of academic achievement developed by the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) using data publicly available from the state.

Conducted by Springboard Schools, the 2004-2005 California High School Best Practice Study was sponsored by NCEA affiliate Just for the Kids—California (JFTK-CA) and received funding from the United Way of the Bay Area, Washington Mutual, AT&T, Bank of America, the California Business for Education Excellence Foundation, and The Broad Foundation. JFTK-CA is a collaboration of the California Business for Education Excellence, the California State University, and the National Center for Educational Accountability.

Researchers used site-based interviews and observations, as well as the analysis of supportive documentation, to investigate the practices of each of the 15 schools in the study. District-, school-, and classroom-level practices were studied in the five themes of NCEA's Best Practice Framework: Curriculum and Academic Goals; Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building; Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements; Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data; and Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment.

The Summary

Research teams wrote individual case studies about each studied school. Summary findings across the cases are presented in this report. Major findings from each case are presented first to provide a brief picture of each higher performing school studied. The composite picture of Best Practice Findings in California, based on differences detected between higher and average-performing schools, follows with examples from individual schools.

This report is a synthesis of findings including direct quotes and summary information drawn from case studies written by researchers at Springboard Schools (formerly the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative) for JFTK-CA. The JFTK Best Practice Framework, developed by NCEA, provides the structure for the findings. Information from the Springboard Schools case studies that does not relate to any of the five themes of the JFTK Best Practice Framework is not represented in this report. **Bold-faced** attributes listed in the "Findings" section of this report represent inferences made by NCEA researchers during the evaluation of the case studies. Those attributes may not necessarily coincide with those inferred by Springboard Schools researchers.



Just for the Kids—California

High School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

The School Identification Process

To study the practices of consistently higher performing schools, one must first identify those schools and compare their practices compared with those in a group of average-performing schools with similar demographics. The contrast between the practices in the two groups of schools is the focus of this study.

NCEA used publicly available student achievement data from the California Department of Education to identify schools that consistently outperformed other schools with similar demographics in English, mathematics, or language arts in the 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 school years.¹ The analysis included data from the ninth- through eleventh-grade California Standards Test (CST) in language arts and the tenth-grade California High School Exit Examinations (CAHSEE)² in English and mathematics.

To identify the schools, NCEA conducted a separate analysis for each subject (English, mathematics, and language arts)³ and year (2002, 2003, and 2004) to learn which schools outperformed their demographic peers on the percentage of students meeting the “Proficient” standard on the state exam. NCEA used a Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analysis to compare each school’s percent of students meeting the standard with the percent that would be “predicted” or “typical” for a school in the state with the same demographics. The demographic and other variables used in this analysis were each school’s percentage of low-income, English Language Learner (ELL), African American, Hispanic, and Asian students; the size of the school; and the percentage of students tested in the subject and year in question. Normally, NCEA also prefers to take students’ prior year test scores and length of enrollment in the same school into account, but that longitudinal information was not available in California.

NCEA ranked each school against the high schools in the rest of the state based on the extent to which it outperformed its “predicted” percent of students meeting the “Proficient” standard. For example, a school that outperformed 82% of the schools in “performance relative to predicted” on the tenth-grade Mathematics Exit Exam in 2004 would receive a percentile rank of 82 for that subject and year. These ranks were averaged separately for English, mathematics, and language arts across the two or three years to produce an overall average performance rank by subject. To be selected as higher performing for the purposes of this study, schools had to have overall average percentile ranks above 66.6 on at least one subject measure (English or Mathematics Exit Exam or Language Arts CST) and also meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements.

¹ Only two years of data were available for California State High School Exit Examinations (2002-03 and 2003-04).

² Although the California State High School Exit Examinations are commonly referred to as CAHSEE within the state, we refer to these assessments simply as Exit Exams throughout this report for clarity with a broader audience.

³ English Language Arts is commonly used to refer to a particular course of study. We use English and language arts separately to distinguish the particular assessment being referenced. Throughout this report, we use “English” in reference to the English Exit Exam and “language arts” in reference to the Language Arts CST.

⁴ A-G requirements are a set of 15 one-year college prep courses high school students must take to be eligible to enter either state university system.



Just for the Kids—California

High School Best Practice Study, 2004-2005

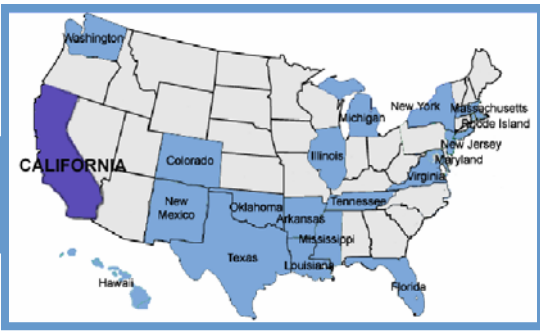
In addition, higher performing schools in this study had to meet one of the following criteria: above state average enrollment in physics, chemistry, advanced algebra, and calculus; above expected percentages of students reaching “proficient” on the California Standards Tests in mathematics; or above expected percentages of graduates meeting A-G requirements⁴ for entry into the California State University (CSU) or University of California systems.

The Higher Performing Schools Studied

School	District	2004 Enrollment		2004 School-Wide Demographics							
		Grade Span	No. of Students	African American	Hispanic	White	Asian	Filipino	Other	Low Income	ELL
Bolsa Grande High School	Garden Grove USD	9-12	1,522	1.6%	35.5%	10.1%	49.7%	1.2%	1.9%	65.8%	41.9%
Central Union High School	Central Union HSD	9-12	1,652	2.5%	87.7%	8.4%	1.0%	0.2%	0.2%	56.8%	35.4%
Cleveland High School	Los Angeles USD	9-12	3,669	9.0%	56.3%	18.8%	12.1%	3.2%	0.6%	68.3%	24.9%
El Monte High School	El Monte Union HSD	9-12	2,023	0.3%	80.7%	1.8%	16.5%	0.3%	0.4%	79.8%	38.4%
Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies	Los Angeles USD	6-12	1,604	36.3%	17.5%	29.7%	13.8%	2.1%	0.6%	31.7%	0.8%
Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts	Marysville Joint USD	7-12	225	5.3%	5.8%	70.7%	2.2%	2.2%	13.8%	35.6%	0.9%
Middle College High School	West Contra Costa USD	9-12	253	23.7%	35.2%	10.3%	20.9%	9.5%	0.4%	0%*	2.8%
Selma High School	Selma USD	9-12	1,473	0.4%	75.9%	15.0%	5.6%	0.3%	2.8%	63.5%	20.8%
Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies	Los Angeles USD	4-12	1,780	8.8%	35.1%	40.0%	12.0%	3.2%	0.9%	40.8%	10.8%
Southwest High School	Central Union HSD	9-12	2,118	1.6%	83.5%	11.7%	1.8%	0.3%	1.1%	48.2%	33.1%

* According to Springboard Schools researchers, the level of poverty among student’s families in Middle College High is not reported to the state.

Demographic and student enrollment data are taken from the California Department of Education website, located at <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us>. Site visits were conducted in Spring 2005 by Springboard Schools researchers.



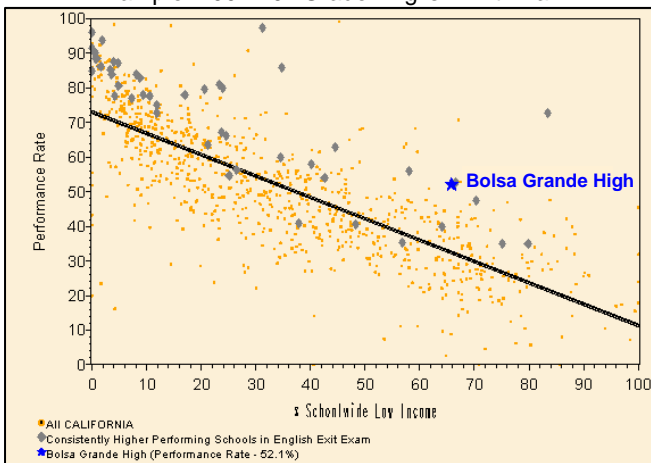
Bolsa Grande High School Garden Grove Unified School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Bolsa Grande High School, which serves 1,522 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is one of seven high schools in the Garden Grove Unified School District (50,172 students). Bolsa Grande's student population is 49.7% Asian, 35.5% Hispanic, 10.1% White, 1.6% African American, 1.2% Filipino, and 1.9% other. Within this student population, 41.9% are English Language Learners, and 65.8% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 10th Grade English Exit Exam



Consistent Higher Performance

Bolsa Grade High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools on both the English and Mathematics Exit Exams. The analyses included all tenth-grade achievement data from 2003 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Bolsa Grande High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 79.9 on the English Exit Exam and 75.1 on the Mathematics Exit Exam.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

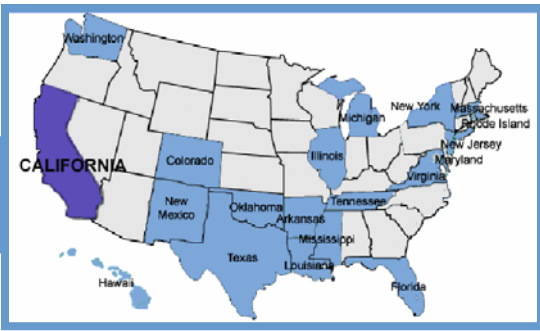
Subject	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	10	10	
English Exit Exam	83	77	79.9
Mathematics Exit Exam	68	82	75.1

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

The district, school, and academic departments within the school have set explicit teaching and learning goals for improvement in student performance by grade, subject, and population group. These goals are measurable, time specific, and aligned. School and district leaders have constructed new roles for boundary-spanning coaches (across grades and subjects) to facilitate efficient and effective knowledge exchange and system continuity. Instructional programs are designed to provide a rigorous curriculum to all students, including having all students meet the requirements to enter either the California State University or University of California systems (A-G requirements). Decisions are based on student achievement data as well as on rubrics used for assessing progress toward vertically and horizontally aligned common quality indicators. Assessments are aligned with curriculum, written collaboratively, and used to track student and teacher performance. The district supplements the state-mandated reporting system with district benchmark assessments to better assess their students' progress. Finally, district leaders develop and train school leaders to use a menu of intervention programs designed to move all students into mainstream instruction marked by rigor and relevance.

The entire case study may be viewed at www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=California. School performance data are available at www.jftk-ca.org.



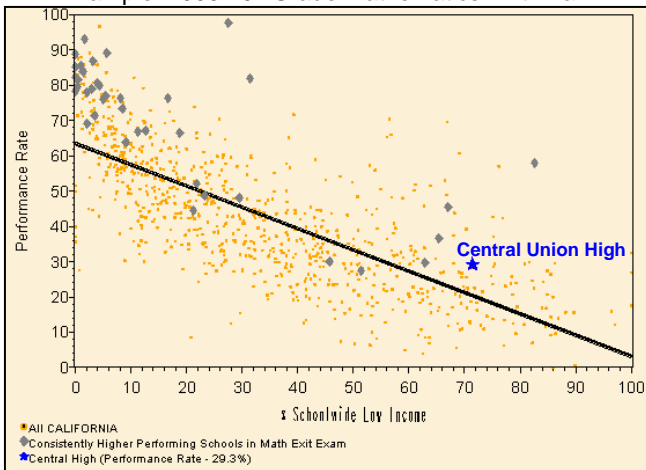
Central Union High School Central Union High School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Central Union High School, which serves 1,652 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is one of two high schools in the Central Union High School District (3,947 students). Central Union’s student population is 87.7% Hispanic, 8.4% White, 2.5% African American, 1.0% Asian, 0.2% Filipino, and 0.2% other. Within this student population, 35.4% are English Language Learners, and 56.8% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 10th Grade Mathematics Exit Exam



Consistent Higher Performance

Central Union High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in language arts. The analysis included all ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. It is also higher performing on both the English and Mathematics Exit Exams. Those analyses included all tenth-grade data from 2003 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Central Union High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 90.3 in language arts, 84.5 on the English Exit Exam, and 89.1 on the Mathematics Exit Exam.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

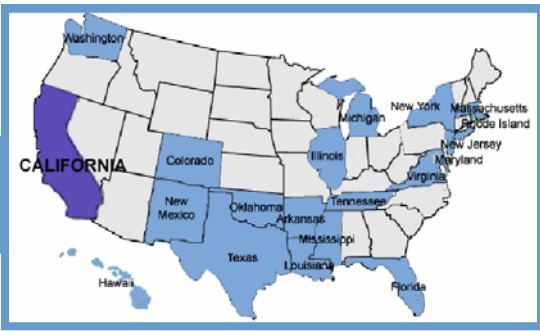
Subject	2002			2003			2004			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			
Grade	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11	
Language Arts	84	96	95	88	90	91	92	90	87	90.3
English Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	90	N/A	N/A	80	N/A	84.5
Mathematics Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	94	N/A	N/A	85	N/A	89.1

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

District, school, and classroom representatives agree on measurable goals for the improvement of student learning. The roles and responsibilities at each school system level for achieving these goals are clear. Everyone in the district agrees that until every student graduates on time, until every graduate is accepted into college, and until every student scores “proficient” or above on the California Standards Test, they will not rest. Program improvement resource teachers and academic coaches are new positions designed to build teachers’ and leaders’ skills by connecting them with the most appropriate resources and providing ongoing, in-house professional learning opportunities. Three new programs designed to serve English Language Learners are tightly monitored for their success in transitioning students to mainstream classes. The development of common assessments that are tightly aligned to the state standards has proved to be among the most meaningful reform efforts at Central Union. The AVID (*Advancement via Individual Determination*) program is used to provide all students access to more rigorous and relevant classes.

The entire case study may be viewed at www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=California. School performance data are available at www.jftk-ca.org.



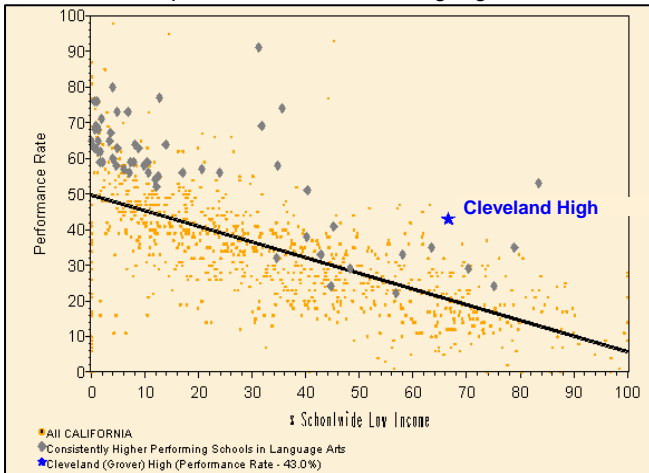
Cleveland High School Los Angeles Unified School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Cleveland High School, which serves 3,669 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is 1 of 63 high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (747,000 students). Cleveland’s student population is 56.3% Hispanic, 18.8% White, 12.1% Asian, 9.0% African American, 3.2% Filipino, and 0.6% other. Within this population, 24.9% are English Language Learners, and 68.3% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 11th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Cleveland High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in language arts. The analysis included all ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. It is also higher performing on both the English and Mathematics Exit Exams. Those analyses included all tenth-grade data from 2003 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Cleveland High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 93.1 in language arts, 87.2 on the English Exit Exam, and 91.3 on the Mathematics Exit Exam.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002			2003			2004			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			
Grade	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11	
Language Arts	94	92	99	86	95	98	89	97	99	93.1
English Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	75	N/A	N/A	98	N/A	87.2
Mathematics Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	85	N/A	N/A	97	N/A	91.3

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Cleveland High School staff are particularly proud of the rigorous curriculum they provide—a curriculum that aims to produce both excellence on the California Standards Test and to teach higher order thinking skills. This curriculum is focused on “power standards” and designed to provide all students with access to rigorous learning. Professional Learning Communities, groups of teachers who collaborate to share knowledge and solve problems, serve as the cornerstone for improving instruction at Cleveland. Textbook adoptions* are supplemented with materials selected by teachers to meet the instructional needs of the student and to increase rigor. Innovation in resources and strategies is supported as long as those innovations are rooted in standards and data. Common benchmark assessments enable teachers to identify learning difficulties and to provide extra support for students as needed. Although the primary “intervention” at Cleveland is improving the quality of regular classroom instruction, other strategies have been designed to “intervene early” and “act fast” when students fall behind.



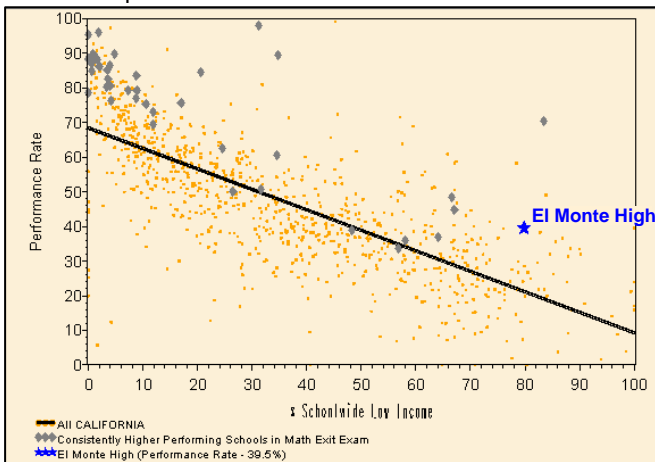
El Monte High School El Monte Union High School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

El Monte High School, which serves 2,023 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is one of five high schools in the El Monte Union High School District (10,254 students). El Monte’s student population is 80.7% Hispanic, 16.5% Asian, 1.8% White, 0.3% African American, 0.3% Filipino, and 0.4% other. Within this population, 38.4% are English Language Learners, and 79.8% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 10th Grade Mathematics Exit Exam



Consistent Higher Performance

El Monte High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools on both the English and Mathematics Exit Exams. The analyses that included all tenth-grade achievement data from 2003 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, El Monte High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 86.9 on the English Exit Exam, and 76.4 on the Mathematics Exit Exam.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2003 Percentile Rank	2004 Percentile Rank	Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
Grade	10	10	
English Exit Exam	88	86	86.9
Mathematics Exit Exam	58	92	76.4

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

El Monte High School staff are focused on standards and the alignment and articulation of curriculum. Designed to have a powerful effect on teaching and learning, higher standards are coupled with “high personalization.” Collaboration time to improve instruction by revising assessments and curricula to reach high standards has been built into the school’s master schedule. Instructional programs have been designed to provide a rigorous curriculum to every student with structures in place to support them. Vocational courses have been redesigned to comply with the standards of industry and to address high learning standards. Data systems are used to track student achievement and to inform decisions. Assessments are aligned with curriculum, written collaboratively in departments, and used to track student and teacher performance. A new study skills model is being implemented in which older students serve as mentors and provide support to younger ones. The district supports these before-school study sessions by providing breakfast for the students.



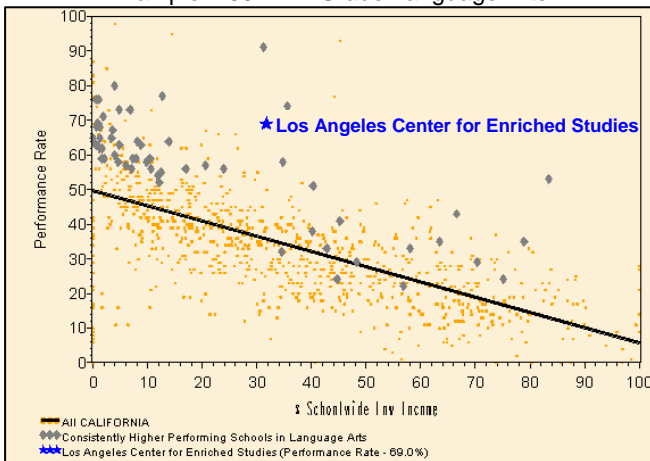
Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies Los Angeles Unified School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies (LACES), which serves 1,604 sixth- through twelfth-grade students, is the oldest magnet school in the Los Angeles Unified School District (747,000 students). LACES' student population is 36.3% African American, 29.7% White, 17.5% Hispanic, 13.8% Asian, 2.1% Filipino, and 0.6% other. Within this student population, 0.8% are English Language Learners, and 31.7% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 11th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies is higher performing than demographically similar schools in language arts. The analysis included all ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, LACES demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 98.7 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002 Percentile Rank			2003 Percentile Rank			2004 Percentile Rank			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2003
	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11	
Language Arts	99	98	98	99	99	98	99	99	99	98.7

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

LACES defines itself as a “college preparatory school of enrichment.” With a ratio of 2,000 applicants for 289 openings each year, staff note that the school meets this definition for the majority of students. Still, they also acknowledge that achievement gaps exist within the school and that some staff continue to wrestle with the myth that “excellence must be sacrificed for equity.” To maintain excellence, yet ensure that excellence is provided for all students, professional development is focused on maintaining academic rigor while providing adequate scaffolding for struggling students. Departments are strongly encouraged to collaborate around the alignment of curriculum, standards, and assessments as a foundation for this work. Teachers are distributed in such a way that all levels of students have access to the most experienced teachers, and all teachers have experience teaching struggling students. The school’s master schedule is driven by the aim of ensuring that all students have equal access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum. Teachers view the seven-period block school schedule as a key factor in the school’s success. To facilitate personal accountability, students are taught to monitor their progress against course objectives. Report cards are aligned to district standards and intended to reflect individual student mastery of set objectives, not student performance as compared to the performance of other students.



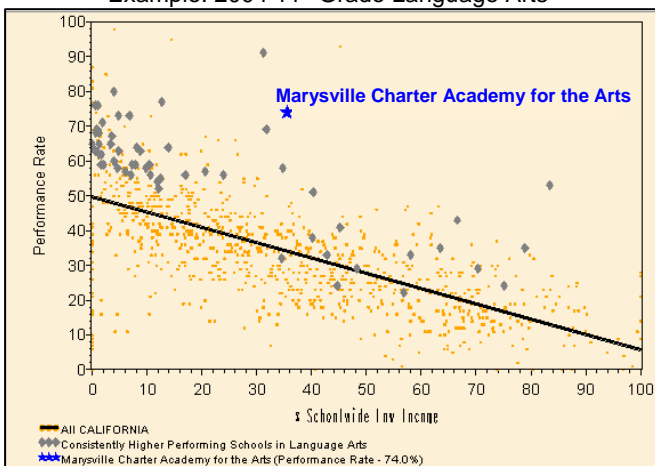
Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts Marysville Joint Unified School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, which serves 225 seventh- through twelfth-grade students, is one of two charter public schools in the Marysville Joint Unified School District (9,839 students). Marysville Charter Academy’s student population is 70.7% White, 5.8% Hispanic, 5.3% African American, 2.2% Asian, 2.2% Filipino, and 13.8% other. Within this student population, 0.9% are English Language Learners, and 35.6% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 11th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts (MCAA) is higher performing than demographically similar schools in language arts. The analysis included all ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 82.9 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002			2003			2004			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			
Grade	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11	
Language Arts	92	77	83	63	89	72	82	84	95	82.9

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts intends to couple the “joy and ownership of creation through the arts” with a rigorous academic curriculum to serve its students. The academic curriculum is standards based and tightly aligned, including components such as essential standards, pacing guides, and aligned instructional resources. Professional development for the 18 staff members has concentrated on curriculum development, project-based learning, writing, and the integration of instructional technology into the classroom. These experiences support MCAA’s goals of being standards based and completely aligned while still focusing on the school’s mission to work in interdisciplinary teams on projects with clear links to real-world application. Students are organized in rotating block schedules—an arrangement designed to encourage students to mentor other students and to maximize student engagement. A rich diversity of assessments is stressed: state and district assessments are embraced; and presentations, exhibitions, and portfolios are evaluated through carefully developed rubrics. The latter, say the faculty, make MCAA “one large intervention and recognition system.”



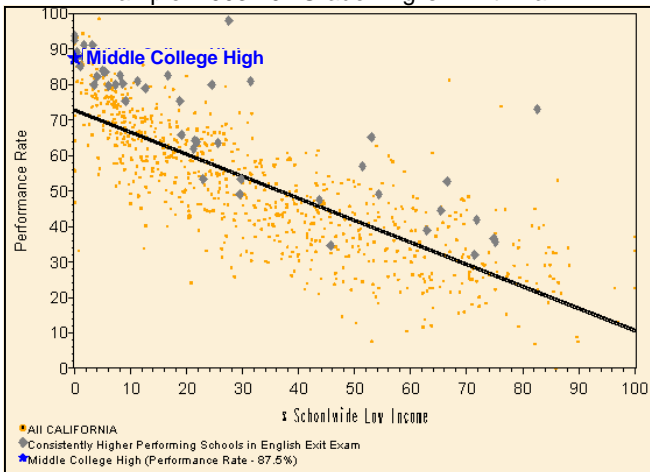
Middle College High School West Contra Costa Unified School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Middle College High School, which serves 253 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is an alternative program of West Contra Costa Unified School District (33,672 students). Middle College’s student population is 35.2% Hispanic, 23.7% African American, 20.9% Asian, 10.3% White, 9.5% Filipino, and 0.4% other. Within this student population, 2.8% are English Language Learners, and the state reports that no students receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2003 10th Grade English Exit Exam



Consistent Higher Performance

Middle College High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in language arts. The analysis included all ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. It is also higher performing on both the English and Mathematics Exit Exams. Those analyses included all tenth-grade data from 2003 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Middle College High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 77.8 in language arts, 88.8 on the English Exit Exam, and 86.4 on the Mathematics Exit Exam.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002			2003			2004			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			
Grade	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11	
Language Arts	60	75	64	90	80	75	87	83	83	77.8
English Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	93	N/A	N/A	85	N/A	88.8
Mathematics Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	88	N/A	N/A	85	N/A	86.4

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Middle College High School’s standards include grade-level expectations for students, common learning targets for teachers, curriculum frameworks to guide teachers, and assessment goals. Deep collaboration between Middle College High School and Contra Costa College staff is ongoing. In addition, the Middle College staff is equally committed to working with the feeder middle schools to articulate curriculum and instruction across grade levels and institutions. Innovative, research-based instructional materials and approaches (e.g., *Agile Mind*) have been identified to accelerate students towards advanced mathematics and science courses. Due to the small size of the school, Middle College staff indicate that they engage in “constant communication about students’ performance and needs.” In addition, students are actively engaged in evaluating their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the state standards. All ninth graders must take a sample California High School Exit Exam online and use the results to identify and outline their learning needs.



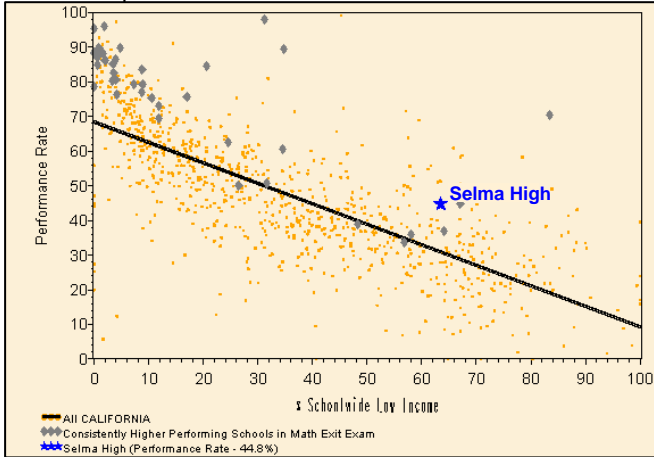
Selma High School Selma Unified School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Selma High School, which serves 1,473 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is the only high school in Selma Unified School District (6,082 students). Selma’s student population is 75.9% Hispanic, 15.0% White, 5.6% Asian, 0.4% African American, 0.3% Filipino, and 2.8% other. Within this student population, 20.8% are English Language Learners, and 63.5% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 10th Grade Mathematics Exit Exam



Consistent Higher Performance

Selma High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in language arts. The analysis included all ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. It was also higher performing on both the English and Mathematics Exit Exams. Those analyses included all tenth-grade data from 2003 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Selma High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 81.2 in language arts, 72.5 on the English Exit Exam, and 83.5 on the Mathematics Exit Exam.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

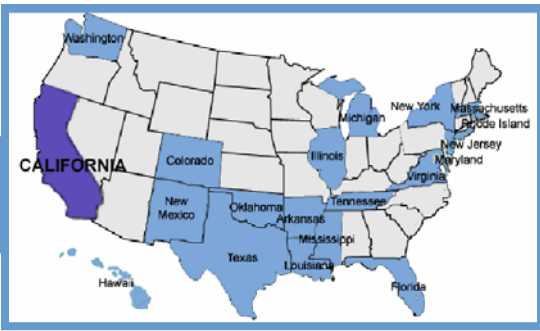
Subject	2002			2003			2004			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			
Grade	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11	
Language Arts	69	83	87	83	80	78	71	89	95	81.2
English Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	73	N/A	N/A	72	N/A	72.5
Mathematics Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	77	N/A	N/A	90	N/A	83.5

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

Students at Selma High School must pass the California Standards Test in both mathematics and language arts with a score of “Basic” or above to graduate. In addition to valuing strong performance on standards-based exams, students at Selma must also meet “Civic Goals” and be engaged in at least one extracurricular activity. Teachers at Selma benefit from the district’s deep financial commitment to staff collaboration. Interdepartmental collaboration on “Focus Lessons” has fostered the development of a rich professional learning community. Focus lessons are centered on an identified “focus standard” and delivered to an administrator and teachers from two departments. Observing teachers provide feedback, and then the lesson is delivered to students. An assessment is given, and student achievement data are brought back to the full group and discussed. In addition, high-performing teachers are identified through state testing data, and their practices are researched to share with all staff. A “Teacher/Coach” position is used to lead the development and discussion of common departmental assessments. Finally, a primary intervention has been to assign the most highly qualified teachers to students with the most need—the master Advanced Placement Calculus teacher now teaches and leads Algebra I.

The entire case study may be viewed at www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/study_framework.cfm?study=California. School performance data are available at www.jftk-ca.org.



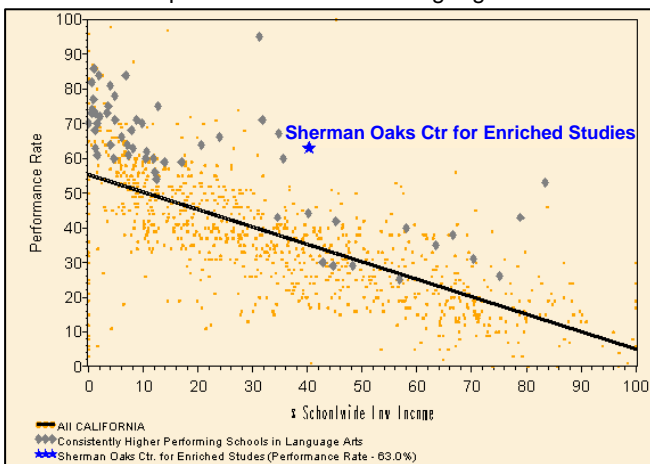
Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies Los Angeles Unified School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, which serves 1,780 fourth- through twelfth-grade students, is the largest magnet school in Los Angeles Unified School District (747,000 students). Sherman Oak’s student population is 40.0% White, 35.1% Hispanic, 12.0% Asian, 8.8% African American, 3.2% Filipino, and 0.9% other. Within that student population, 10.8% are English Language Learners, and 40.8% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 10th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies (SOCES) is higher performing than demographically similar schools in language arts. The analysis included all ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, SOCES demonstrated an overall average performance rank of 94.6 in language arts.

Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002			2003			2004			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			
Grade	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11	
Language Arts	98	97	77	95	97	95	97	97	95	94.6

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

SOCES staff consistently attributes student success to a culture of high standards. Teachers share curriculum and collaborate regularly. Achieving measurable improvement goals is seen as a collective, cooperative activity, and time and resources are allocated to support it. The district created a new testing coordinator position to ensure all staff are trained in assessment and data comprehension for daily use. Since SOCES is a “span school,” serving fourth through twelfth grades, teaching is tightly aligned to graduation expectations. Staff feel that students benefit tremendously from this continuous experience. Using AVID (*Advancement via Individual Determination*), teachers indicate they are moving underachieving students into accelerated classes without compromising course content. Teachers supplement the state, district, and school assessments with their own assessments to ensure constant review of student performance. “Teacher learning walks” are designed for teachers who have students not meeting standards to observe other teachers and determine what changes should be implemented in their own classrooms.



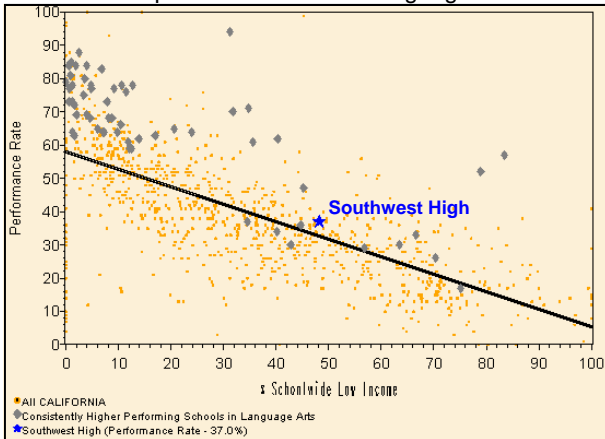
Southwest High School Central Union High School District

Just for the Kids—California NCEA Executive Summary

The School

Southwest High School, which serves 2,118 ninth- through twelfth-grade students, is one of two high schools in Central Union High School District (3,947 students). Southwest’s student population is 83.5% Hispanic, 11.7% White, 1.8% Asian, 1.6% African American, 0.3% Filipino, and 1.1% other. Within this student population, 33.1% are English Language Learners, and 48.2% receive free or reduced lunch services.

Example: 2004 9th Grade Language Arts



Consistent Higher Performance

Southwest High School is higher performing than demographically similar schools in language arts. The analysis included all ninth- through eleventh-grade achievement data from 2002 to 2004. It is also higher performing on both the English and Mathematics Exit Exams. Those analyses included all tenth-grade data from 2003 and 2004. According to Weighted Least Squares (WLS) regression analyses for each grade and year, Southwest High School demonstrated overall average performance ranks of 90.7 in language arts, 84.3 on the English Exit Exam, and 90.0 on the Mathematics Exit Exam.

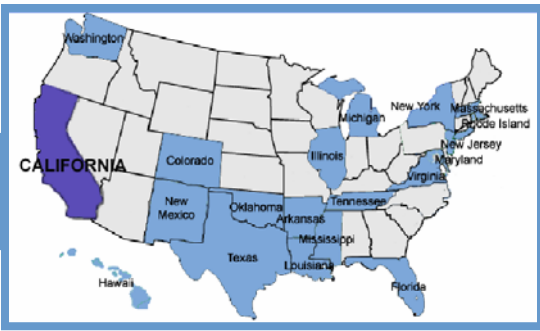
Schools were identified for study based on 2002-2004 data with site visits occurring during the 2004-2005 school year. Differences between the demographics reported in this case study and the values shown on the scatter plot reveal demographic changes in the school between 2002 and 2005.

Subject	2002			2003			2004			Overall Avg. Rank* 2002-2004
	Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			Percentile Rank			
Grade	9	10	11	9	10	11	9	10	11	
Language Arts	91	97	89	82	86	88	98	92	94	90.7
English Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	78	N/A	N/A	90	N/A	84.3
Mathematics Exit Exam	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	90	N/A	N/A	90	N/A	90.0

*The overall average rank is a weighted average of the separate percentile ranks shown, using the number of tested students in the grade as weights.

Major Findings

The focus on standards and academic improvement was key to moving Southwest High from the state’s Program Improvement List in 1999 to being a California Distinguished School in 2005. The strategies heralded as leading to the improvement include common standards-aligned courses, pacing guides, common assessments, standards-aligned instruction, and support systems to ensure accelerated learning of students in the bottom quartile. The district also funded a full-time instructional coach for Southwest—a financial investment that staff say was among the most crucial in securing Southwest’s continual improvement. The goal of exposing all students to a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum meant arranging for expanded support. District, school, department, and classroom processes and structures focus on ensuring English Language Learners receive the language skills needed for advanced coursework. Common assessments, aligned to state standards, are given at the district level every semester. Southwest has added common nine-week assessments to provide additional data on student performance.



California High School Best Practice Study: Findings

Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework

Five organizing themes provided the structure for studying the practices of consistently higher performing schools. The themes are listed below.

1. Curriculum and Academic Goals
2. Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building
3. Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements
4. Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data
5. Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

These themes are used below to summarize the findings of this study. The themes represent the broad topics that connect best practices across different school system levels—district, school, and classroom. Together, these themes capture the primary instructional activities undertaken by school systems and represent the major content areas in which practices of higher performing school systems differ from their average-performing counterparts.

The first theme described in The JFTK Best Practice Framework forms the foundation of The Framework. Each of the other four themes rests upon the assumption that there is absolute clarity about what is to be taught and learned by grade level—pre-K-12. Therefore, Curriculum and Academic Goals forms the base of The Framework. Building upon that base, higher performing schools are deliberate about selecting and developing their human resources (Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building) and equipping all staff with evidence-based tools and strategies to deliver the curriculum (Theme Three: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements). With people, tools, and strategies in place, higher performing schools regularly monitor student progress (Theme Four: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data). Finally, higher performing schools are quick to respond to student achievement data—recognizing success and intervening or adjusting whenever necessary to ensure all students reach the stated standards (Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment).



Theme One: Curriculum and Academic Goals

"What is Taught and Learned"

This theme focuses on the learning target. What is it that we expect all students to know and be able to do by grade and subject? Consistently higher performing school systems have clear academic targets from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Principals and teachers understand the learning goals and understand that these goals are for all students and are non-negotiable.

Specific California Findings: Curriculum and Academic Goals

- **State standards, with detailed interpretation at the district level, are used to set goals, develop course outlines, and create common assessments.**
 - Since one of the school's chief academic goals is to increase student skills of "critical thinking," the physical education, home economics, and horticulture teachers have all built

rubrics to measure the increase of improvement of critical thinking skills relative to their course content. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)

- Time was set aside to look at the standards that needed to be met by the end of each grade in order to prepare students for the next course and for life after high school. Then teachers looked at the year's schedule and created a timeline for teaching standards. From there, teachers looked at their units to see which units they could all agree to teach. For example, in social studies each teacher brought his/her "favorite" unit(s) to the table for review, aligned with the standards the unit(s) would cover. Together, they reached consensus on what would be used in a common course outline and pacing guide. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
- Common benchmark assessments guarantee that all teachers are teaching the agreed-upon curriculum. One teacher described these benchmark assessments as ensuring that all teachers are "finding the common denominator from point 'a' to point 'c' without taking the scenic route." (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
- Departments focus on "power standards" and the related skills needed to be successful in a subject; they do not try to teach students everything. The alignment to standards is further ensured by building group lessons capitalizing on each individual teacher's strengths. (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
- Key priorities in advancing the school's learning goals include continuously working on strengthening course alignment to standards and to each other, increasing the emphasis on benchmarks, standardizing grading within and across departments, and increasing the numbers of Advanced Placement students. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
- The district has focused on curricular alignment through close collaboration of departments and site leaders at the middle and high schools. The superintendent explains, "We introduced a process for each of the sites to look at essential standards, identify how you would pace those, and how you would align the textbook materials to that pacing to create a standards-based curriculum." (Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District)
- Teachers share curriculum and collaborate regularly. Achieving improvement goals is seen as a collective, cooperative activity, and time and resources are allocated to support it. (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
- The tight focus on standards and academic improvement is key to Southwest's improvement. (Southwest, Central Union High School District)
- **Explicit, measurable goals based on data and aligned to standards drive improvement planning.**
 - The district, school, and academic departments have set explicit, measurable teaching and learning goals for improvement in student performance that include focused goals by grade, subject, and student population group. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - The superintendent notes, "Key elements for high school [reform] are not different than elementary or middle. You have to be focused; have to know exactly where you're going. Then make sure everything you do supports that focus, and you have to make sure you don't change that focus." (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - There is agreement at every school system level on measurable goals for the improvement of student learning. Roles and responsibilities for achieving these goals are clear. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)
 - The district led the way in establishing clear, measurable, time-specific goals that are horizontally and vertically linked. The goals are also linked to evidence of goal

achievement, to staffing commitments, and to support training assistance needed to achieve the goals. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)

- **Academic expectations are high for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, bilingual status, etc. Resources and training are designed to support the school structures and instructional skills to meet these expectations. Personalization is considered a primary means to reach high academic expectations for all.**
 - To ensure that all students meet grade-level proficiency, the faculty and staff have determined action steps for implementing “measurable solutions” to better equip all teachers to help students reach this goal. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - Everyone in the district agrees that until every student graduates on time, until every graduate is accepted into college, and until every student scores “proficient” or above on the California Standards Tests, they will not rest. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)
 - The school leadership and department heads are particularly proud of the rigorous curriculum they provide to students, a curriculum that aims to produce both excellence on the California Standards Tests and to teach higher order thinking skills. The school prides itself on providing all students with access to rigor and points to examples such as the students in sheltered English classes recently performed Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - A primary goal has been to increase all students’ opportunities to access a rigorous and rich curriculum. A diverse set of initiatives has been employed to do so. “We embrace API, AYP, and CELDT as key goals. However, given that we are a high-poverty, high-crime area, and kids have a lot of issues, we’re trying to work on improving student support, giving kids guidance. We had to personalize things.” (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - The practical measure of success at the school is college admission. Another goal is that every student will take one or more Advanced Placement class by the end of their LACES career. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Student responsibilities and opportunities are supported by the school’s grade-spanning (6-12) structure. This structure helps students and teachers develop personal, supportive relationships over a seven-year period. According to one teacher, this smaller, familial school environment facilitates more consistent connections because “you can have sixth graders who you teach again as twelfth graders.” High expectations are coupled with high levels of concern for students. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - The school’s success was consistently attributed to a culture of high standards that define instructional practices. According to one teacher, “One of the things that explains our success is our culture. All kids can learn, and it’s not just a trite thing. It’s not just a mantra; it’s in our blood. Regardless of color, gender, all kids can learn and learn at high levels.” (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Middle College High School has adopted college preparatory minimum requirements. Middle College requires all students to take the subject requirement courses certified by the University of California and the California State University systems to meet minimum freshman admission requirements. A slate of additional course offerings provides each Middle College student the option to graduate with an Associate of Arts degree. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
 - The school graduation requirements have been increased. One graduation requirement is now a 2.0 cumulative grade point average; students must have a C average overall to

graduate. The strategies used to make sure students and teachers can meet these new requirements include common standards-aligned courses, pacing guides, common assessments, standards-aligned instruction, and support systems to ensure accelerated learning of students in the bottom quartile. (Southwest, Central Union High School District)



Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

"Selecting and Developing Leaders and Teachers"

This second theme focuses on the selection and development of a school system's most precious commodity—people. Once the academic goals of the system are clear, the leaders and teachers are selected and given professional development opportunities to make these goals a reality for every learner in the system.

Specific California Findings: Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- **District, school, and classroom leaders and staff are part of a professional learning community that provides multiple ways for leaders and teachers to develop the skills to ensure that all students receive high-quality instruction.**
 - The central focus for capacity building is fostering a culture of inquiry. One example of fostering that culture was the development of the data team. The chief goal of the data team, according to one teacher, was to “create a mind-set that decisions are made on data, not instinct.” (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - New teams—District Improvement Teams and building-level Content Teams—have been designed to provide a rare and valuable venue for educators to think collectively and collaboratively about what is and is not working well. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)
 - Cleveland has sought to respond to the challenges of size (145 teachers, 17 administrators, and 3,669 students in the second largest district in the nation) by creating professional learning communities. In response to the question, “What is the secret to your success?,” the repeated response was “building a learning community.” (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Through a close working relationship with professional developer Rick DuFour, the school leaders and faculty worked to realize his motto, “rely on each other,” to create an effective Professional Learning Community.¹ School leaders indicate that they have also embedded themselves in a learning community that extends beyond the school itself to the district office. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - Collaboration used to be like that of a small liberal arts college in which colleagues are much more comfortable talking about subject matter than student learning. New learning communities are beginning to focus on the alignment of assessments to standards and on data-based instructional changes. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - As in nested professional learning communities, all levels of the school system are aligned for the purpose of improving instruction. Teachers work collaboratively to improve practice; principals learn to provide instructional support for teachers; and district staff learn to improve their ability to provide support for schools. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)

¹ DuFour coined the term “Professional Learning Community.” The concept is becoming more commonly used in education, however, so the term is capitalized in this report only when explicitly linked with DuFour’s work.

- **District and school professional development plans focus on a deep understanding of curriculum and assessment and on the development of instructional strategies that have proven most effective in raising student achievement. Activities are practice-oriented with structured follow-up activities.**
 - All teachers are supported to look at data together, based on standards and backed by research-based practices, to find ways to strengthen and refine instruction. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - A critical question is how to organize professional development to launch and achieve the proposed radical changes to achieve a tight focus on teaching and learning based on standards and data. “If you want this, you need to have a goal of getting the right kind of professional development,” according to the principal. “The most important questions are what and how are we teaching; how do we know whether students are learning; and, what do we do when students don’t learn?” (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - School and district leaders meet at the district office to analyze data and learn from each other. To ensure the focus on teaching and learning is not lost, one meeting a month is dedicated to standards and instruction and one meeting is dedicated to data review. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - All teachers are being asked to examine why some student subgroups are failing at higher rates despite successful rates overall. Professional development is focused on maintaining academic rigor while providing adequate scaffolding for struggling students. The principal states, “If you don’t build the right structure, people will wall themselves off.” Building appropriate opportunities for professional development and collaboration focused on data has been this principal’s focus since taking on his role in 2001. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Another key strategy that has helped the school remain anchored in standards and in the district’s common work is the development that occurs in the district’s Articulation Committee, a body designed to build cross-school “power standards,” course outlines, pacing guides, and formative assessments. (Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District)
 - “Focus Lesson” meetings have been instituted to build leadership and capacity around data-based instruction. Administrators and teachers from at least two departments meet, and one staff member shares a lesson based on a “focus standard.” The team discusses instructional strategies and materials that might enhance the lesson. The Focus Lesson is then delivered to all students in at least one of each participating staff member’s classrooms. At the end of the lesson, an assessment is given. The student achievement data are then brought back to the Focus Lesson Meeting and discussed. Adjustments are made based on the data. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
- **Teacher collaboration time is used to refine and revise curriculum, develop assessments, and share instructional strategies and practices. Collaborative teams take solution-centered approaches to address learning needs. Educators highly value professional inquiry, reflection, and problem solving by team members.**
 - Teachers were initially reluctant to give up their autonomy, and they had little experience with standards and collaborative grade-level planning. However, the pressure to improve was real. Through the support of coaches and time to collaborate, teachers began slowly to collectively familiarize themselves with new standards-based textbooks. The next step was introducing a computerized data analysis system. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)
 - The principal notes, “Teachers are naturally ‘isolationists,’ and a central role for administrators is getting them into collaborative groups. Get teachers to sit and talk about

what they do and how to make it better, where they are sharing best practices and doing demo lessons, they get results. Remove the idea that sharing is evaluative.” (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)

- Professional development mirrors the school philosophy of teachers as knowledgeable resources with valuable strengths. The focus is not on more traditional forms of professional development—workshops and conferences—but on collaboration. (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - The administration works to make “private teaching public.” Lack of time has proven a common challenge in institutionalizing this shift, but structures are being put in place. The school has recently established common times for teachers to visit one another’s classrooms. A group of newer teachers are opening their classrooms to do model lessons based on California Standards for the Teaching Profession. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - Collaboration time aimed at improving instruction, monitoring student achievement, and revising assessments and curricula is built into the school’s master schedule. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - The push now is for teacher collaboration to center on data and standards rather than for teachers to feel that data and standards hinder free and exciting exchange about curriculum and instruction. A deeper culture and commitment to talking about instruction through the lens of data about results are emerging slowly. This adjustment—providing teachers the structured time to collaborate around student work by department and across departments—is one of the chief factors to which site leaders attribute the school’s recent success on the California Standards Tests and the California High School Exit Exams. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Teachers collaborate every other Friday from 12:50 PM—3:30 PM with a focus on curriculum development. The small staff size allows them to start each meeting hearing how each teacher is making progress against stated outcomes. (Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District)
 - Teachers meet with colleagues to review assessment results, discuss student needs, and modify instruction. These meetings result in strengthened curriculum and instruction. When a staff member showed that many students were not achieving particular standards in mathematics, the teachers investigated the reason. Based on this, they added *Agile Mind* as a technology-based supplemental program. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
 - The district made a deep financial and practical commitment to staff collaboration. Two-and-a-half hours on Tuesday afternoon are dedicated collaboration time. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
- **Instructional specialists, coaches, and/or master teachers work with teachers to ensure that evidence-based teaching strategies are implemented effectively in every classroom.**
- Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) is a boundary-spanning role that is described as “more than the traditional school coach.” TOSA selection, training, service, and cycling back into the classroom are all designed to increase the flow of deep and fresh knowledge about curriculum and instruction across the schools and at the district office. Garden Grove USD ascribes to the idea that teachers are the best teachers of other teachers. The TOSA puts experienced and respected teachers into the position of supporting and teaching their peers. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - Citing research that peers learn best from peers, the district identified, through a collaborative process, two teachers to become coaches at the high school level. Having formal positions for trusted teacher leaders to serve as resources enabled the system for

using data to improve instruction to spread organically. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)

- Content specialists are now identified to work across traditional boundaries between teachers, between departments, and between schools. All school content specialists in the district come together to learn from one another and then go back to each site to guide and collaborate around benchmarks, course outlines, pacing guides and textbook matrices. These will be more consistently applied across the district because of their work. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
- Both an external and internal coach were provided. The external coach from WestEd “was beside us, ahead of us, behind us, helping us to do the hard work of starting to use the data to guide our instruction.” The internal coach ensured that teachers were “buying in” to the reforms and provided the support in skill building that gave them the capacity to do so. The coaches’ jobs were to build teacher skills in three areas: conducting data analysis, adjusting instruction to respond to data, and engaging in data-based reflective dialogue. (Southwest, Central Union High School District)



Theme Three: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

"The Right Stuff—Time and Tools"

This theme focuses on the "things" that higher performing school systems use—the arrangement of time, the instructional resources and materials, technology, etc. Strong instructional leaders and highly qualified teachers need evidence-based tools and resources to reach high standards with every learner.

Specific California Findings: Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- **Selection of instructional programs and resources used district wide is based on available research and/or evidence of effectiveness. These instructional programs are tightly aligned to learning standards with the understanding that the learning standards, not the textbooks, drive instructional planning.**
 - Adoption of the textbook series was just the beginning. Lessons were then created with the guidance of the Teacher on Special Assignment by identifying the focus standards and determining what sections of the text might best address them (not by following the textbook sequentially chapter by chapter). (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - Rather than letting textbooks guide the instructional process, the process begins by aligning courses to standards with a focus on essential standards for ninth graders. The English Department opted for depth over breath. Instead of hitting every standard once, the teachers decided to use the instructional materials to hit each of five essential standards twice. They felt students would be better prepared for later grades by doing so. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - The district provides instructional support that includes sample lessons and planning guides, sample assessment items and blueprints, and effective practice descriptors. The district provides training and guidance about the power standards. It is understood that the adopted textbooks may not always adequately address a standard, and therefore supporting materials and services may be necessary. (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)

- **A variety of instructional structures, programs, and resources has been selected to assist in differentiating instruction so that the vast majority of students can be served in the regular classroom and have access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum.**
 - Through the tight structure, identified resources, and multiple assessments used in each course, the aim is that instruction will not be watered down, even as an increasing number of students are encouraged to take advantage of the school's rich Advanced Placement offerings. Counselors encourage students to enroll, and students themselves encourage peers—telling them what support is available and how they themselves might help with peer mentoring. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - School leaders expect every teacher to be aware of students' language designations and California English Language Development Test levels. Shared responsibility means that English Language Development is seen as a critical tool for providing all students with access to a rich curriculum. The program is neither a goal in itself nor marginal to the curriculum. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)
 - Textbook adoptions, like that for English Language Development, are supplemented with materials selected by the school. Teachers describe these supplemental materials as being necessary to meet the instructional needs of the students, primarily to increase rigor. For California English Language Development Test Levels 4 and 5, they integrate *High Point* and *Prentice Hall* to allow English Language Learners to move seamlessly into mainstream English classes. (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - *Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)* is soon to be introduced school wide, because, as school leaders explain, "all students can learn from it." Some practices that are usually labeled as interventions are considered best practices and good teaching at Cleveland. (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Instructional techniques such as scaffolding give formal-sounding names to "good teaching." Making such techniques explicit gives all teachers access to alternatives to watering down difficult material. The goal is to provide students with a common ground to interact with even the most challenging material. (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - El Monte has been leading efforts to align, rather than abandon, vocational courses, which may in fact help students gain access to both college and career. Auto Technology courses, for example, are being reformatted to comply with both the standards of the industry and A-G requirements. The courses are aligned to core content courses and offer opportunities (due to powerful collaboration of teachers across departments) for the application of rigorous concepts. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - Teachers discuss course material selection in teams with an emphasis on choosing supplemental materials that are research based, standards aligned, and responsive to a data-based analysis of needs of their widely diverse student body. Research-based strategies were identified to improve the instructional program and address specific student needs. Strategies were identified in both English Language Arts and mathematics for students scoring "proficient or above" or for those scoring "basic or below." Differentiation is carefully structured to continually stretch all students toward greater rigor. One goal at the high school is to advance students into college-level mathematics courses by their second semester freshman year so they can take Geometry, Calculus AB, and Statistics. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
 - Another instructional arrangement that has been widely successful in offering support to prepare average-performing students for college eligibility is the *Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)* program. In all student interviews, AVID was mentioned as a key tool in helping them achieve at high levels. Students also reported that they were

offered the intensive support they needed to achieve in more rigorous courses. (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)

- The expectation that the teachers and school and district leadership would arrange to support high learning for all was not “business as usual” but rather a new and radical expectation. As the chemistry chairperson put it, it was a shift from the “old school” way to the “new school” way. Teachers, who had in the past learned to focus on offering “the best” lesson for “the best” student, had to adjust the arrangement and strategies of each lesson so that all students could succeed. (Southwest, Central Union High School District)

- **Schools’ schedules and structures protect instructional time and reflect an emphasis on core academic courses.**

- The reason for identifying “focus standards” was that instructional time is limited and must be carefully allocated. By prioritizing, it is understood that student learning must be paced to ensure the highest level of achievement possible. The selection of focus standards helps with this time economy. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
- The school’s master schedule is driven by the aim of ensuring that all students, no matter what their learning needs, have equal access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum that is standards based and offers access to college, career, and citizenship. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
- Teachers cite the school structure—the school serves sixth through twelfth grades—and the block schedule as two core variables related to their success. Longer class periods allow teachers the time to use a variety of instructional approaches and, thereby, reach students with a range of learning needs. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
- In an effort to develop a personal learning environment, the site is a “span school,” serving seventh- through twelfth-grade students. Student groups are organized so that all are in rotating block schedules in eight-hour days. The school points to this structure as a valuable tool to encourage students to mentor other students—just one of many strategies used to provide extra support for all students to succeed with more rigorous materials. (Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District)
- There are several unique instructional arrangements that many teachers and administrators discussed as critical to explaining the success of the school. The first instructional arrangement to which success is attributed is the block schedule and the second is to the fact that Sherman Oaks is a “span school” covering fourth through twelfth grades. Teachers are always directing lessons toward the expectations of the high school level. (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)

- **Teachers are assigned so that all levels of students have access to the most qualified and experienced teachers.**

- The master schedule is seen by the district and site leadership as *the* critical lever for reform. The core question has become: are the most qualified teachers also teaching the students most in need? The Advanced Placement Calculus teacher also teaches intermediate math, and every teacher teaches one or two “lower-level” classes. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
- Teachers are distributed in such a way that all levels of students have access to the most experienced teachers, and all teachers have experience teaching struggling students. Every teacher teaches at least one entry level and one advanced course in an effort to enhance coherence within the continuum of skills. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)

- A common practice in high school is that veteran and/or highly qualified teachers teach the higher level courses. Selma believes there is a substantive and strategic value to placing the most qualified teachers into the classrooms with lower achieving students. The Learning Director notes, “We are transitioning into that. We meet with teachers during master scheduling. We were able to get the Calculus teacher to teach Algebra I. Algebra I grades have gone up.” (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
- “In contrast to years past where you could see a difference in the quality of effort and investment on the part of teachers in advanced classes versus lower level classes, today when you go into an algebra class that has a support class connected to it or an advanced algebra class you should see no difference in either quality of interaction or the level of effort in teaching,” states the principal. To further support common high-quality practice, in the core departments teachers rotate which classes they teach, from Advanced Placement to support and English Language Development (ELD) classes. (Southwest, Central Union High School District)



Theme Four: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

“Knowing the Learners and the Numbers”

After clearly identifying what is to be taught and learned by grade and subject and ensuring that the schools are equipped with the staff and the tools to successfully deliver the curriculum, the school system then asks and answers an important question: “How are we going to know if students learned what we said they would learn?”

Specific California Findings: Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- **The district provides a user-friendly district-wide set of formative, diagnostic, and progress-monitoring assessments that reflects the standards and written district curriculum.**
 - The district supplements the state-mandated reporting system with district benchmark assessments to better assess their students’ progress. The pride of this year has been completion of the English Language Development (ELD) plan which offers a comprehensive program and benchmark assessments where ELD and English Language Arts assessments are totally aligned. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - The development of common assessments, while not easy, has proved to be among the most meaningful reform efforts for Central Union. Although sometimes contentious, building agreement around a set of quality, common assessments served as a learning experience for teachers, who were forced through the process to become intimately familiar with the state standards. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)
 - The district expects student progress to be measured against state standards. District-initiated benchmark assessments are designed to accomplish this. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - In addition to the state test, the district has had a district-wide writing prompt in place for several years. At the high school level, the district is now focused on common benchmark assessments. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
 - A teacher/coach position has been created to lead the development of common departmental assessments. Originally, the tests were administered at the end of the semester but the goal is to have all departments using common assessments for the end of

each unit. This addition provides for multiple assessments each semester to periodically monitor the students and adjust instruction. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)

- Common assessments each semester are used across the district's schools and regularly adjusted to make sure they are aligned to standards. Southwest has added nine-week assessments to increase information about student learning. (Southwest, Central Union High School District)
- **The district ensures that data systems are both useful and used to track student achievement and to inform key decisions. The district data department provides the data that are most needed and useful and provides training about data use and data systems as needed.**
 - Though all of the structures are valuable, they are a means to an end. The key is the joint reflection among colleagues around the data. The Data Director, action walks, Teacher on Special Assignment, "consult" process, alignment work, and benchmarks are all in the service of this one end: that teachers can learn together how to do a better job reaching every student. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - The assessments are administered quarterly and scored electronically. Each week data are reviewed and analyzed by district and school leaders to determine whether the tests need to be revised or whether an individual teacher's instruction needs to be modified. The district uses *EduSoft* to manage data and is training "key early adopters" who then teach it to their more reluctant peers. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)
 - Departments track student performance on benchmark assessments through district and school websites, enabling them to provide extra support to students as soon as they start falling behind in a subject. (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Using the district's data system, the Social Science Department is taking the lead in developing a test bank of items to be used in formative assessments and benchmark assessments. Those test bank items are linked to the rubrics for research papers, and to specific lesson units. (Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District)
 - A district-wide assessment system provides teachers with useful information about student progress relative to standards. (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
- **District and school leaders, teachers, and even students discuss assessment results openly and honestly in large-group, small-group, and individual meetings.**
 - Data teams are at each site. Action walks, informed by the data prepared by the data team, are a core part of the vertical teams' work. The department chairs, principal, Data Director, counselors, and other specialists work together to analyze data. Institutionalizing data reflection represents a significant shift in the way business has been done. "Looking at each other's data is probably the largest cultural shift which has occurred," the 7-12 Director states. "If you want to find best practice, it will be in reflecting on your own data together." According to one teacher, "[Data discussion] was uncomfortable for many teachers. There was an initial uproar but gradual acceptance. ... We started saying to each other, 'look at my data.'" (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - Monitoring student achievement happens in all departments across the school. One result is an upbeat, optimistic attitude about the ability to impact learning. When discussing the gap closure that has been happening at Cleveland over the past few years, the principal confidently stated, "Just wait for this year's results." (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)

- The principal looks at every student's scores to see where each student has improved and/or where each is struggling. He then writes each student a letter saying, for example, "You did a great job in English. You moved from the 20th to the 40th percentile. ... Next time shoot for 50!" (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - School and district leaders and directors meet to analyze data and learn from each other's successes and challenges. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - Just as students own their learning goals, students are also trained alongside site leaders and teachers to understand, discuss, and track their own achievement data. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - The entire staff meets twice a month to analyze data from state exams such as the California High School Exit Examination as well as data from district exams such as Algebra 1 and Language Arts. The staff looks at trends in the overall scores of all the students, and in the disaggregated data by significant subgroups (African American, Hispanic/Latino, and English Language Development [ELD]), by gender, and by grade level. Results are compared with previous tests. The Instructional Leadership Team meets bi-weekly to look at test scores and student work, plan interventions for specific students, and make recommendations for intervention materials. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
 - Student transcripts and test results are given to students for structured and unstructured reflection. Teachers conference individually with students at least once a semester to discuss their performance and analyze their progress toward accomplishing the Expected School-Wide Learning Results (ESLRs) and standards. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
 - Selma encourages students to self-monitor their mastery of California Content Standards. Students in one class are listed on a large chart along with all of the standards that they are expected to learn. Once they have mastered a particular standard, they place a sticker next to the standard they have completed. This allows students to take responsibility for mastering standards while allowing the teacher to see which standards need to be re-taught. In this particular class, 30% of each student's grade is based on mastery of the standards. The strategy was adopted from the elementary level. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
 - "There are no secrets at Selma High School!" according to the Learning Director, when discussing the review of student data. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
 - Teachers also equip students to assess their own work through rubrics. The students then know what they need to do to earn a high grade. The students have reference points for the grade they are trying to earn and can self-monitor. (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
- **Teachers use classroom, school, district, and state assessment results to continually examine student performance and to direct instructional decision making.**
 - The most critical component to teacher-designed common assessments, according to the principal, is the fact that they allow teachers to "share and then find out what others were doing so they could learn from one another." The common assessment against standards allows for intensified, accelerated knowledge sharing and knowledge management. The chief purposes of benchmark assessments are to allow teachers to monitor student comprehension of the standards and compare results. Comparing results helps teachers identify best practices and to modify instruction as needed to best serve the students. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)

- Data are the essential foundation for El Monte’s work to improve instructional practices and meet the needs of all students. The work began with simply looking at student placement and achievement data but has since evolved into careful analysis and, most importantly, data-based action. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
 - The faculty is asked to use existing collaboration time to look at the data and any achievement gaps. According to one site leader, “We wanted folks to look at data, and not just look but have conversation about them. You have to take it to the next level: how it breaks down, how to take it back to the classroom.” Teachers agree that they are making the move from reflecting on the data to using this reflection jointly to improve instruction. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - A testing coordinator helped all staff comprehend and assess data. Test scores are disaggregated, which allows departments to see students’ strengths and weaknesses. Departments can then devise alternative methods of instruction for concepts that have been identified as weak areas. For example, students had difficulty in geometry with the concepts of area and volume. So the following year, students were asked to build their own polyhedrons to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts. (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
- **Multiple assessment tools and methods are used to monitor student learning.**
 - Rubrics constructed by departments or individual teachers are a critical enhancement to the quarterly benchmarks. They offer a qualitative assessment that is made public yet remains highly personal to each department. All rubrics, however, are aligned to standards. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - Many teachers encourage students to develop criteria and rubrics to be used for evaluating essays, presentations, and projects. In the English Department, students are given the opportunity to have their work edited by their peers and to revise and improve it until they reach the highest score on the rubric. This “highest” standard is considered to be within reach for all students. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Presentations, exhibitions, and portfolios are the primary tools for formative assessment. A rich diversity of assessments is stressed. (Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District)
 - Formative assessments such as presentations, exhibitions, and portfolios are primary evaluation tools. However, standardized tests are also emphasized. In 2003, ahead of the state, the California High School Exit Exam was made mandatory for graduation. Even though Middle College is an alternative school, students are required to take all district and state assessments, including end-of-course exams. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
 - Faculty often ask students to use self and peer evaluation to create realistic expectations and to improve students’ critical thinking skills. Examples of these types of evaluations include students evaluating expository essays according to a student-created rubric; students meeting regularly in portfolio-writing response groups; four classmates analyzing character description according to a teacher-created rubric; and mathematics students taking part in group tests and collaboratively analyzing the results. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)



Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

"Ensuring All Children Learn"

The most important question of all follows the monitoring of student performance: "What are we going to do if students do not learn the knowledge and skills we said they would learn?" Higher performing school systems have *pyramids of intervention* that provide immediate and intense intervention at multiple levels when learning is interrupted.

Specific California Findings: Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

- **School leaders work with academic department leaders, teachers, and students to provide timely interventions and prevent students from falling too far behind. Teachers have multiple intervention programs to choose from to meet a diverse range of student needs.**
 - Incoming ninth-grade students who had low reading SAT9 scores and low GPAs were identified and placed in the TARGET Academy (now called the Delta Sigma Epsilon Academy). These students were enrolled in two language arts classes, English IP and the *Language!* program. These classes specifically address the reading needs of these students. The Academy program uses a district-adopted instructional program called *Language!* which emphasizes encoding and decoding skills. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
 - The primary intervention is improving the quality or structure of regular classroom instruction. For example, the Mathematics Department regroups (shuffles classes based on results of common assessments) at five-week intervals in algebra. Regrouping in algebra prevents students from falling too far behind. Some students, however, arrive at school missing skills they need to succeed at grade level. Not all such gaps can be addressed in the regular classroom, so when students are struggling, the principal views additional assistance as a crucial part of improving student achievement. The focus is on early and rapid intervention. While some interventions take place after school and on weekends, a majority take place during the school day when more students are present to attend. By using lunch time to run interventions, students who work, are bussed from other parts of LAUSD, or those who just otherwise would not attend, can easily attend sessions targeting their needs. (Cleveland, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - Intervention is less of a focus than enrichment. The school offers a wide range of Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and the focus on a similarly wide range of differentiated courses to prepare students for these AP courses is now emergent. A very real debate is in play within the faculty about whether differentiating and scaffolding instruction means "watering down" content particularly given limited resources and time. (Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)
 - By many reports, Marysville Charter Academy is one large intervention and recognition system. According to one faculty member, students who may have been "washed out [in other schools] ... those are the kids you find here as engaged and self-confident and effective." There is a lot of room for unusual avocations from Kuk Sool Won, a form of martial arts, to "clogging" and ballet through which students can be engaged in the school even when they are struggling with Algebra 1 or English. "The point is to stay with them and *stay on standard*," states one teacher. (Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District)
 - The greater alignment of the courses to pacing guides and standards has facilitated clear communication among students, parents, and fellow teachers. In addition to looking for ways to build on each student's strength, explicit interventions in each subject area are in

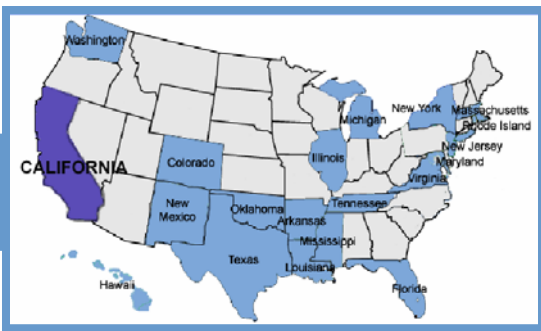
place. Each teacher has a certain group of students under his/her care and will be the first to focus on which interventions are needed for those students. For example, says one teacher, "I worked hard on getting the student out of the F-box. ... I gave the syllabus to the parent, and they put it on their fridge; the parents check off the homework, and I get it back signed. Weekly reports go to the parents and their signatures come back to me. And now he's a straight A student," she smiles. (Marysville Charter Academy for the Arts, Marysville Joint Unified School District)

- As an alternative program designed by the district to support students who are not working to their full potential but could be college bound, the whole school can be viewed as one large intervention system. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
- One of Selma's goals is to make sure that all students have access to a rigorous curriculum. In order to ensure this, teachers and administrators have a variety of strategies to recognize student progress and to offer additional assistance. One strategy has been to put the most qualified teachers with the neediest students. This is a change in culture, but teaching the students most in need is no longer a punishment, but recognition of a teacher's skill and knowledge. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
- Teachers and administrators do not leave students to sink or swim in a high-level class. Selma provides them with extra support through a special transitions class, which offers academic support as well as information on career and job opportunities. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
- All ninth and tenth graders performing below a 2.0 grade point average must attend a mandatory after-school tutorial for an entire grading period. Saturday School is offered for students who need additional assistance outside of the traditional school week and for students who may be above a 2.0 but need extra help. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
- When a teacher or administrator identifies students who need educational support in order to pass the California High School Exit Exam, they are placed in an intervention class, which supports them in gaining the skills they need to pass. (Selma, Selma Unified School District)
- Academic and personal student intervention also includes an "Adopt-a-Student" program in which faculty and staff establish relationships with students who are struggling either academically or socially. Again, this reinforces the familial environment that is an overarching feature of the school. (Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies, Los Angeles Unified School District)

▪ **Staff ensure the adoption of proven intervention and recognition programs. Staff continually evaluate intervention and recognition programs to ensure they are instructionally effective.**

- The commonly cited weakness in the *Sustained Silent Reading* (SSR) program is that there is no way to assess its impact. Garden Grove has initiated a step toward making SSR gains for a student measurable. The district's Data Director is helping the site do an increasingly careful job of tracking students and program effectiveness. The school instituted the program with 12 minutes daily set aside for silent reading as part of an effort to enhance student interaction with the written word. Based on research into the participating students' gains and the results of two faculty surveys, SSR was extended to 17 minutes at the beginning of 2001-2002. (Bolsa Grande, Garden Grove Unified School District)
- The *Advancement via Individual Determination* (AVID) program provides two periods of support per week, tutorials with college students, and opportunities for students to work collaboratively. It is the expectation that each student in the program will attend college. The program is intentionally targeted and works with students who are at risk. (Central Union, Central Union High School District)

- Following a study-skills model learned from Rick Dufour, this year El Monte laid the foundation to launch a study-skills class series in which older students serve as mentors to support younger ones. The program is being implemented with full support from district and school leaders, all of whom cite the power of peer-to-peer relationships and the proven record of the program in other schools. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
- The AVID program was launched three years ago and is of such excellence that El Monte is in line to become a demonstration school. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
- The Assistant Principal for Activities has been the lead on the SB65 grant. Its goal is to ensure that all students graduate on time. “The thing we’ve done ... we aggressively track never-enrolled students and non-attendees to try to get them to school.” A key structure for the program is the Coordinating Services Team or COST team. (El Monte, El Monte Union High School District)
- By site report, one of the key whole school programs for intervention is the site’s AVID program which Middle College adopted in 1996. The AVID model resonated with the school objectives, emphasizing collaboration and team teaching, inquiry, writing, and the development of study skills. (Middle College, West Contra Costa Unified School District)
- AVID and TIPS, an adjusted version for struggling students developed by one English teacher, offer strategies such as Cornell Note Taking that have been adopted and are in use school wide. (Southwest, Central Union High School District)



California High School Best Practice Study: Conclusion

Based on the Themes of The JFTK Framework

Researchers conducted site visits to 15 high schools in California, identified through the NCEA analysis. Summaries of the findings of those practices that appeared to distinguish consistently higher performing high schools from average-performing ones are presented below by theme.

The Findings

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Each of the 10 higher performing schools in California was powerfully focused on the state standards as well as on employing critical thinking or higher order thinking skills to teach the standards. State standards were studied in detail, and “power” or “focus” standards (to prioritize skill acquisition) were typically identified. Powerful tools and resources to ensure systemic alignment for reaching those standards were provided (i.e., course outlines, pacing guides, related instructional materials, staff development, student exemplars, and formative and evaluative benchmark assessments). Along with meeting state standards, there was a strong concentration in each of the schools on providing the necessary support to ensure that all students had access to a rich and rigorous curriculum. Ensuring that all students had this opportunity was seen as tightly tied to the advent of standards. By clarifying, prioritizing, and aligning student learning, educators could see the path that increased student participation in a much more rigorous curriculum without diminishing the content of that curriculum.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

Clearly the strongest practices to emerge within this theme centered on the development of professional learning communities and a new form of teacher collaboration at the secondary level. Professional learning communities were described as teams of educators from across the system—district, school, and classroom—who were focused on developing ongoing and honest discussion based on standards and data to impact student learning. Educators noted a profound shift in staff discussions and meetings—from “dialogue about subject matter” to “collaboration around student learning.” Professional development activities were infused into the regular school day with the understanding that the day of teacher “isolationism” had passed. While departmental structures remained strong, new cross-departmental structures were also strong. Forced and spurious “interdisciplinary” programs were replaced with rich dialogue and planning across departments made possible by a deep understanding of specific learning objectives to be mastered. Instructional or academic coaches, content specialists, master teachers, and assessment advisors were emerging positions created to support teachers as they shift to a new culture marked by open discussion and observation, student performance data analysis and review, and instructional strategy adaptations and modifications.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Educators at higher performing secondary schools were described as making the shift from “textbook-driven instruction” to true “standards-driven instruction.” This was seen as a “radical” shift that required a deep alignment of each course to standards that were understood in terms of both substance and needed level of student skill acquisition. Texts were resources that were used only as proven to reach stated learning objectives, and supplemental materials were sought in response to demonstrated need (through student performance data). No longer was the teacher’s aim at the “best lesson” for the “best student,” but the target was seen as the “best lesson” for “each student.” Differentiation was viewed as a powerful strategy to carefully guide all students toward greater rigor. “Span schools”—those extending beyond the typical 9-12 configuration—emphasized the gains made by eliminating unnecessary transitions and variation for the learner. The majority of the schools cited block scheduling as an arrangement that enhanced standards-based instruction. Finally, numerous examples emerged of schools restructuring to ensure that all students have equal access to the most qualified teachers.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

Without exception, the higher performing schools noted the use of common assessments as a powerful force behind student achievement gains. The districts tended to provide common semester assessments with schools choosing to create more frequent assessments by nine weeks or by unit. District and school leaders ensured that teachers had access to useful, powerfully formatted data from local assessments as well as state assessments and the training to know how to use them. Rather than focused on understanding what the data meant or how to read it, training was focused on how to respond instructionally to an interpretation or analysis of the data. Multiple assessment tools—including portfolios and performance-based reviews—were used to enrich more traditional assessment measures.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustment

More and more frequently, “intervention” was described in terms of well-structured daily and master schedules, institutionalized programs and practices, and high-quality, differentiated instruction in every classroom. That is, structures and strategies that are often cited as “interventions” in average-performing schools are becoming part of the fiber of the primary structures and strategies in every classroom for every student of higher performing schools. Interventions were discussed not as much for assisting failing students (although these interventions were in place) but for ensuring all students had timely and intense support necessary to have access to rigorous coursework. These interventions were layered—from within the regular classroom to extensive programs across the district—and varied in approach. The Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program was the most often cited external program used to assist students in reaching higher standards.

Next Steps

NCEA’s state-study protocol assumes that the state framework of best practices will be built based on a three-year study of consistently higher performing and average-performing schools at the elementary-school level (Year One), middle-school level (Year Two), and high-school level (Year Three). Having completed studies of elementary and high schools, JFTK-California’s next step should be to continue with an exploration of higher performing middle schools. After exploring these themes at all levels, JFTK-California could continue with a targeted study of issues that emerged during the previous work in California schools.

One of the dangers of studying consistently higher performing schools is drawing conclusions based on a single school example. To avoid this danger, the conclusions for the JFTK-California High School Best Practice Study, 2004-05, focus on a description of the practices that are most consistent across the higher performing schools in this study and that can be distinguished in quantity or quality from the same practices in average-performing schools of the study. While any individual case study may cite different factors or practices than those noted above, we highlight those practices that are found to be systematically different between the higher performing schools as a group and the average-performing schools as a group. Finally, the practices highlighted in the conclusion of this study have also been informed by the findings from a much larger body of schools studied (300+ across five years and 20 states) to help determine meaning in the context of California.