

**National Center for  
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# **Just for the Kids – California**

## **High School Study, 2004-05**

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Bolsa Grande High School, Garden Grove Unified School  
District

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# CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY

SUMMER 2005

BOLSA GRANDE HIGH SCHOOL  
*GARDEN GROVE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT*

*Presented by Springboard Schools under contract with  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUST FOR THE KIDS - CALIFORNIA*

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## *California Best Practices Study*

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Springboard Schools is conducting the California Best Practices Study under contract with the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA) and Just for the Kids-California (JFTK-CA). Spanning three years (2004-2006), this research initiative spotlights effective practices of elementary schools (Year 1), high schools (Year 2) and middle schools (Year 3) that show high levels of student achievement, with particular focus on high achievement among their English learners, ethnic minorities and students living in poverty. The study also includes a comparison group of “average performers.”

The following high school case study is the product of the second year of research during 2004-2005. High schools across the nation are in need of improvement, and this year more than ever is an important time for change. The California Department of Education put the spotlight on improving high schools with the State Superintendent’s High Performing High School Initiative. In addition, recent research points to the importance of compiling a richer portrait of “best practices” to guide practitioners’ work.

While most agree that high school reform is urgently needed, the path to reform is uncertain. School and district leaders are often frustrated by competing waves of reforms, and high schools in particular have found themselves pulled in contradictory directions.

The California Best Practices Study is responding by documenting in an accessible format the work of real schools getting better-than-expected results. The case studies are intended to provide rich descriptions that teachers, administrators, and those working alongside them can use.

The case studies identify strategies that may be useful in similar schools and districts across the state and the nation. Each case study includes promising strategies at the district, school, and classroom level as well as tools actually in use in high-performing school settings. Of course, 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.”

Two complementary questions have guided this study:

- *What school and district strategies appear to foster high performance?*
- *What is the context for these strategies and how do they work together to contribute to high performance?*

Following the NCEA framework, this study examines best practices in several key areas:

- Curriculum and Academic Goals
- Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building
- Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements
- Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data
- Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment

A California Best Practice Framework, which summarizes crosscutting themes from high performing schools and districts, is posted under “Best Practices” on the Just for the Kids – California website at [www.jftk-ca.org](http://www.jftk-ca.org).

In addition to those identified in the NCEA Framework, this study focuses on the following areas:

- Support to English language learners (ELL)
- Support to students of color
- Student preparedness for college and career

### ***Selection Criteria***

The selection process for schools in both the high and average performance categories provides important background for this case study. This section includes an outline of the selection criteria established by NCEA/JFTK-CA used for this study.

Anyone interested in technical information about selection should visit the Springboard Schools website.

California high schools were identified as high performing through an analysis of their performance on the California Standards Test (CST) and the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)<sup>1</sup>, a state exam that California public high school students, beginning with the class of 2006, must pass in order to graduate. Three years of performance data were used in the analysis of CST Language Arts performance and two years of data were used from Mathematics performance, while two years of data were available for the analysis of English and Mathematics Exit Exams.

The percentage of students scoring “proficient” or higher on the CST was used to calculate each school’s performance rank. Performance ranks, which had to be at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher, were calculated for each tested grade, subject, and year. Overall performance rank, which had to be at the 66.6<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher, was calculated by aggregating individual performance ranks across one tested subject. Schools could be

designated as high performing in a specific subject or overall across all tested subjects. Each school selected also met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets in 2003 and 2004. AYP is the annual target for improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year, according to the federal [No Child Left Behind Act \(NCLB\)](#). As such, it is a measure of progress toward the goal of all students meeting state academic standards.

Three factors were used to compare a school’s performance relative to its demographically similar peers:

1. Free- and Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRLP) enrollment percentages,
2. English language learner enrollment percentages, and
3. Ethnic minority group enrollment percentages.

Selected schools had to meet or exceed the California average enrollment of either Latino students or African American students and meet or exceed the State average in both the percentage of students from low-income families and the percentage of students classified as English language learners.

In addition, high performing schools in this study had to meet one of the following criteria:

1. Achievement distribution among enrollment in “good courses” is above state-wide median for all four courses in two of the last three years;
2. Percentage of graduates meeting A-G requirements, which is the set of 15 one-year college prep courses high school students must take to be eligible to enter either the California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) systems, is above

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<sup>1</sup> More detailed explanations of California education terminology can be found at <http://www.edsource.org/glo.cfm>

- expectations when controlling for poverty in 2002 and 2003; or
3. Percentage of students reaching “proficient” or above on CA Standards Tests in math is above expectations when controlling for poverty in two of the last three years.

The selection process for “average performers” included the same measures, with lower expectations for performance. Overall performance rank for these schools was between the 40<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> percentiles, and Adequate Yearly Progress was not considered. For additional information on the selection process, please go to [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org)

# Bolsa Grande High School: A Case Study

## *State Characteristics*

Student Enrollment:	6,298,413
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage:	49%
English Language Learner Percentage:	25%
Percentage of Parents who did not Complete High School:	18% <sup>2</sup>
Percentage of Parents Completed College/ Above:	31%
Percentage of Teachers w/ Full Credentials:	89%
Average Number of Years Teaching:	13
Average Class Size	27

<sup>2</sup> California State has parental education data on 48% of the students enrolled in grades 9-12. Eighteen percent refers to the state average of parents who did not complete high school for students enrolled in grades 9-12.

## *District Characteristics*

Student Enrollment.....	50,172
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage.....	60%
English Language Learner Percentage.....	49%
District Characterization.....	Urban

populations of Asian American (28%) and white (17%) students as well. African American, Filipino and Pacific Islander students each form one percent of the district's population.

Located just south of Los Angeles in Orange County, Garden Grove Unified School District draws students from the ethnically and linguistically diverse cities of Garden Grove, Westminster, Santa Ana, and Anaheim, as well as from Cypress, Fountain Valley and Stanton. The district serves more than 50,000 students in grades K-12 in 67 schools. The district is the second largest among 28 public school districts in Orange County, ranks 11th in size among 1000 school districts in California and ranks 89<sup>th</sup> in size out of 16,500 in the U.S. Garden Grove provides support to students in 46 elementary schools (47 by district report), ten middle schools, two adult education centers, two special education centers and seven high schools.

Just over half of the students in the district are Latino (52%), and there are sizeable

## District Enrollment 2004

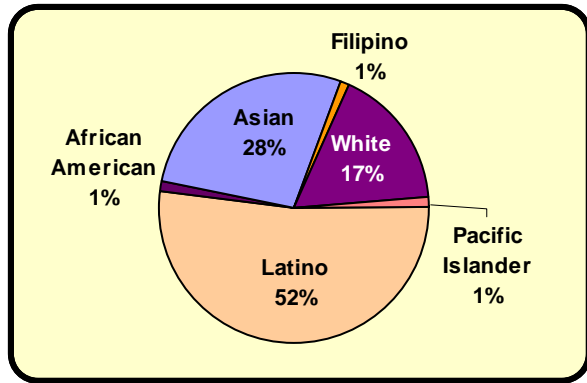


Fig. 1 Garden Grove Unified School District Student Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity<sup>3</sup>

Students in Garden Grove Unified are almost twice as likely as students in the state overall to be identified as English Language Learners (EL). The percent English Language Learners in the district stands at 49 percent in 2004-2005 compared to the state average of 25 percent. Students in the district are also more likely to come from poverty. The percent of students in Garden Grove who qualify for and claim subsidies through the federal Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRLP) stands at 60 percent compared to the state average of 49 percent.

Garden Grove Unified School District employs 2,236 full-time teachers, of which 96 percent, slightly higher than the state average of 91 percent, are fully credentialed. Teachers in the district teach classes that, on average, have 29 students compared to the state average of 27.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise referenced, all quantitative data in this study is drawn from the California Department of Education website: [www.ed-data.k12.ca.us](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us)

## School Characteristics

Student Enrollment	1,522
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage...	66%
English Language Learner Percentage...	42%
Percentage of Parents who did not Complete High School	26%
Percentage of Parents Completed College/Above.	39%
Percentage of Teachers w/ Full Credentials	87%
Average Number of Years Teaching	11
Average Class Size	31

Bolsa Grande High School, a comprehensive school that first opened its doors in 1961, is located in the City of Garden Grove. The school serves just over 1,500 students in grades 9-12.

Bolsa Grande has a higher proportion of Asian American students (50%) than the district average. It also serves a significant population of Latino students (36%). Ten percent of Bolsa Grande's student body is white; two percent is African American, two percent Pacific Islander and one percent Filipino.

Two thirds of the students at the school are eligible for and claim the Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch program – slightly more than in the district and significantly more than in the state as a whole. Bolsa Grande, with 26%, outranks the state (18%) in the percent of students it serves whose parents have not graduated from high school.

While 25 percent of students statewide are identified as English Learners, 42 percent of students at Bolsa Grande have been identified. Students at Bolsa Grande speak 29 different languages. Most of the students in this group are living in homes where either Vietnamese or Spanish is the primary language spoken.

## Student Enrollment 2004

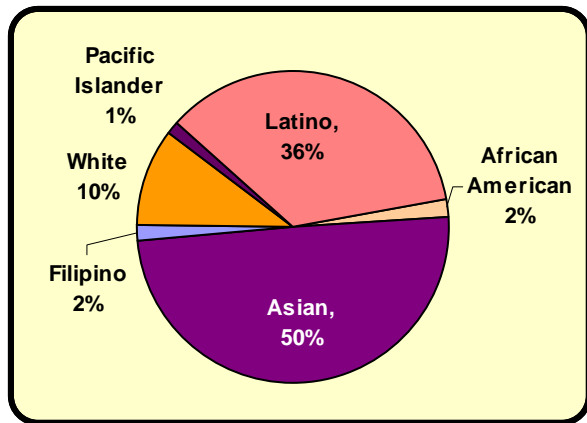


Fig. 2: Bolsa Grande High School Student Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity.

In Bolsa Grande, 91 percent of the school's teaching staff has a full credential, just slightly higher than the state average of 89 percent. The average class at the school has 31 students.

### *Why Bolsa Grande?*

Bolsa Grande is a high-poverty, diverse comprehensive high school that consistently out-performs similar schools. The percentage of Bolsa Grande students scoring "proficient" or above on the Language Arts CST increased dramatically, across all subgroups, between 2002 and 2004. While all students showed growth in this period, the achievement gap also widened with white students showing growth of 26 percent, while English learners and economically disadvantaged students showed growth of 15 percent and 19 percent respectively. The percentage of students scoring "proficient" or above did not increase between 2003 and 2004 and in fact dropped significantly in the case of white students.

## CST Language Arts 2002-04

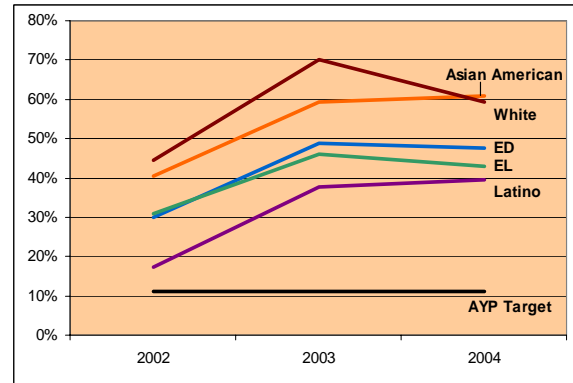


Fig. 4: 2002-2004 Bolsa Grande's Language Arts CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Trends for Bolsa Grande's math performance show opposite results. After showing slow or no growth, and in some cases a decline between 2002 and 2003, scores increased between 2003 and 2004. White students showed growth almost three times that of other groups. With a proficiency rate of 38 percent, Latino student performance is well below that of other groups and trails significantly behind the school's highest performers, Asian American students, who show a proficiency rate of 79 percent.

## CST Math 2002-04

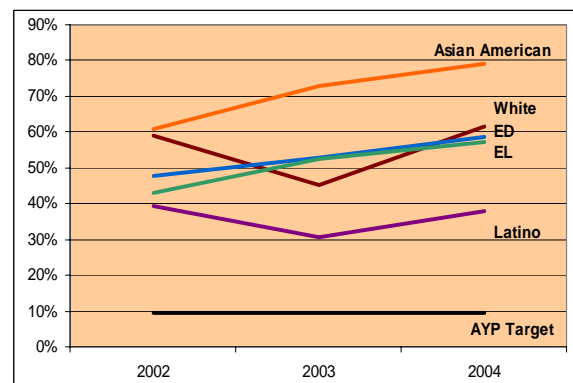


Fig. 5: 2002-2004 Bolsa Grande's Math CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Student passing rates on both language arts and math components of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) increased for all significant subgroups between 2003 and

2004. While English Learners are still the least likely of any group in the school to pass the Language Arts CAHSEE, their passing rate increased by 13 percent in one year to attain a passing rate of almost 60 percent. The achievement gap on this measure is also closing, having been reduced from a 40-percentage point difference to 30 percentage points between 2003 and 2004.

CAHSEE Language Arts 2002-03 & 2003-04

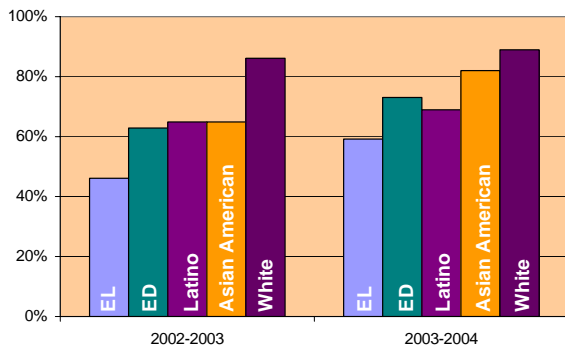


Fig. 6: Percentage of Students Passing CAHSEE, Language Arts.

CAHSEE Math 2002-03 & 2003-04

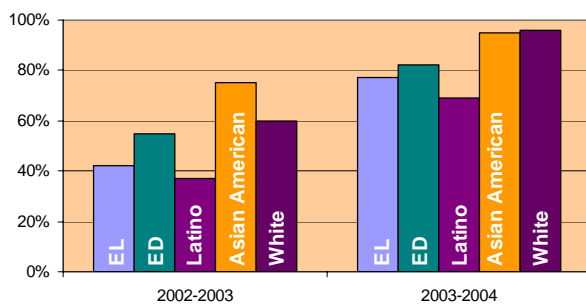


Fig. 7: Percentage of Students Passing CAHSEE, Math.

Passing rates for Bolsa Grande students showed a dramatic, one-year increase on the Math CAHSEE. Between 2003 and 2004, English Learners’ passing rate increased by 35 percent, while those of economically disadvantaged and Latino students increased by 27 percent and 32 percent, respectively. Passing rates for all subgroups range from 69 percent to 96 percent.

While students at Bolsa Grande are, by all accounts, performing above the state average, their performance is most impressive when the school is compared to peers with similar demographics. The two figures below show the school’s performance relative to schools that share similar student demographics. For each grade and subject listed, the bar on the left shows Bolsa Grande’s performance and the bar on the right shows the average of the top ten comparable schools in the state.

In 2004, Bolsa Grande students were more likely to score “proficient” or above in all comparison grades in language arts. Students at the school were also less likely to have scored “below basic” in the same area. Student performance in math shows a similar picture. Bolsa Grande students were far more likely than students in similar schools to score “proficient” or above and far less likely to score “below basic” on Geometry, Algebra I, and Algebra II exams.

The Garden Grove Unified School District was honored for three consecutive years as a national finalist for the Broad Prize for Urban Education, winning the award in 2004. The prestigious award recognizes Garden Grove as one of the top five urban school districts in the nation.

Multi-grade Math Comparisons 2004

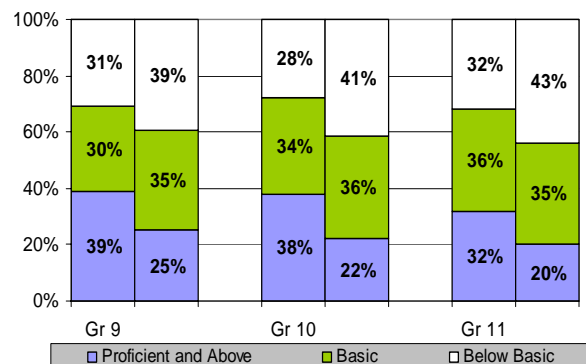


Fig. 8: Multi-Grade Results for Bolsa Grande High School and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Math. Data referenced is from <http://www.jfthk-ca.org>.

### Multi-grade Language Arts Comparisons 2004

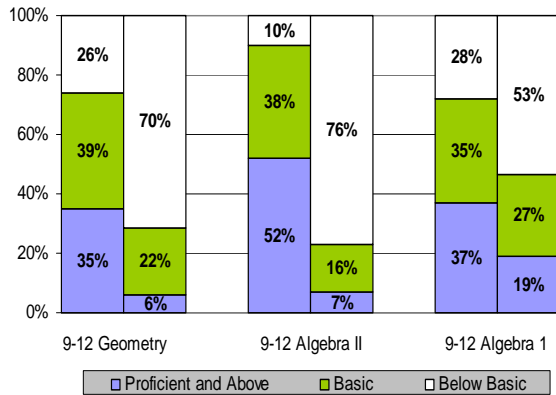


Fig. 9: Multi-Grade Results for Bolsa Grande High School and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Math. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Turning to Bolsa Grande’s English Learner results, the Fluent English Proficient (FEP) graph reveals that Bolsa Grande is above the state average in moving their English Learner population to Fluent English Proficient, and has made steady progress over the last four years towards that goal.

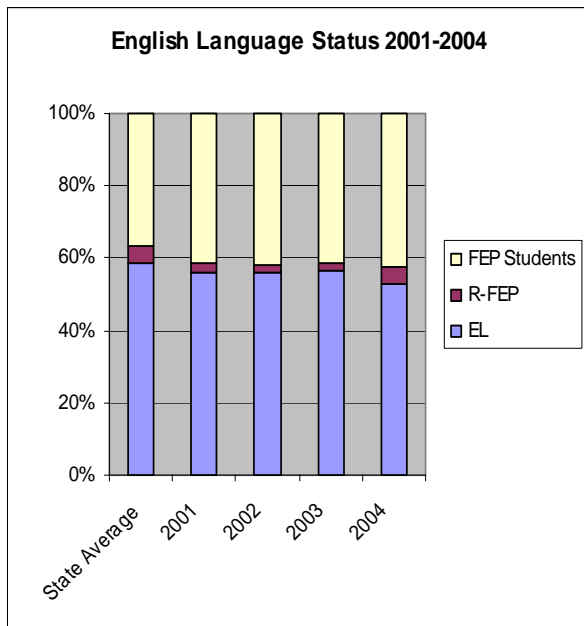


Fig 10: 2001-2004 English Language Learners by FEP Status Results for Bolsa Grande High School.

The California English Language Development Test (CELDT) shows further promising data. From 2002-2003, Bolsa

Grande has been very successful in moving their English Learners to the Early Advanced and Advanced levels. Consequently, the percentage of students in the Beginning through Intermediate levels has decreased. This shows evidence that Bolsa Grande is effectively moving students to English proficiency.

### CELDT Results 2002-2005

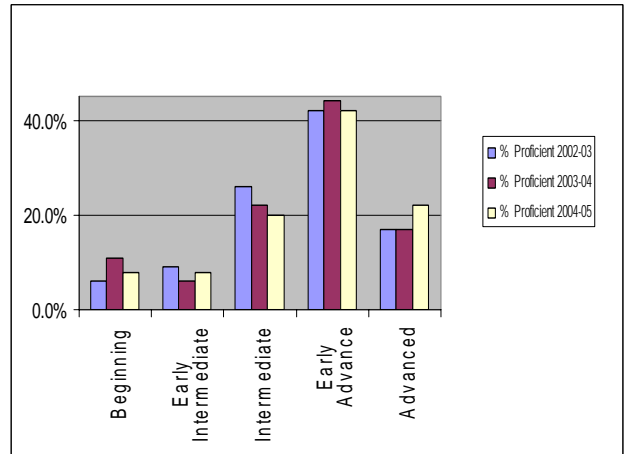


Fig. 11: 2002-2005 CELDT Results for Bolsa Grande High School.

### Findings

Bolsa Grande is a site focused on the goal that each student reaches or exceeds proficiency and, according to the Superintendent, can exit “holding all the keys” to college and skilled careers.

According to the Garden Grove Unified School District website:

*It is the goal of the district to ensure that all students have the opportunity upon leaving high school to choose from a wide variety of options including four-year colleges and universities, technical education, or a skilled career. The opportunity to choose among these paths requires that students achieve proficiency as defined by state standards in core academic subjects and achieve proficiency in the use of the English language. These proficiencies will make it possible for*

*students to access rigorous high school courses and enable them to graduate ready for college and skilled careers.*

To achieve those ends, Bolsa Grande has concentrated on all faculty and leadership engaging, with increasingly tightly aligned focus, in continuous and highly focused, rigorous collective reflection using mutually agreed upon assessments. There is a high level of confidence and experience at the site when it comes to curriculum: “We’ve made some great strides by aligning curriculum, developing pacing guides and aligning assessments,” says Denise Jay, the principal who lead the school from a four compared to peer alike sites to an eight in 2004. The focus is now on differentiating instruction. In particular, the school leadership and teachers are challenging themselves to offer rigorous curriculum to all and building teachers’ skills and opportunities to teach higher order thinking and advanced reading and writing skills to all students.

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### *Curriculum and Academic Goals*

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*The district central office, school, and department leadership have set explicit, measurable goals for improvement in student performance. Goals, which include academic success and gap closure, include grade, subject, and student population subgroup measures. Goals also include preparation for success in college, career, and citizenship. Roles and responsibility for achieving these goals are clear. School leaders take responsibility for goal-oriented action.*

#### *At district level*

After careful consideration of achievement data, demographics, and state standards, the district identified two goals: Goal 1 focuses on all students reaching academic proficiency in core academic subjects; Goal 2, specific to limited English speakers, focuses on attaining English language proficiency. The district

central office worked with an expert statistician to develop focused, measurable, and achievable goals, but came to consensus by examining their data. Notes the superintendent, “We knew right away we wanted specific measurable goals that could be used to hold ourselves accountable at all levels: at district, school, classroom, and student levels so the goals would guide all the way through the system.” Goal definitions were to hold system-wide relevance, where teachers, for example, could say to students, “here is where you are now and here’s where we want you to be by end of year;” and all levels could measure, track, and report findings. When asked how they expanded the circle to include and receive feedback from principals and teachers, Schwalm reflected, “We brought a group of teachers and principals and worked them through the data.” Those site and teacher leaders offered their own input and edits before the goals were disseminated again. “Now the goals are part of everything we do. They are the basis for our single school plan; how we look at everything.”

According to the Superintendent, goal setting at Garden Grove was not just measured in performance on API or AYP. “We didn’t want to think just about numbers. We wanted goals that meant something to the students. So our challenge was to put goals in place that were meaningful to students and their parents.” The decision to keep goals in terms that were “meaningful to students” accelerated the process for the district, the Superintendent reflected. “That’s why it wasn’t hard to come to consensus. We came to teach kids. So how do we know we taught them? What is fair to expect of ourselves in terms of what we came to do? And the beauty of it is, if we hit our own goals we can’t miss the others. Our teachers bought into it because they are not chasing AYP and API, but something that makes sense to students and parents.”

From this process grew the two district goals. The first goal concentrates on Academic Proficiency by grade and subject: Students in Garden Grove (five years or longer) will meet grade level standards in core academic subjects. The focus of students in the district five years or longer should be noted as it makes the district and school's accountability for goal achievement more defensible. Measures are explicit: these goals are to be assessed by proficiency level on the California Standards Test (CST) in English Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Science, and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) in both ELA and Math.

The second goal concentrates on English language proficiency for English learners. English Language Learners in Garden Grove four years or longer will demonstrate English language proficiency as measured by CELDT-English Proficiency Level: Early Advanced/Advanced level with all sub-skills at the "Intermediate" level or above (grades 2-12).

Each goal is linked to a set timeline. Goal 1 is measured by students raising their score one level on the CST in English Language Arts and Math. In one year,

- Students at "Far Below Basic" will progress to the "Below Basic" level
- Students at "Below Basic" will progress to the "Basic" level
- Students in lower "Basic" will progress to the upper "Basic" level
- Students in upper "Basic" will progress to the "Proficient" level
- Students reaching "Proficient" will maintain this level or progress to the "Advanced" level.

Academic progress will be supported and indicated during the year by:

- District Benchmark Assessments
- District Writing Assessments
- Standards-based Report Cards.

The time frame for the second goal is also clear. English Language Learners in Garden Grove will steadily progress toward developing English language proficiency as measured on California English Language Development Test (CELDT). In one year:

- Students at “Beginning” will progress to the “Early Intermediate” level
- Students at “Early Intermediate” will progress to the “Intermediate” level
- Students at “Intermediate” will progress to the “Early Advanced” level
- Students at “Early Advanced/Advanced” will progress to the “English Proficient” level
- Students reaching English Proficient will maintain this level until designated as Re-designated Fluent English Proficient.

To measure progress towards Goal 2, the district also provides curriculum-based assessments correlated to the English Language Development Standards.

These goals are ambitious; in particular for the seven high schools. The superintendent believes they are feasible because the district is taking a systemic approach. According to the Superintendent, “Key elements for high school are not different than elementary or middle; the circumstances and strategies are different. The same single ingredient is critical. You have to be focused; you have to know exactly where you’re going and then make sure everything you do supports that focus.” She stressed the patience and focus it takes to succeed in the key task, which, she says, is adult learning. She elaborated:

*“Consistency; patience; a lot of support and opportunities for people to meet expectations... We’ve been doing things for decades that now may not serve students as well as needed; it takes a lot of time; What needs to be done is not a mystery; the body of work is there. It takes time to change the system – and not as much time for kids to change as for adults to change. It is as much about adult learning as student learning, and you have to give adults time to learn to do things differently to help them help students meet higher expectations. That’s why you can’t expect it to happen over night.”*

When asked to what extent, if at all, high schools present a particular problem, she turns to the question of differentiating instruction versus tracking, which she points out is differentiating curriculum:

*“The way high schools are set up, it’s easy to differentiate the curriculum instead of differentiating instruction. We want all students to be able to achieve at high levels. The work is more difficult than it is complicated. There is no doubt that teachers who effectively teach struggling students must work harder and use a variety of instructional strategies to achieve their goals.”*

*At school level*

Bolsa Grande’s goals demonstrate that they have embraced the commitment to system alignment. The first remarkable feature of the goal setting at the school level was the school and district level leadership’s decision to establish common goals. The second is that they are measurable. The third is the

commitment to ensure that these goals are aligned between the district, departments, and classrooms. The significance of this third act cannot be overestimated. It is counter to prevailing practice. All too often, sites will set goals, but they are not vertically aligned with district or department goals, a habit particularly common in large and highly diverse (and therefore highly complex) districts.

To identify site-specific needs, Bolsa Grande's leadership reviewed CST data and CAT-6 data (not a data set the district uses to track progress towards Goals 1 and 2). Other reviewed data included the Garden Grove local reading assessment, called the Basic Reading Inventory (BRI), as well as teacher and student designed rubrics and teacher observations.

Based on this data review, school leadership came to the following conclusions about their students' needs. They identified a correlation between students struggling on standardized tests and regular assignments with their level of confidence and facility in higher order thinking skills. Students scoring *beneath the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile* in the local reading assessment or *below or far below basic* on standardized tests, as well as students struggling to understand writing prompts, laboratory activities and general directions also showed weakness in the areas of higher order thinking skills. Based on this school level analysis, conducted within the framework of the district analysis, the three "Critical Academic Needs" for Bolsa Grande were identified as:

1. the need to focus on increasing all students' reading skills across the curriculum,
2. the need to focus on improving all students' writing skills across the curriculum, and
3. the need to incorporate opportunities to strengthen students' critical thinking skills across the curriculum.

With support and encouragement from Principal Denise Jay and site leadership, Bolsa Grande staff used collaboration time to build rubrics in each department measuring progress in higher-order thinking skills, often involving reading and writing.

Student achievement goals are tightly tied to professional development goals for each member of Bolsa Grande. But this is not at the expense of personal initiative. A key goal of the administration is that everyone would be firmly on one page. One administrator reflects, "We are test score driven. I sit down with Denise [Principal] and we develop our personal goals as administrators. Also, we set goals to see the growth of the students. We also set goals to see the growth of ourselves and other staff. A goal of ours is to see the staff buy-in to our goals. You have to get the faculty to buy-in and become a part of that direction." Denise Jay confirms this deep commitment to faculty voice and faculty ownership: "We are all professionals. We have to be persuaded that a direction is right or we will not stay the course. Also, each professional has important professional knowledge to offer that has to be respected." A critical goal is to reach common agreement.

In light of this focus on a common goal, an important vehicle for ongoing tracking against goals are the faculty reflection meetings (elaborated in Theme Two: Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity Building) where departments gather to assess student work, consider progress and areas of improvement, and learn together how to better advance towards the goals commonly set. They are also opportunities to strengthen goal awareness and goal focus horizontally across faculty and across departments school wide. The principal was careful to ensure that the school made time, when the ambitious goals were set, to give faculty the time, opportunity, and support to collaborate to meet those goals.

Bolsa Grande's alignment is also horizontal as well as vertical in other ways. The Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLR) and California Standards Test measures of success are aligned: The goals are also consistent between the site's academic critical needs areas and its ESLRs. This alignment is particularly noteworthy because it is so unusual. For each of the three "Critical Academic Needs," the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) plan identifies which ESLRs address this need. For example, the ESLR "Read and comprehend informational, functional, and literacy text" addresses the Critical Academic Need #1, ensuring "all students improve reading skills across the curriculum" as measured by CST and other data.

To extend this alignment, Bolsa Grande has made all of their ESLRs measurable. Through extensive collaboration, faculty, department leads, and assistant principals and principals agreed on indicators so staff could measure and report the degree to which ESLRs were being met. Bolsa Grande's first ESLR, for example, reads that students are "developing the ability and confidence to learn independently." Teachers agreed that certain indicators would determine if that ESLR was met, such as:

- the number of students enrolled in honors and AP classes,
- the number of students voluntarily attending before and after school tutoring,
- the membership list of academic decathlon teams,
- the number of students taking the PSAT and the SAT tests, and
- the sign-up sheets in the career center for meeting with college representatives

Goals are also aligned vertically from district and site goals to student achievement goals. The 2004-05 WASC Action Plan details the

"action steps to implementing measurable solutions" towards fulfilling the district's two goals and addressing the site's areas of critical academic need.

Finally, goals are established for administrators and teachers. The principal and assistant principal set their personal professional growth goals against the school and district goals. Faculty set their personal professional growth goals against department, school, and district goals. At many sites, professional growth goals remain vague because they are difficult to measure. At Bolsa Grande, these goals are not limited to goals measurable by student achievement data.

Bolsa Grande's Action Plan offers a pacing guide and benchmarks for adult learning toward those goals. For example, to advance the district's goal of helping all students meet grade level proficiency, the faculty and staff have determined action steps to implementing "measurable solutions" to better equip teachers to help students reach those district and school goals. To help advance the district's first goal, the site provides services to teachers and adult aides on SDAIE and research based strategies. The target was Fall 2004; evidence of completion was the sign-in sheets for demonstration lessons, coaching and implementation. To help advance the district's second goal, the site planned to create a coordinated ELD program that is articulated across all levels, and throughout the school. The target was Fall 2004; evidence of completion was the curriculum alignment notebooks and lesson plans.

#### *At department level*

One area where the departments have sought alignment across departments is on "writing," "reading," and "critical thinking."

The departments have used a framework to build their own goals. The administration has asked each department to frame their goals

around reading (as improvement in reading is a school wide goal) or one of the subject's focus standards to build the goals. This exercise ensures that the school's "critical academic needs" and "ESLRs" link to the district goals. Since one of the school's "critical academic needs" is writing, every teacher, including the physical education teacher, has incorporated writing into the curriculum. Similarly, since another is "critical thinking," all teachers have built a rubric to measure improvement among students in their classes on critical thinking.

Within departments, teachers created a timeline for teaching standards by selecting units that everyone would teach. For example, in social science, teachers agreed when and how to teach the outbreak of World War I and the Great Depression. The team then sketched out the pacing guide and agreed to the benchmark assessments they would all adhere to and use to test students' grasp of the materials and mastery of the standards. Given this alignment, in their collaboration time they could assess together how well students were learning in each of the classrooms, and could begin to learn from and with each other how to improve instruction of these standards under this timeline. (For more on pacing guides and assessments, see Theme Three: Instructional Program Practices and Arrangement).

Under this structure, students knew what materials and standards they were aiming to master and could self-assess their progress towards their own learning goals, summarized in the course outline received at the beginning of the class (and for multiple courses also available on the web for review prior to enrollment in the class).

Each year teachers identify their own professional learning goals. As the goal of the whole school is to build capacity in teaching higher order thinking skills and reading and writing in all classes, one common goal is for

each faculty member to build their skill and knowledge in that domain. By administration request, faculty set targets to improve writing and critical thinking skills in their classes. Therefore, all teachers have set finding ways to embed writing and critical thinking exercises in their instruction as their own goals for the year.

#### *At student level*

Overcoming motivational barriers and building ownership means helping the students believe in their own future and that education will help get them to a successful future. Engaging students in their own goal setting and tracking of progress towards goals is crucial; it means getting students involved in monitoring their own progress. Students lay out their course plan at the inception of their high school career and each year following. A counselor reviews it with them when they sign up for courses, advising the student on what they might take so that they can accelerate their progress to become college ready. In-class structures are set around learning goals for students and for the whole class. (For more on course selection and support to college and career planning see Theme Five: Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment).

School personnel participate in regular goal setting conferences with students, including after school programs designated for English learners and student study teams to review students' own goals. Student/parent conferences provide a venue for Bolsa Grande students to present their personal learning goals. Students will typically lead the meetings and offer a tour of their work when parents attend the student/parent conferences.

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## *Staff Selection, Leadership & Capacity Building*

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*School and district leadership construct new roles for 'boundary spanners' and 'boundary spanning committees' in order to facilitate efficient and effective knowledge exchange and system continuity.*

The central focus at Bolsa Grande and the Garden Grove district central office is on fostering a culture of inquiry. Under district and school leadership, the traditional structures of school and district are constantly being tested and adjusted to increase the system's capacity to improve its one output—high levels of student learning. In this sense, boundary spanners and boundary spanning committees are key; they are people and groups of people who hold knowledge and blend responsibilities traditionally held only in one part of the system (e.g., the classroom, the district central office, or in the ELD department).

All teachers review data collaboratively, in light of standards and backed by research-based practices, to find ways to strengthen and refine instruction. Teachers' and others' roles at Bolsa Grande span across traditional boundaries as each professional reaches beyond their traditional responsibilities. Examples of four boundary-spanning roles and committees include the Teacher on Special Assignment, or TOSA, the *Consult*, and the *Data Team & Data Director* and the *Action Walks*.

### *The Teacher on Special Assignment, or TOSA*

Perhaps one of the most distinctive features of Bolsa Grande and the district is the strong emphasis on the coach-like role of the Teacher on Special Assignment, or TOSA. In the district department of 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade instruction, nine TOSAs make themselves accessible to provide support to teachers.

The district is working to develop Garden Grove's capacity to become more independent from external support providers and instead build their own internal capacity to support teachers. The district and site seek a dynamic relationship between the classroom, school, and district. Garden Grove ascribes to the research that teachers are the best teachers of other teachers. The TOSA puts experienced and respected teachers into the position of supporting and teaching their peers.

### *Consult*

The Consult refers to the body of teachers who convene at the district office to offer advice in key curricular decisions, such as textbook adoptions. This group of teachers counsels the district's instructional specialist. The Consult seeks to provide new roles in which teachers can support and guide the district. Working with the director of 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade Instructional Services, the instructional specialist determines goals and objectives, dates, times and locations of meetings as well as the process and procedures to be utilized.

The teachers' union is intimately engaged in the Consult process. The director of 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade Instructional Services contacts the president of the Garden Grove Education Association (GGEA) with the names of recommended Consult members. The GGEA Office makes the initial contacts to recommended members of this advisory body and notifies the director. If someone declines, the director of instructional services will probe for reasons why. If someone steps forward who wants to be on the Consult, though they were not asked, they too are invited to participate.

Using the Consult process, the district developed and adopted focus standards, curriculum and pacing guides. In Fall of 2004 the district rolled out district wide curriculum guides for its core subjects joined with focus

standards and pacing guides. Now, one year later, the district is gearing up to recall Consult to work on improving the materials (curriculum guide and standards-based lesson design) that 500 high school teachers have been trained on to date.

#### *Data Team and Data Director*

A third key example of a boundary spanning committee important for Bolsa Grande is that of the Data Team and a data software package called “Data Director.” By one Bolsa Grande faculty member’s report, the chief goal of the data team was to “create a mind-set that decisions are made on data, not instinct.” In addition, the data team helped with the nuts-and-bolts of collecting the assessments, inputting them into the Data Director system, printing, and organizing them by teacher and course. The Data Director software guides data analysis and Bolsa Grande’s librarian invested a tremendous amount of time to learn how to make the data system more user friendly for teachers.

The district purchased the Data Director software in the Fall of 2004 and required each school to create a Data Team. The goal of this skill-building was to ensure faithful implementation of the district’s plan and learn how to use data to drive decision making, with special attention on EL students. Data teams worked with three objectives: to analyze student achievement data, to use *Action Walk* to analyze school wide implementation data, and to use *Looking at Student Work* to analyze student product data.

#### *Action Walks*

Rubric writing and classroom observations are foreign skills to many traditionally trained high school teachers. Action Walks offer teachers the opportunity to visit other classrooms and learn by observation. Visual supports, such as “learning walls” and “teaching walls” covered in student work,

offer visual ways of understanding how curriculum translates into student learning. Students and teachers are encouraged to “walk the walls” and examine student work linked to rubrics. The Action Walks are particularly powerful because at Bolsa Grande and Garden Grove they are married to ongoing opportunities for professional development where staff study how and why to put new practices to use.

There are other means of opening the classroom door at Bolsa Grande. For example, one internal advertisement reads:

*“Are you a new teacher or new to the English Department or a veteran who would like to learn ways to use the writing rubric quickly and efficiently? Then attend a valuable in-service...”*

The principal understands the shift high school teachers are making in becoming willing and comfortable in opening up their classrooms to each other and outside visitors. She addresses teacher apprehension regarding Action Walks seriously and publicly. “I know some of you are a little nervous about your lessons. Don’t be. You are all wonderful teachers and there is so much to be learned from each other’s classroom.”

Department chairs echo the role of support. Says the ELD department chair, “Before I started teaching I put myself through college as a life guard. Being a support. That’s the work now.” In this spirit of building the courage for shared inquiry, next year, under the guidance of the Title 1 coordinator and facilitator for the WASC report, Terri Shook, all department chairs will be supported in defining their roles.

Professional learning is one of six components that the district and school believe will lead to increased student learning and achievement. The other five components are standards based curriculum and

assessment; scientifically research based strategies; targeted professional development; achievement driven support and structure; and family and community engagement focused on academics. All of these components have data driven decision making at their core.

Though each of these points are critical, along with the opportunity to engage in the cycle of inquiry, targeted professional development to secure new knowledge is certainly one of the most highlighted at Bolsa Grande at this juncture. Professional development is neither a single-shot nor single participant matter. Participants engage in teams and share out to others to leverage the learning. Key components of professional development include: initial training; demonstrations in classroom coaching and follow up training with each new text or strategy adoption; publishers' training; demonstrative training through a 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade "Leadership Academy" for principals, assistant principals, and new administrators; coaching by teachers on special assignment; Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) for new teachers; and the training of paraprofessionals.

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### *Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements*

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*Instructional programs are designed to provide a rigorous curriculum to all students, including having students meet A-G requirements. Supports have been put in place to ensure that all students can access the curriculum and see relevance to their life outside of school. AP courses and A-G courses have not been watered down.*

Many sites narrow their focus to direct instruction dictated from the central office when they want to – or are forced to – quickly accelerate the learning of the below basic student groups. Bolsa Grande and Garden Grove do exactly the opposite. With critical

learning needs set as "improving reading skills across the curriculum," and "improving writing across the curriculum," the school added to these two the third goal: incorporating more, rather than less, critical thinking into the curriculum.

Common textbook adoptions occurred in 2003-2004 through the collaborative work of the director of 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade instruction, TOSA and a Consult. It is noteworthy that the district does not work with one boiler plate of criteria for textbook selection. Each time, the Consult composes the task relevant criteria, some of which are common across all adoptions (such as alignment to standards); and others are specific to the purposes of the text. The criteria for the 2003-2004 textbook adoption included appropriateness for students with different levels of English knowledge, alignment to standards, and the ease with which the materials could be learned and taught at quality by the district's teachers.

Selected texts included *Holt* English/Language Arts, *High Point* by Hampton Brown for English learners, and *Language!* for students in need of intervention. Adoption was only the beginning. Departments did not follow the textbook sequentially. Instead, they designed lessons to help students gain mastery of focus standards. Bolsa Grande and Garden Grove defined focus standards as the minimum standards selected for students to fully master the content.

The goal for departments was to develop and own a rigorous curriculum while also providing necessary support for academic success. School leadership wanted to ensure that teachers could use these outlines to modify instruction, close the achievement gap, and bring all to success. In this context, the purpose for focus standards, as articulated by school and district leadership, was to carefully allocate limited instructional time. This takes into account that student learning must be

paced to achieve the highest level of achievement possible. The selection of focus standards helps with this time economy. To choose among the many state standards meant identifying those in each subject that:

1. are highly assessed in the California Standards Test Blueprint;
2. are easily linked across content areas through focus on common standards;
3. are skills and ideas needed to understand and develop within the course;
4. provide critical scaffolding to standards in the next course; and
5. are strategically important at this grade level for student's future success in college and career.

The next step was to identify those standards deemed essential or worthy of focus. Each department went through a selection process to arrive at their focus standards.

Departments met weekly to “deconstruct the standards” and identify focus standards. Deconstructing involves fine grain analysis of which concepts and skills need to be acquired for a student to meet a specific standard, and then deliberating what assessments would test whether the student had mastered those concepts and skills. Faculty was to determine what standards should receive focus, considering the content and “levels of cognition” by Bloom’s taxonomy. For example, a focus standard proposed by the US History department was US History 11.4.4: *Define and explain Theodore Roosevelt’s Big Stick Diplomacy, William Taft’s Dollar Diplomacy, and Woodrow Wilson’s Moral Diplomacy, drawing on relevant speeches.*

Faculty needed to agree on skills being developed: implementing research strategies; implementing note-taking skills; identifying textual evidence; and supporting claims with evidence. Next, faculty ensured that both higher and lower order thinking skills would be developed in an instructional sequence addressing this standard. Leadership asked

the faculty to consider which standards would invite higher and lower levels of cognition, with the aim that the curriculum be made more rigorous. For each standard they had to query what “level of cognition” it tasked by Bloom’s taxonomy. Bloom’s taxonomy ranks ideas by whether they are indicators of evaluation, synthesis, or analysis (i.e., higher order thinking skills); or focus on application, comprehension and knowledge (i.e. important but lower order).

Faculty pored over each of the state standards, considering whether they should be focus or related standards. This process offered an opportunity for faculty to have a sense of ownership of the standards. The shared goal was to develop common professional accountability for the task of building rich and relevant curriculum and requisite supports, drawing from the textbook as a tool.

A next step was to work on course/ curriculum alignment. Bolsa Grande completed its first round of curriculum alignment three years ago, in 2002, two years before the district. In teams, departments met to review each other’s courses and mark areas of overlap. In those cases, teachers across departments agreed on points to target and strategically reinforce. For example, English Language Arts and Social Studies targeted a host of areas of overlap in the study of Homer and Ancient Greek Civilization.

The result of this collaboration was Bolsa Grande’s, and eventually Garden Grove’s, “Curriculum Guide.” In the guide, each course has:

- an objective,
- the strand in the California Standards that this objective addresses,
- the focus standard it teaches to fully master content,

- the related standards introduced but possibly not taught to mastery; as well as always,
- the related ELA and ELD standards, and
- supporting skills or foundational skills necessary for students to master the focus standards and objective.

In addition, these curriculum guides provide suggested timelines, instructional strategies, suggested sample assessments and teaching resources along with sample instructional levels. However, remaining aligned is the key. Says the Science Teacher and WASC coordinator, Terri Shook, “It’s critical that all course-alike teachers stay close to the same pacing; within a couple of days from each other.” With this alignment and pacing secure, there is more room in the calendar to cover other enriching content and strategically reinforce key standards.

To ensure rigor and richness, one year of A-G courses, named “college preparatory electives,” are required. They range from visual and performing arts to advanced mathematics or laboratory science. Through the tight structure and multiple assessments used in each course, the aim is that instruction will not be watered down, even as an increasing number of students are encouraged to take advantage of the school’s rich AP offerings. Enrollment in AP courses is routinely broken down by subgroup to see enrollments of Latino and EL students. This area is a growing edge, as site leaders are quick to admit. However, the number of students from underrepresented groups enrolling and scoring three or higher on AP exams has already begun to increase, according to the site’s WASC report.

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### *Monitoring: Gathering, Analysis and Use of Data*

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*Decisions are based on student achievement data as well as on evaluating rubrics for assessing progress toward common quality indicators aligned vertically and horizontally. Assessments are aligned with curriculum; they are written collaboratively in departments and are used to track student and teacher performance. The district supplements the state-mandated reporting system with district benchmark assessments to better assess their students’ progress.*

Bolsa Grande has been a leader in articulating strong assessments. This year saw the completion of the English Language Development (ELD) plan, which offers a comprehensive program and benchmark assessments where ELD and ELA assessments are aligned. This alignment is critical because it is linked to the district’s second key goal of educating EL students.

The structure to enable this reflection at Garden Grove and Bolsa Grande is rather straightforward, though roles are continuously being adjusted. Each site maintains a data team. Action Walks are a core part of the work vertical teams engage in, with data from the data team. After the Action Walk, teachers give their data to the data team for analysis. The district and site are poised to centralize this service through an upgrade to their data warehouse so data can be aligned with other individual student data, such as demographic data.

Though the structures are valuable, they essentially serve as infrastructure. The key, by many reports, is the joint reflection among colleagues around the benchmark assessment data. The Data Director software, Action Walks, TOSA program, Consult committee, and alignment and benchmarks are all in the service of one end: teachers collaboratively

learn how to do a better job reaching every student.

As in the design of power standards and course outlines, it is critical that teachers have a key part in the design of the assessments. Says Shook, “The teachers have to be a key part of this; they developed the focus standards [at Bolsa Grande] so they felt like their expertise was being valued; same thing at the district level when the district used the Consult process.” Shook quotes one teacher: “If we had not been part of this we would not have tried it.” The real measure of the value of this work was the CST scores: once teachers knew they were involved in tracking progress and building curriculum to accelerate progress towards higher CST scores, “they saw the CST as valuable,” the director of 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade instruction concluded. The teacher-designed common assessments allow for intensified accelerated knowledge sharing and knowledge management among colleagues.

Creating an assessment item is a craft, Shook recalls. The chief purposes of benchmark assessments are to allow individual teachers to monitor student mastery of the standards and to allow teachers to compare results. Comparing results helps teachers identify best practices and modify instruction as needed to best serve the students.

Bolsa Grande teachers and leadership have learned several lessons through trial and error:

1. Teachers or the district can write focus standards and common assessments; however, teachers need to be involved. If it comes from the district, the assessments have to be reviewed by the Consult, the teacher advisory committee.
2. The benchmark assessments should cover one unit of instruction and not more than eight standards. This helps keep clear the standards measured by the benchmarks.

3. Assessment items should have no more than three to five questions per standard. Again, this ensures that student mastery is known.
4. Assessments should resemble CST questions and should ideally be scored by computer based scantron system to minimize chances of system error.

Shook concludes, “One of the most powerful moments is the reflection around assessments of aligned curriculum because it gives the best picture to teachers of where the student is.” The alignment and common assessments allow all eyes to be on the student, not the adult, and all aim to build a composite picture of that student’s strengths and needs.

Institutionalizing data reflection was a cultural shift. Examining each other’s data is probably the largest cultural shift that has occurred, the director of 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade instruction at the district office reflected: “If you want to find ‘best practice,’ it’s in reflecting on your own data together.” One Bolsa Grande teacher summarized, “It was a remarkable transition in the way we educate students.” This development was not without its challenges, Shook remembers: “There was initial uproar but gradually, acceptance. We started saying to each other, ‘look at my data.’”

Reflections involve the following: Teachers instructing the same course meet together after a benchmark assessment. In those meetings they:

1. compare results,
2. brainstorm contributing factors to non-mastery of standards,
3. identify best practices by sharing classroom strategies and assignments, and
4. modify instruction as needed.

The key here is the follow up. If no single teacher has an activity or strategy that promoted mastery of a standard(s), then volunteers from the department must be

willing to develop at least one new one. For this task, teachers can work on their own or in pairs, depending on the task and department. Occasionally test questions must be adjusted. Course teachers identify a flawed question when they note that high rates of students answer a question improperly, or there is a strong trend in a wrong answer. For example, the language might be too difficult for English Learners, barring the teachers' ability to assess whether the student has mastered the standard. In that case, volunteers must be willing to re-write the assessment.

In addition to benchmark assessment, the school uses a host of additional data to monitor performance. The key intent of formative assessments is to provide teachers with meaningful information about their students' learning (because teachers are better positioned to use the data if it has personal and professional meaning). This information helps teachers differentiate instruction. By building these skills for instructional differentiation, the school is guarding against curricular differentiation or tracking. At the school, just as the district level, the aim is to learn to differentiate instruction and establish common, high quality rigor across curricula. Among the most notable tools to help build these skills in instructional differentiation and curricular rigor is the rubric.

The extensive use of rubrics for grading at Bolsa Grande is notable because it is unusual in the environment of accountability. Many schools and districts have tended towards thinking there is no time for rubrics or that rubrics would throw assessments off alignment to standards. Bolsa Grande proves otherwise. Standards alignment is a required component of the rubrics. Further, teachers must make assessments public, requiring teachers to share how they assess the standards.

Rubrics constructed by departments or individual teachers are a critical enhancement

to the quarterly benchmarks. They offer a qualitative assessment that is made public yet remains highly personal. The Art rubric is still quite distinct from the math department scoring rubric or the personal/business law scoring rubric, even in format. Yet, all are building rubrics and aligning those to student work and standards.

It helps students to have rubrics; a student remarked: "We know what a teacher is looking for and there are no surprises. That's so much better than when a teacher just goes into a zone, writes all his math on the board, gives us a quiz and hands it back with a score, and we never knew how he got to any of this."

In addition to rubrics, benchmark assessments, and state data, Bolsa Grande and Garden Grove use a host of other forms of data. Notable are the ELD benchmarks aligned with ELA benchmarks. Critical for gap closure, the site tracks not only student but also teacher attendance, as well as student suspension and expulsion data disaggregated by sub group. Bolsa Grande also constantly tracks the number of students and subgroups enrolled in AP and honors courses, and how many achieve a three or higher on the AP exams.

One last example of boundary spanning regards the Action Walk, a key component in the work of the data team. Here again, Bolsa Grande was the leader for the district. The principal had learned from the report "Five Components of High Performing Schools" of the "Implementation Reviews or Action Walks." According to the principal, the department chairs organized those reviews in three ways: by what students know and can do; which students are learning; and how well students are learning. The task was to look at student work, talk with students about the work and determine the consistencies of program practices and policies in the school

site that directly align to mastery of the California Content Standards.

The Action Walk took vertical teams into each other's classrooms, and soon to neighboring schools and the feeder middle schools. Each Action Walk was taken as an opportunity for explicit inquiry into each professional's own work. Wrote Principal Denise Jay in a memo preparing for the site visit to two of Bolsa Grande's feeder middle schools: "As you walk, you are encouraged to contemplate the expectations you have for your students, the level of work your students are producing and compare/contrast that to what you are seeing in the elementary and junior high classrooms. Ties will be the topic of discussion at our debriefing sessions."

Action Walks provided a common language and assessment of practices. It also made traditionally private teaching publicly shared inquiry. At the debriefing session that followed, one teacher offered: "We have to do something to up our level of expectations for the kids because we're not ready for them yet." Action Walks opened communication and understanding between middle and high schools and allowed high school teachers to set a new bar.

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### *Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment*

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*The district provides necessary support to schools so that they continually track students receiving interventions.*

*District leaders learn and train school leaders and district staff to use a menu of intervention programs. Schools institutionalize programs that provide all students access to more rigorous and relevant classes. The skills used in the programs are taught to and used by all teachers to help students in and out of the programs learn.*

*Taking an intervention school wide: Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) linked to data and standards*

The school instituted a Sustained Silent Reading program where 12 minutes a day have been set aside as part of an effort to enhance student interaction with the written word. Based on the results of two faculty surveys, SSR was extended to 17 minutes at the beginning of 2001-2002 and was given a timeslot in the daily schedule. All students read books only; magazines and newspapers are not allowed. English and ELD department members have made a commitment to ensure students have books to read during SSR.

The Data Director software is helping the site do an increasingly careful job of tracking students and program effectiveness. The students' actual reading level is measured by the district's *Basic Reading Inventory*.

Beginning in the 2000-2001 school year, incoming ninth grade students who were identified with low reading SAT9 scores and low GPAs were placed in the TARGET Academy (now called the Delta Sigma Epsilon Academy) to ease the academic transition into high school. These students were enrolled in a common English, reading intervention, math and science class based on their reading and language levels. Teachers in these classes define common expectations and specifically address the core academic needs (e.g., reading skills) of these students. The curriculum used in the Academy program is a district-adopted program called *Language!* that emphasizes encoding and decoding skills. The *Language!* program is also offered through Language Arts and Special Education.

The Delta Sigma Epsilon Academy program requires students to do mentoring and tutoring twice a week. There are regular meetings with parents and with teachers. Weekly meetings with teachers generally target the low-end students. In the words of the head guidance counselor, "a miniature

SST will occur weekly.” All present here in on those 90 students and they are monitored through the year. If students still need this core support after 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they can continue in the program, but the aim is to help these students to transition into mainstream coursework.

Bolsa Grande also devised a Math Lab based on student data. Students who score below basic on the CST or are assigned to the Math Lab by teacher recommendation can take advantage of an extra hour a day for practice and individualized help. Most recommendations come from middle school teachers. The true value of this class, reports one teacher, is that students can be enrolled in Algebra 1A or 1B, which would normally be difficult for them without the additional assistance necessary to tackle specific areas that challenge them.

*Opportunities are created to help students' progress toward individual learning goals as well as toward department, school, and district goals.*

Overcoming motivational barriers and building ownership means helping the students believe in their own future, and believe that education will help get them to a successful future. That means engaging students in their own goal setting and tracking of progress towards goals. Based on the findings of the school's Curricular Paths Focus Group, supported by the student survey, the school determined that there is a need for improved career exploring, instruction, and planning. The focus of the Curricular Paths Committee was to study the current plan in place at the time of the WASC visitation. Bolsa Grande implemented a school wide program to meet the needs of all students as they progress through their curriculum paths.

Bolsa Grande's four-year personal learning plan allows students the annual opportunity to

“map out” what courses they plan to take in each year of high school. In this exercise they are instructed to record a sample schedule for each grade level, including electives. The four-year learning plan also includes the post high school options: UC, CSU and community college entrance requirements and military, technical school and vocational education classes. This comprehensive plan is to evaluate students' personal strengths and interest beginning in their freshman year.

The whole course selection and planning process is marked by profound thoughtfulness and intentionality in its design. Two examples of powerful thoughtful design features can serve as illustrative examples.

One example of the school's resourcefulness and intentionality regards the career planning exercise, in which students prepare for the design of their four-year learning plan. Bolsa Grande was the first high school in Garden Grove to test and adopt “Choices Explorer,” an online career and education planning system issued by software developer Bridges.com. In ninth grade, students fill out a career-planning questionnaire. In tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades, Bolsa Grande students take the Choices Explorer questionnaire online. The system produces roughly 50 jobs for a student once they have answered all the career and education questions. After choosing two of those careers, students answer subsequent questions from the system. Persuaded by its use, the county's ROP chose to carry the cost of Bolsa Grande's Bridges program.

The other example of thoughtfulness and purpose regards Bolsa Grande's registration process. Unlike many high schools across the country, Bolsa Grande's registration process is not a clerical or paper and pencil matter. It is intensely supported by the school's strong counseling staff. In preparation for registration, the counselor conducts a personal one-on-one session with the student

to review their progress at that point in light of their four-year learning plan and next year's courses. This meeting "is a chance to ask questions," in the words of one counselor. It is a lengthy conversation that can prove invaluable, particularly to a student who may be at risk of falling off-track. Says the counselor: "[T]hat's where you can actually say 'You can do it.' A kid may be borderline and they hear you explain that if he/she just repeats this or that, they'd be on track. Light bulbs go on – they're a little more motivated and inspired. I've seen turnaround from just those meetings. Those kinds of conversations are really important – an opportunity to make a difference when you're registering."

A focus on communication between key stakeholder groups within Bolsa Grande (e.g., teachers, parents, and students) revealed that not only teachers, but parents and students as well, wanted a stronger emphasis on higher-order thinking skills. Many students and a measure of parents wanted to be challenged more, with appropriate scaffolding to meet those challenges. These and other stakeholders collaborated to establish a coherent vision of what students should know and be able to do upon graduation.

The conclusion was that specific focus standards for each course, district curriculum guides, and benchmark assessments would hopefully assist in making teacher expectations clearer. In response to this data, the principal also created a Principal's Communication Concise (PCC) for a cross section of students representing Bolsa Grande's student body at large to increase communication.

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### *Conclusion*

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In closing, as the elaboration across these five themes illustrates, Bolsa Grande High School is a case of a site focused on increasingly tightly aligned reflection to help all students

reach high levels of achievement. That reflection is grounded in data, tied to standards, informed by a strong commitment to articulation across levels, and carried with increasingly powerful ownership on the part of each actor in their position. As is characteristic of high performers, the school has a clear vision of where it wants to focus its energies next to improve further. According to the principal, "Though we continuously are working to improve, we've become pretty solid on key components like pacing guides, rubrics, and common, regular, and precise standards-aligned assessments. Next big steps include focus on continued work on extending structures of support to English learners and support to higher-order thinking skills across all classrooms." A veteran faculty member agrees and adds the great debt owed to the principal: "To move and come to Bolsa Grande was a great change. She spoke about curriculum development and long term plans and to see it evolve has been amazing. She has kept that focus and that direction, whether it be a pat on the back or a poke in the side to keep that curriculum improving. 'Curriculum alignment and support:' our staff was so lucky to hear those words before they were buzz words."