

California's Past Programs to Support School and District Improvement: A Synthesis of Evaluation Studies

Compiled by the staff of the California Collaborative on District Reform

This document synthesizes the findings from the evaluations of four statewide programs designed to provide support for underperforming schools and districts in California as part of the state accountability system:

- Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP)
- High Priority Schools Grant (HPSG) Program
- School Assistance and Intervention Teams (SAIT)
- District Assistance and Intervention Teams (DAIT)

This overview outlines the cross-cutting findings and recommendations from the evaluation studies of these programs. In addition, this document includes two charts. The first provides programmatic details for each effort, including timeline, school or district selection criteria, state funding for implementation, and additional technical support provided. The second chart summarizes the evaluations of each program, including study design and findings related to student performance outcomes as well as implementation.

Study Findings

Mixed methods studies were conducted to evaluate the impact of II/USP, HPSG, SAIT, and DAIT on student outcomes. Without exception, the programs either had negligible or no overall program effects on student achievement. The majority of the findings from the evaluation studies focused on program implementation. School and district staff generally reported that their program participation had positive effects on school capacity, instruction, and data-based decision-making. This was true across all four programs. In two of the four studies, participants reported that the school or district relationship with their external provider helped improved principal capacity. In at least two of the studies, an increased focus on monitoring student achievement data was associated with improved student performance, and qualitative responses to surveys and interviews in all four studies mentioned that schools and districts had increased their use of data to inform instruction or policy.

Study Recommendations

Each of the evaluation studies presented a series of recommendations to improve the processes through which the state supports underperforming schools and districts. While many recommendations were program-specific, there were three general themes that emerged. In at least three of the four studies, the authors made the following recommendations for program improvement:

- Provide additional funding for sustainability;
- Enhance the role of the district to support school improvement; and
- Increase monitoring and accountability expectations.

The need for additional financial resources was the most frequent recommendation, appearing in all four evaluation studies.

Overview of Improvement Programs

| Program | Timeline | School/District Selection | Funds Provided | Technical Assistance Provided |
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| Immediate Intervention/ Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) | 1999-00 through 2004-05 | <p>Cohort 1 (430 schools): Schools scoring in the bottom half of the state's schools on the Stanford Achievement Test, 9th Edition (SAT-9) for two consecutive years (1998 and 1999) were invited to submit an application to participate in the program</p> <p>Cohorts 2 & 3 (860 schools, 430 each in each cohort): Schools had Academic Performance Index (API) scores in the lower five deciles and had not met their API growth targets in the previous year</p> | \$50,000 for the first year to develop an Action Plan for school improvement, then \$200 per pupil per year to implement the Action Plan | <p>II/USP schools received funds to create and implement an Action Plan for school improvement with the assistance of a state-approved External Evaluator.</p> <p>The External Evaluator was responsible for assisting in the creation of the Action Plan, particularly in supporting the involvement a variety of stakeholders during plan development.</p> <p>The External Evaluator was also responsible for supporting and monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan.</p> |
| High Priority Schools Grant (HPSG) Program | 2002-03 through 2005-06 | <p>A total of 658 schools statewide participated in the program.</p> <p>While schools in deciles 1-5 were eligible, priority for participation in the HPSGP was given to schools ranked in the lowest decile on the state API.</p> | \$50,000 for the first year to develop the Action Plan for school improvement, then \$400 per pupil per year for three years (and possible fourth year) to Implement Action Plan | <p>Schools were required to develop an Action Plan (or modify an existing plan) to serve as a blueprint for the school and community to focus on improving student achievement and meeting growth targets.</p> <p>Districts monitored the development of the Action Plan and reported on schools participating in the HPSGP by submitting annual reports accounting for school characteristics such as instructional materials used, courses offered, levels of parental involvement, teacher training, and principal experience.</p> |
| School Assistance and Intervention Teams (SAIT) | 2003-04 through 2009-10 | <p>Schools were placed in state monitoring status when, after participation in either II/USP or HPSGP, they did not make significant yearly API growth.</p> <p>All state-monitored schools were required to obtain the services of an SAIT provider.</p> <p>Each cohort started with 430 schools</p> | Districts were provided one-time funds for each state-monitored school: \$75,000 for each elementary and/or middle school and \$100,000 for each high school | <p>The SAIT provider was responsible for assessing the degree to which the school was implementing nine Essential Program Components: adoption of SBE-adopted or standards-aligned instructional materials; adequate instructional time; participation of in School Administrator Training Program; engagement of highly qualified teachers and universal participation of ELA and math teachers in state Professional Development Program; implementation of a student achievement monitoring system; ongoing instructional assistance and support for teachers; monthly teacher collaboration facilitated by the principal; use of lesson and course pacing schedule and master schedule flexibility; and district alignment of fiscal support.</p> <p>Working with the District/School Leadership Team (DSLIT) and school staff, the SAIT provider completed an Academic Program Survey to determine the school's existing level of implementation of the nine EPCs. Based on the information collected during this assessment, the SAIT</p> |

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| | | | | <p>provider produced the Report of Findings and Corrective Actions (ROF) and worked collaboratively with district and school staff to establish benchmarks for each corrective action. The SAIT provider was required to complete the ROF within 30 days of being engaged. The local Board of Education was required to review and approve the ROF within 30 days. Once the local Board approved the ROF, it was to be submitted to the CDE to become the basis for revising and aligning the school plan to better implement all of the EPCs.</p> |
| <p>District Assistance and Invention Team (DAIT)</p> | <p>2008-09 through 2009-10</p> | <p>LEAs identified as not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) in accordance with Title I legislation for three or more years fell/fall in to Program Improvement (PI) status and were targeted for DAIT support.</p> <p>LEAs in "severe" need of assistance were required to contract with a specific district assistance and intervention team (DAIT), selected for them by the state.</p> <p>LEAs in "moderate" need of assistance were required to select and work with a DAIT of their choosing.</p> <p>43 districts received the DAIT intervention</p> | <p>California spent \$44.25 million on the 43 districts that received the DAIT intervention over the 2008-9 and 2009-10 school years, or a little over \$1 million per district that received the intervention. However, amounts per district ranged from \$200,000 to \$4.8 million. California ranked and grouped the PI3, districts (intensive, moderate and light) and provided differentiated funding based on criteria adopted by the California State Board of Education.</p> | <p>LEAs received support from a state-approved DAIT provider who assisted them in diagnosing district needs and summarizing their findings in a capacity study. DAIT providers also helped LEAs develop or rewrite an existing improvement plan to incorporate recommendations from the capacity study.</p> <p>The DAIT provider also supported LEA efforts to implement and monitor their progress on improvement plans.</p> |

Overview of Program Evaluation Studies

| Program & Study | Design | Findings – Student Outcomes | Findings - Implementation |
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| <p><u>Program:</u> Immediate Intervention/ Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP)</p> <p><u>Study:</u> Bitter, Pérez, Parrish, González, Socias, Salzfass, & Esra, 2005. American Institutes for Research.</p> | <p>Mixed-methods: impact analysis of statewide achievement trends using data from all II/USP schools and relevant comparison schools; interviews with district- and school-level administrators and teachers in II/USP schools growth.</p> | <p>The overall program effect was negligible. Any small advantage experienced by II/USP schools relative to comparison schools during program participation dissipated before or soon after program completion.</p> | <p>There was evidence that II/USP participation contributed to growth in some schools. Even though there was no overall impact of II/USP on student achievement, some previously struggling schools were able to make substantial progress during the time of II/USP implementation, and some attributed this growth to participation in the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating factors: Several essential factors for growth were identified by schools that made consistent and/or high growth in student achievement during II/USP. These included school capacity, instructional coherence, and systematic assessment and data-based decision-making. <p>Local districts were found to influence the achievement trends in low-performing schools. While district supports were reported as key to some schools' improvement, these supports did not appear to be present in all schools.</p> <p>Differing state and federal accountability systems diffused the attention schools were paying to the Public Schools Accountability Act.</p> |
| <p><u>Program:</u> High Priority Schools Grant (HPSGP) Program</p> <p><u>Study:</u> Harr, Parrish, Socias, & Gubbins, 2007. American Institutes for Research.</p> | <p>Mixed-methods: impact analysis of extant student- and school-level achievement data for HPSGP and non-HPSGP schools; Conducted case studies of 16 HPSGP schools; Administered and analyzed data from surveys in 106 HPSGP schools and 49 districts.</p> | <p>There was no overall program effect. While HP Only plus planning schools demonstrated academic progress during the period of program implementation, their gains were not statistically different from the gains of the comparison schools included in these analyses.</p> | <p>Many survey respondents were not aware of program requirements. While nearly half of the school survey respondents described their external provider support as appropriate and effective, nearly 45 percent of school staff reported that the school did not use, or reported that they did not know if the school used, an external provider in the development of the Action Plan,</p> <p>Half of survey respondents were concerned about the short length of the program. Although the majority of HPSGP school respondents indicated an effective use of funds, half reported concern about the short length of the program, and nearly a third reported that the untimely arrival of funds did not permit appropriate planning and spending.</p> <p>Spending on personnel was reported as the most common and the most effective local use of HPSGP funds.</p> <p>A slight majority of respondents reported a lasting HPSGP impact in areas of school capacity.</p> <p>Survey respondents had mixed opinions on the sustainability of program impacts. While 60 percent of school respondents indicated confidence in sustaining the impact of HPSGP, only 40 percent said they had been able to find funding to continue these reforms.</p> |

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| <p><u>Program:</u> School Assistance and Intervention Teams (SAIT)</p> <p><u>Study:</u> McCarthy, Li, Tabernik, & Casazza, 2008. Hatchuel Tabernik and Associates.</p> | <p>Mixed methods: Longitudinal analysis of student achievement (API and STAR) data from 200 schools working with SAIT providers; qualitative reports on schools' progress in implementing the EPCs; analysis of online surveys of SAIT providers, district personnel, principals, and teachers; and visits to SAIT schools.</p> | <p>Close analysis of the API and STAR data reported in this evaluation do not sufficiently support the authors' conclusion that participation in SAIT improved student learning outcomes (as measured by API and CST scores) at a faster rate than was the case for non-SAIT decile 1-5 schools. Both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 SAIT schools performed at or near the average of for all API decile 1-5 schools the year prior to identification for SAIT; 3 or 4 years later, they scored near or slightly below the non-SAIT average. The trend of declining achievement prior to selection into SAIT appears in some cases to be a one-year perturbation, making interpretation of subsequent increases difficult.</p> <p>Results for particular subgroups varied by subgroup, SAIT cohort, and subject area. However, the African-American sub-group consistently did not achieve statistically significant increases in ELA and mathematics compared to their pre-SAIT performance.</p> | <p>The majority of site visit respondents believed that SAIT had improved their school.</p> <p>Actions perceived by respondents as facilitating successful implementation included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands-on leadership by the principal • Assessing students, identifying their needs, and placing them in appropriate classes early in the school year. • Coordination of DSLT (District/School Liaison Team), SAIT provider, and school staff to align school plan to address all state and federal accountability requirements. • Creating and monitoring a plan with SAIT provider to implement EPCs <p>SAIT providers were perceived as having a positive impact on EPC implementation and other aspects of school improvement, especially when support was targeted to improving classroom instruction.</p> |
| <p><u>Program:</u> District Assistance and Invention Team (DAIT)</p> <p><u>Study:</u> Westover, Strunk, McEachin, Smith, Keller, & Stump, 2012. Center for Education & Evaluation Services at the University of California, Davis.</p> | <p>Mixed methods: analysis of California Standards Tests (CST) student outcome data scores in both math and ELA in grades 2 to 11 from 2005-6 through 2010-11; qualitative analysis of surveys were administered to DAIT providers (for those PI3 districts with DAITs) and district leaders (for all PI3 districts in Cohorts 1 and 2) and interviews were conducted with district leadership and DAIT providers for each Cohort 1 and 2 district with a DAIT</p> | <p>Overall, the results were negligible with a few instances of slightly positive effects.</p> <p>DAIT had a small positive effect on math scores for Cohort 1. Students in Cohort 1 districts with DAITs (categorized as severe or moderate) outperformed students in non-DAIT Cohort 1 districts (categorized as light and not required to contract with a DAIT) in math, particularly in years two and three.</p> <p>DAIT had a slight overall positive effect on ELA scores. Students in Cohort 1 districts with DAITs did not have significantly higher test results in ELA; however when combining results from both cohorts 1 and 2, there is evidence of a positive impact on ELA scores.</p> <p>There were small positive outcomes for some student subgroups. Groups of minority students (African American and Hispanic), students who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program, and English learners (ELs).</p> | <p>DAIT providers engaged with their districts as anticipated, including conducting initial needs assessment and remaining engaged in assisting their districts for an average of two years.</p> <p>Areas identified as experiencing the most growth during implementation were: data systems and monitoring; curriculum, instruction and assessment; governance, and English language development (ELD).</p> <p>Student achievement growth was associated with district focus on data use, high expectations, accountability, recruitment and retention policies, and improving instruction.</p> <p>Implementation barriers included superintendent turnover, contentious relationships at the district-level, lack of financial resources, and normalized underachievement.</p> |

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