

Balancing Act



Best Practices in the Middle Grades

A report on the findings from the third and final year of the California Best Practices Study

Conducted by Springboard Schools, Spring 2007



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**BALANCING ACT:
BEST PRACTICES IN THE MIDDLE GRADES**

**A REPORT FROM THE
CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY**

SPRINGBOARD SCHOOLS

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PREFACE: ABOUT BEST PRACTICES

In the past, educators almost always looked for best practices in classrooms. In fact, when educators say “practice,” they are generally talking about teacher practice. Yet 12 years of work at Springboard Schools (and its predecessor, the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, or BASRC) argues that administrators, as well as teachers, need to worry about best practices. Equally important are organizational best practices for both schools and school districts. These kinds of best practices are crucial parts of creating school systems in which good teaching is the norm for every student in every classroom.

While all of these practices are called “best,” what this means is that they seem to be associated with improved performance. W. Edwards Deming, famous as the man who brought “Total Quality Management” to the private sector, taught that improvement is the result of a careful process of seeking out and addressing variations in quality, even small ones. The idea that dramatic improvements in quality could result from the cumulative implementation of many small improvements was key to Deming’s approach. This means that “best practice” is the sum total of many “better practices,” and that it is always evolving. In any field that is actively improving, today’s “best” practice is likely to be tomorrow’s “second best.” Still, without a systematic effort to identify, understand, and scale-up best practices at all levels of the education system, the broad-scale improvement of public education is impossible.

So, what is known now about best – or at least better – practices beyond the individual classroom? Springboard Schools’ first foray into understanding what might constitute best practices for school administrators and for schools as organizations came as part of our work to help schools narrow the achievement gap. Springboard Schools researcher Kiley Walsh began by using test scores to identify one group of gap-closing and another group of non-gap-closing elementary and middle schools. Walsh then used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to discover systematic differences in school-level practices between these two groups of schools. This approach revealed striking differences in the ways schools organized their reform or improvement work, the way school leaders explained and framed that work, and the ways that teachers worked together.¹ Often, best practices were revealed to be not individual programs or strategies but carefully orchestrated combinations that come together to produce results.

Building on this initial study, which focused on schools in the Springboard Schools (then BASRC) network, we have spent three years conducting a statewide study whose goal was to identify the practices behind higher-than expected results. This report summarizes findings from schools serving middle grades students.

1 Walsh, K. (2004). *After the Test: Closing the Achievement Gap with Data*. Bay Area School Reform Collaborative: San Francisco.

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ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY

Today, the availability of multiple years of data on school performance has expanded the frontier for new types of research into schools. The standards movement and No Child Left Behind legislation have created both an unprecedented opportunity to identify higher-performing, high-poverty schools and an unprecedented appetite for information about the strategies that lie behind improved performance. In response, Springboard Schools has spent three years conducting the California Best Practices Study, an ambitious research initiative spotlighting effective practices of schools throughout California. The first year of study focused on elementary schools, the second year on high schools, and now middle grades schools in the third and final year. This initiative highlights schools that show high levels of student achievement, with particular focus on high achievement among their English learners, students of color and students living in poverty. The study also includes a control or comparison group of “average performers.”

Methodology

The selection process began by identifying schools that serve the middle grades (defined as any two of the grades 6-8) and enrolled at least 400 students in the 2004-05 school year. To focus on schools that serve above-average numbers of students living in poverty and English language learner (ELL) students, only those schools with over 45 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) or more than 20 percent of students identified as ELL (within 5 percent of the state average for each subgroup) were retained in the sample.

Next, performance on the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics sections of the California Standards Test (CST) was analyzed for three consecutive years (2003-2005). To qualify as a “high-performer,” the school’s

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) proficiency² had to rank in the top 20 percent of all schools serving middle grades in the state in either ELA or Mathematics and in the top 40 percent in both ELA and Mathematics, with the middle grades being representative of the school’s achievement (see Appendix B). Additionally, each high-performer met all AYP requirements each year from 2003-2005. The control group of “average-performers” consisted of schools that ranked in the 50-60 percent range for AYP proficiency in ELA and Math. Average-performers were not required to have met all AYP requirements in all three years.

Finally, ten high-performers and five average-performers were chosen by controlling for geographic distribution and incorporating a variety of grade configurations.³ Average-performers were matched to high-performers according to school size, grade span, percent FRPL and percent ELL in order to allow for a representative and comparable control group.⁴

After site selection, research teams used a carefully structured protocol of questions to interview school district central office administrators, school leaders and teachers. Research teams also reviewed a comprehensive set of supporting documents collected from each site, including materials related to curriculum, instruction, measurable goals, professional development, data and monitoring, specials programs and interventions that reflected work at the district, school, department and classroom levels.

2 AYP Proficiency for Elementary and Middle Schools is based on student proficiency levels on the CST.

3 Since the top 20 percent of schools statewide included both K-8 and middle or intermediate schools we made sure that both types of schools were represented in our sample.

4 For more on the selection process and for case studies and tools from Years 1 and 2 (elementary and high schools) go to “Best Practices” at www.SpringboardSchools.org.

Limitations of this study

Like all studies, this one has limits. First, this study describes practices that appear to be associated with high performance; it does not offer a conclusive causal analysis of how these high performing sites reached these levels of achievement. Second, as a cross-sectional design, the study provides a snapshot of the work underway in ten high performers at a particular moment in time. While the research protocols included questions about

the change journey, the stories respondents recounted about change reflect their experiences and perceptions. They may or may not correspond with others' perceptions of the same events and may be subject to errors of memory. Finally, each strategy should be seen as part of a larger whole. Schools are complex systems, and particular practices and strategies often depend on others. Readers are encouraged to think of these case studies as portraits of high-performing systems rather than as a list of disconnected "best practices."

California Best Practices Study: Balancing Act Study Sample

Demographic Analysis of Study Participants: High-Performing Schools

School	District	District Population	Grade Span	School Size	% FRPL	% ELL	% Hispanic /Latino	% Black
Alvarado Intermediate	Rowland USD	17,945	7-8	1,106	42.9%	19.7%	38.4%	2.7%
Edison Computech Middle	Fresno USD	80,760	7-8	732	53.7%	1.4%	43.7%	11.1%
Elizabeth Hudson K-8	Long Beach USD	96,319	K-8	1,135	77.5%	23.9%	37.2%	23.0%
Hughes Middle	Long Beach USD	96,319	6-8	1,548	50.8%	4.8%	27.8%	25.3%
McGarvin Intermediate	Garden Grove USD	50,030	7-8	670	57.0%	32.4%	17.2%	0.1%
Monterey Highlands Elementary	Alhambra USD	19,673	K-8	871	56.7%	38.3%	31.2%	0.5%
Ramona Elementary	Alhambra USD	19,673	K-8	1,019	70.5%	45.0%	32.3%	0.5%
Repetto Elementary	Alhambra USD	19,673	K-8	726	54.8%	34.6%	31.3%	0.3%
Riverview Elementary	Kings Canyon Joint USD	9,250	K-8	422	37.9%	21.3%	53.8%	0.5%
Ynez Elementary	Alhambra USD	19,673	K-8	927	77.5%	47.9%	25.9%	0.4%
<i>State Average:</i>				976	49.0%	25.2%	46.8%	8.0%
<i>Average of all High Performers:</i>				916	57.9%	26.9%	33.9%	6.4%

Bold indicates that school statistics exceed state average.

Data are from 2004-05, the most recent available at the time of selection

Table 1: Study sample, California Best Practices Study, middle grades. Data source: California Department of Education, 2004-05.

FOCUS ON THE MIDDLE GRADES: PUTTING THIS REPORT IN CONTEXT

As this report goes to press, public education is re-discovering the importance of the middle grades. From Educational Leadership, to Education Week, to the New York Times, writers are examining the current state of education for middle grades students in this country. The configurations of middle grades schools take center stage in some articles, while others focus on curriculum and content as the critical targets for change.

Middle grades schools are positioned at the center of the K-12 education pipeline. These schools receive students from their feeder elementary schools and help them develop the knowledge and skills needed to transition into high school. Unfortunately, in California and the rest of the nation, many students face major challenges in making that transition. Some enter high school without the reading skills and math background needed to perform well in the ninth grade. Others are unprepared socially and emotionally to successfully make the transition into a highly complex environment that can leave students feeling disconnected and alone.

Ninth grade transition has emerged as a crucial predictor of whether or not a student persists in school to graduation or leaves school.⁵ While part of this problem rests with high schools and earlier experiences in elementary grades, for many students the middle grades bear the burden of ensuring students enter high school prepared to succeed. Indeed, the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) given in the tenth grade includes content students learn in middle grades.⁶ Thus, students need to leave the middle grades having mastered the middle grades standards required to succeed on this exam.

5 Rumberger, R. W. (1995). Dropping out of Middle School: A Multilevel Analysis of Students and Schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 583-625.

6 Blueprints of the CAHSEE standards are available from the California Department of Education (CDE) <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/resources.asp>.

This Study in Context: Background on the Middle School Movement

Though high-stakes testing and the push for middle grades students to pass courses like Algebra puts a new spotlight on the middle grades, the problem itself is hardly new. Starting in the early 1980's, middle grades began to receive national attention as both researchers and practitioners began to express frustration with the quality of programs for early adolescent students. Reports by organizations such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1985), the Carnegie Corporation (1989), and actions to reorganize middle grades by high profile districts such as in Columbus, Ohio (1981) were key in creating what came to be called the middle school movement.

This movement yielded a set of very influential reports and changes to middle-level education across the country, including The California Department of Education's (CDE) *Caught in the Middle* (1987), and on the national level the Carnegie Corporation's *Turning Points* in 1989. These types of reports painted a picture of a significant mismatch between the needs of early adolescents and the schools that purported to serve them. In response, many began to propose a major shift from a traditional "junior high school" model to "middle school," a new structure more closely aligned with the needs of these students. This new "student-focused" way of thinking about middle schools sought to provide students with a more supportive environment and led to recommendations for a number of structural changes:

- A shift from a grades 7-8 or 7-9 junior high school to a grades 6-8 middle school structure;
- The introduction of the "advisory" period as a way of giving students an adult mentor in school;
- An emphasis on "coring," or creating interdisciplinary classrooms and reducing

the number of different teachers students experience in a day; and

- The introduction of a broad spectrum of “exploratory” classes and experiences.

In addition, middle school reform reports like those cited above introduced a number of ideas that have become central to subsequent reform efforts. For example, the middle school movement argued for a focus on the school as the unit of change. Schools, they argued, need to be intentional communities with the commitment and capacity to respond to the needs of the particular group of students they serve. The middle school movement also argued for small learning communities, the primacy of relationships for learning, the importance of students learning a “common core” of knowledge, and the value of teacher collaboration time in the improvement process. Middle school reformers were also pathfinders in taking a “systems” approach to creating better schools, understanding that students experience curriculum, instruction, structure, and relationships not as separate, but as interconnected elements of their lives at school. Today’s improvement efforts build on the middle school movement in important ways.

Standards for Curriculum and Instruction

Despite these promising strides, two decades later, the middle school movement is no longer the cutting edge of change. Standards-based reform responds in part to the perceived weaknesses of the middle school movement, at least as it was initially conceived. In its 2000 report, *Turning Points 2000*, the Carnegie Corporation noted that middle grades schools were “warmer and happier places” but that too often middle grades reform had produced limited change “at the core of most students’ experience: curriculum, assessment, and instruction.”⁷ This finding echoes Richard Elmore’s broader conclusion

7 Jackson, A.W. and G.A. Davis. (2000). *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*. Carnegie Corporation of New York: New York. p5.

about school reform in general. Writing in 2000, Elmore comments that school reform efforts most often have focused on change at the level of structure and failed to impact what he calls the “technical core” of schooling: what happens in classrooms between teachers, students, and the curriculum.⁸ Thus middle school reform arguably laid the groundwork for a next step, which it shares with the rest of the school reform movement in this nation.

Partially in response to these ideas, some influential middle grades reformers embraced standards and accountability. For example, Hayes Mizell noted that, “Middle school reform is not about a few changes at the margins. It is about putting students first and the prerogatives and convenience of adults second, changing how the school functions and students are taught so they learn more and become partners in developing and sustaining a caring school community.”⁹ Mizell goes on to elaborate on this connection between deep change and standards in the middle school movement: “There are many school systems using standards, in most cases because their states insist on it, but few of these school systems seek to reform curriculum, instruction, assessment and staff development so as to become interconnected, moving parts that cause all students to perform at standard.”¹⁰ The systemic approach Mizell recommends in fact resembles our observations of high performers and thus represents the future of middle grades reform.

8 Elmore, R.F. (2000). *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*. Albert Shanker Institute: Washington, DC.

9 Mizell, H.M. (2002). *Shooting for the Sun: The Message of Middle School Reform*. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation: New York. p67.

10 Mizell. p126.

PART ONE: SUCCEEDING IN THE MIDDLE

AN OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

This section presents three layers of findings from the Springboard Schools middle grades study: 1) the “front line” activities occurring in middle grades schools and how high-performing schools differ from average-performers, 2) documented efforts of high-performing schools to engage students and empower student voice, and 3) examples of what we call “systems thinking,” which we believe represents the next wave for middle grades reform. The “front line” activities in the middle-level schools we studied are focused around standards-based reform as the most prominent strategy for change occurring in these schools. They are presented below as action principles and key findings.

I. Front Line Activities in the Middle Grades

The first area of findings relates to the standards-based improvement activities we observed in our study sites. Our study finds that both high- and average-performing middle grades schools are engaging in similar types of activities to improve their schools. Among these, the most common include:

- Aligning curriculum to standards;
- Establishing structures that make high standards real;
- Intervening for students academically and socially;
- Supporting teachers to ensure high quality instruction; and
- Using data to develop strategies and improve practice

While high- and average-performing schools are both attending to these activities, closer examination highlights critical differences between these two groups of schools. These differences are explored below through a set of action principles and key findings.

Action Principle: Align Curriculum

Key Finding: *High performing middle schools work to align curriculum in three ways: 1) with*

standards, 2) between classrooms, and 3) from grade level to grade level.

Alignment between classrooms has been a challenge, but in high-performing sites, many teachers have embraced the goal of a common curriculum. Despite questions about the value of what has been lost, the advent of standards and adoption of a common curriculum has led to an increasing degree of consistency from classroom to classroom, especially in the higher-performing schools we visited. Teachers in these schools work from common course outlines or “pacing guides” that specify (to varied degrees of detail) which chapters, units, or even lessons, for teachers to cover and map standards to content. These pacing guides, generally developed at the district level, serve as a timeline for when specific content is to be covered and are often reinforced by district benchmark assessments.

Many of the high-performers we studied extended the goal of “alignment” beyond curriculum through the school-wide use of common instructional strategies, instructional programs and/or other school wide initiatives. Specific strategies varied: for example, AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), “Writer’s Workshop,” a school-wide code of conduct, and “Character Counts” were all sources of common strategies. One example involved teachers reinforcing Cornell note-taking strategies so that students received consistent expectations around note-taking styles and strategies in every class. In each case, teachers described these strategies as both meeting specific goals and also as helping to create a more coherent student experience across grade levels and classrooms.

The greatest challenge for most of the middle grades schools we studied was aligning the curriculum with feeder and/or destination schools. Even in districts with a highly aligned approach to curriculum, which provides a framework for the conversation between middle grades teachers and those at feeder elementary and destination high schools, transitioning students into and out of middle grades requires coordination. Stan-

dards and common curricula make work on alignment by teams of teachers possible, but these tools did not make transitioning efforts unnecessary. Teachers reported that alignment efforts with feeder/destination schools were crucial to ensure student transitions went as smoothly as possible. High-performing sites generally focused more on the issue of alignment with feeder and destination schools.

While many of the schools and districts we studied focus on vertical alignment in content areas, a smaller number are also seeking to develop what some call “horizontal alignment” by focusing on interdisciplinary connections. In these schools an interdisciplinary approach serves primarily as a method of creating coherence across the curriculum. In the past, horizontal alignment commonly involved teaming students and teachers, or “coring.” This approach can lead to credentialing issues, for example, if a teacher with an English credential teaches a humanities block that includes social sciences¹¹. While some high performers continued to use these strategies, others sought to reduce the fragmentation of students’ experience through the use of the kinds of common instructional strategies discussed above.

Action Principle: Design Structures that Make High Standards Real

Key Finding: *High performing middle grades schools create systems and structures, including a master schedule, that balance the aims of access, rigor and flexibility.*

One of the critical issues facing middle grades schools is the need to help a wide variety of students master important content. The balancing act between rigor and flexibility or differentiation is easier said than done. In many cases, feeder schools produce students

¹¹ In California, middle grades teachers can either hold a single subject credential (as high school teachers have) or a multi-subject credential (the credential for primary grades). Teachers with multi-subject credentials sometimes have an add-on credential in a specialty. This is common among Algebra 1 teachers.

with widely varying educational experiences and students enter with vastly different backgrounds and past achievement levels. These pressures are intensified in a standards-based environment in which goals often collide with reality as it becomes difficult to help a very diverse set of students attain high standards. In middle grades, the students who are struggling become more apparent. In the words of Alvarado Intermediate principal Dr. Nancy Padilla, “Kids behind academically become more apparently so in the single subject environment. ...There, those kids become more glaringly obvious than in a single teacher classroom.”

Many middle and intermediate schools must integrate students from several feeder elementary schools. District data systems play an important role in informing teachers’ efforts to determine student ability levels and needs. The high-performing schools we studied appear to be especially adept at developing master schedules and making strategic choices about student grouping that respond to diverse needs. The commitment of teachers to providing students with the best education regardless of agreement with these strategic decisions was important. Whenever school leaders were faced with challenging situations, such as students’ needing to learn English and also to master challenging content within the constraints of a school day, they made strategic choices and were clear about their rationale so teachers could understand. Maximizing opportunities to succeed at both goals was essential. As one administrator put it, “Invariably when you have classes only for English learners, the content suffers. We want our English learners to have access to the same content, and get the support they need to access it. We don’t want them off some place just studying the language while others master content.”

Algebra – and the imperative to teach algebra in eighth grade to as many students as possible – drives the master schedule to

a surprising degree in many schools.¹² Our high-performers balanced trade-offs as they sought to achieve this goal. In many situations an unintended consequence of the focus on algebra is often some level of de facto tracking, even when the explicit policy is in favor of heterogeneous grouping. Small grade-level cohorts can funnel students into tracked classrooms based enrollment in algebra versus enrollment in support classes or preparation classes. Algebra is not the only cause of de facto tracking, however. In other cases, students learning English or struggling in English language arts are scheduled into a support class and then end up traveling together all day. In the high-performing schools we studied, school leaders did not sweep these issues under the rug but instead were aware of this effect and used multiple strategies to manage this issue and ensure that each group of students had access to both challenging curriculum and the support they needed to succeed.

High-performing middle grades schools are providing insight on how to create the appropriate structures to support students. In the case of algebra, some sites have chosen to have all students, regardless of past math achievement, take Algebra 1. The reasoning behind this is one of rigor: expose the student to a challenging conceptual curriculum and they will rise to the occasion. If they do not pass they can retake the class. Some schools may also provide support classes or after school interventions to students who may be less prepared for the course. The other common approach involves having students who are judged to be insufficiently prepared take pre-algebra in the 8th grade. The reasoning here is that by ensuring students have a strong math base, more will have the skills to succeed in algebra the first time they take the course. Those who ascribe to this perspective are concerned that students who are not prepared will not only fail, but be turned off to

12 The CDE does specify that algebra is the state standard for 8th grade math, which has impacted many districts' decisions on this matter. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/mthgrades8-12.asp>.

math and alienated by the experience and still lack the skills needed to pass in the future. Examples of structures to support students beyond the issue of algebra include blocking through double periods of English language art or math, coring, and/or other interdisciplinary approaches.

These structures necessitate that middle grades leaders take a “systems” approach to evaluating structural options and allocating resources. If no district policy exists on heterogeneous grouping or 8th grade algebra, school leadership must decide how best to serve their students given their educational philosophy and logistical constraints. Even where district policy exists leaders must work to build systems and structures to support those policies.

Logistical forces, including the schedule, calendar, class size and number of qualified teachers, will in part determine the choices that are available. Each school we studied took a different approach to grouping and arranging classes and students. High performers appeared to have a keen knowledge of their students, teachers, and resources, and were able to use that knowledge to exercise critical judgment in weighing advantages and disadvantages of different options and in making deliberate choices about how to best serve their students.

Action Principle: Intervene and Accelerate for Students who are Struggling

Key Finding: *The high-performing middle grades schools we studied acted with a sense of urgency to intervene with struggling students and do so with sufficient intensity to help them accelerate their learning.*

Between concerns about high school success as discussed above, responding to the accountability environment, addressing the achievement gap, and of course, the determination to see all students succeed, schools and districts implement a variety of support programs and intensive interventions to provide

timely academic assistance for students. High-performing schools are more likely to respond to these issues with:

- A sense of urgency;
- Support that is focused on helping students do well academically and catch up with their peers;
- Interventions tailored to student needs and goals;
- A holistic approach that draws on community and family resources; and
- Support for students on a timely basis when they need it.

Again, high performers know their students and the resources available to support them. High performers use data to help teachers and schools monitor students and identify problems. Intervention programs in use in the schools we studied were connected to mastery of standards and were most often taught by teachers. These intervention programs include:

- In-class strategies such as English language development strategies taught during class;
- Opportunities for student peer tutoring;
- Support or double period classes during the school day; and
- Extended day and support classes offered before and after the school day.

Before and after school programs are especially visible in the high-performing schools. In these programs teachers provide extra support for students who need to accelerate their learning to catch up with their peers. Without extra time, it is unlikely that those students who are struggling due to insufficient skills will be able to catch up.

In some cases after school programs are staffed by fully certified teachers, but this is an area in which local conditions affect what is possible. Schedules, buses, the local labor market for teachers – all this matters. High-performers once again demonstrated a systems approach that enables them to coordinate these structures and ensure that students get the support they need when they need it.

For example, at Hudson Elementary and McGarvin Intermediate schools, teachers design and implement intervention classes and use data to monitor the progress of students in these classes. At Hudson, the teachers serve only their own students, while at McGarvin the courses are targeted towards specific skill or standards areas and students are sorted by needs into classes.

Finally, effective site leaders in the schools we studied also look beyond school walls to meet students' needs. In many cases they initiate and manage strategic partnerships with community-based organizations to provide vital services to students and even families. They are also actively involved in working with families and finding ways to engage them in their child's education. These strategies include coordinators who speak students' home languages and serve as more than just translators between teachers and parents by providing outreach to parents, helping them understand the educational system and participate in their children's education.

Action Principle: Build Systems and Structures to Support Teachers

Key Finding: *High performing middle grades schools build in systems and structures that help teachers do their best work.*

High-performing middle grades schools are employing a wide range of structures and resources to help their teachers learn and improve practice. Examples include:

- Deliberately committed time for collaboration;
- School-based professional learning communities;
- School-based instructional coaches or district level content teachers on special assignment;
- District-provided curricular and instructional materials; and
- District data systems and professional development to support and improve data-based decision making.

High quality district workshops and insti-

tutes aligned to district goals and school level initiatives that include follow up and support both continue to be highly utilized strategies. Professional development is provided by the school or district; at the district level teachers on special assignment who specialize in particular content areas or who are experts in particular instructional strategies provide the support, while at the school level instructional specialists or coaches work with teachers on instructional strategies or follow up on particular professional development initiatives.

The content and focus of professional development for teachers almost always consists of targeted training focused on priority areas for reaching school and district goals. Often professional development emphasizes reading, math, and support for English learners

and other students who are struggling, but the range of professional development also includes support for meeting the unique affective and developmental needs of middle grades students.

In most of the districts in which our high-performing middle grades schools were located, regular structures are in place to build the capacity of both teachers and principals as instructional experts. Professional development happens on a regular schedule through a combination of “early release” days and day-long “staff development days,” and teachers have some kind of regular collaboration time that is either built into the daily schedule or

The Instructional Specialist at Ynez Elementary

The Instructional Specialist is an important teacher leadership position at Ynez Elementary, as well as the other three Alhambra Unified schools in this study. At Ynez, the instructional specialist provides support for the principal and assistant principal by managing categorical funding, ensuring good communication between teachers and administrators, and organizing professional development. She also makes frequent classroom visits in which she models lessons, helps teachers modify their instruction for English learners, and checks to make sure that teachers are taking advantage of strategies discussed in professional development sessions.

Instructional specialists also help teachers obtain supplementary classroom materials. At Ynez, each teacher creates a list of “must-have” and “would-like” items and the instructional specialist assesses each list and provides as much as funding will allow. Teachers also come to her with requests for outside professional development, such as attending or presenting at conferences. The instructional specialist checks each request to make sure that programming is aligned with the school’s goals and that funding is available. By working directly with teachers on budget issues, the instructional specialist ensures that teachers feel included and develop trust in the process. In this district, instructional specialists from each school also meet as a team along with the district level instructional specialists, in order to continue building capacity and ensure uniformity between schools and clarity on roles district-wide.

that relies on the early release days.¹³

District-based (and to some degree school-based) professional development has largely replaced the “send-a-teacher-to-a-workshop” approach. Districts take on a variety of roles in brokering or sponsoring formal training on best practices, with the key work of implementation enforced and supported at the school level. The new focus on teacher collaboration and on targeted professional development has led to the creation of a wealth of new leadership roles for teachers. Teachers serve as instructional leaders and implementation specialists working with teams of other teachers. Teachers facilitate learning communities that create a sense of transparency and ongoing learning among adult professionals. They use data to facilitate collaborative inquiry, discussion of specific students, and important short-term and long-term reflections on practice. This exchange also provides a feedback loop to the district, when school leaders, including teacher leaders, meet with district leaders to plan, identify issues and track progress. All of this collaboration and the data that drives it is relevant and meaningful to real issues teachers in these schools face.

Action Principle: Use Data for Continuous Improvement

Key Finding: *High performing middle grades schools use data from frequent student assessments to guide a continuous improvement process.*

Data systems are emerging in schools and districts across California, but in many cases these systems are not well developed or used in meaningful ways to support decision-making and improve instruction. With wide varia-

tion across districts and schools, we found the following attributes of data systems and support in high-performing districts and middle grades schools:

- Data systems include assessment data from both state and local assessments;
- Data use is supported by both technological and professional support;
- Data systems are easy for teachers to use;
- Educators at all levels of the system have direct access to the data on a timely basis;
- District, school and teacher leaders help teachers understand data and use these data to discuss specific students, identify problems and reflect on practice within the context of the reality of their schools;
- Teachers are using data to inform a collaborative inquiry process whose focus is on the improvement of instruction; and
- The schools and districts use data to engage in continuous improvement, not just to generate required reports.

In middle grades schools, teachers utilize data from the California Standards Test (CST) along with local benchmark assessments or curriculum-embedded assessments to monitor student progress and better understand student needs. Middle grades teachers have implemented common, standards-based assessments in some of the same ways that elementary schools have, albeit to a lesser degree. Generally our high performers gave quarterly benchmark tests tied to district curriculum and the pacing guides. Others focused on more diagnostic tests: for example, one high-performer gave a quarterly computer-adapted skills-based test that identified student skill levels in math and language arts. Teachers use the common data to diagnose both student needs and program gaps and to evaluate their own strategies. Data are especially crucial for students learning English, and the high-performers we studied monitor progress towards redesignation to fluent English proficient (FEP) status.

¹³ The Education Code that governs California schools specifies the number of instructional minutes that are to be offered to students. To meet these requirements and still provide teachers with time to collaborate, many school offer students a longer day four days a week and release students early on the other day. In addition to these early release days, California provides schools with funding for three “staff development days” each year.

II: Focusing on Students

One of the most striking features of high-performing middle grades schools is their commitment to helping early adolescents navigate through this critical time of change in their lives in a way that fosters student engagement, gives students a voice in their own education, and provides opportunities for students to make personal connections with both peers and adults. While schools have wrestled with these challenges for years, our study has identified some promising practices in high performing middle grades that:

- Focus explicitly on student engagement;
- Empower students to set goals and take charge of their learning;
- Create a personal environment for teaching and learning; and
- Recognize that academic performance is often influenced by the students' social and emotional development.

Teachers in these middle grades schools, instead of telling students what they need, embrace students as partners in the teaching and learning process.

Key Finding: *High-performing middle grades schools focus explicitly on student engagement as a key ingredient for success.*

Middle grades teachers and principals often cited “student engagement” as a central challenge – and anyone who has worked with early adolescents understands that these are students with a lot on their minds besides mastering the California state standards. Middle grades students are particularly interested in taking control over their lives including their lives in school. Clever middle grades educators sometimes harness this energy by designing multiple points of engagement for students. Examples include:

- Students serving as peer tutors or reading to younger students in their K-8 school;
- Students serving as peer mediators to resolve conflicts among students;

- Students expanding their intellectual horizons through creative electives that appeal to them;
- Students playing sports or other fun activities during lunch; and
- Students becoming authentic partners by setting goals for themselves related to both learning and behavior.

Through these activities, students are encouraged to not only take ownership for their learning in schoolwork that they find interesting and relevant, but they are also engaged in activities with peers that model good behavior and habits. By fostering personal connections among students, schools help ensure that each student has a personal safety net that includes both friends and school staff. At the same time, teachers in the high-performing middle grades schools must also find ways to engage students in work that is challenging, tied to rigorous standards, and that builds both knowledge and skills. Leaders in middle grades schools often talk about the need to create a program that strikes the right balance between activities that personally engage students and that challenge them academically. Achieving both is often difficult. In the world of limited resources, this is never easy, but schools that do both well are better equipped to succeed.

Schools have different ways of addressing personalization and student engagement. At McGarvin Intermediate in Garden Grove Unified, the principal meets with students in the homework club (an intervention group) to discuss their progress and goals. Staff at McGarvin are committed to their electives, with an art class that is faithful to the California state standards in art, while also engaging students, including English language learners. At Computech Middle School in Fresno Unified, the teachers voted to extend their day by one period, allowing them the time to offer electives such as Peer Mediation (which includes a research project), Foreign Language, an advanced Spanish for Spanish speakers class, and math and science electives, such as an engineering class on simple

machines (reinforcing the physical science standards) in which students build a catapult. (See the Alvarado Intermediate School and Hughes Middle School case studies in part two of this report for more examples of addressing personalization and student engagement.)

Hudson Elementary School in Long Beach Unified takes a different approach, focusing on building individual connections with students in the K-8 school, for example by having older students tutor younger students. Ynez Elementary School in Alhambra Unified has a student council for middle grades students with impact on school-wide events.

***Key Finding:** Educators in high performing middle grades schools engage students in setting their own goals and taking ownership of their own learning.*

One notable strategy employed by many of the high-performing middle grades schools we studied was engagement of students in setting goals for their learning. Middle grades teachers, just like teachers we studied in high-performing elementary and high schools, work from an interlocking set of goals for improvement that often begin with district

goals that are translated into school and then to classroom-level goals. Goals reflect district-wide foci as well as state and federal accountability programs. What was unique in high-performing middle grades schools was the effort teachers made to involve students in setting their own goals for learning and for improvement. Goals addressed the multiple areas of importance at the middle grades level, such as mastery of standards, improvement on state tests and district benchmark exams as well as day-to-day goals such as homework completion, attending and participating in interventions, and behavior-related goals. Students then work with teachers to use these goals in reviewing improvement over time. Student goals also help the school and students work together in tailoring support that is highly relevant to student needs and aspirations.

At McGarvin Intermediate School, personal goal setting is combined with additional mentoring to support students in reaching their goals. “At-risk” students are defined as students who have not shown growth or whose level of proficiency on the CST and benchmarks exams has declined. Students who have remained at the same level or dropped

Personalization at Hughes Middle School

At Hughes Middle School, personalization and support are encouraged in two ways. Structurally, student support is provided through Learning Directors (formerly Assistant Principals) who “loop” with students, following each group for all three years, and getting to know and understand students well in the process. These learning directors make a concerted effort to connect with their students in a variety of informal ways including seeking students out on the playground and at lunch. Additionally, to advance the goal of creating a climate of respect on the Hughes campus, teachers participated in professional development aimed at building empathy for students. This was viewed as a critical foundation for further professional development on mastery of skills and strategies. In Principal Daley’s words, “Staff development has to help teachers who drive from middle- and upper-class environments but serve kids from a wide range of environments, including low-income housing. Teachers need to understand they have all those as their clientele.”

one or more levels meet with the principal to develop an action plan. This plan includes a “contract” that prompts students to outline their own personal improvement strategies. The contract is signed by the student and the principal, and a copy is sent to the student’s parents. The principal meets with all the at-risk students (176 at the time of data collection) in order to follow through on the action plan and provide additional mentoring for this group of students.

At Riverview Elementary in Kings Canyon Unified, students take the computer-adapted NorthWest Evaluation Association (NWEA) benchmark assessments quarterly to gauge mastery of standards in math and language arts. Students work with teachers to set goals for improvement for each quarter.

***Key Finding:** High performing middle grades schools seize opportunities to help students build connections with adults and other students in a more personalized environment.*

Early adolescent students need opportunities to connect and build relationships both with adults and with positive peer groups and “personalization,” an element often-cited by middle grades educators as a key ingredi-

ent in school success. A personalized learning environment is one in which teachers know each child’s strengths and struggles and can draw on their knowledge of the student to address their needs and engage them academically. Personalization requires that the school has in place systems and structures that allow the teacher to mobilize resources to address problems affecting the student, whether those problems are rooted within or outside the classroom. In this way the personal and the academic, along with the teacher and the school combine to touch students in positive ways.

In high-performing K-8 schools, the school perceives both their size and structure as giving them an advantage in knowing their students well. In some such schools, the community environment allows student to maintain a formal or informal connection with their teachers from the elementary grades, for example by volunteering in an elementary class. Interestingly, grades 7-8 or 6-8 schools will also cite their structure as a strength. These high performing 7-8 or 6-8 schools offer elective courses or clubs or provide teachers with opportunities to work with students to develop “individual learning plans.”

III: Systems Thinking and Middle Grades

Finally, we find that high-performing middle grades schools are heading toward new territory by assuming what we might call a “systems” view of their practice. While their immediate focus is the school and the students they serve, a systems view more closely considers their place in the larger K-12 system of the district. Each person in the school and the district can see the goals of the whole system and sees their own work and goals as part of this larger context. Individual educators can speak about how both they as individuals and their school as a whole contribute to attaining system goals. As a system view emerges, schools and teachers work differently, forge new partnerships, and take on new challenges in aligning curriculum and supporting students to transition from elementary to middle and from middle to high school.

The unique position of the middle school in the center of the K-12 system naturally puts the focus for middle school reform today within a systems framework. A systems approach means:

- Taking on the challenge of developing a seamless K-12 system with a coherent curriculum and the capacity to serve all students;
- Partnering with the district office to ensure the best resources are available for all teachers and schools to help all students learn;
- Exercising critical judgment as part of a balancing act to ensure that choices about staffing, schedules, curriculum design, resource allocation and other key issues are made with an eye to how each decision will affect the others; and especially how each decision will affect those students most at risk; and
- Mobilizing the resources of the system as a whole school to address the needs of students with special needs, including English learners.

Our study finds that high-performing middle level schools are increasingly embrac-

ing their central spot in a K-12 system as an opportunity rather than as a threat to their autonomy. To serve their students well, middle level educators today must become, of necessity if not by choice, “systems thinkers,” whether or not they view themselves in that way. We believe that effectively approaching day-to-day schooling and decision-making through a systems view represents the new frontier for improving middle grades schools. These key findings are described in greater detail below.

***Key Finding:** High performing middle grades schools are taking on the challenge of developing a seamless K-12 system with a coherent curriculum and the capacity to serve all students.*

The standards movement has led to an increased emphasis on aligning curriculum vertically in an effort to ensure that students master appropriate grade-level standards and are prepared to do the same in the next grade. Thus transitioning successfully from grade to grade and between school levels has become a natural focus for those seeking to improve outcomes for students. Given the challenge of this kind of vertical alignment, we not surprisingly found somewhat less emphasis on interdisciplinary curricula. This is one of many choices that middle grades educators make that clearly involve tradeoffs. The new focus on vertical alignment emphasizes articulation with both feeder elementary schools and destination high schools. Effective middle grade educators are often aware of recent research that suggests that potential dropouts can be identified in middle grades, and all recognize the importance of their role in preparing students for high school success. We find high performing K-8’s and middle schools in well-defined feeder patterns deliberately working with high schools in order to improve student preparation.

These issues center on the idea that the middle grades do not exist in a vacuum. They must balance and link the skills students have as they enter the middle grades (often from multiple feeder elementary schools) and the skills students need to succeed in high

school. For example, standards tested on the California High School Exit Exam begin with the statistics, data analysis and probability standards to be covered in sixth grade.¹⁴ Our high-performing middle grades schools communicated with the destination schools (and feeder schools where applicable) frequently in order to align curriculum and identify resources to best prepare students for ninth grade. For this reason, teachers at high-performing sites embraced district curriculum and instructional practices as a tool to better articulate what students should master at each grade level and in each subject to both meet grade-level standards and prepare students for the next grade. In our study, even the two schools choosing to “core” – or use an interdisciplinary humanities curriculum – still aimed for high fidelity to district curricula and benchmarks, adjusting them to make coring work. A key reason cited for this work on alignment with standards was the school’s commitment to their students’ success in high school.

In districts like Garden Grove Unified that have strongly aligned systems and specific feeder patterns, this kind of articulation happens both within specific feeder patterns and at the level of the district as a whole. The goal is to ensure that the district’s aligned curriculum moves students from primary to secondary grades seamlessly, providing the background students need to succeed in high school. In districts like Long Beach Unified, with strong aligned curricula but with a less-defined feeder pattern due to a large number of magnet programs, the aligned district systems allow for students to have access to the same curriculum and equivalent preparation for high school, while data systems support efficient transfer of student records throughout the system. In both of these districts as well as Alhambra Unified, relative ease of in-district transfers was also noted as a byproduct of aligned curriculum and data systems.

Key Finding: *Higher-performing middle grades*

14 See CAHSEE Math Blueprint: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/resources.asp>.

schools are partnering with the district office to ensure the best resources are available for all teachers and schools to help all students learn.

Our study finds high performers leveraging district resources, whether these are extensive or more limited. Even in small or struggling districts, our high performers were making the most of the resources available to them. Districts play a key role in creating the structures that support greater K-12 articulation and alignment: district-sponsored professional development, teacher leader roles, district-adopted assessments, district data systems, tools such as pacing guides or sets of “power standards” – all of these and more are used as resources by high-performing middle grades schools.

The role of the district can become especially important in systems without well-defined feeder patterns. In such an environment, students may enter middle school coming from very different educational experiences. A district with a strong commitment to common curriculum and to aligning the entire system around common standards helps support students to make a seamless transition from one level to the next. In districts without either a strong central approach to curriculum or well-defined feeder patterns, middle grades schools face a daunting challenge when they seek to help all students make good transitions both into and out of their school.

The role of the district is key in multiple ways. High functioning districts can marshal resources in ways that leave teachers with more time to devote to teaching and learning. For example, if teachers must develop or find appropriate instructional practices, curriculum units, supplemental materials, and tools that help address the needs of students who are struggling, they have less time to work with the students in their classes. Districts are supporting high-performing middle schools by providing:

- Structured opportunities for ongoing curriculum development;

- Accurate, relevant and easy-to-use data systems;
- Access to information on best practices;
- Professional development on curriculum, strategies, and data use;
- Common textbooks aligned with standards;
- Tools such as pacing guides, lesson plans and supplemental materials; and
- Human resources such as instructional coaches, data mentors, and curriculum specialists.

Systems thinking is also a two-way street. While schools use the district office as a resource, we also found districts drawing on and learning from the work of their schools. For example, in Garden Grove Unified, with a tight district curriculum, the district examines the practices at high-performing schools like McGarvin Intermediate and Bolsa Grande High School (which we studied in Year 2) to look for replicable practices to take district-wide.

***Key Finding:** Higher-performing middle grades schools are exercising critical judgment as part of a balancing act to ensure that choices about staffing, schedules, curriculum design, resource allocation and other key issues are made with an eye to how each decision will affect the others; and especially how each decision will affect those students most at risk.*

Middle grades educators must be able to work effectively within a framework of constraints that range from the skills of incoming students, to scheduling, to staffing and teacher credentials, budgets, facilities, and a host of other issues, only some of which are within the control of school leaders. The leaders we studied were able to maximize the strengths of their particular situation and manage the downsides. As leaders, they can explain the reasoning behind choices and how the choices will move the school toward their goals. As organizations, high-performing middle grades schools are characterized by self-awareness and intentionality.

One issue where this is illustrated is the debate over the best grade configuration for students in grades six through nine. While policymakers, researchers and educational publications may debate about which grade configuration is best, none of the schools we visited were planning to change their grade configurations. Instead, and regardless of configuration, leaders of our high performing schools carefully and consciously maximize the strengths of their particular grade configuration in order to best serve their students. For example, leaders of high performing K-8 schools refer to the high levels of personalization that their structure offers. These schools often serve students for 9 years, and students often have siblings at the school as well. They cite the trade-off as the

District-School Connections in Fresno Unified

In Fresno Unified, a district struggling to meet state standards, we found high-performing Edison Computech (a magnet 7-8 school) utilizing district systems to strengthen their program. Instead of shunning the district and viewing themselves as an independent operator, the school makes a point of engaging with district resources. The teachers participated in district committees adopting text books and designing pacing guides and benchmarks. They were found implementing them with fidelity, even in “cored” interdisciplinary humanities classes. The school has fully adopted and utilizes the district data system in a comprehensive and systematic manner.

lack of electives and dedicated support classes they can offer. Intermediate and middle school principals cite electives, flexibility (in terms of grouping, support and course offerings) and the wider range of opportunities for students as advantages. Conversely these leaders understand that having students in their building for only two or three years is a drawback to their structure, and that they must work harder to help students forge a connection with a new school.

Scheduling for middle grades programs is another example of strategic decision-making. Scheduling involves a delicate balancing of many factors: teacher credentials; contract considerations; requirements for instructional minutes, including length of periods and number of periods per day; bus schedules; number of students in the school per grade; courses needed for struggling students and special populations; physical school arrangements, including technology and classrooms for specialized courses; and district and school policies concerning “coring” (interdisciplinary coursework) and tracking. We encountered a wide range of schedules and opinions about how best to serve students through schedules. Examples include:

- At Riverview Elementary, a rural K-8 school, approximately 100 seventh and eighth graders are served by three teachers. All teachers teach math at the same time so they can group students by ability in math. Students then spend the rest of the day in a single, mixed-ability classroom with their own teacher.
- At Ramona Elementary, also a K-8, students take three classes a day with their homeroom teacher (which three classes varies by teacher specialty), and move for other classes.
- At Edison Computech Middle School in Fresno, teachers voted to have eight classes instead of the district norm of seven in order to provide students with a second elective class.
- At McGarvin Intermediate School, the school leadership works to preserve electives for students as much as possible (including for

EL students), while still providing extensive intervention opportunities for students. As a consequence, after school interventions are a crucial element of the school’s program.

While a wide range of scheduling structures were established, what was consistent at each of the high-performers was a keen sense of awareness about the choices they made, the practical constraints that were real for them, and the tradeoffs involved.

As middle grades educators negotiate the sometimes bumpy terrain of balancing multiple goals and working under pressure with limited resources, the high-performing schools were able to weigh both costs and benefits of the choices they make and understand how each choice will affect others. Like skilled chess players, we found their leaders seeing several moves ahead and preparing for what comes next. They asked themselves and their colleagues: If we spend more time on this standard, what unit can we shorten? If we add a support class for English learners, what will they miss? If we focus professional development on math, how will that impact English learners? As a result, these leaders tended to experience fewer surprises than leaders in other schools.

Key Finding: *Higher-performing middle grades schools are mobilizing the resources of the system as a whole school to support students with special needs, including English learners.*

It may be a cliché to say that it takes a system to educate a child, but for particular groups of students this theme rings true. Standards-based accountability systems have brought a new sense of urgency concerning the achievement gaps existing among subgroups of students, including those who are English learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. Our study in particular followed these issues as they pertain to EL students. As schools move to state standards and curricula aligned with expectations for college readiness (such as A-G requirements for UC/CSU entry), high-performing schools are struggling with pressures to successfully prepare EL students

in academic content while at the same time ensuring that they are making progress in learning English.

In addressing these issues, we found high- and average-performing sites using similar instructional materials for English learners. High Point, one of the state-approved reading intervention programs for English learners, and textbook supplements are the most common instructional materials. However, these schools employ a variety of other structures to support these students. These structures in some cases reflect district policy, while others were developed through school decisions. Schools are providing English learners with English Language Development (ELD) instruction either 1) as part of their English language arts (ELA) class with all students receiving direct ELD instruction, regardless of ELD status; 2) by adding an additional period of support for students who are struggling in their ELA class, including English learners; or 3) by having students not yet proficient in English take an ELD class as an elective or pull-out class (sometimes tied to their ELA class). In making these choices, factors such

as the master schedule, number of qualified teachers, and the number of EL students and their proficiency levels as measured by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) often determine the choices available, and thus the program that is offered. Working within these constraints as well as district policy regarding implementation of Proposition 227, high-performing middle schools construct an interconnected set of support programs to help students progress toward proficiency in English.

What stands out in differentiating between high- and average-performers seems to be not the particular components they chose, but rather what we call the “coherence” of the program.

Key elements for coherent programs appear to be: how data are used to help teachers intervene early and monitor student progress towards redesignation to fluent-English proficient (R-FEP) status; and the way that ELA and ELD standards are used to connect English

English Learners at Alhambra Unified

Alhambra Unified provides a good example of how systems thinking led the district to reconsider how best to educate English learners. Recalls one principal, “Once upon a time [Alhambra] had bilingual services and would clump our teachers with student language needs. ... We’re not doing bilingual anymore. ... We are doing immersion with a lot of support. We have aides, and teachers get SDAIE [Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English] strategies. All teachers teach English learners.” When asked why, the district director explained: “Invariably, when you have classes only for English learners, the content suffers. We want our English learners to have access to the same content and get the support they need to access it. We don’t want them off some place just studying the language while others master content.” Now English learners are represented in all middle grades classes, sitting with other students who may share their first language, students who speak other languages, and students who have been re-designated as fluent in English, as well as native English speakers.

classes with English language development.¹⁵ Consistent with our findings from elementary and high schools is that all teachers, whether or not they are responsible for direct ELD instruction, consider themselves to be teachers of English language development and English learner students. This includes participation in professional development on strategies to support EL students. This is systems thinking in

action. Furthermore, we found a large proportion of teachers making use of specific instructional strategies for assisting these students in their classes.

These issues have common themes that resonate with a whole-school approach committed to using the resources of the system to reach all students.

¹⁵ One average performer is an exception to this, as their ELD program is one of their strengths and is similar to our high performers.

IV: Conclusion

Springboard Schools' study of middle grades schools sheds light on issues that have been on the forefront for both high-performing and average-performing schools and further documents highly promising practices that distinguish high- and average-performing schools. Finally, the study provides insight into how these schools are moving toward new frontiers through systems thinking.

Both sets of schools are attempting to improve their education programs through similar types of activities. All of these schools are working within a standards-based environment. The hallmarks of reform in these schools are the same: curriculum alignment and support for students and teachers. This finding is not a surprise when we consider that average-performers are not low-performers, and are attending to the needs of their students with good results. Still, high-performers stand out in specific practices that appear to lift them above the average-performers.

High-performing schools make and manage strategic decisions while remaining clear about trade-offs. They base those decisions on keen knowledge of their students and faculty. They draw on data for insights into their strengths and areas that need to change. They are also led by principals and other school leaders, including teacher leaders, who are adept at seeing current and future challenges in order to address issues in advance. In this way they are not just adapting to the conditions in which they live, they are maximizing opportunities to structure that future and those conditions in ways that help them thrive. The high-performers are increasingly taking a systems view, both within their school and within the district, of decision-making and change, and this broader view gives them greater leverage within their district. Finally, as smart decision-makers, high-performing schools are aware of the limitations of their context and resources, as well as their strengths, and use this awareness to make decisions while acknowledging that trade-offs must be made across compet-

ing pressures. All schools face competing pressures and operate with limited resources and challenges, but the higher-performers are strategic and savvy in how they balance these pressures to ensure they are doing the best for their students in an imperfect world.

Higher-performing middle grades schools are also adept at creating coherence. While average-performers may be attempting to align their curriculum, high-performers are attempting to bring these activities together as an integrated program, including systems of interventions and using data to understand areas of need. In other words, each target for change reinforces and strengthens the others. Data can be used to strengthen the school's effort to support students, help teachers improve instruction, and help the school identify areas where greater curriculum alignment is needed. Rather than pursuing a loose or fragmented set of reform activities, the high-performers bring these activities together in a way that reinforce each other, generating synergy and momentum.

These are all threads that weave through the discussion on systems thinking. The high-performing schools in our study embrace their roles as part of a larger system and leverage this to their benefit. This involves collaboration with their elementary feeder schools and destination high schools as part of an education pipeline to best prepare all students for college or the workforce. They value the district as a partner and a resource that can be leveraged for improvement, while astutely negotiating their own role and autonomy where it is needed to focus on offering high-quality teaching and learning. High-performers are working with the system to support students with special needs, such as EL students, and assuming a whole-school sense of responsibility for these students. In addition, many schools actively reach out to parents, and some schools even connect students and parents to community organizations to help meet other student needs. Finally, once again, they balance these pressures as smart decision-makers who know how to use the system to maximize their performance.

Overall, high-performing middle grades schools have a sense of urgency to close the achievement gap and help all students accelerate to high levels of performance. What is especially striking is how this urgency has led

to a focus on student engagement, empowering students to take charge of their education and lives, and on providing a more personal learning environment that can support students academically, socially and emotionally.

V. Recommendations

Springboard Schools believes the findings from this study do not paint a picture of a finished product, but instead outline a platform for the next wave of middle school reform. To help schools and districts take the next step, policymakers should:

- Invest in the middle grades schools as a key – and often neglected – part of a larger K-12 education pipeline;
- Encourage the creation of structures and relationships to support stronger partnerships between schools and the district office and between the school and other community agencies;

- Rather than seeking a silver bullet for improvement that often involves a revolving door of interventions with new agendas, reward schools for the hard work of continuous improvement;
- Invest in the creation and use of local data systems that will help schools better know their students and make effective day-to-day decisions about improving teaching and learning; and
- Connect schools and districts to best practices that will help them better engage students and address the needs of the whole child, both academic and social.

PART TWO: CASE STUDIES

TAKING ON THE GAP

Hughes Middle School, Long Beach Unified School District

Located in Los Angeles County's Long Beach Unified School District, Charles Evans Hughes Middle School serves just over 1500 students in grades six, seven and eight. Hughes has seen its population change dramatically over the years. Today, a quarter of the Hughes student body is African American, compared to the state average of eight percent; and another 27 percent are Latino. This is a large, busy school with a host of clubs and activities.

Upon entering the main office at Hughes, one is greeted by a sign in bold letters: "Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire" — W. B. Yeats. Igniting that fire at Hughes has meant taking on the challenge of narrowing the achievement gap. The school has made significant progress toward this goal.

Between 2002 and 2005, the percentage of Hughes' African American students scoring proficient in English Language Arts rose about 13 percentage points, bringing the percent of students proficient and above to 46, well exceeding the state target of 24 and outperforming the state average of 29 percent for African American students. In that same time period, scores for Latino students also increased to 46 percent proficiency, well surpassing the state average for Latino students of roughly 27 percent. In fact, all student groups at Hughes are improving their scores and all groups are outperforming AYP targets and state averages. In 2005, the school's API was 9 out of 10 in state wide ranking and 10 out of 10 on the similar schools ranking.

Defining the Issue at Hughes

When Principal Monica Daley came to Hughes in 2002, the school was doing well by a wide range of measures. In 1999 it had been honored as a California Distinguished School, and in 2000 it became a National Blue Ribbon

School. Yet, the school served an ethnically diverse student body whose socioeconomic status ranged from high to low, and despite all the awards, the achievement gap was stark. To cite just one example, there was a 40 percent differential between the number of white and the number of African American students scoring proficient in English Language Arts. One learning director at Hughes pointed out that, as a group, "The African American students were performing more poorly than the students from poverty." He added, "[It's] not just the academics..." pointing to data that showed disproportionately high incidents of referrals for defiance, tardies and absences among African American students. Thus the school was not working well for a group that constituted a quarter of the student body.

As a first step toward taking on the issue, the Hughes leadership and faculty affirmed their commitment to the district's middle school goals. These were:

- Achieve expected growth toward meeting the API and AYP targets,
- Assist students to move to the next proficiency level in reading, math and language on the California Content Standards Test,
- Increase the number of students enrolled and proficient in eighth grade algebra,
- Maintain a safe and orderly school climate, and
- Use a data-based framework to assess and monitor improvement.

Then, to avoid becoming overwhelmed and to give themselves a clear place to start, the Hughes community made a collaborative decision to emphasize the final two goals, focusing their efforts on school climate and on monitoring effectiveness. At Hughes, efforts to maintain a safe and orderly school climate included an initiative to build empathy for students and to ensure that students felt respected. This initiative was seen as supporting, not replacing, a rigorous academic program. In one teacher's words, "You focus on safety and respect [and that] ignites learn-

ing.” Expanding on this idea, Principal Daley shared, “High quality instruction hinges on an environment that is respectful of adults and, importantly, students.” Echoing the district’s mission statement, she adds, “[It also] begins with high expectations that all students can learn and become responsible, productive members of a competitive society.”

No one used the words “overcoming racism,” yet the focus on respect for students became a clear pathway to build a culture in which all students were viewed as capable of high levels of learning. Daley added, “It’s emotionally hard to be looking at a student walking through the door of a teacher who clearly does not like him or hold him to high standards. What choice does that student have, but goofing off or getting smaller and smaller? We all decided we had to start with clear expectations for students and adults. And they had to hinge on being respectful.”

Getting Started

“Every interaction a teacher has with students is meaningful and has the potential to be the one that has a lifelong impact on any or all of them. ... Staff and student growth takes place in an environment of mutual respect and trust.”

Principal Monica Daley, “My Beliefs” Hughes Faculty Handbook, 2006

Staff development was an important tool in changing school culture and improving student learning. Staff development is provided for the entire faculty on alternating Tuesdays. The district provides ongoing training on both pedagogy and curriculum, but the Hughes leadership has been careful to maintain a narrow and manageable focus for their site-based professional development. Principal Daley shared, “We have learned the hard way: Less is more and slow is fast... We have decided to choose one overarching staff development [goal] per year.” She also is concerned to make sure that professional development impacts all of her almost sixty teachers. She notes, “I know there is the problem of the ‘hitchhiker,’ who is just along for the ride.

So we structure our professional learning so [everyone] takes the lead at [some point].”

To advance the goal of creating a climate of respect, teachers participated in professional development aimed at building empathy for students. This laid the foundation for professional development on mastery of skills and strategies. In Principal Daley’s words, “Staff development has to help teachers who drive from middle- and upper-class environments but serve kids from a wide range of environments, including low-income housing. Teachers need to understand they have all those as their clientele....”

One tool that the school used to good effect was drawn from a district training: As part of their adoption of the Safe and Civil Schools Project¹⁶ in the 2003-2004 school year, Hughes faculty and leadership participated in a district training that led to the adoption of a set of strategies to help develop clear expectations for conduct by both students and adults. Hughes leveraged this district training to support their focus on creating a climate of respect. “You have to work with faculty on something like this. You have to train the faculty and have the faculty train the students,” observed one administrator. To that end, a committee called BREATHE, Building Responsible Environments and Tapping High Expectations, was formed. The team, composed of teachers, administrators and classified employees, implemented a survey to determine areas of strength and areas in need of improvement regarding safety and respect on campus and delivered it to both teachers and students. The findings led the BREATHE committee to develop lessons that established standards for passing periods, lunch time, assemblies, and student and adult expectations for responding to directions from adults (see artifact: “Responding to Adult Directions”). Members of the BREATHE committee taught mini-lessons to faculty members during staff meetings, and they in turn taught them to students. Each of the lessons also

¹⁶ Eugene, Oregon-based program, led by Mr. Randy Spricks.

included clearly defined standards for adult behaviors that would support students in meeting the expectations.

Finally, the BREATHE committee involved students themselves in determining Hughes Middle School's "Guidelines for Success." For this job, all homeroom classes brainstormed qualities that successful students exhibit. The brainstormed lists were submitted to a student committee (facilitated by an adult BREATHE team member) and the lists were pared down to twenty qualities. These were presented to members of the community through the School Site Council, PTA and neighborhood walks to get the list further reduced to ten items. These ten were put to a school wide student vote and the results given to the Student Council for them to create the Guidelines for Success. The result is "Wise Owls Show RESPECT," a reminder to students to be Responsible, Encouraging, Scholarly, Positive, Enthusiastic, Caring and a Team player. The guidelines were unveiled at a January 2005 awards assembly and posted in classrooms and throughout the campus.

Setting Goals

Helping students take more responsibility for their own learning is a strategy that Hughes teachers turn to frequently. Teachers worked together to set department goals aligned to their school and district goals. Individual teachers also set goals for their classrooms. In a strategy that many of the schools we studied used, teachers and administration worked with students to set individual learning goals. Many teachers and administrators discussed the importance of engaging students in such a goal-setting process. In one teacher's words, "We are all working for buy-in from the students on what goal they want to see..." A humanities teacher added, "On the bigger global goal we in our department and grade level team ask [students] regularly, 'What grade do you want to get? What knowledge do you want to obtain?'"

One teacher shared another example:

"With some students getting off-task a

lot in sixth period, we stopped the class to ask, 'How is sixth period behavior? What's a "driver" and what's a "pre-venter" [of good behavior]?' – a strategy we learned in our Professional Development. We put the two terms up on a big poster board and started to gather ideas. Groups looked across the suggestions they all came up with, and grouped them, and then shared out those ideas. The majority of students said we needed a lot fewer off-task conversations. ... Twenty-five out of 45 kids wrote that on a post-it. The goal we set as a class was 'we'll avoid off-topic conversations.' We set ourselves a reward also: next Friday, fifteen minutes' free time to chat with friends. [Then] we'll take it from there, analyze data again to see if we need to continue with a goal like this."

Goal-setting at Hughes also includes special needs students with IEPs or Individual Education Plans. According to one resource teacher, "The first two-week unit is to correlate IEP goals and student learning goals. ... A lot is getting students to use their tools and resources – like their IEP – a little more than they have. If they own the plan and know how it links to academic and other learning goals, and learn how to define their goals, that gives them what we want them to get: power. We can ask, 'What is a goal? If this is yours, how will you know you're getting there?' I will review with them what that means: Can I walk into a classroom and see you getting an A? How do I know that you're doing that? What does that mean?' Then they have identified their goal and owned it."

Strategies and Tools

All Hughes certified staff received Baldrige training, which provided teachers and administrators with two key tools that have become central to the school's professional culture. The first, the "Baldrige Continuous Improvement Cycle," mentioned above, is a continuous improvement process that moves through the following steps: Plan – identify an improvement opportunity, collect data and

plan a change; Do – implement the change and collect data; Study – analyze the results; Act – adopt, adapt or abandon the change. The principal reports that: “When we’ve done a staff development session on, for example, student motivation, we apply the Baldrige ‘Plan-Do-Study-Act’ structure and ask each department to designate a way they will test the strategy, what data they will collect, and what data they will bring to a next staff meeting to share what they’ve learned.”

The second Baldrige tool to be enthusiastically embraced is known as the “force field analysis.” This is a process whereby groups analyze a situation or project, identifying the “drivers” and “preventers” that help or hinder progress toward goals. This data-based process can be applied broadly, and at Hughes, students, teachers and administrators alike employ it regularly (see artifact: “Student Perspectives on Drivers and Preventers”). After using the force field analysis diagnostically, plans are made and progress is tracked by examining appropriate data. Thus data at Hughes expands beyond test scores and is used by students and adults alike to support the school’s focus on creating a positive climate.

Redefining Leadership as Support for Learning

Upon her arrival, the principal expanded the number of assistant principals from two to three, one for each grade level. At Hughes, the assistant principals are called “learning directors,” to emphasize the focus on the instructional leadership aspect of the role. The learning directors “loop” with their grade, following the same class from arrival through graduation. They make a concerted effort to make authentic connections with their students, seeking them out on the playground and at lunch.

The work of learning directors is largely motivational. In their time with the learning director, students use the Baldrige force field analysis tool to ask themselves what led them to receive poor grades and what steps

would lead to getting higher grades. Two of the school’s three learning directors are African American, reflecting the diversity in the student population and providing role models in key leadership positions. Learning directors are also chosen for their leadership potential and receive a great deal of support and professional development, participating in district-sponsored trainings and receiving coaching from district administrators. Reflecting on her role, one learning director shared, “I go through their grades to encourage them to do well and encourage them to do better.” Another learning director agreed, “This may seem like a small thing, but it’s huge. ...they like to find out that we know how they’re doing in classes. We can say, ‘I saw your grades aren’t where they should be...what’s going on?’ and that makes a far larger difference than if only the math teacher talks to them.” Learning directors also work with “multiple F students” to set goals. These goals are shared with parents.

Choices and Tradeoffs

Electives: Many schools must grapple with the choice of giving students who are two or more years below grade level a “double dose” of language arts and math at the expense of electives. The Hughes faculty strongly believes in the value of elective courses and are committed to making them available even to students who are taking a double period of language arts and/or mathematics. The solution was to offer some electives and clubs before and after school. Offerings are rich: Polynesia Club, journalism, dance team, mock trial, Art Club, outdoor venture club, diversity awareness training, jazz band, chorale, Chess Club, and others. Again, site leaders and teachers looked to data to guide their resource allocation. The data suggested this was an appreciated alternative: on any given day in 2005-06, over 250 students participated in these kinds of support and enrichment activities, which are offered in the zero period or eighth period time slots.

Algebra: An important goal for Hughes was to bring more students into algebra in

eighth grade. Data analysis pointed toward the development of higher-level language and thinking skills as critical to student success in algebra. Building the needed vocabulary and critical thinking skills became a shared responsibility, and students learned Bloom's taxonomy terms and practiced at each level with the help of a student-appropriate sheet explaining Bloom's different learning levels. Results are encouraging: In 2003-04, 29 percent of all Hughes students enrolled in Algebra I; that number rose to 32 percent in 2004-05 and rose again to hit 36 percent in 2005-06. At the same time, the percent of African American and Latinos enrolled in Algebra I doubled, moving from 3 percent to 6 percent for each subgroup. The percentage of students meeting proficient also rose for each subgroup.

Support Strategies

Support strategies for students needing extra help in meeting challenging academic goals include:

- AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) – At Hughes, AVID students enroll in an honors-level curriculum and take AVID as their year-long elective. In this elective, they receive academic preparation, training in study skills for college-level work, encouragement to seek a college education, and career awareness. Cornell note-taking, adopted from the AVID program, is used across the school.
- SOAR – An unusual AVID support class, SOAR (Summer Opportunity for Algebra Readiness) is a summer booster course (developed by Hughes teacher Vicki McLoyn) that quickly proved effective, bringing the number of AVID students enrolled in algebra from three to 27 in 2005-06. Title I funds support this summer program.
- Strategies for Success – Strategies for Success (SFS) is a district program to build study and critical thinking skills in special needs students. In this model, special education students are enrolled in standard English language arts, math, history and science

courses. The SFS teacher collaborates with the general teachers to identify student needs. Three days a week, each student receives a period of instruction in the SFS classroom. Resource teachers who received district training in SFS also offer intensive professional development to their fellow faculty, which, according to Principal Daley, "allows all faculty members to recognize their resource teacher colleagues as experts."

- Leadership Class – Male African American eighth graders with multiple F's have been enrolled in a "leadership class" taught by an African American male who serves as a role model and sets high standards for conduct and achievement. As an SFS teacher, he is well prepared to provide an effective study skills curriculum and to support his students in meeting their academic goals. At the end of the first trimester reporting period, the seven students who had a combined total of 16 F's from the previous trimester had reduced that number to only five.

Parents also play an active role on campus. One notable structure for parent involvement is called CAAP – Concerned African American Parents. This group is active at a number of the Long Beach School District schools, but it really took hold at Hughes. CAAP serves as an advisory group and link between the school and the community. According to one learning director, "This is an important body. ... At other schools all over you have a task force that looks at English Learners, or a club for Pacific Islanders. But we have not yet done as good a job at mobilizing clubs and task forces in support of our African American students. And you can't continue to push it under the rug."

Monitoring Progress

The district played an important role throughout the work at Hughes as the school drew on district tools in goal setting, professional development, and curriculum and instruction. When it came to meeting the school's second major goal, building systems to monitor progress, the district also provided

key building blocks. Under the guidance of the Long Beach Office of Curriculum and Instruction, curriculum leaders and groups of teachers had already developed:

- Course outlines and pacing guides that supported achievement of California Content Standards,
- District-wide end of course tests to monitor student progress in English, math, science, and history,
- Tests in English every six weeks and quarterly math exams, including a test of mastery of new content and the Long Beach “Math Facts,” designed to bolster students’ grasp of arithmetic as they move to higher level math,
- Systems to ensure that results of cluster and quarterly tests are regularly and quickly evaluated and made available for planning, and
- Progress reports and final course grades that are mailed home for all students on a six week cycle.

These tools provide a framework for monitoring progress and Baldrige, discussed above, provides important process tools. What was missing was data about teacher practice. To fill this gap, the principal and administrative team make monitoring an ongoing part of their job, conducting “walkthroughs” on a regular basis. In the beginning these were focused on ascertaining whether the lesson objectives and standards were posted but soon moved on to a deeper level. For example, after staff development on the use of “non-contingent attention” as a means to develop relationships and encourage appropriate behavior, teachers were given feedback on the number of “non-con-

tingent attention” interactions they were observed to be having with students. According to one learning director, “This is different from positive reinforcement. ... It’s showing caring.” Walkthroughs are now a regular part of practice at Hughes and serve many purposes. Department chairs accompany the principal and other administrative staff in quarterly walkthroughs that include observations of all classes within the department. These walkthroughs help determine the content of further staff development, both school-wide and for specific departments.

Conclusion: The Balancing Act at Hughes

Hughes is a typical example of a school with the charge – and with the real need – to “do it all.” Serving a population that is socio-economically and racially diverse and plagued by a persistent achievement gap, this school could not afford to choose between rigorous academics and hard work on climate and culture. What allowed the school to move forward on multiple fronts was the combination of a clear focus on the goal of narrowing the achievement gap and the foundation laid by the school district for work to develop rigorous academics. In this way, Hughes Middle School functions as part of the system. By using district pacing guides, assessments, and ongoing professional development to provide the framework for curriculum and instruction, Hughes leaders could focus on what, for them, seemed the missing ingredient: building a culture of respect and raising expectations and achievement especially for their African American students.

BUILDING A WEB OF SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Ramona Elementary Alhambra Unified School District

Ramona Elementary is a K-8 school that has developed a robust web of support for its more than one thousand students from a very diverse set of backgrounds. Located in the city of Alhambra, Ramona Elementary is one of 13 K-8 schools in Alhambra Unified School District. Seventy-one percent of the students at Ramona are eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL). Latino students represent 32 percent of the student body at Ramona. The school has one of the highest proportions of Asian American students in the district, with large Chinese and Vietnamese student populations. Results from the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) show that Ramona has had success in moving students from beginning levels of English proficiency to Early Advanced and Advanced levels. Over the course of 3 years, Ramona also improved in its similar schools ranking: In 2002, Ramona ranked “6” among similar schools and “4” statewide. As of 2005, the school increased its rankings to 9 and 6, respectively. In recognition of the school’s accomplishments, Ramona was named a California Distinguished School in 2004.

Defining the Issue at Ramona

In 1992 Ramona applied for and won one of the state’s first Healthy Start planning grants. The picture painted in this initial application was stark: the high poverty population served by this school was beset by multiple needs. The rigorous demands of the Healthy Start proposal process, which asked applicants for a “full needs assessment” to be conducted both for students and for their community, helped Ramona understand the scope of the problem and develop a comprehensive response to it. Central to this response is a focus on data use that is both innovative and rigorous. With ongoing funding from Healthy Start, Ramona has built its capacity to collect and use “wellness” data, a broad set of indicators meant to highlight student assets (skills and resources)

as well as areas of weakness.¹⁷ As one teacher explained “The whole idea of Developmental Assets [is to] build on what [students] are good at.” Acting on these data has led the school to an array of new initiatives aimed at meeting students’ needs.

Being Part of a System: The District’s Role

With the arrival of a new superintendent in 1999, Alhambra Unified took a new and especially hard look at student achievement data. At this time the district was in “Comite” (short for *Comite de los Padres*), a state accountability process triggered by evidence that the district was not providing English learners with a fair and equitable opportunity to learn. To disentangle themselves from this state process, all schools needed to revamp their delivery of services to English learners and show an increased percentage of English learners meeting or exceeding proficiency. In the words of the Superintendent, they evaluated student achievement data “every way we could,” from Latino males in math, to all underperforming groups, to English learners in early intermediate CELDT levels, to English learners not adequately progressing through designated levels of proficiency. In addition to this thorough look at the student achievement data, the district central office initiated a rigorous review of educational practice and programs. As part of their plan to exit *Comite*, they tasked themselves to tighten their whole

¹⁷ By contrast, in many schools, skills, ability or knowledge that students bring to the classroom that do not align specifically with the curriculum are not valued or utilized. Assessment of student knowledge and capabilities is limited to a narrow list of attributes. Those students not in possession of these attributes are seen as coming to the classroom with a deficit; hence the characterization of this approach as a “deficit model.” For example, schools that work with students who are literate in other languages and leverage students’ existing literacy skills to help them learn English would be using an assets approach. A deficit model approach treats non-English readers as though they lack literacy skills in general (Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive Schooling*. Albany: SUNY Press).

data monitoring system. This new district focus fueled the Ramona faculty's commitment to work with data.

Data collection was not limited to data about students, however. An "Educational Practice Survey" was introduced, as were a set of "School Effectiveness Criteria." These data served dual purposes: sites receiving Title 1 and other federal dollars conduct a program evaluation and report on it annually to the district. Thus Alhambra Unified School District is the rare example of a district that has made this type of reporting mandate into a meaningful process for schools. According to the districts office's special projects director, Terry Larson, "The data is available for all to use. We have to report to the federal government on our consolidated programs evaluation."

Though the district exited Comite in 19 months, since then data monitoring has continued and even intensified. One example is the district's English Learner Progress Profile, a report card for English learners that includes checks each trimester on English learners' progress in mastery of English as correlated to CELDT Levels (see artifact: "ELD Progress Profile 6-8"). The ELD progress profile provides the regular data check-ins that are essential to moving students toward re-designation to FEP as quickly as possible.

Strategies: Translating District Goals and Strategies into School-Level Work

Following a process of system-wide data analysis, the District central office announced a challenging goal: to ensure that all students would be adequately prepared for college when they leave high school. As Superintendent Dr. Julie Hadden put it, "I said to teachers and principals, 'we want to have our students graduating at [the] same rates as the demographics of our schools...' When you put that goal out there and tell people that, it starts to take hold..."

The next step for the Ramona community was to translate the goal of college readiness into more concrete school-level goals and an action plan to achieve them. At Ramona, that meant a two-pronged approach: acknowledging and addressing the difficult life circumstances of the great majority of their students and building teachers' skill to differentiate instruction and expand their repertoire of teaching strategies. Throughout, there was a strong emphasis on using data to make decisions, design programs and monitor progress.

The district drew on the services of a professional development organization, the Search Institute, and its Developmental Assets Framework to set the tone for the school's approach to serving students. The district offered professional development to all staff

Alhambra Unified School Effectiveness Criteria

What are they?

- Developed to address the strength of programs in place at the school and district levels. Program effectiveness is determined through review of student data and interviews.
- Identifies performance standards for all students and underperforming groups.
- Consists of "essential standards for academic achievement" and "useful standards for professional development, parent involvement and leadership activities."
- Allows schools to annually set objectives and celebrate success.

on the Search Institute’s “40 positive experiences and qualities,” termed Developmental Assets, to establish an asset – rather than deficit – approach to working with students. Two years ago the school nurse became a trainer and is now able to offer training to new staff as they join the Ramona community.¹⁸

Ramona’s Approach: Partnerships and Attending to the Whole Child

✓ Healthy Start

With their Healthy Start funds, the school began to look at ways to support students’ personal and social needs in order to equip them for academic success. In the words of the principal, the school needed “to provide an elaborate foundation of support so [kids] can care about academics.” The principal describes the reality that many of their students face, “You need to take care of kids’ needs, [as in] Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. If [students] don’t know where their parents are

or where their next meal is coming from, they don’t care about homework or the next test.” As the Ramona nurse added, “If we don’t have their hearts, comfort level and safety level, the other stuff is much harder to come by. ... With this slate of programs over the years we are slowly filling out our skill set to move away from the old approach of managing behavior to developing assets and self-confidence.”

As part of the Healthy Start work, Ramona has partnered with the Children, Youth, and Family Services Consortium at Alliant University to provide students and their families with mental health resources, which data analysis revealed to be the greatest need in the community. Under the guidance of the school nurse and Healthy Start coordinator, Ramona leadership formed a team to provide the necessary support. The team is comprised of the principal, assistant principal, school psychologist, all counselors, school/community coordinators, home/school coordinators, and the resource specialist teachers responsible for the students under review. Interns from Alliant University also staff the center, providing individual and family counseling.

18 See www.search-institute.org/assets for more information on the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets.

Alhambra Unified

District strategy for addressing equity and access:

- 1: De-tracking all English and math classes
- 2: “Kindergarten though College” project (a district-wide initiative to promote a college-going mentality starting in kindergarten and continuing through graduation)
- 3: Algebra 1 in 8th grade,
- 4: Pre Algebra in 6th grade and Algebra in 7th grade
- 5: Geometry honors in 8th grade for GATE students
- 6: Standardization of honors/AP entrance criteria for core classes
- 7: AP Vertical Teams in grades 6-12
- 8: SAT and PSAT preparation in 8th grade
- 9: AVID Expansion Project

All students in fifth through eighth grades were screened using the “Barriers to Learning” screening questionnaire, developed at Columbia University, in order to gather data on large-scale issues and individual student needs. Thirty out of seventy students tested positive for “significant issues.” The school has worked to provide services for these students. In addition, the Healthy Start Center connects with a variety of community agencies around health issues and offering classes for parents. The Principal views these pieces as “...part of a collaborative. All the interconnectedness provides a safety net for kids so they can leap into the academic realm.”

With each renewal of the Healthy Start plan, a memorandum of understanding is signed by the school principal, district superintendent, and the lead of all participating agencies, from the chief of police of the Alhambra Police Department to the head of the San Gabriel Valley Dental Society. Specific services are detailed in the memorandum of understanding, for example, that the Alhambra Police Department will deliver a DARE presentation to all fifth grade classes, free fingerprinting for children at the annual Family Health Fair and free onsite school-based parenting skills classes in collaboration with the San Gabriel Valley Medical Center. These memoranda are critical to managing the many partnerships in which Ramona is involved.

✓ Violence Prevention

Another element of the fruitful collaboration with Alliant University has been the implementation of a violence prevention program. The program is yet another example of Ramona’s intent to meet the needs of the “whole child.” The program is built around the research-based “Second Step” curriculum, developed by the Committee for Children, a non-profit organization based in Seattle. The curriculum focuses on essential student competencies – empathy, impulse control, problem-solving and anger management. The entire staff received training from practicum students in Alliant’s School of Psychology, and the school nurse supported the program. Since

implementing the program the school has seen a decrease in the number of suspensions.

✓ Peer Mediation

While Peer Mediation programs are common among high performing high schools, only a few of the middle grade schools included in this study employ this strategy. For seven years, the school participated in the Peacemaker (peer mediation) Program. Through a grant, the school adopted the peer mediation program in order to build communication and problem-solving skills among students. The school had up to 60 students a year trained in mediation. Students in the Peacemaker program meet monthly at lunch to practice skills. Through peer mediation the school feels they “get the word out that there is support,” according to the school nurse.

✓ AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination)

The AVID program seeks to build academic and study skills in order to facilitate student achievement and expose students to challenging course material. The program targets “average” students and qualified students are invited to apply for participation. Students take an AVID course as an elective in which they are taught study skills such as Cornell note-taking and critical reading, and organizational skills to help them succeed in the challenging courses.

✓ Mentoring

Building on the school’s strong AVID program, students are regularly offered opportunities to support each other in class. One sixth grader shared, “In our science class, we will do the exercise where one of us teaches what the periodic tables are and then makes the rest of us test each other.” Students enjoy this peer teaching/learning relationship. One student commented, “They break it down ... teachers make things more complicated.” Another opportunity for mentoring occurs at Family Night when high school tutors come to Ramona to help students and their parents in language arts and math. Older students will

also help younger students at “Homework Club.”

✓ **Parent Involvement**

Ramona’s principal insists: “It is about empowering parents. ... We do raffles and tie it into subject areas, such as Family Nutrition Health Night where we raffled off pineapples, or Family Math Night where we had workbooks. ... There is so often the notion, ‘I can’t help my kids because I don’t know how.’ It’s how to empower those parents to be involved in the education of their kids. Often, culturally, it’s this that takes work.” Ramona gets help from the district in doing this work, however. As with all schools in Alhambra Unified, Ramona Elementary employs home/school coordinators. Ramona has two, one fluent in Spanish and the other in Chinese and Vietnamese. Both work part-time. Coordinators serve as key players in the school’s work with community organizations and referring parents to many of the services available to them. Coordinators serve as a bridge between teachers and parents, discussing both student achievement and behavior.

✓ **Confronting the Resource Issues**

The principal at Ramona is committed to meeting the ongoing extra-academic needs of the school’s students in spite of resource constraints: “I make sure we have a counselor on site always. Because there is no money for a full time counselor, we work with community agencies to make sure among them they will always have one counselor on Ramona’s campus. That matters a lot.” Many of the positions are covered from multiple income sources. The school/community coordinator’s position is funded by Title 1, Title 7 and district dollars, for example. Despite the fact that resources are patched together piecemeal, the creative – but, she emphasizes, compliant – budgeting is worth it. The principal reports that out of seventy students who had been evaluated in September 2005, thirty screened positive for significant issues. All thirty received counseling within two weeks and are now each on an upward trajectory in performance.

Support for Academic Achievement at Ramona

Ramona’s focus on support systems does not mean that academic achievement is not also important. The following are important programs or strategies in place at Ramona:

✓ **Support for English Learners**

English language learners follow the English language development standards, which blend content standards and performance levels. These standards provide a foundation for development of content expectations from Beginning to Advanced proficiency levels. The District’s ELD progress profile provides the benchmarks that build on literacy and fluency skills so that English learners can comprehend instruction in the English language arts standards. Teachers use the ELD progress profile to determine grouping for differentiated instruction of ELA and ELD. English learner students are expected to progress one level for every year in the district (a five-year model for students entering the district at the “beginning” level). If progress is not occurring, additional support and evaluation are prescribed to ensure student success for English learners.

✓ **Monitoring Progress toward Standards**

Ramona is a large school, and this poses challenges. In part in response, teachers maintain an evaluative portfolio for each student, which is passed on each year and includes the district’s annual performance writing assessments, oral reading assessment, phonemic awareness tests, Comprehensive Assessment in Reading Strategies (CARS), district’s benchmarks in ELA and math, math assessments and the ELD Progress Profile for EL students. This portfolio follows the student from kindergarten through eighth grade, and teachers can use the portfolio to better understand their students’ strengths as well as their needs. Students are given opportunities to select their “best work” samples and place them in the portfolio. This collaborative

approach ensures that students understand what constitutes grade-level standards work.

Parents are welcome to review their child's portfolio throughout the year. In fact, parents, and students too, play an important role in helping teachers monitor student progress toward standards. Standards and assessments are made accessible to students and their parents. For students, teachers identify what standards they are addressing in their lessons and the principal encourages them to post the standards on the bulletin board in age-appropriate language. For parents, teachers speak at open houses and "Family Nights" about their student's achievement against the standards and optimal placement to help them master those standards.

Conclusion: The Balancing Act at Ramona

Given limited resources and a challenging student population, many schools confront what looks like the choice of focusing only on core academic goals or risking diluting teachers' instructional efforts by asking them to attend to a host of other student needs as well. In contrast, Ramona Elementary School's approach has been to use both district and community resources to build a support system that is effective, but that does not rely on teachers alone to take on every pressing challenge. Data become key resources in managing this multi-layered support system. The result of attending to students' basic needs while also fostering strong connections between students and the school community has been to enable teachers to teach and students to learn at levels far beyond their counterparts in similar schools.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STRATEGIES IN A STANDARDS-BASED WORLD

Alvarado Intermediate School Rowland Unified School District

Located in Los Angeles County's Rowland Unified School District, Alvarado Intermediate is a large and diverse 7-8 school serving just over 1,100 students. Over 40 percent of students at Alvarado are economically disadvantaged and nearly 20 percent are learning English. Student transience is also high, with 11 percent turnover in the student body between the beginning and end of the year. Despite these challenges, Alvarado has shown steady growth in student achievement. Between the years 2000 to 2005, Alvarado's API rose 98 points from 727 to 825, while its statewide API rank rose to a 9 and its similar schools ranking moved from a 6 to a 10. Since 2003, Alvarado has been recognized as one of the top three middle schools in the State, earning the distinction of becoming a model middle school – a "California School to Watch, Taking Center Stage" recipient.¹⁹

Defining the Issue at Alvarado

"Middle school is unique. ... Kids behind academically become more apparently so in the single subject environment. ... There, those kids become more glaringly obvious than in a single teacher classroom." – Principal Dr. Nancy Padilla, March 2006

Dr. Padilla started her tenure as principal at Alvarado in 2001 by leading staff in a comprehensive analysis of the data to identify school-wide needs. The result was a set of strategies to build students' skills in four identified high-need academic areas: writing, word analysis and vocabulary, reading comprehension and rational numbers. Armed with this clear articulation of areas of focus, the principal led development of the School Plan Checkpoint, a tool that enables individual teachers, departments and teams to "check" or evaluate and reflect on instructional practices used in the classroom and determine their effectiveness in improving student

achievement (see artifact: "School Plan Checkpoint 2005-2006"). However, goal setting did not stop with academics. Alvarado sought to integrate social, personal and academic development as key components of a comprehensive strategy.

To meet these goals, Dr. Padilla built on a school-within-a-school model and interdisciplinary teaming structure. English, Math, Social Studies and Science are all represented on these interdisciplinary teams, and teachers in every department work together to develop and implement strategies for meeting the targets for writing, reading and mathematics that are identified in the annual school plan. This integrated approach became a central focus at Alvarado and, though Alvarado is a grades 7-8 school, its academic structure and program in many ways reflect many traditional middle school ideas. The rationale is that an interdisciplinary curriculum helps students make connections with what they're learning and so fosters student engagement, while the school-within-a-school structure helps with personalization and creates a shared sense of responsibility among teachers. As always, the structures created for students also shape adult work, and the interdisciplinary structures at Alvarado provides teacher teams with a daily common preparation period. Thus the interdisciplinary teams are the basis for a professional community for teachers and create many formal and informal opportunities for collaboration.

Alvarado's interdisciplinary teams support heterogeneous groups of students and each includes English learners and special education students as well as other students. All but the honors classes are heterogeneously grouped. All faculty agree to teach students representing a range of achievement levels and teachers work hard to create lessons that work well in groups in which skill levels are mixed. The "Benchmark Analysis" tool guides faculty to assess where student groups are on standards, where the areas of weakness are, and ends with a planning process for how to re-teach to differentiate (see artifact: "Benchmark Analysis"). This was a critical

¹⁹ www.rowlandunified.org/schools_alvarado.

ingredient in supporting the faculty “to differentiate instruction instead of curriculum,” as one teacher put it.

As another reflection of their commitment to building student engagement, the administration and faculty at Alvarado agreed to invest in both exploratory and advanced elective courses that would leverage students’ talents and accommodate their interests. All elective courses include a strong academic focus as well and are tied to standards. Alvarado thereby became what they feel may be one of the few remaining intermediate schools in the state to retain a visual and performing arts program. Where other sites chose to cut the arts program in the high accountability environment, Alvarado opted to make cuts in other areas. Most importantly, its classrooms are above the state average in size with an average of 31 students per class, versus the state average of 27. The faculty, supported by the district central office, felt that the trade-offs were worthy in advancing the school’s aim of getting all students involved and “plugged-in” in Dr. Padilla’s words. Student interview data paint a clear picture of student enthusiasm for elective courses.

Strategies and Tools

Establishing the ACES Teams

ACES stands for Affective and Curriculum Enhancement for Students. The purpose of ACES was to create a structure in which cross-grade and cross-department groups of teachers could discuss and respond to instructional, curricular and behavioral issues so that all students would progress academically. Each team was expected to analyze CST, EduSoft (multiple measure standards-aligned data reports) and benchmark data for their students. Focus students from each sub-group – honors, general, SDAIE, RSP, AVID – were identified. Specific teaching and learning goals, along with embedded assessments and re-teaching strategies, were developed for each focal student. All of this work aligned with the school-wide focus and goals as

identified in the school plan. Behavioral issues and strategies to address them would be developed and agreed upon by the team for the success of individual students. In addition, eight to twelve students would be “adopted” by individual members of the team to receive extra attention through the year.

In order to develop and track teaching and learning goals, along with embedded assessments and re-teaching strategies, each ACES meeting was organized to accomplish the following basics:

- Analyze data for students on the team, using CST, EduSoft, Benchmark and Teacher Assessments,
- Develop team goals to support the school plan,
- Develop re-teaching strategies to support student mastery of content standards,
- Plan differentiated assignments based on assessments,
- Analyze embedded assessment results and adjust instructional planning as needed,
- Plan interdisciplinary units,
- Regularly examine student work, and
- Create discipline strategies/behavior contracts for students as needed.

Site administration would regularly participate in ACES meetings along with teachers (see artifacts: “ACES Expectations” and “ACES Team Report Sheet”).

Articulation Days

Part of the district’s role in supporting its schools includes establishing both a regular meeting structure for principals and articulation days for teachers. The articulation days are scheduled throughout the year to provide teachers from the intermediate and high school levels the opportunity to meet for several hours in the afternoon to discuss classroom strategies, share student work and to link the transition from 8th grade to 9th grade. Alvarado teachers spend early morning collaboration time on articulation as well.

These are valued structures at Alvarado, where the faculty defines middle school as a time of transition, personally, socially and academically. One department chair noted that, in most districts, articulation meetings with feeder and destination sites happen only

once a year, towards the end of the school year. “That’s too late!” she emphasized.

The list of activities below was developed from the work of the monthly articulation meetings.

Effective Transition Activities To and From Middle School

1. Transition activities are planned well in advance.
2. Transitions work best when all stakeholders—parents, counselors, receiving teachers, sending teachers, administrators, and students—are involved in the planning process.
3. Personal and institutional connections and relationships are important. Leadership teams from sending and receiving schools meet regularly to discuss students, curriculum and achievement data.
4. Informed and involved parents are important to student’s successful transition. Parents need to know what is happening, when it is happening, and how it will affect their children. The communication process starts months before the students’ transition and continues throughout the year.
5. Social activities for students help them lower their anxiety and create positive bonds with other students. “Veteran” students from the receiving school can help newcomers feel welcomed and connected.
6. The expeditious transfer of data and information about student academic performance is crucial to a student’s successful transition. Administrators need preliminary data early in the calendar year to plan and schedule appropriate courses for incoming students. Receiving teachers need specific data about which standards their new students have mastered or not mastered before the new school year begins.
7. A standards based diagnostic assessment of all incoming students should take place before the new school year. Teachers can then begin appropriate instruction immediately without wasting time on needless review or redundant instruction.
8. A wide array of student data and information assists the receiving school staff with planning for the necessary intervention programs and curriculum support needed by the students.

From “Schools to Watch: Taking Center Stage – Alvarado Intermediate School, 2005”

Being Part of the System: The District's Role

Rowland Unified is a socio-economically diverse district that has traditionally been decentralized in its management approach, with budgeting and other related decisions made at the site level. To foster coherence within this context, Rowland uses a common set of benchmark assessments that help ensure district-wide accountability for student achievement despite its decentralized culture. This approach works for this community in part by allowing the district to provide choices to parents, a strategy which in turn develops community ownership and pride in their schools. This is part of what makes Alvarado's interdisciplinary approach possible.

Rowland's use of data from benchmark assessments to measure progress on standards far pre-dated the state's or the nation's focus on testing. When the first English Language Arts standards came out in the 1980s, Rowland began developing standards-based assessments. Teachers now administer benchmark assessments twice a year, once before the end of the first semester and once no later than three weeks before the state's STAR testing. The benchmark assessments were developed by classroom teachers and have been revised several times. Each time the district adopts new curricula and materials, the benchmark assessments are updated both in response to teacher feedback regarding their usefulness and to ensure that they are aligned with the new curricula. The assistant superintendent prioritizes internal validity, recognizing that if teachers don't find the assessments useful they will simply be perceived as a burden and won't help to focus instruction on student need. The availability of good data also means that decentralization is not the only answer in Rowland: the district does intervene if student outcome data is low. Many described the district's approach as "hands-off if you're doing well, but hands-on if you're not."

All schools in seventh through eleventh grades in English language arts (including

writing), mathematics, history/social science, and science use what they call the "Comprehensive Approach" to assessment and data analysis. This consists of four levels of analysis by classroom teachers to identify specific skills and knowledge that need to be reinforced or taught with a greater variety of strategies to ensure student learning. The four levels include; a) school-wide data analysis that translates to big ideas taught across all curricular areas, e.g. Thinking Maps, AVID strategies, vocabulary development; b) departmental analysis in the four core areas; c) analysis by teachers of common courses in the four core areas; and d) analysis in individual classrooms by the teachers.

To ensure that both school and district decision-makers have the data they need, the district invested in a data software program, EduSoft, to give teachers easier access to a wide range of student data. "Our district is not afraid to look at data and use data," explained Assistant Superintendent Dr. A.J. Santorufo. This focus is also a part of the Rowland culture: the district created a "Director of Research and Evaluation" position almost 20 years ago to support teachers and administrators in the data analysis process. Teachers have been trained in the Edusoft program over the past several years and its use is growing, especially now as the district expands the capabilities of the program to include re-teach lesson plans. The system contains references to relevant portions of text books and suggests lesson plans for addressing each standard so teachers who wish to review a standard can do so easily. According to Director of Student Assessment Tony Wold, "The move to EduSoft was critical to really become data-driven in decision making. In the past, the delay between assessment and return of results was significant – to the point that the outdated data was not relevant to teachers. With immediate same-day results and analysis, the focus is now on instructional strategies and not on data delays."

Though teacher buy-in is important, so is buy-in from students. For middle grades schools to succeed, their students must

embrace the goal of high achievement. In order to accomplish this, the principal of Alvarado developed a Powerpoint presentation entitled “Understanding State Standards and the Accountability System” (see artifact of same name). The presentation tasked each student to calculate their current performance level, their scale scores and the level they want to achieve by year’s end.

Results of the benchmark assessments are shared across the secondary school division in a variety of ways. Teacher and supervising administrator meetings may be called in each of the core content areas. These meetings bring together colleagues from both the intermediate and high schools to focus on results by course/grade level, and to explore needs and effective strategies. These meetings include sharing samples of student work. Similar meetings are held at the secondary principals’ meetings. “Administrators need to be part of the instructional process to be able to speak with teachers with knowledge and expertise about data and research-based instructional strategies, and to reflect on student work,” said Assistant Superintendent Santorufo. In essence, the existence of common benchmark tests allows the district to

take advantage of school autonomy by allowing sites to try new ideas and assess their effectiveness. The most promising strategies can then be disseminated district-wide.

Conclusion: The Balancing Act at Alvarado

Many schools that once focused on interdisciplinary strategies to engage students and foster teacher collaboration have moved away from this approach with the advent of standards-based reform. Alvarado Intermediate is a counter-example, a school that opted to retain its school-within-a-school structure and align its interdisciplinary curriculum with standards. In this case, Rowland Unified’s tradition of site autonomy on curriculum matters made this choice possible, while the district’s focus on standards-aligned benchmark assessments and user-friendly data gave the school some essential tools for aligning their curriculum with standards. This approach entails additional work and requires the creation of new structures to manage the curriculum alignment process. But in the eyes of the Alvarado leadership, the results are worth the effort.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: SITE SELECTION AND PERFORMANCE DATA

APPENDIX II: ARTIFACTS FROM CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

- a. Hughes Middle School
- b. Ramona Elementary School
- c. Alvarado Intermediate School

APPENDIX III: REFERENCES

APPENDIX I

SITE SELECTION AND PERFORMANCE DATA FOR HIGH-PERFORMERS AND AVERAGE-PERFORMERS

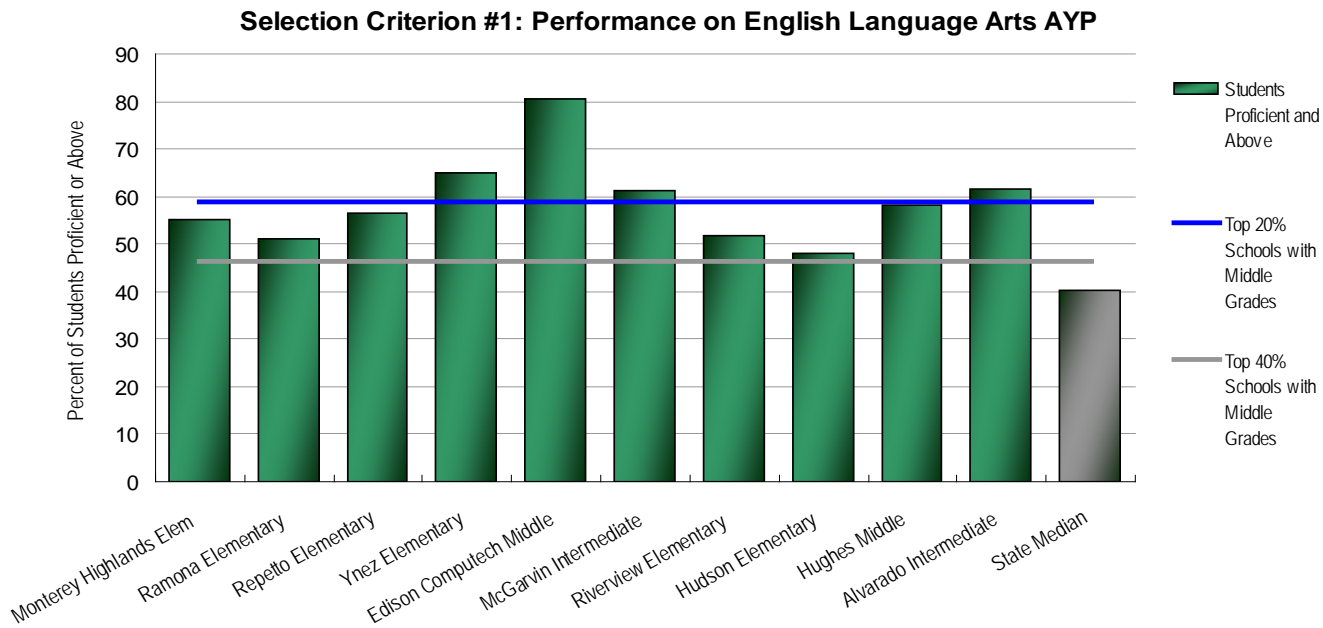


Figure 1: High-Performers' ELA AYP Scores. Data source: California Department of Education, 2004-05.

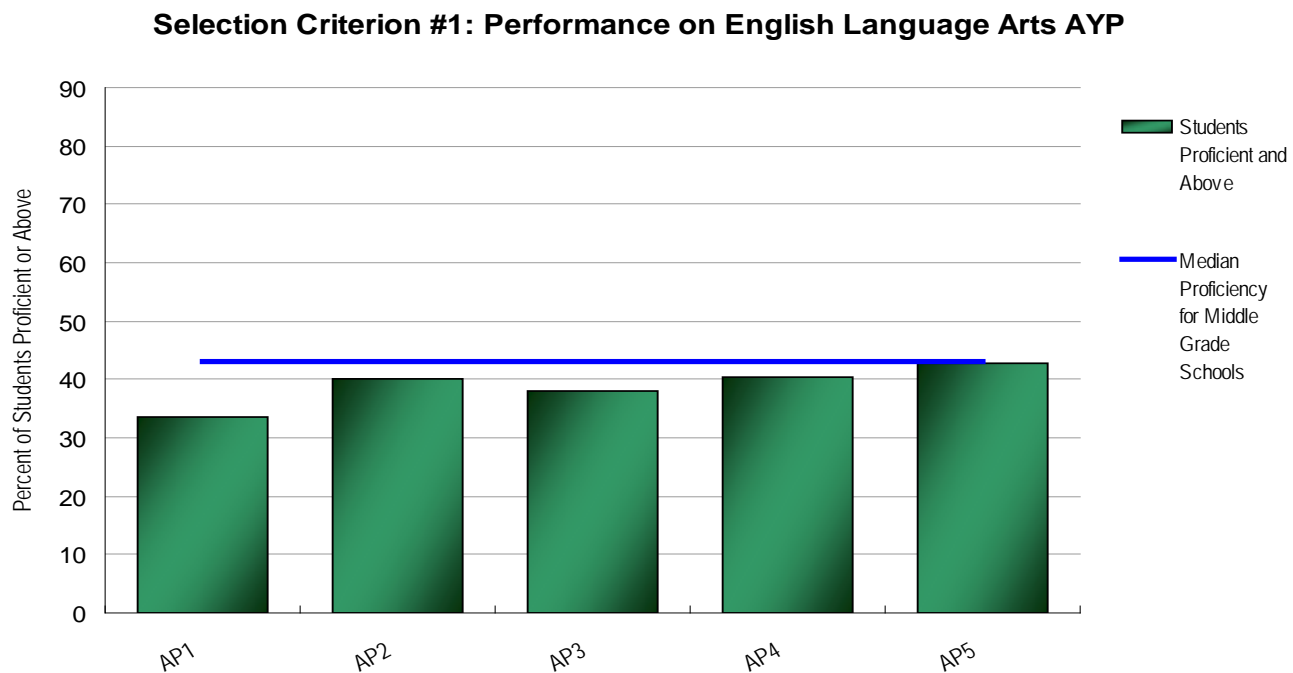


Figure 2: Average-Performers' ELA AYP Scores. Data source: California Department of Education, 2004-05.

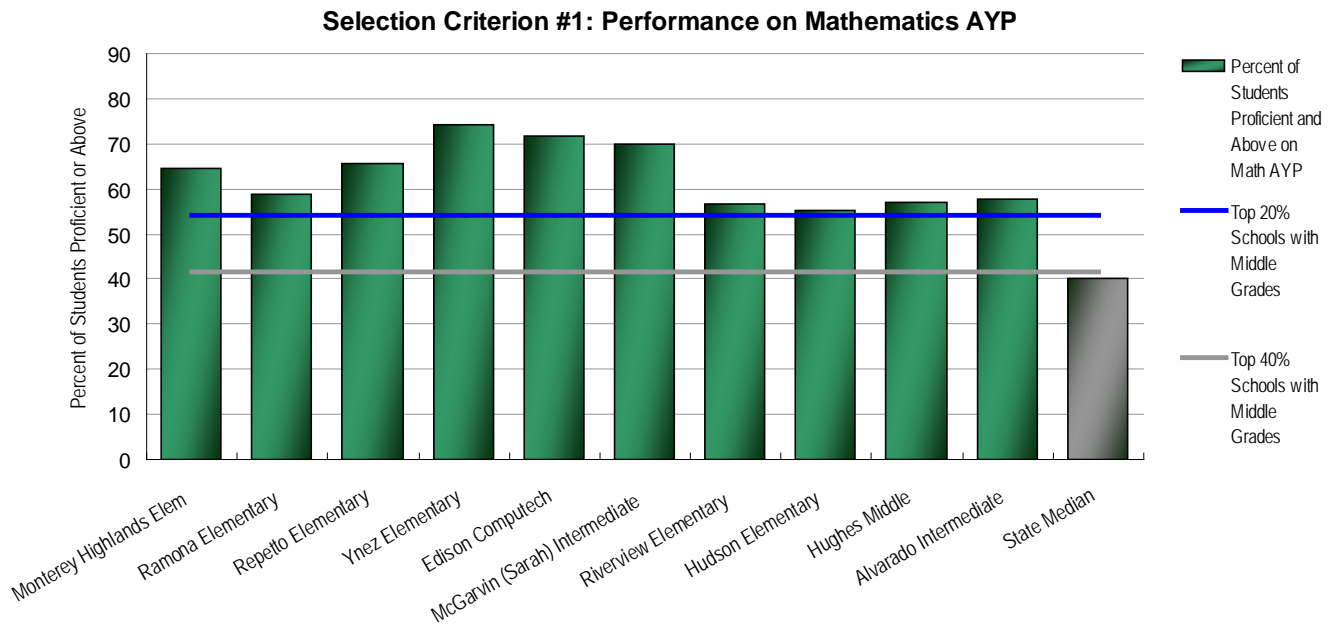


Figure 3: High Performers' Math AYP Scores. Data source: California Department of Education, 2004-05.

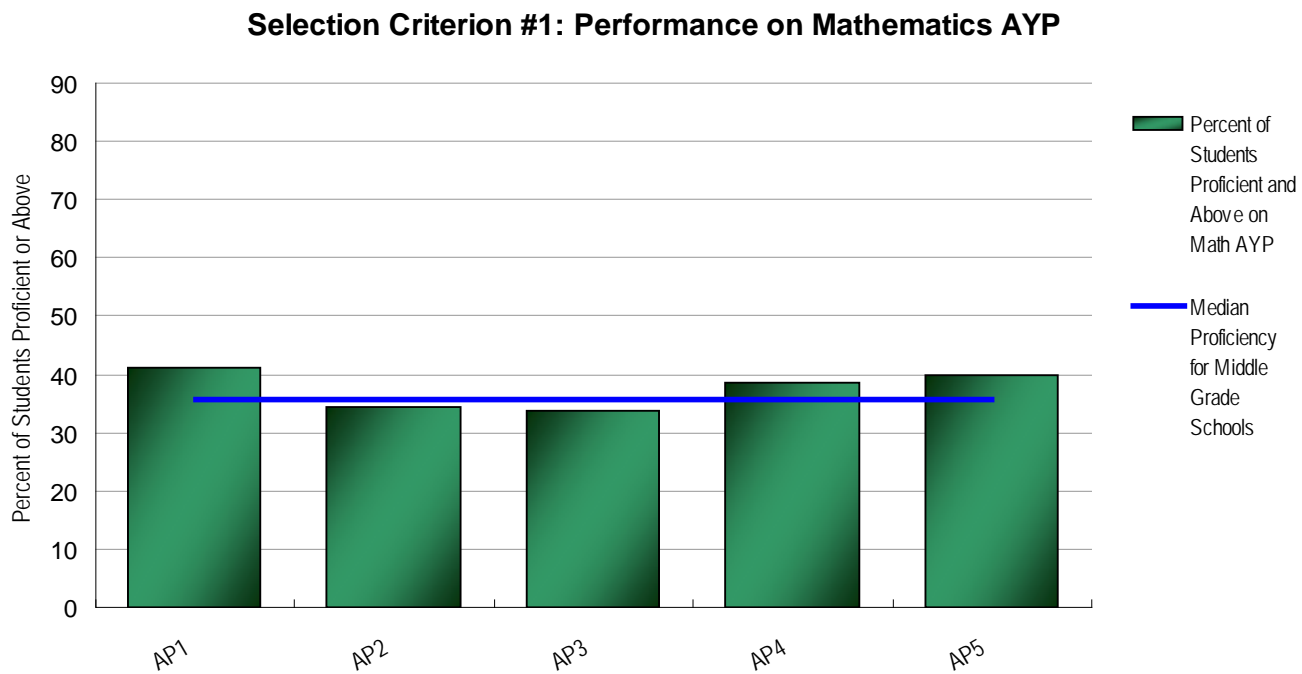


Figure 4: Average-Performers' Math AYP Scores. Data source: California Department of Education, 2004-05.

ALL HIGH PERFORMERS EXCEED AYP TARGETS – BUT BY HOW MUCH?

School and Subgroup Performance Against 2005 AYP Targets*

School (District)	Grade Levels	School Demographics/Enrollment					English Language Arts Percent of Students Proficient and Above AYP Target for No Child Left Behind: 24.4%					Mathematics Percent of Students Proficient and Above AYP Target for No Child Left Behind: 26.5%				
		School Enrollment	FRLP	ELL	Hispanic	African American	Entire School	FRLP	ELL	Hispanic	African American	Entire School	FRLP	ELL	Hispanic	African American
California State Average	n/a	976	49.0%	25.2%	46.8%	8.0%	41.9%	26.5%	21.9%	26.9%	28.9%	45.0%	32.8%	31.9%	32.6%	27.4%
Average Performing Middle Grades Control Group: Mean	n/a	873	59.9%	25.9%	45.1%	7.9%	39.9%	30.4%	21.4%	28.8%	25.8%	37.2%	32.5%	29.6%	29.4%	19.5%
High Performing Middle Grades Group: Mean	n/a	916	57.9%	26.9%	33.9%	6.4%	58.9%	50.7%	45.4%	42.3%	52.5%	63.2%	56.7%	58.4%	41.9%	47.8%
Monterey Highlands Elem. (Alhambra USD)	K-8	871	56.7%	38.3%	31.2%	0.5%	55.0%	49.4%	52.3%	33.5%	**	64.6%	58.2%	67.9%	31.0%	**
Ramona Elem. (Alhambra USD)	K-8	1,019	70.5%	45.0%	32.3%	0.5%	51.1%	48.4%	50.2%	33.8%	**	58.7%	57.9%	65.0%	30.0%	**
Repetto Elem. (Alhambra USD)	K-8	726	54.8%	34.6%	31.3%	0.3%	56.5%	50.4%	50.4%	38.0%	**	65.7%	60.9%	65.4%	38.0%	**
Ynez Elementary (Alhambra USD)	K-8	927	77.5%	47.9%	25.9%	0.4%	64.8%	61.6%	63.4%	45.8%	**	74.1%	71.9%	75.8%	47.0%	**
Edison Computech Middle (Fresno USD)	7-8	732	53.7%	1.4%	43.7%	11.1%	80.5%	73.0%	**	76.8%	71.8%	71.7%	66.8%	**	65.5%	59.2%
McGarvin Intermediate (Garden Grove USD)	7-8	670	57.0%	32.4%	17.2%	0.1%	61.1%	54.6%	46.1%	32.3%	**	69.9%	66.7%	63.6%	37.5%	**
Riverview Elem. (Kings Canyon Joint USD)	K-8	422	37.9%	21.3%	53.8%	0.5%	51.9%	30.1%	22.8%	34.4%	**	56.8%	39.8%	31.6%	40.0%	**
Alvarado Intermediate (Rowland USD)	7-8	1,106	42.9%	19.7%	38.4%	2.7%	61.5%	50.4%	42.0%	43.1%	**	57.8%	47.0%	49.9%	34.7%	**
Elizabeth Hudson K-8 (Long Beach USD)	K-8	1,135	77.5%	23.9%	37.2%	23.0%	47.9%	44.8%	35.6%	39.3%	40.0%	55.3%	52.8%	47.6%	49.7%	44.4%
Hughes Middle School (Long Beach USD)	6-8	1,548	50.8%	4.8%	27.8%	25.3%	58.2%	44.7%	**	46.0%	45.6%	57.0%	45.4%	**	45.8%	39.9%

Source: California Department of Education – www.cde.ca.gov

Italic indicates school statistics exceed state average

Bold indicates that the designated group outperforms the control

**Not a statistically significant student group

*No Child Left Behind requirements for 2005 state that 24.4% of California middle grades students reach proficient or above in English Language Arts on the AYP and 26.5% reach proficient or above in Mathematics. This chart compares the proficiency rates of the high-achieving challenged middle grades schools in this study against the state average and against the control group of average-performing challenged middle grades schools.

Table 2: Comparison of high-performers to state average in terms of demographics and student achievement.
Data source: California Department of Education, 2004-05.

CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY: MIDDLE GRADES SAMPLE

Matches between high-performing study sites and average-performing control sites

District Name	Dist Size	School Name	Grade Span	School Size	% FRPL	% ELL
Alhambra USD	19,673	Monterey Highlands Elem.	K-8	871	56.7%	38.3%
		Match: AP School 1	K-8	899	66.9%	26.7%
Alhambra USD	19,673	Ramona Elementary	K-8	1,019	70.5%	45.0%
		Match: AP School 4	K-8	1,016	73.8%	31.4%
Alhambra USD	19,673	Repetto Elementary	K-8	726	54.8%	34.6%
		Match: AP School 1	K-8	899	66.9%	26.7%
Alhambra USD	19,673	Ynez Elementary	K-8	927	77.5%	47.9%
		Match: AP School 1	K-8	899	66.9%	26.7%
Fresno USD	80,760	Edison Computech Middle	7-8	732	53.7%	1.4%
		Match: AP School 5	6-8	869	58.8%	32.5%
Garden Grove USD	50,030	McGarvin Intermediate	7-8	670	57.0%	32.4%
		Match: AP School 5	6-8	869	58.8%	32.5%
Kings Canyon Joint USD	9,250	Riverview Elementary	K-8	422	37.9%	21.3%
		Match: AP School 2	K-8	437	50.6%	21.1%
Long Beach USD	96,319	Elizabeth Hudson K-8	K-8	1,135	77.5%	23.9%
		Match: AP School 4	K-8	1,016	73.8%	31.4%
Long Beach USD	96,319	Hughes Middle	6-8	1,548	50.8%	4.8%
		Match: AP School 3	6-8	1,143	49.1%	17.7%
Rowland USD	17,945	Alvarado Intermediate	7-8	1,106	42.9%	19.7%
		Match: AP School 3	6-8	1,143	49.1%	17.7%

Data are from 2004-05, the most recent available at the time of selection.

Table 3: High-performing study sites and their average-performing matches. Approximate matches were made by taking into account grade span, geographic location, school size and percent of students who were English learners or economically disadvantaged. Data source: California Department of Education, 2004-05.

APPENDIX II: ARTIFACTS FROM CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

- a. Hughes Middle School**
- b. Ramona Elementary School**
- c. Alvarado Intermediate School**

Responding to Adult Directions

Stop, Look, Listen, and Do

Student Expectations

- Stop walking immediately when adult speaks to you.
- Turn to face the adult.
- Make eye contact with the adult.
- Listen quietly.
- Show respect in your body language:
 - Uncross arms
 - Stand upright
 - Maintain eye contact
 - Remain silent when the adult is speaking
- Nod or answer "okay" to show you understand.
- Give appropriate reply:
 - "Okay"
 - "I understand"
 - "All right"
 - "I'm sorry"
- Immediately follow the adult's direction without talking back.
- You do have the right to discuss the incident with the adult. You must find:
 - The right time
 - The right place
 - The right words
 - The right tone of voice
 - The right body language

(See your learning director for help with this part.)

- Remember the adult is doing her/his job to guide student behavior.

Adult Expectations

- If possible, use non-contingent attention first.
- Approach student directly. When possible, wave student toward you and away from peers or speak softly if in class.
- Use a calm, respectful tone of voice at all times.
- Refrain from calling out down the hallway or across the classroom.
- Remember the power of positive facial expression in setting the tone.
- Positively redirect student behavior. Use an initiating statement rather than a terminating statement. "Please remember to walk," rather than, "Stop running."
- Allow student appropriate time to comply with request.
- Thank student for compliance.
 - "Thank you for your respect and for keeping us safe by walking."
- If student begins to talk back, dispassionately remind them, "You have the right to discuss this, but now is not the appropriate time. See me later if you want to talk about it."

Student's Perspectives on Student's Actions That Impact How All Students Receive A "C" Or Better In All Classes

- Listening
- IEP's
- Friends
- Asking for help
- Answering questions
- Going to High School
- Getting into Gate
- Using time wisely
- Paying attention
- Positive thinking
- Writing in agenda
- Reading
- Doing homework
- Not being absent
- Be in uniform
- Do class work
- Looking forward to graduation
- Practice
- Write in notebooks
- Take good notes
- Review
- Outlining
- Using calculators on tests
- Being organized
- Using dictionaries
- Looking at teachers
- Having fun in class

Drivers

- Talking
- Playing with hair
- Making fun of others
- Day dreaming
- Fighting
- Cursing at teacher
- Being bad
- Chewing gum
- Off task
- Pretending to listen
- Watching t.v./play games
- Eating/sleeping in class
- Cheating
- OCS
- Not doing homework
- Interrupting
- Not studying
- Ditching
- Waiting too long to start an assignment
- Playing with cell phones
- Going to friends' houses
- Not doing best work
- Making other people laugh in class
- Wasting time (in class)

Preventers

Hughes Middle School,
Long Beach Unified School District

**Student's Perspectives on Teacher's Actions That
Impact How All Students Receive
A "C" Or Better In All Classes**

- Help em when I need it (CW/HW)
- Teach me good (help me raise my grade)
- Help me in A. M./P.M.
- Have students help at table
- Teachers care, listen to me
- Give me extra credit
- Give me overhead notes
- Don't yell or give me attitude (they're nice)
- Use document camera
- Highlighted questions/materials I need
- Make it fun (games, action)
- Keep me updated on my grades
- Give me good advice
- Give me warning before they call on me
- Give me helpful information
- Pay attention to me
- Make me feel good
- Give me good examples
- Give you answers to study
- Helps us take notes
- Give us time to think
- Give me rewards for being good

Drivers

- Give too much info
- Talks too much about off task stuff
- Don't listen to us
- Talks too fast- can't copy overheads
- Quick to jump to conclusions
- Pick on same people daily
- Put us on the spot
- Not enough active participation
- Strict, mean, don't pay attention to us
- Not enough one on one
- Not organized
- Give up on us
- Don't explain well enough
- Don't grade on effort
- Talk to me like I'm stupid
- Too much homework
- Some tests too hard/ some tests too easy
- Don't talk loud enough
- No modified work
- Not enough basic info; they move on before we understand


Preventers

Hughes Middle School,
Long Beach Unified School District

Student's Name Last First M.I. 6-8

Grade 6 7 8 School _____ ID Number _____ Gender M F

Parent Consultation/Conference (Sixth Grade)	Parent Consultation/Conference (Seventh Grade)	Parent Consultation/Conference (Eighth Grade)
Date	Date	Date
Comments	Comments	Comments



Alhambra City Elementary and High School Districts, 15 West Alhambra Road, Alhambra, CA 91801

ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS PROFILE

INTRODUCTION

English Language Development - Multilingual Multicultural Education - December 2001/Revised 2002

The program provided for English language learners (ELL) is guided by the English Language Development (ELD) Standards and Benchmarks.

Students are placed in the ELL program based upon their scores on the California ELD Assessment instrument (CELD). Versions of this instrument are used for initial placement, annual assessment, and redesignation: all versions are aligned with the California ELD standards adopted in 1999.

Designation as an ELL (LEP) means that students **must** be provided with an English language development course of study which includes listening, speaking, reading and writing through appropriate instructional methods for English language learners.

The revised ELD Progress Profile is aligned with the state standards. The Progress Profile provides an **ongoing** record of student progress which provides legal documentation of the program provided for each student. It is also a source of valuable information that can be used to group students for appropriate levels of ELD instruction based upon their needs. In addition, this profile provides consistent district-wide criteria for moving students from one instructional level to another. Teachers are to monitor student progress to evaluate competency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To provide evidence of meeting benchmarks, student work samples must be collected in the ELD Progress Profile folder where indicated (*).

Student progress through the stages of acquisition **must** be monitored and recorded using the ELD Progress Profile benchmarks. Suggestions for evidence and suggested strategies for assessment are provided in a chart (English Language Development, Progress Profile, K-8, Teacher's Guide) to assist teachers in gathering information as they monitor student performance. The information recorded on the ELD Progress Profile will be used to monitor the progress of each ELL student as well as to assist the teacher with placement in the appropriate instructional level.

- Guided Reading should become part of the student's language arts program beginning with the Intermediate level.
- ELD lessons continue until the student is redesignated.
- The ELD Progress Profile is cumulative within the grade spans K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. When a student moves from one grade span to another, each receiving teacher should review the benchmarks of the previous span to assess the student's instructional needs.
- For students new to the District, documentation on the ELD Progress Profile should begin at the CELDT level determined by the Orientation Center upon entering.



Alhambra School District: ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS PROFILE (6-8)

Name: (Last) _____ (First) _____ (M.I.) _____ Student I.D. Number: _____ Primary Language: Other: _____ SP CT MN VN
 (To be passed on to next year's teacher until all benchmarks are met)

Sixth Grade CELDT Results			
Date	Listening/Speaking Scale Score/ Level	Writing Scale Score/ Level	Total Overall Prof. Level

Seventh Grade CELDT Results			
Date	Listening/Speaking Scale Score/ Level	Writing Scale Score/ Level	Total Overall Prof. Level

Eighth Grade CELDT Results			
Date	Listening/Speaking Scale Score/ Level	Writing Scale Score/ Level	Total Overall Prof. Level

Redesignation Data
 (Affix Redesignation Sticker/Label Here)

Date Tested/Redesignated: _____
 Teacher's Recommendation _____
 Parent's Recommendation _____
 S747 Test (percentile) _____
 Reading _____
 Language _____
 Math _____
 Oral Fluency (CELDI)
 Writing (CELDI)

Notes: _____

BEGINNING			
Date	Grade	Teacher	School

Listening and Speaking (Comp/Org/Del)
 Asks/answers questions using phrases and simple sentences
 Retells familiar stories (w. gestures/ expressions/ drawings)
 Independently uses common social greetings/expressions
 Begins to speak using English phonemes in words or phrases
 Demonstrates comprehension of simple directions/instructions through non-verbal responses

Reading Word Analysis (CP/PAV/CD)
 Recognizes English phonemes (sounds) that correspond to phonemes student already hears and produces
 Recognizes some common words by sight in instructional contexts (e.g. a, and, how, the, with, etc.)
 Recognizes sound/symbol relationships in own writing
 Demonstrates comprehension of vocabulary with an appropriate action, word or phrase
 Adds words/drawings to graphs, charts, lists, tables and academic settings
 Reads aloud simple words in lists/charts, stories and games

Reading Comprehension (C/A)
 Responds orally to stories read aloud by answering factual comprehension questions using one- or two-word responses
 Orally identifies relationships between text read aloud and own experiences
 Identifies events in classroom interactions, stories, and presentations as true/not true
 Identifies the basic sequence of events in stories read aloud using key words, pictures or student-generated drawings
 Identifies the main idea in stories read aloud using key words/phrases

Reading Literary Response and Analysis
 Points out text features (e.g. title, table of contents)
 Listens and responds to a story by answering factual comprehension questions with one or two words
 Orally identifies characters and settings in simple stories
 Orally distinguishes between fiction/non-fiction and poetry using one or two word responses

Writing Strategies and Applications (P/O/F)
 Copies familiar and classroom print legibly
 Writes the alphabet legibly
 Produces patterned sentences and phrases
 Uses models to write short narratives *
 Uses capital letters appropriately when writing
 Uses periods at the end of sentences

EARLY INTERMEDIATE			
Date	Grade	Teacher	School

Listening and Speaking (Comp/Org/Del)
 Asks/answers questions and makes statements in various contexts using phrases and simple sentences
 Speaks with inconsistent use of standard English sounds and grammatical forms
 Restates or rephrases simple directions, details/main ideas/sequence from familiar stories

Reading Word Analysis/ Fluency/ Systematic Vocabulary Development (CP/PA)
 Reads unfamiliar phonemes orally (e.g. /b/ /t/ /p/ /l/ /ou/)
 Dictates Language Experience Stories
 Reads simple vocabulary, phrases and sentences chorally and independently
 Recognizes common morphemes in phrases and simple sentences (e.g. plural and tense markers, affixes)
 Monitors selected features of English by self-correcting word choice, usage or structures

Reading Comprehension (C/A)
 Exhibits use of cueing systems for unfamiliar text
 Responds to stories read aloud by answering factual questions using phrases or simple sentences
 Identifies main events of the plot with words or phrases
 Identifies relationships (inferences) between text and own experience using simple sentences
 Identifies examples of fact/opinion and cause/effect

Reading Literary Response and Analysis (IVA)
 Orally describes narrators and characters using simple sentences and key vocabulary
 Orally distinguishes between fiction/non-fiction/poetry
 Identifies informational, literary, and other texts

Writing Strategies and Applications
 Follows models to construct and revise compositions that narrate, describe, inform, compare and problem solve *
 Responds to familiar literature using drawings, lists, charts and simple sentences
 Produces notes generated in structured note-taking activities on informational topics and career explorations
 Prewrites, drafts and does simple editing for mechanics with guidance (e.g. capital letters/periods/question marks/commas)
 Writes independently with inconsistent use of standard spelling and grammatical forms

Exit Date	Grade	Teacher	School

Exit Date	Grade	Teacher	School

Primary Language Program Waiver on file, updated annually:

Name: (Last) _____ (First) _____ (M.I.) _____ Student I.D. Number: _____ Primary Language: Other: _____ SP CT VA NH

INTERMEDIATE			EARLY ADVANCED			ADVANCED		
Date	Grade	Teacher	Date	Grade	Teacher	Date	Grade	Teacher
L1 Instruction Benchmark (Mark with date completed) <input type="checkbox"/> Asks and answers instructional questions using complex and detailed sentences <input type="checkbox"/> Listens to stories/information to verbally identify key details and concepts <input type="checkbox"/> Uses standard English sounds and grammatical forms consistently (some rules may still not be in evidence) <input type="checkbox"/> Prepares/delivers short presentations on topics across the curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Retells stories/participates in instructional and social activities using language to describe/paraphrase/dramatize			L1 Instruction Benchmark (Mark with date completed) <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehends detailed information with minimal contextual clues on new topics in language arts and content areas <input type="checkbox"/> Speaks native-like English in social and academic discussions and learning activities <input type="checkbox"/> Expresses self during classroom interactions with appropriate registers and precise vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Retells stories with detail and elaboration			L1 Instruction Benchmark (Mark with date completed) <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies orally the main points and supporting details from presentations/media/stories in all subject areas <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates understanding of idioms by responding to and using them appropriately <input type="checkbox"/> Negotiates/initiates social conversations by questioning, restating, and seeking information <input type="checkbox"/> Selects appropriate ways of speaking and writing based on purpose, audience and subject matter <input type="checkbox"/> Prepares/delivers presentations and reports across the content areas		
Reading Word Analysis (PA/DWR) <input type="checkbox"/> Applies knowledge of common English morphemes to derive meaning from texts across the curriculum Reading Fluency and Systematic Vocabulary Development <input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes that some words have multiple meanings <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibits use of cueing systems (semantic, syntactic, graphophonic) for unfamiliar texts Reading Comprehension (C/A) <input type="checkbox"/> Uses detailed sentences to respond to factual/inferential, cause/effect, comprehension questions <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies basic text features of informational/consumer materials (e.g. glossaries, indexes, contracts, warranties) <input type="checkbox"/> Uses detailed sentences to orally identify key ideas, make predictions, and support inferences in texts <input type="checkbox"/> Follows written multi-step directions for simple applications			Reading Word Analysis (PA/DWR) <input type="checkbox"/> Applies knowledge of word relationships (e.g. roots, affixes) to derive meaning from texts across all content areas Reading Fluency and Systematic Vocabulary Development <input type="checkbox"/> Decodes and interprets the meaning of unfamiliar words <input type="checkbox"/> Reads aloud with appropriate pacing, intonation, and expression Reading Comprehension (C/A) <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies/explains main ideas and critical details of informational materials, literary, and content area texts <input type="checkbox"/> Generates questions and reflections in interactions with texts <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies/explains differences among various categories of informational materials <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzes the organizing patterns found in consumer and informational materials			Reading Word Analysis (DWR) <input type="checkbox"/> Applies knowledge of word relationships (e.g. roots and affixes) to derive meaning from literature and texts in content areas Reading Fluency/Systematic Vocabulary Development <input type="checkbox"/> Applies knowledge of academic and social vocabulary to achieve independent reading <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzes a variety of rhetorical styles <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies and analyzes the differences among various categories of informational materials		
Reading Literary Response and Analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Writes short narratives (which include beginning, middle, end) that define significance for the reader. <input type="checkbox"/> Uses complex sentences to follow organizing patterns for stories, biographies, reports, and essays <input type="checkbox"/> Creates cohesive paragraphs that develop a central idea/thesis with appropriate support <input type="checkbox"/> Explores a variety of genres with modeling (e.g. expository, comparative, cause/effect, persuasive) <input type="checkbox"/> Investigates/researches a topic and develops a brief essay or report including source citations <input type="checkbox"/> Edits for mechanics and grammatical forms with guidance <input type="checkbox"/> Revises own writing with input from teacher and peers			Reading Literary Response and Analysis (NALC) <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies literary devices with guidance <input type="checkbox"/> Describes orally in detailed sentences the major characteristics of several forms of poetry <input type="checkbox"/> Reads/explains using detailed sentences the literary elements of plot, setting, and character <input type="checkbox"/> Describes and compares or contrasts the major characteristics of several forms of literature: short story, essay, novel, ballad, and lyric epic Writing Strategies and Applications <input type="checkbox"/> Uses the writing process to identify and organize ideas, generate thesis, develop support, and cite sources. <input type="checkbox"/> Employs rhetorical conventions and devices (e.g. figurative language, quotation, citation, analogy). <input type="checkbox"/> Writes responses to literature that develop interpretations and cite specific examples from the text <input type="checkbox"/> Revises writing for word choice, organization, consistency/focus, transitions, and coherence <input type="checkbox"/> Uses appropriate tone and voice based on purpose, audience, and subject matter <input type="checkbox"/> Edits writing for structures and conventions			Reading Literary Response and Analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Analyzes the influence of setting, plot, and theme on the meaning and conflict of a literary selection <input type="checkbox"/> Compares and contrasts the motivation and reaction of characters across a variety of texts <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies and describes literary elements and techniques in texts Writing Strategies and Applications <input type="checkbox"/> Creates coherent paragraphs through effective transitions and parallel constructions. <input type="checkbox"/> Develops a clear thesis and supports it w/ a variety of rhetorical devices (e.g. analogies, statistics, comparisons) <input type="checkbox"/> Responds to literature through careful reading and developed interpretations. <input type="checkbox"/> Uses organizational strategies to structure clear, coherent, and focused essays using standard grammatical forms <input type="checkbox"/> Includes coherent plot development, characterization, setting, and literary strategies in compositions <input type="checkbox"/> Investigates and researches to develop balanced reports, including references and bibliography <input type="checkbox"/> Edits writing for conventions of Standard English		
EXIT: Date _____ Grade _____ Teacher _____ School _____ (* Requires student work sample)			EXIT: Date _____ Grade _____ Teacher _____ School _____ (* Requires student work sample)			EXIT: Date _____ Grade _____ Teacher _____ School _____ (* Requires student work sample)		



Alhambra School District
15 West Alhambra Road
Alhambra, CA 91801

ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS PROFILE: DIRECTIONS

English Language Development
Multilingual Multicultural Education
December 2001
Revised September 2002

Developed by L. Sasser, L. Naccarato, J. Corren, and Q. Tran © 2002

1. Complete the information on the identifying portion of the ELD Progress Profile for each LEP student in your class.

2. When a student enters your class, fill in the date (month and year) grade, teacher, and school for the current level of the student at the top of the appropriate column. If the student receives primary language instruction, a parent waiver must be on file annually, the date recorded in the space indicated, and 'yes' recorded on the L1 line. If primary language instruction is not taking place and there is no waiver on file, record "no" in the L1 box.

3. When a student has **consistently** met a benchmark for his/her grade level span, record this by entering the month and year in the box provided to the left of each benchmark.

4. The asterisk (*) on selected benchmarks in the Writing area denotes that a student work sample is required. The student work samples **must** be dated and placed in the ELD Progress Profile.

5. Students usually function in no more than two proficiency levels at one time. **Do not** start a third proficiency column until the student has met **all** the benchmarks on the first column of the three.

6. To exit from a proficiency level, the student must meet **all** the benchmarks in Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The teacher must date and sign in the exit boxes provided at the bottom of the benchmark criteria column. The teacher then needs to record the appropriate information, date (month and year), grade, teacher, and school, for the new level of the student at the top of the next column.

Notes To The Teacher

The elementary ELD Progress Profile has been revised to reflect California's 1999 standards for ELD. The standards cover grade level spans — K-2, grades 3-5, grades 6-8 — each of which is aligned with the California ELD test (CELDT). Each grade span recognizes five levels of proficiency: **Beginning, Early Intermediate, Intermediate, Early Advanced, and Advanced.**

Students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 are assessed in listening/speaking on the CELDT. Because students are determined to be orally fluent at the early advanced level, Kindergarten and Grade 1 students who are FEP have not been assessed on the ELD reading/writing standards. Students in Grades 2-8 are assessed in listening/speaking, reading and writing; their scores in all four language areas are used to determine their placement on the ELD Progress Profile.

Because the ELD standards are organized by grade level spans (K-2, 3-5, 6-8), benchmarks that are listed at one proficiency level may not be repeated at the next. This means that teachers using the grades 3-5 and 6-8 progress profiles should refer to previous grade spans to locate benchmarks which were assumed to have been met previously.

7. Student progress should be documented on an on-going basis by the classroom teacher. The ELD Progress Profiles are reviewed for LEP student progress by the site and/or district administrators and specialists.

8. The time element is a critical piece of information to look at for those students who are not making progress. If students have been receiving appropriate instruction - targeted at their proficiency levels - they should show evidence of growth. Students who do not make appropriate growth should be assessed further. The ELD Profile contains pertinent information for at-risk conferences, PAT referrals, guidance team appraisals, etc.

9. The ELD Progress Profile must be kept in the classroom and passed on as the student moves from grade to grade.

10. Use the ELD Progress Profile to review student progress with parents.

11. Each LEP student is assessed upon entry into the District at the Elementary Orientation Center. After assessment, the teacher receives a copy of the results. This initial assessment should be the **first** CELDT score recorded. The teacher copy of the Elementary Orientation Center Profile and the CELDT student score sheet should be kept with the ELD Progress Profile.

12. CELDT annual update results **must** be recorded in the spaces provided when results are sent to the teacher.

13. When a student leaves a school, the ELD Progress Profile must be inserted into the Cumulative Record (cum).

(6-8)

09/04

Alvarado Intermediate School

School Plan Checkpoint 2005-2006

An Analysis/Reflection of Instructional Practice

Components of the Comprehensive Approach for the Single Plan have been determined through the efforts of the staff via data analysis and a school-wide needs assessment:

1. Level 1: General Learning Skills for All Students

- Will respect other students comments, opinions, and ideas;
- Will say, “thank you” when given something;
- Will complete homework every day;
- Will be as organized as possible;
- Will, no matter the circumstances, be honest;
- Will speak and write in complete sentences;
- Will develop the vocabulary of the discipline;

2. Level 2: Gaps to be addressed by all teachers school-wide

1. Writing: Using complete sentences, expanding vocabulary of the discipline, systematically using Cornell note taking, using the “I” format for single and multiple paragraph essays, developing self-editing skills, and internalizing Thinking Maps as a pre-writing strategy.
2. Word Analysis and Vocabulary: Using the Word Bank program, institutionalizing Thinking Maps, developing context clues, expanding vocabulary of the disciplines, using affixes along with roots to build vocabulary skills.
3. Reading Comprehension: Using Thinking Maps and Cornell note taking, examining cause and effect (If...Then), Reading for meaning, expanding WICR (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Reading) strategies, implementing Costas’ Levels of Inquiry.
4. Rational Numbers: Fractions, Decimals, and Percents

This checkpoint is for individual teachers/departments/teams to evaluate/reflect on instructional practices used in the classroom and determine their effectiveness in improving student achievement.

1. Using students identified in ACES and targeted for additional intervention/attention as a barometer, reflect on your teaching practices as they address the areas of Level 1 & Level 2 of the school plan (enumerated above).
2. Given the professional development on instructional strategies initiated at Alvarado this year (and during the past four years) reflect on your use of research-based instructional practices: Thinking Maps, Costas’ Levels of Inquiry, Cornell Note Taking, Differentiation (GATE Depth & Complexity), the Word Bank Program, the “I” format for writing, and brain compatible strategies.
3. Write a summary regarding your instructional practices as enumerated on the attached page.
4. By January 9, 2005, give your department chair three/four work samples (**one** for each of the School-wide Gap areas) from an ACES students’ (from Far Below Basic, Below Basic, or Basic categories) and attach the accompanying form identifying the School-wide Gap, the objective of the lesson, the instructional strategy(ies) employed to teach the lesson, and any follow-up/re-teaching that may have occurred.



Alvarado Intermediate School

School Plan Checkpoint
2005-2006

An Analysis/Reflection of Instructional Practice

Teacher Name: _____

Reflection of Instructional Practices (Thinking Maps, Costas’ Levels of Inquiry, Cornell Note Taking, Differentiation (GATE Depth & Complexity), the Word Bank Program, the “I” format for writing, brain compatible strategies, etc.) implemented from Sept.-Dec. 2005 to address the goals enumerated in Level 1 of the School Plan and determine their effectiveness.

- Will respect other students comments, opinions, and ideas;
- Will say, “thank you” when given something;
- Will complete homework every day;
- Will be as organized as possible;
- Will, no matter the circumstances, be honest;
- Will speak and write in complete sentences;
- Will develop the vocabulary of the discipline;





Alvarado Intermediate School

School Plan Checkpoint 2005-2006

An Analysis/Reflection of Instructional Practice

Teacher Name: _____

Reflection of Instructional Practices (Thinking Maps, Costas' Levels of Inquiry, Cornell Note Taking, Differentiation (GATE Depth & Complexity), the Word Bank Program, the "I" format for writing, brain compatible strategies, etc.) implemented from Sept.-Dec. 2005 to address the goals enumerated in Level 2 of the School Plan and determine their effectiveness.

School-wide Goal: Writing: Using complete sentences, expanding vocabulary of the discipline, systematically using Cornell note taking, using the "I" format for single and multiple paragraph essays, developing self-editing skills, and internalizing Thinking Maps as a pre-writing strategy.

Standard/Objective of Lesson to Teach Goal: _____

What instructional strategies were used to teach this concept? _____

How effective were these strategies?

How might you change this lesson if you were teaching it again to the targeted students?



Alvarado Intermediate School

Benchmark Analysis

Teacher _____

Indicate below if class is Honors, EL, RSP, Reg. and performance level attained (Basic, Proficient, etc.).

Period A Subject/ Course _____	Overall Class Performance _____
Period B Subject/ Course _____	Overall Class Performance _____
Period C Subject/ Course _____	Overall Class Performance _____
Period D Subject/ Course _____	Overall Class Performance _____
Period E Subject/ Course _____	Overall Class Performance _____
Period F Subject/ Course _____	Overall Class Performance _____

Analyze your benchmark results and return to your department chair. This should facilitate a discussion by department/course about what you are doing to address the needs of our students.

Honors:

What 2 or 3 standards (put more than the number) are the areas of strength?

What 2 or 3 standards are the areas of need or weakness?

What are your re-teaching strategies? Please attach a sample/student product that reflects the re-teaching.

Regular:

What 2 or 3 standards are the areas of strength?

What 2 or 3 standards are the areas of need or weakness?

What are your re-teaching strategies? Please attach a sample/student product that reflects the re-teaching.

Other Significant Sub-Group (SDAIE, RSP, AVID):

What 2 or 3 standards are the areas of strength?

What 2 or 3 standards are the areas of need or weaknesses?

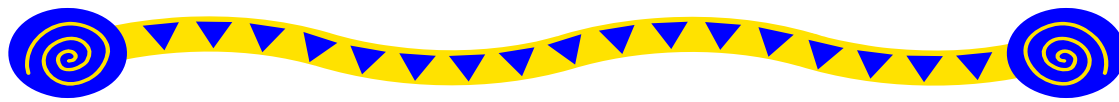
What are your re-teaching strategies? Please attach a sample/student product that reflects the re-teaching.

General Reflections and Comments

Are there any commonalities between the classes?

What appears to be unique to a particular class and to what do you attribute this phenomenon?

Looking at the targeted students for your team (ACES kids) and their performance on the benchmark, give one or two strategies you will try with certain individuals to either encourage their good progress or stimulate their academic focus as we enter the second semester.



A.C.E.S. Expectations Alvarado Intermediate School

A.C.E.S. - Affective and Curriculum Enhancement for Students

The purpose of A.C.E.S. is to discuss instructional, curricular, and behavioral issues so that **ALL** students progress academically. Each team will be expected to analyze CST, Edusoft, and benchmark data for their students. Focus students from each sub-group will be identified and specific teaching and learning goals, along with embedded assessments and reteaching strategies, will be developed to align with the articulated school wide focus areas and three target goals as identified in the school plan. Behavioral issues and strategies will be developed and agreed upon by the team for the success of individual students. In addition, 8-12 students will be "adopted" by individual members of the team to receive special attention throughout the year.

A binder to hold data and notes of ACES meetings, along with specific products pertaining to assessments, data analysis, and behavior plans will be brought to each meeting.

Site administration will regularly participate in A.C.E.S. meetings to provide support and resources and help address issues in a timely manner.

Below are the basics that will be accomplished during A.C.E.S. meeting times.

- Analyze data for students on the team - CST, Edusoft, Benchmark, Teacher Assessments
- Develop team goals to support school plan
- Develop reteaching strategies to support student mastery of content standards
- Plan differentiated assignments based on assessments
- Analyze embedded assessment results and adjust instructional planning as needed
- Plan interdisciplinary units
- Regularly look at student work
- Create discipline strategies/behavior contracts for students as needed
- Have Parent meetings



Alvarado Intermediate School

Team _____ Date _____

Team Members Present:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

STUDENT: _____

Concerns:

Strategies Used:

Action Plan:

Alvarado Intermediate School
Dr. Nancy Padilla

Understanding State Standards and Accountability System

1. What is your current Performance level?
English: _____
Math: _____
2. What was your Scale Score in English and Math on the 2005 California State Standards Test?
English: _____
Math: _____
3. What Scale Score do you need to achieve in both Math and English to be considered proficient?
English: _____
Math: _____

All Students Evaluated in Three Major Areas:

AREA	STANDARD
• State Test Scores – -Standard Tests	Proficient or Advanced (3+ years)
• Semester Grades –	A, B, C
• Benchmark Exams – in Math, Science, English, Social Studies	Proficient or Advanced

Performance

Levels	Scaled Score	Performance Level
Advanced	- 400+	Above Grade Level
Proficient	- 350-399	At Grade Level
Basic	- 300-349	1 Grade Below Grade Level
Below Basic	- 250-299	2 Grades Below Grade Level
Far Below Basic	-Below 250	3 Grades Below Grade Level

CST Individual Report

January 27, 2006 Page 1 of 1

Report Options

Student # [redacted]
School Name: Alvarado Intermediate School
Grade: 8
District Name: Rowland Unified School District
Exam: CST CST-STAR 8-05
Rosters: 2005-2006 Fall, School Year

Teacher: [redacted]
Ethnicity: All
EQ Programs: All
Course: English 8
Custom Groups: All

Overall Scores

	Scale Score	Raw Score	# Items Attempted	% Correct	Proficiency Level
English-Language Arts	375	80	74	72	Below Basic
Mathematics	391	48	64	75	Below Basic

CST Individual Report

January 27, 2006 Page 1 of 1

Report Options

Student # [redacted]
School Name: Alvarado Intermediate School
Grade: 8
District Name: Rowland Unified School District
Exam: CST CST-STAR 8-05
Rosters: 2005-2006 Fall, School Year

Teacher: [redacted]
Ethnicity: All
EQ Programs: All
Course: English 8
Custom Groups: All

Overall Scores

	Scale Score	Raw Score	# Items Attempted	% Correct	Proficiency Level
English-Language Arts	273	29	75	35	Far Below Basic
Mathematics	311	31	65	45	Below Basic

Promotion - Retention

Students at the Far Below Basic or Below Basic levels are at risk of retention and must attend some intervention programs.

1. Reading Classes
2. After School Academies
3. Tutoring Programs
4. Summer School

Grade Point Average is also considered when determining retention promotion. Students with a GPA below a 2.0 are considered at risk of retention.

G.P.A.

What does it mean?
Grade Point Average is a number that shows what kind of classroom performance a student has achieved.

How to calculate a G.P.A.:

1. Assign Point values for each letter grade.
2. Add up all the point values.
3. Divide the point values by the total number of letter grades.

Grade = Point Value
 A = 4 B = 3
 C = 2 D = 2
 F = 0

Total Points ÷ # of Grades = G.P.A.


Figure the GPA of these students with the following grades:

Student 1	Student 2
English – A	English – D
Math – B	Math – F
Science – A	Science – D
History – A	History – C
Elective – B	Elective – D
PE – B	PE – B
GPA _____	GPA _____

California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)

All students must pass the High School Exit Exam to graduate from High School.


The first opportunity to take the CAHSEE is in the 10th grade. It's offered twice per year.



THE MORE YOU LEARN, THE MORE YOU WILL EARN

Measuring the Payback

Although an investment in higher education doesn't come with a money-back guarantee, research has shown that average earnings have increased with the level of education attained.



Education Level	Average Annual Income (Approximate)
Master's Degree	\$75,000
Bachelor's Degree	\$65,000
Associate Degree	\$45,000
High School Diploma	\$35,000
Less Than HS Diploma	\$25,000

Basic Living Expenses

Item	Monthly Cost
➤ 3 Bdrm/2Bath House	\$3,000
➤ Ford Mustang	\$ 450
➤ Utilities/Insurance	\$ 350
➤ Clothing	\$ 150
➤ Food	\$ 150
➤ Vacation	\$ 200
➤ Fun	\$ 200

- Monthly - \$4,500
- Annual - \$54,000
- Annual Including Taxes - \$76,000

STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM QUIZ

1. What Performance level does the state expect all students to achieve?
2. How many semesters are there in a school year?
3. How does G.P.A. affect a student?
4. What is the CAHSEE?
5. What year in high school do you start to take the CAHSEE?

APPENDIX III: REFERENCES

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ABOUT SPRINGBOARD SCHOOLS

Springboard Schools is a California-based nonprofit and non-partisan network of educators committed to raising student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap. Springboard Schools was founded in 1995 as the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). Since that time, Springboard Schools has worked with 325 schools in 74 districts in the San Francisco Bay Area, Central Valley, and Southern California.

Springboard Schools' "research to action" approach to improving schools consists of three parts: 1) research, especially in high-performing, high-poverty schools to understand what they're doing right; 2) professional development for teachers and administrators; and 3) comprehensive, multi-year partnerships with school districts that include both professional development and provide intensive, on-site coaching so new ideas are transformed into practical strategies for change. The Springboard Schools research team has developed a reputation as a reliable source of information that is useful to both practitioners and policy-makers.

Springboard Schools' clients range from large (Fresno Unified, with more than 80,000 students) to small (Exeter, with 2,000 students) and include urban, suburban and rural districts. Springboard Schools is supported in part from fees charged to districts for our services and in part by a diverse coalition of foundations, corporations and individuals committed to investing in the improvement of public education.

For more information, please visit the Springboard Schools website: www.Springboard-Schools.org, email info@SpringboardSchools.org, or call 415 348-5500.



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