Special Series on the Fresno–Long Beach Learning Partnership

Building District Capacity for Data-Informed Leadership

California Collaborative on District Reform

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About this series

This brief is the fourth in a series exploring the promise and challenge of the Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership. This project is funded by grants from the Stuart Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Introduction

How do district and school leaders know whether all students are progressing in their learning and are on track for graduation and adult success? How do they know whether their systems are serving all students well and are fostering equal access to college and meaningful work? To answer these questions, many districts rely almost exclusively on standardized student outcome measures such as the California Standards Tests (CSTs), the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), or end-of-course tests. Although such indicators can provide a valuable window into a system's success in supporting students, by themselves they give little information about what educators might do to improve those outcomes. Data from these measures may not even arrive until after it is too late to intervene for a given student or cohort.

Fresno and Long Beach are working together to build their collective capacity to use data.

To address this problem, the two districts in the Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership are building a more multifaceted approach to monitoring the progress of their students and their systems. As the partnership between the third and fourth largest California school systems has grown, the districts have developed not only sophisticated ways of looking at student outcomes, but also leading indicators, such as course transcripts and formative assessment scores, that provide evidence about students' opportunities and progress along the way. Using a lens of equity and access to examine their efforts, the districts have leveraged their collective strengths to push their systems beyond what either might have accomplished alone. Examination of common metrics has been a central element in this process. As several district leaders explained, the districts do not compete with each other; rather, they push one another to explore how existing metrics can be combined with new indicators to provide a different view on a common challenge. Building their collective capacity to use data, the district leaders argue, will help both of them improve teaching and learning so that students in both systems will have access to a wide array of postsecondary options.

About the Partnership

The Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership is a collaboration between Fresno and Long Beach Unified School Districts, the third and fourth largest districts in California. The Partnership is designed to accelerate achievement for all students and to close achievement gaps by capitalizing on shared, systemic capacity-building across the two districts. The districts identified four strands that focus their work: enhancing mathematics instruction, improving outcomes for English learners, developing leadership at the school and district levels and college and career readiness. As a growing number of districts consider cross-system collaboration, it is more important than ever to learn how partnerships like this one operate and how their collaborative efforts become embedded in the policies, structures, and daily work of each district.

For a description of the early stages of this Partnership, see: Duffy, Brown and O'Day, 2009 (http://www.cacollaborative.org/Portals/0/cafiles/CA_Collaborative_Fresno_LB_Brief1.pdf).

For a description of the Partnership as a leadership strategy, see: Duffy, Brown, O'Day and Hannan, 2010 (http://www.cacollaborative.org/Portals/0/cafiles/CA_Collaborative_Fresno_LB_Brief2.pdf).

For a description of the mathematics and EL work of the Partnership, see: Duffy, Brown, Hannan and O'Day. 2011 (http://www.cacollaborative.org/pdf/CA_Collaborative_Fresno_LB_Brief3.pdf).

Drawing upon three years of interviews with district leaders, focus groups with district and school leaders, notes and observations from quarterly Partnership meetings, and artifacts such as data dashboards, meeting agendas, and walk-through protocols, this fourth and final brief in the California Collaborative on District Reform series examines how the Partnership uses data to inform work across and within the districts.

In 2008, Fresno Unified and Long Beach Unified School Districts entered into a formal learning partnership, with the goal of preparing all students for success in higher education or for a career with significant growth potential. Though they were perhaps at different points on their growth trajectories, both districts were on similar paths, and their Partnership was an opportunity to accelerate existing work. With this overarching goal in mind, the districts focused initially on three key areas: enhancing mathematics instruction (curriculum), improving outcomes for English learners (students), and developing strong leadership at the district and school levels (adults). In 2011, the districts added an explicit focus on college and career readiness. The cross-district conversations in these four arenas have led to a number of strategic district policy and program reforms designed to improve outcomes for all students as the districts work toward their common goals.

Over time, the Partnership has leveraged a variety of data to measure progress and accelerate growth. The districts have also worked together to increase the capacity of each system to generate and use data effectively for decision making This brief provides examples of the way the Partnership has done the following:

1. Deepened the culture of evidence-based practice within and across the districts;
2. Helped both districts as they address infrastructure challenges, such as access to data, deployment of resources, and training; and
3. Provided support as they use data for local and state policy conversations.

Deepening a Culture of Evidence-Based Practice

Building a culture of data use goes well beyond the practices and policies associated with accountability. In addition, it must include opportunities for ongoing conversations among district and school staff to interpret data, propose solutions, and raise additional questions. Often, those conversations create a desire for different types of data, and different ways to use those data. The Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership provides just those sorts of opportunities for district leaders. In the course of their work together, the districts' leaders have raised questions related to their shared equity goals that have led them to new data sources and deeper analysis of achievement patterns.

As the Partnership took shape, leaders noted that Long Beach was further along in its mathematics growth than Fresno was. As Long Beach shared the story of its success, Fresno leaders believed they could learn from Long Beach's mathematics instruction reforms.[1] Their early conversations about these metrics also led the districts to ask *which* students were struggling—and why. Both superintendents agreed that they needed to provide a stronger system-wide emphasis on the achievement of English learners (ELs). And when they considered the human capital needed to implement these changes, a focus on leadership development emerged as a third essential component to reach their goals. Figure 1 includes the common metrics the two districts identified early on as they began conversations about benchmarking their work together; as the Partnership has evolved, other metrics have been added that help monitor progress for mathematics and EL achievement.

Figure 1. Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership Shared Metrics

Category	Metric	2007 Fresno	2007 Long Beach	2013 Fresno/ Long Beach Goals
Performance Indicators	5th grade ELA proficiency	29%	44%	70%
	5th grade Math proficiency	32%	56%	70%
	8th grade ELA proficiency	25%	38%	55%
	Gen. math proficiency in 8th grade	14%	25%	50%
	8th grade Algebra I enrollment	28%	30%	60%
	8th grade Algebra I proficiency (of those enrolled in course)	43%	68%	75%
	First time pass rate CAHSEE 10th grade	70% Math 67% ELA	74%	85%
	Graduation rate	79%	80%	90%
Postsecondary Eligibility	A-G completion rate	40%	38%	60%
	Performance on SAT and ACT		TBD	
College/ Career Readiness	AVID[2] participation (MS and HS)	Not yet reported	Not yet reported	All schools at 10%
	AP enrollment and passage	Not yet reported	Not yet reported	5% annual growth
	Early Assessment Program[3] – ELA pass rate	10%	14%	25%
	Early Assessment Program – Math pass rate	3%	10%	25%
	College enrollment (of graduates)	Not yet reported	64%	80%

Source: Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership

Once the districts formalized the Partnership in 2008 and identified the key district staff who would participate, they agreed to hold quarterly meetings to discuss the strands of work. Monitoring progress in those four focal areas continues to provide structure for ongoing conversations during the Partnership meetings.

Quarterly meetings put "data dashboards" at the forefront and allow the districts to share data practices.

These quarterly meetings between the districts put "data dashboards" at the forefront and allow the districts to share data practices that accelerate change across both systems. Leaders describe data sharing as "the backbone for our conversations." Data dashboards[4] that include common metrics across the districts promote deeper conversations around multiple forms of data. Through this approach, district leaders emphasize data use not only for accountability, but also to shed light on common challenges in a way that leads to identifying shared solutions.

Quarterly meetings are structured flexibly to meet the needs of the districts, most often focusing on problems of practice and sometimes taking stock of the Partnership itself. Typically, meetings begin with opening comments from the superintendents to frame the day, followed by a presentation of a district practice, and then a "deep data dive" that carefully examines one or more of the districts' common areas of focus. Each meeting also includes time for "job-alike" conversations (between staff who hold similar roles in the different districts) and time for district leaders to explore opportunities for joint work. As the participants examine data together in their deep dives, the conversation builds their capacity to analyze and address complex problems of practice. Using the same metrics across the two contexts is key to this process, as the comparisons across systems help the leaders ferret out the factors that may be contributing to the patterns they observe while they also problem-solve potential solutions. And as leaders from each of the four strands of work learn more about practices in the other district, deeper questions emerge that require different kinds of metrics. The example that follows, from a quarterly meeting focused on EL student achievement, illustrates this process.

Examining EL Achievement in a Quarterly Meeting

The districts' focus on EL achievement serves as an example of how the Partnership helps build a culture of data use by monitoring district progress, assessing the impact of resource deployment decisions, and identifying new types of data as additional questions emerge and district partners engage in joint problem-solving. One meeting in particular focused almost exclusively on EL achievement. To begin, district leaders used the common set of metrics that the Partnership had identified for district-wide trends. In addition, they disaggregated those data to include only ELs. Figures 2 and 3 include achievement data shared by each district at the meeting. Although the labels each district used to report these data vary slightly, the data are common across both systems. The figures report results for all students as well as disaggregated results for ELs. The color-coded far right column represents their assessment of progress toward meeting their goals, with green indicating that the goal was met, yellow that it was trending upward, and red that progress was flat or declined. These figures illustrate the development in the districts' examination of data. Not only have they added indicators to their initial dashboard (Figure 1), they have also disaggregated these data to address questions that have emerged about EL student achievement.

Figure 2. Fresno EL Student Data: Common Metrics

Metric	2007	2008	2009	Evaluate
EL redesignation rate	10.2%	10.1%	10%	
CST ELA – Proficient				
ELs	17.4%	19.6%	24.1%	
Districtwide	*30.7%*	*33.2%*	*37.2%*	
CST Math – Proficient				
ELs	24.0%	28.5%	34.7%	
Districtwide	*29.6%*	*33.6%*	*38.5%*	
CST 3rd Grade Math – Proficient				
ELs	38%	35%	46%	
Districtwide	*45%*	*50%*	*59%*	
CST 5th Grade Math – Proficient				
ELs	20%	21%	29%	
Districtwide	*33%*	*41%*	*49%*	
CST 8th Grade Algebra Proficiency				
ELs	31%	45%	49%	
Districtwide	*44%*	*55%*	*60%*	
8th Grade Algebra Participation				
ELs	2.3%	2.1%	1.9%	
Districtwide	*29.4%*	*27.7%*	*26.8%*	
Percent ELs Meeting AMAO #1 (progress on CELDT)[5]	47.1%	54.4%	52.9%	
Percent ELs Meeting AMAO #2 (English proficiency)	25%	31%	32.1%	
CAHSEE Math passing rate, first attempt				
ELs	49%	45%	51%	
Districtwide	*69%*	*71%*	*71%*	
CAHSEE ELA passing rate, first attempt				
ELs	28%	31%	31%	
Districtwide	*66%*	*68%*	*67%*	
9th–12th grade students enrolled in at least 1 AP course				
ELs	3.6%	3.9%	4.1%	
Districtwide	*9.8%*	*11.2%*	*14.0%*	
9th–12th grade AP enrollment				
ELs	187	207	203	
Districtwide	*3,235*	*3,772*	*4,555*	

Green: has met target

Yellow: approaching target

Red: flat or declining progress

Source: Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership

Figure 3. Long Beach EL Student Data: Common Metrics

Metric	2007	2008	2009	Evaluate
EL percent of overall enrollment	23.1% 20,975	24.7% 21,816	23.7% 20,715	
EL redesignation rate	12.1% 2,673	9.1% 1,901	11.8% 2.584	
CST ELA – Proficient				
ELs	26.7%	29.1%	31.8%	
Districtwide	*43.8%*	*46.5%*	*49.5%*	
CST Math – Proficient				
ELs	41.2%	44.3%	46.6%	
Districtwide	*50.2%*	*53.8%*	*56.5%*	
CST Math, grade 3 – Proficient				
ELs	43%	51%	53%	
Districtwide	*62%*	*68%*	*69%*	
CST Math, grade 5 – Proficient				
ELs	34%	36%	52%	
Districtwide	*56%*	*60%*	*63%*	
CST Algebra, grade 8 proficiency				
ELs	54%	57%	44%	
Districtwide	*68%*	*66%*	*69%*	
Algebra 1–2 participation, grade 8[6]				
ELs	1%	2%	2%	
Districtwide	*17%*	*18%*	*21%*	
AMAO 1 – Met Target (progress on CELDT)	48.1%	49.9%	53.6%	
AMAO 2 – Met Target (English proficiency)	26.4%	30.1%	32.7%	
CAHSEE Math passing rate, first attempt				
ELs	31%	38%	45%	
Districtwide	*74%*	*78%*	*79%*	
CAHSEE ELA passing rate, first attempt				
ELs	18%	28%	33%	
Districtwide	*74%*	*79%*	*78%*	
AP, min. 1 Course – Participation				
ELs (ELs/All Enrolled)	2%	1%	1%	

Green: has met target

Yellow: approaching target

Red: flat or declining progress

Source: Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership

Collaborative examination of a wide range of data has helped both districts understand the power of multiple indicators for assessing progress.

Those disaggregated common metrics provided a foundation for the cross-district discussion during the meeting. Based on their conversation, both districts acknowledged the need to focus attention on students who have been enrolled in their schools for five or more years, yet remain classified as ELs. Leaders noted that as students progress through the grades, it becomes increasingly challenging for them to score proficient both on the ELA CST and the CELDT. Their conversation led them to agree that more of their efforts should focus on helping ELs become proficient before they leave elementary school. Examining redesignation rates also led to a discussion of how those students fare once the intensive EL supports disappear. As they examined EL mathematics achievement trends, Fresno noted that, after one year of implementing instructional reforms based on Long Beach's elementary mathematics program, ELs did not demonstrate the same level of achievement growth as non-ELs. After the Fresno team shared their analysis, Long Beach noted similar patterns in their own data. This led the two districts to redouble their efforts to address the needs of ELs in mathematics through district-led coaching and professional development activities.

In addition to including the common metrics that grounded discussion during earlier meetings, leaders from both systems had additional questions that led them to collect other types of data. For example, Long Beach implemented self-contained sixth grade classes and deployed its EL specialists in a pull-out model for ELs in fourth and fifth grades. The Long Beach team wondered how ELs were performing in each instructional context, so they examined those data during the quarterly meeting. As Long Beach examined trends in formative assessment scores for ELs, the team concluded that their fourth, fifth, and sixth grade strategies were having positive impacts on ELs.

Meanwhile, Fresno had been piloting a transcript analysis process to understand course enrollment patterns. Fresno applied that analysis to one subset of courses: Advanced Placement (AP) courses for their ELs. In particular, because of the relatively high number of Spanish speaking students in the district, it made sense to see how many of those students might have had access to AP Spanish. It seemed important to examine access to AP courses for ELs because enrolling ELs in those courses might increase the number who would be competitive college applicants.

The conversation that resulted from examination of these data together led to a deeper understanding in both districts of the importance of focusing attention on long-term ELs, as well as monitoring—and supporting—ELs beyond reclassification. The process led to a jointly developed English language development progress monitoring tool for each grade level, along with a process to monitor and support EL students when they transition into mainstream instruction.

Extending Data Use Beyond Quarterly Meetings

The goals and strategies for these data-based quarterly meetings mirror those in a number of other Partnership-related activities. For example, building on the mathematics instructional reforms in each of the districts, middle school principals from Fresno visited middle schools in Long Beach to gain a clearer understanding of effective mathematics instruction.[7] Prior to conducting "walk-throughs" of classrooms, Long Beach principals provided Fresno principals with an overview of their schools—including demographics and student achievement patterns—and long-term trends and patterns on recently administered benchmark assessments.

The presentation of those data served as a foundation for the classroom walk-throughs, which were guided by an observation protocol that district leaders and coaches employed to assess implementation of Long Beach's instructional approach in mathematics.

The protocol reflected the mathematics lesson design that teachers in both districts used, including a warm-up and anticipatory set designed to activate students' prior knowledge, a clearly articulated objective and purpose for the lesson, teacher modeling, checks for understanding, guided practice, and closure. The observation protocol provided a guide for classroom visits—the protocol was structured around the instructional components they should see, and it shaped the debriefing conversations that followed. Using these tools to frame instructional observations demonstrates another way in which the Partnership broadens the sources of data the two districts use to inform their work. The visiting Fresno principals were able to meet with some of the teachers they observed to ask questions about lessons and to provide feedback. In turn, Long Beach leaders collected the visitors' reflections on the observations to inform the local principals about the level of lesson design implementation among their teachers. If essential features of instruction were absent, coaches and the principal knew more support might be necessary for effective lesson design implementation.

Infrastructure for Supporting Effective Data Use

The examples above illustrate how the Partnership has accelerated the districts' efforts to build their data-use cultures. But the analysis, inquiry, and subsequent actions would not be possible without an infrastructure that supports access to those data. While each district had a solid foundation of data access to build upon, the sorts of questions that emerged during Partnership meetings created additional demands for information.

The Partnership's data-based efforts have led to conversations focused on what might be contributing to student achievement patterns.

By basing conversations on shared data dashboards and by expanding the types of data they consider, the Partnership has helped district leaders discern potential contributors to the achievement patterns, monitor progress, and make mid-course corrections. Such an approach also establishes norms and values about grounding key decisions in precise metrics and data collection activities.

Developing Tools for Transcript Analysis

When the Partnership formed, each district had already begun creating strategies of its own to draw upon data that are sometimes overlooked. Both had moved beyond reliance only on student outcomes by incorporating analyses of students' access to rigorous courses. For example, early in the Partnership, Fresno leaders shared processes they were developing to examine school calendars, student transcripts, and master schedules. From their examination of current course placement patterns, they developed case studies demonstrating the ways in which certain placement practices systematically denied some high school students access to A–G courses.[8] For example, one analysis illustrated that some students who could demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English while still in middle school were routinely programmed into foreign language classes in high school. The fact that students were programmed into classes for

which they could already demonstrate proficiency and test out of the A–G foreign language requirement meant that they were not taking other A–G courses that they might need to become University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) eligible.

Presenting the case studies corroborated the ongoing work in both districts and helped to push their thinking farther. The quarterly meeting allowed Fresno to discuss the district reforms they believed would begin to address gaps in the system's placement and scheduling practices, and provided Fresno leaders the opportunity to hear multiple perspectives on their proposed solutions. Seeing the analysis and tools being developed in Fresno also accelerated Long Beach's efforts to develop a similar data tracking system that will operate within the existing Long Beach data portal. Currently in beta testing, the hope is that Long Beach's new system will provide schools and parents with access to data that will support more precise and timely analysis of student achievement and access to courses. Long Beach's system will help students, parents, and counselors make more informed decisions about course pathways, based on the goals students set for themselves.

These transcript analysis tools exemplify one way in which the Partnership facilitates sharing new types of data management practices that build the capacity of both systems. It also demonstrates how the Partnership provides opportunities for school leaders to share their challenges and raise tough questions together. In this way, the districts push one another to continuously improve.

Enhancing Supports for College Readiness

Enhancements to data infrastructures in the two districts have also led to other data-based tools and strategies to support student success. Built upon their transcript analysis and driven by a desire to increase the numbers of students who attend UC or CSU and who are "competitively eligible,"[9] district leaders in Fresno added a feature that would automatically enroll struggling students in summer school. This feature allows the district to query information related to A–G completion and student characteristics and track the numbers of students meeting A–G requirements. Even though a student can pass a class with a "D" and graduate, the district does not believe a "D" demonstrates proficiency; nor will it qualify for A–G requirements. Therefore, students who receive an "F" or a "D" are automatically enrolled to repeat those A–G classes in the "Expanded Year" (summer school) Program. To increase the likelihood that students will take advantage of the opportunity presented by the Expanded Year program, Fresno decided to adopt the opt-out policy that Long Beach had previously implemented for its Saturday school. This policy requires parents to sign a waiver if they do *not* want their child attending the additional classes. Using the same language developed by Long Beach, the opt-out policy in Fresno makes it more difficult for parents not to send their children to the Expanded Year Program.

By giving students a chance to achieve passing grades on their transcripts, the district better positions those students to complete the A–G courses required for UC/CSU eligibility. The tool can indentify students who are not A–G eligible as well as those who are eligible but do not have enough advanced A–G credits to ensure they are competitively eligible.

In a Partnership meeting, Fresno leaders presented case studies to their Long Beach partners that brought this tool's capabilities to life, allowing the Long Beach team to envision how investment in such a tool might benefit their district. Long Beach Superintendent Chris Steinhauser cited the tool as the perfect example of a benefit that the Partnership provides and indicated that he and his team would adopt these practices.

Not only does this data tool identify who could be put back on track by participating in the Expanded Year Program, it also sheds light on

inequities in course placement across the district. Through its application, district staff can pinpoint policies and practices that have inhibited equal opportunities for students to enroll in more rigorous courses. The tool allows the district to see if there are students who, based on their academic history, should have been placed in certain courses (such as AP classes). In addition, Long Beach used the tool in 2011 to identify incoming 10th grade students who might benefit from a summer academic program designed to help students get ready for college preparatory course work. While both districts are still in the early stages of adopting such practices to uncover inequities in their systems, the Partnership serves as a forum to examine their progress and think together about using such tools.

Improving Data Displays, Generating Efficiencies, and Preventing Misinterpretation

In addition to using their data dashboards to measure performance related to their strategic plans and state and federal accountability systems, Fresno and Long Beach also continue to keep leaders focused on metrics that link to goals embedded in those strategic plans. As those data dashboards were first being developed, the districts borrowed ideas from one another for data displays that would reflect progress on their strategic plans. Both districts now share common data displays that are easily interpreted by leaders in the district and by parents and members of the public.

Creating efficiencies in data generation and analysis has become increasingly important as the districts adjust to cutbacks in state funds. Trying to minimize the impact of budget cuts on direct classroom services, the districts have made significant cuts at the district level, including cuts to research departments. Long Beach leaders explained that the increased call for data, along with cuts to district-level staff, have resulted in a bottleneck in fulfilling data requests. Recently, two district leaders from Long Beach visited Fresno to job-shadow that district's research department staff. Their goal was to learn more about the way Fresno organized its research department in hopes of taking back some ideas that would help them address their own challenges. Fresno shared different types of displays and explained the training given to staff who handle data requests. As a result of the visit to Fresno, Long Beach has created cross-functional teams that will allow more and different staff members to generate reports for schools. They believe this strategy will help address the bottleneck.

Sharing their infrastructure challenges inevitably led to discussions about the culture of data use and about how to provide staff greater access to data displays and analyses that can inform their work and planning. Both districts are currently trying to determine what level of access teachers, counselors, principals, and other stakeholders should have to which types of data. The director of Fresno's research department explained that both districts struggle to provide access to data in a way that will reduce the chance of misinterpretation. "If we provide more data to people or the power to initiate queries, the plus side is the information gets out more quickly; the minus is that people can misinterpret based on the wrong data sets…When a lot of data becomes available, you run the risk that [the users] don't know how to navigate exactly what they're looking for." For example, it is easy for teachers to end up getting information on CST scores for the prior year's class rather than for students in the current year's class.

While research department leaders in both districts believe they have come a long way in providing timely access to data, they also acknowledged that they continue to struggle with how to simultaneously make data accessible to more people and avoid misinterpretation. Tapping the wrong data to answer a question is one potential pitfall. Another is drawing premature conclusions about underlying causes of achievement patterns. The research staff admit that, because of the level of programming that is necessary, neither district has yet to "hit

the mark" with respect to access and interpretation. But they continue to push each other to grow in this arena. Long Beach intends to incorporate some of what the district is learning from Fresno as Long Beach beta tests a new data system that will allow counselors, parents, and students to access information on test scores, grades, and course-taking trajectories that will help monitor students' progress toward achieving their goals.

Data Use for Local and State Policy

In this climate of increased scrutiny and accountability, Fresno and Long Beach recognize the need to support one another as they help their respective publics interpret the student performance data that will guide assessment of program quality, policies, and resource allocation. The need to support one another is increased by the high profile and size of these districts. In addition, the audience varies substantially for different types of data and different contexts. For example, presenting data at a school board meeting might raise different challenges than presenting data to a group of other superintendents or to a group of district instructional coaches. Even within the local setting, different stakeholders might bring different questions to the interpretation of the data the districts share; indeed, the challenge of ensuring appropriate interpretation of data is amplified when they are shared with the broader public, who may lack sufficient knowledge of instructional contexts, goals, and strategies associated with those data. To help deal with this issue, the districts use the same set of metrics in their conversations with their school boards, and explicitly embed those metrics into their strategic plans.

Fresno Superintendent Mike Hanson explained that including data from Long Beach allows his team and his Board to see a potential trajectory for Fresno. Long Beach data can provide concrete examples of a program's impact on student achievement, the expected progress, and possible challenges along the way, illustrating both where Hanson sees Fresno heading and how the district can get there. For example, Fresno incorporates Long Beach's mathematics data to track their own progress. The ability to share where he sees Fresno in its growth cycle helps him ensure that premature conclusions don't derail current efforts to improve. In an earlier brief,[10] we described some disappointing results in Fresno's eighth grade algebra proficiency rates two years into a new placement practice. Rather than abandoning the policy altogether, Fresno was able to see that the district's implementation missed an important support for students that Long Beach had in place. Understanding Long Beach's practice prevented Fresno from misinterpreting the disappointing outcome data and abandoning the policy. Instead, the district understood that it was the lack of student supports, not the placement practice itself, that contributed to the outcomes. Presenting data in these ways requires that leaders develop political savvy, that they have a deep understanding of their audience, and that they relentlessly and skillfully bring data to bear on real challenges they face.

Similarly, Steinhauser pointed to an example of the Partnership's influence on state policy. Several years ago, Long Beach had begun looking at data from the Early Assessment Program (EAP). The EAP is an assessment that 11th grade students can take to get a sense of how well they are prepared for college-level work. If they do not perform well on the EAP, students have the option of taking a class specifically designed to prepare them for the rigors of college-level English and mathematics. As a result of conversations with Fresno around equity and access, Long Beach piloted a program developed in collaboration with Long Beach City College and CSU–Long Beach. In this program, a grade of C+ in the special college preparatory class will guarantee that a

student will not be placed in developmental classes[11] in either of these two postsecondary institutions. Based on data from the Long Beach pilot, the state legislature is considering a policy that will allow this approach to be adopted statewide. Steinhauser said that the Long Beach pilot—and the state's willingness to look at the practice as a broader policy—is a direct result of the Partnership's capacity to leverage data, using processes and tools that were originally developed by Fresno.

Both district leaders pointed to the layers involved in conversations that employ metrics the Partnership has developed, including conversations with teachers about curriculum, conversations with school leaders and counselors about master schedules to ensure equitable access to rigorous courses, conversations with central office staff around their support of schools, and conversations with community leaders and institutions of higher education.

Conclusion

The values that form the foundation of the Fresno-Long Beach Partnership and the strategic thinking that we have witnessed over the last three years represent a robust notion of data-informed leadership. Knapp and colleagues suggest that "data-informed leadership rests on a foundation of values and strategic thinking that guides the leaders' reach for data, engagement in inquiry, meaning making, and subsequent actions" (Knapp, Swinnerton, Copland, & Monpas-Huber, 2006, p. 12). By engaging in joint work focused on common challenges and by employing common metrics to measure their progress together, the districts have been able to refine their implementation of key strategies across the districts. The Partnership has also provided opportunities to ask deeper questions about performance and make sense of evidence produced in response to those queries. Thus, while the Partnership is grounded in the development of common measures and tools, it also builds the capacity of each system to use those tools. Both districts had already begun the hard work of building the culture and infrastructure for data-informed leadership before the Partnership began; the Partnership helped accelerate that process by providing a wider context for examining metrics and learning from each other's practices. As they engaged in collective inquiry, their questions deepened, creating a need for richer portraits of student achievement.

Engaging in this collaboration has been hard work, not only because it represents a break from traditional ways in which school districts operate, but also because building the trust required for collaboration takes time. In earlier briefs, we have mentioned the importance of relationship building and trust as an essential component of the Partnership's joint work. Nowhere is that need for trust clearer than when districts look beyond publicly available accountability measures to ask themselves and each other tough questions about the ways in which their systems structure opportunities for student success. Asking those deeper questions and having access to the tools that can help uncover systematic patterns contributes to collective organizational learning. The district leaders believe that the investment of time and resources has been worthwhile—both professionally for the individuals most directly involved and for students in both districts. Tying their metrics to district-wide strategic plans has helped leaders monitor their progress. Building a culture of data-informed leadership and ensuring that the infrastructure exists to meet those needs has helped leaders accurately assess the root causes for achievement patterns and make adjustments when warranted.

The Fresno-Long Beach Learning Partnership serves as one example of a cross-district collaboration that has resulted in deeper organizational learning and has accelerated growth in student achievement. The development of common metrics has ensured that the day-to-day work of everyone in the system remains focused on the larger, coherent vision for all students, and has created a sense of accountability across the two systems. And while their work together has always been grounded in common goals that have remained constant throughout, the Partnership itself has been dynamic and responsive to the needs of the districts as those needs have emerged.

As state and district leaders look for efficiencies that can conserve precious resources, cross-district collaborations might be a promising alternative to going it alone or with external support providers. However, the Fresno and Long Beach district leaders emphasize the need to embrace the demands of creating and nurturing a successful partnership. Although the Partnership has provided opportunities to share resources and created some efficiencies, it has also demanded a significant investment of time and energy to plan and engage in the activities that have contributed to its success—activities like quarterly meetings, walk-throughs, and cross-district job shadowing. Leaders from both districts believe this sort of hard work is the only way to truly address the systemic change necessary to improve the opportunities for their students. In the words of one leader, examining their systems and the achievement of students more intensely has been "bone-crushing and deeply emotional." But it is also the path toward improving teaching and learning, raising student achievement, and closing the achievement gap.

This is the fourth and final brief documenting the Partnership. We want to thank leaders from both districts who have taken time from their busy schedules to speak openly and candidly about their work. While we have noted the importance of trust among district leaders who work across traditional boundaries, it is equally important to establish trust with researchers who document the work of complex district systems. We hope our conversations and these briefs not only inform others in the field about the promises and challenges of partnerships, but also provide an opportunity for leaders from Fresno and Long Beach to reflect upon, and learn how others are making sense of, their work.

References

Knapp, M. S., Swinnerton, J. A., Copland, M. A., & Monpas-Huber, J. (2006). *Data-informed leadership in education*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Endnotes

[1] For a more thorough discussion of the implementation of changes to mathematics instruction in both districts, see Duffy, H. Brown, J, Hannan, S. and O'Day, J. (2011) *Separate Paths, Common Goals: Cross-District Collaboration on Mathematics and English Learner Instruction.* San Mateo, CA: California Collaborative on District Reform.

[2] AVID, or Advancement Via Individual Determination, is a program designed to prepare more students for postsecondary education. It targets under-achieving students who are willing to work hard and enrolls them in rigorous courses with an elective class that provides academic support.

[3] The Early Assessment Program (EAP) is a collaborative effort between the California State University (CSU) system, the California Department of Education (CDE) and the State Board of Education to provide students, parents and educators with feedback on student readiness for college-level work. Eleventh grade students voluntarily take an augmented state assessment exam that includes additional mathematics and ELA items. Student scores on those augmented items are indicators of readiness for college work.

[4] Data dashboards, used for years in business, provide relatively quick views (thus the use of the term "dashboard") of information related to progress toward established goals.

[5] Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) are performance objectives or targets that all districts receiving Title III funding must meet. AMAO 1 represents the percent of ELs making progress in learning English. AMAO 2 represents a target for the percentage of students achieving proficiency in English. In California, both AMAO 1 and 2 are measured using the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). AMAO 3 represents targets for meeting Annual Yearly Progress targets for the EL subgroup.

[6] Long Beach measures participation in Algebra 1 and 2; Fresno only considers Algebra 1.

[7] The districts use the same instructional approach to mathematics. A teacher in Long Beach developed the approach, which is based upon Singapore math. For a more detailed description of the mathematics work in both districts, see *Separate Paths, Common Goals: Cross-District Collaboration on Mathematics and English Learner Instruction.*

[8] In California, A–G requirements are the minimum number of approved courses students must complete in order to become eligible for entrance to the California State University or University of California systems.

[9] Completing the A–G requirements does not ensure students will be admitted to the most competitive UC campuses. Students who wish to become "competitively eligible" must successfully complete advanced courses such as honors and Advanced Placement courses.

[10] Duffy, H., Brown, J, Hannan, S., and O'Day, J. (2011). *Separate Paths, Common Goals: Cross-District Collaboration on Mathematics and English Learner Instruction.* San Mateo, CA: California Collaborative on District Reform.

[11] Students who arrive in postsecondary institutions with a goal of pursuing a college transition program or a technical education, but who do not have adequate language or mathematics skills, are often placed in developmental classes. Developmental classes do not count toward credits for a college diploma. Studies suggest that placing out of developmental classes is one predictor of college completion.

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California Collaborative on District Reform

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The California Collaborative on District Reform, an initiative of the American Institutes for Research, was formed in 2006 to join researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders in ongoing, evidence-based dialogue to improve instruction and student learning for all students in California's urban school systems.

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