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

Cleveland High School, Los Angeles Unified School
District

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CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY

SUMMER 2005

CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL
LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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

California Best Practices Study

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, so 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 cross-cutting 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.

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

- Support to English language learners
- 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/JF'TK-CA used for this study. Anyone interested in more 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)¹, 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 50th percentile or higher, were calculated for each tested grade, subject and year. Overall performance rank, which had to be at the 66.6th 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 (ELL) enrollment percentages, and
3. Ethnic minority group enrollment percentages.

Selected schools had to meet or exceed the California average enrollment of either Hispanic/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 statewide median for all 4 courses in 2 of the last 3 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

¹ 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 2 of the last 3 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 40th and 55th percentiles, and Adequate Yearly Progress was not considered. For additional information on the selection process, please go to www.just4kids.org

Cleveland 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% ²
Percentage of Parents Completed College and Above:	31%
Percentage of Teachers w/ Full Credentials:	89%
Average Number of Years Teaching:	13
Average Class Size	27

² 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.....	747,009
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage.....	77%
English Language Learner Percentage.....	44%
District Characterization.....	Large city

As the nation's second largest district, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) serves over 747,000 students in grades K-12. The district covers 704 square miles and all or part of 29 cities, including the City of Los Angeles. LAUSD is composed of 693 schools, with 63 schools serving grades 9-12 and 7 schools serving grades K-12.

Seventy-seven percent of the students in the district are eligible for the Free- or Reduced-price Lunch Program, compared to the state average of 49 percent. Forty-four percent of the students in the district are identified as English Language Learners, compared to the state average of 25 percent.

There are just over 37,617 full time teachers at Los Angeles Unified, of which, 75 percent are

fully credentialed, compared to the state average of 89 percent. Average class size in LA Unified is 27 students, which is same as the state. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:21, which is also the same as the state average.

District Enrollment 2004

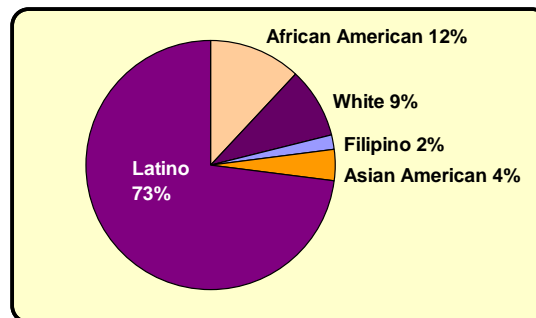


Fig. 1: LAUSD District Student Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity. ³

School Characteristics

Student Enrollment	3,669
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³ Unless otherwise referenced, all quantitative data in this study is draw from the California Department of Education website: www.ed-data.k12.ca.us.

Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage...	68%
English Language Learner Percentage...	25%
Percentage of Parents who did not Complete High School	24%
Percentage of Parents Completed College/Above.	39%
Percentage of Teachers w/ Full Credentials	87%
Average Number of Years Teaching	11
Average Class Size	28.9

Twenty-one percent of students at Cleveland High are native Spanish speakers. This is comparable to the state average but less than the district average. Fifty-six percent of students are Latino, significantly less than the district but higher than the state average. Nine percent are African American, comparable to both state and district averages. Nineteen percent are white and twelve percent are Asian American, both of which are higher than the district. Three percent of students are Filipino.

School Enrollment 2004

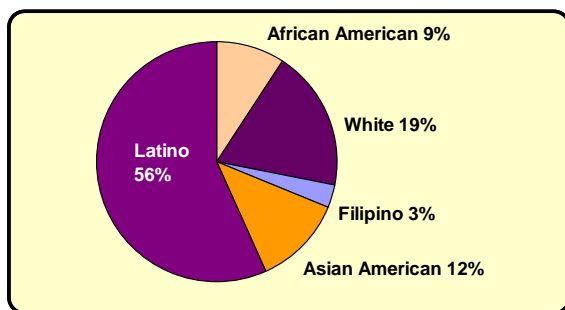


Fig. 2: Cleveland High School Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity.

There are 145 full time teachers at Cleveland, of which 74 percent are fully credentialed, compared to the state average of 91 percent. Average class size is 29 students. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:27, higher than the district ratio of 1:21.

Students at Cleveland are drawn primarily from the Reseda, Winnetka, and Northridge areas. Other students from Local District 1 attend the residential school or the

Humanities Magnet, one of the small learning communities at Cleveland. A third group of students, who live in areas with overenrolled high schools, are bussed to Cleveland from other parts of Los Angeles. As administrators shared with us, many of these students spend over 2 hours a day on the bus.

Why Cleveland High School?

Cleveland High School has shown significant gains on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) over the last three years. The percent of students scoring at proficient or above in English Language Arts has increased for all major student subgroups from 2002. Latino, English Learners and economically disadvantaged populations scores have increased. The Math data also shows improvement. All subgroups show movement toward gap closure.

CST Language Arts 2002-04

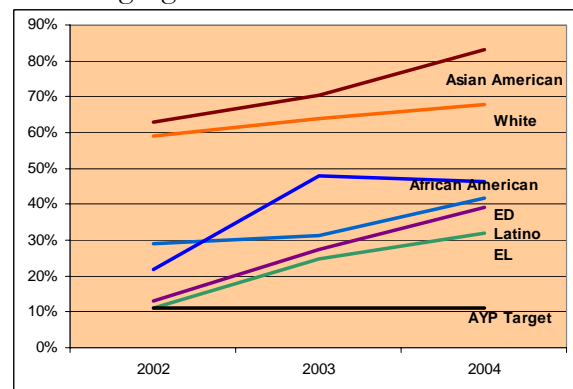


Fig. 4: 2002-2004 Cleveland High Language Arts CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

CST Math 2002-04

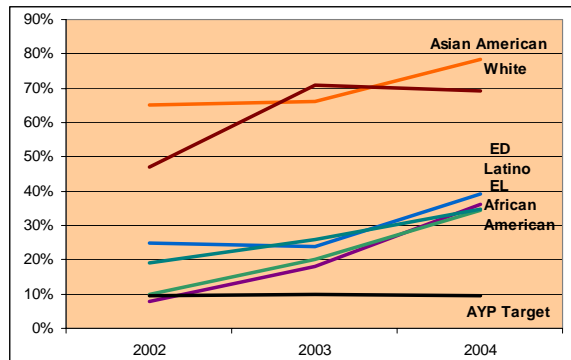


Fig. 5: 2002-2004 Cleveland High Math CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) results show significant improvement between 2002/03 and 2003/04 in both Language Arts and Math. In Language Arts, English Learners made the greatest gains with nearly a 20 percentage point increase from the following year. In Math, there was also a jump in the overall percentage of students passing, and English Learners, economically disadvantaged, Latino and African American groups all had notable gains.

CAHSEE Language Arts 2002-03 & 2003-04

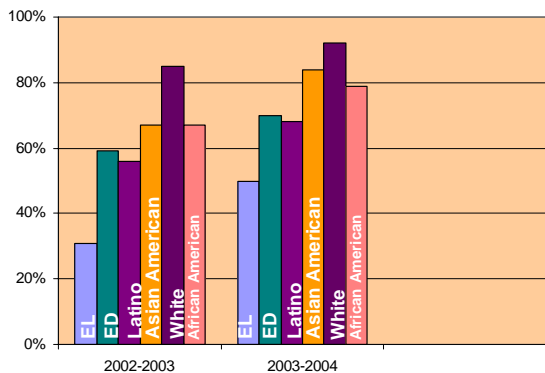


Fig. 6: Percentage of Cleveland High Students Passing CAHSEE, Language Arts.

CAHSEE Math 2002-03 & 2003-04

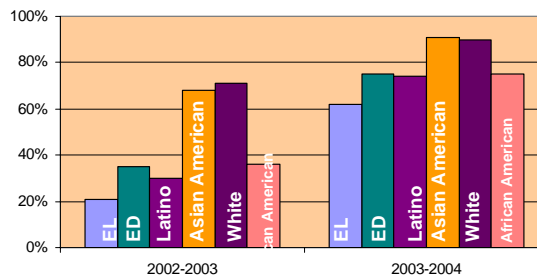


Fig. 7: Percentage of Cleveland High Students Passing CAHSEE, Math.

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 Cleveland's performance and the bar on the right shows the average of the top 10 comparable schools in the state. Comparing Cleveland High School to the top 10 schools serving similar or more challenging demographics, one sees that Cleveland has effectively moved more of their students to proficient and above than their peers in both Language Arts and Math. Conversely, they have a lower number of students that are testing below basic than their peers in grades 9-11. This speaks highly of their Math and Language arts programs.

Multi-Grade Language Arts Comparisons 2004

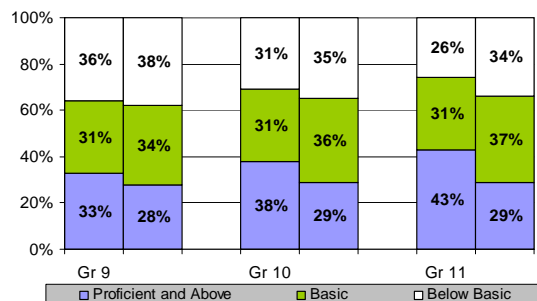


Fig. 8: Multi-Grade Results for Cleveland High School and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Language Arts Data referenced from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Multi-Grade Math Comparisons 2004

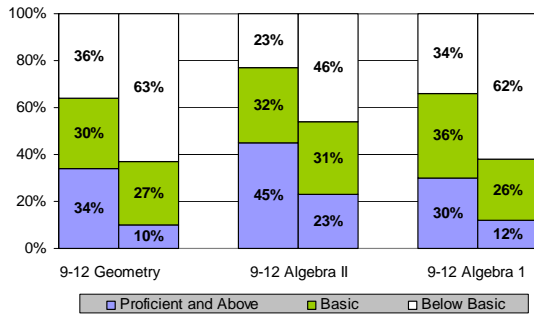


Fig. 9: Multi-Grade Results for Cleveland High School and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Math Data referenced from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>

The California English Language Development Test presumes annual gain by one level for each student tested. At Cleveland, they have made significant advances in moving their English Learners from intermediate to early advanced.

CELDT Results for Cleveland High School 2002-2005

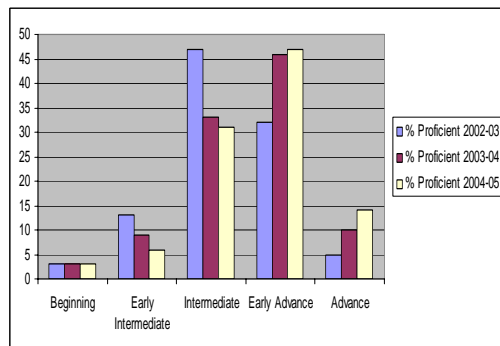


Fig. 10: 2002-2005 CELDT Results for Cleveland High School.

Findings

Cleveland High School has established professional learning communities for teachers. These formal and informal structures work to foster curriculum alignment and to ensure all students succeed by providing a forum in which teachers can plan, share instructional strategies and assess the effectiveness of both in-class and out-of-class interventions to aid struggling students.

These professional learning communities and

the strategies that result function in the service of increasingly sensitive and precise focus on what and how students need to be taught in order to master the standards. The professional learning communities serve as places where teachers share techniques, revise and review their agreed-upon set of “power standards,” adjust curriculum guides and develop benchmarks and instructional materials.

Small learning communities for students allow the school to monitor students’ progress and to provide more personalized support for students. The school contains several small learning communities. These structures are organized around student interests.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

School community members at every level share both a common vision of success and agreement on a set of key strategies for closing the achievement gap and improving student achievement overall.

Improving achievement for students and closing the achievement gap while providing students a rigorous curriculum is the goal at Cleveland. The common benchmark assessments given by departments help the teachers, departments and the administration monitor student achievement throughout the year. One teacher described these benchmark assessments as ensuring that all teachers are “finding the common denominator from point ‘a’ to point ‘c’ without taking the scenic route,” and staying focused on what students need to learn to master skills.

Monitoring student achievement (see theme 4, Monitoring: Gathering, Analysis and Use of Data) and providing interventions as soon as students start falling behind (see theme 5, Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment) happens in all departments across the school. One result is an upbeat, optimistic attitude. When discussing the gap closure that has been

happening at Cleveland over the past few years, the principal confidently stated, “just wait for this year’s results.”

Relationships with the district are best characterized by the fact that Principal Weiner meets with LAUSD Superintendent Roy Romer to discuss successful programs at Cleveland. As in the case with several other high performers in large urban districts, the school teaches the district tools for success. While the school takes advantage of many district programs, such as 1st year teacher and administrative trainings, it passes on others, such as teacher hiring.

Finding: There is a common vision and recognition that excellence on the CST is an important measure of student success, though not the only one. Development of higher order thinking skills and citizenship are also included as goals as well as the social and emotional growth needed to attain those goals.

Common goals become reality for students through strong curriculum at Cleveland. The school leadership and department heads are particularly proud of the rigorous curriculum they provide to students, a curriculum that aims to produce both excellence on the CST and to teach higher order thinking skills. All departments work to provide strong content for all students. The school prides itself on providing all students with access to rigor and points to examples such as the fact that students in sheltered English classes recently performed Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

Aligned, shared curriculum and assessments (particularly in math) (see themes 3: Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements, and 2: Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity-building, respectively) keep classes focused on the key standards that are referred to as “power standards.” At Cleveland, departments focus on these key standards and the related skills needed to be successful in a subject; they do not attempt to teach students everything. The

alignment to standards is also ensured by building lessons at the department level, utilizing individual and department strengths, to create strong lessons for all teachers in the department to use.

Staff selection, Leadership and Capacity-Building

Collaboration time aimed at improving instruction, monitoring student achievement and revising assessments and curricula are built into the school and district master schedule.

With 145 teachers and 6 administrators serving almost 3,700 students in a very large school in the second largest district in the USA, Cleveland faces different challenges than most schools in this study. Cleveland has sought to respond to the challenges of size by creating what they call Professional Learning Communities for teachers. These communities serve as the cornerstone of strategies to improve teacher practice at Cleveland. The Professional Learning Communities are groups of teachers who collaborate to share knowledge and solve problems. These interactions happen both within departments and in the small learning community structure. These structures, in combination with the school’s shared vision and mission, have created a framework for success at Cleveland. Principal Weiner describes teachers as naturally tending to be “isolationist” and sees that a central role for administrators is “to get them in collaborative groups. Get teachers to sit and talk about what they do and how to make it better, where they are sharing best practices and doing demonstration lessons, they get results. Remove the idea that [sharing is] evaluative.” Departments serve as a teacher’s primary learning community. Departments meet a minimum of twice a month (once at lunch, and once after school), but many meet weekly at lunch. This is a school focused intensely on continual cooperation and learning.

In response to the question, “What is the secret to your success?” the repeated response was building a learning community. Strong professional learning communities flourish in the departments and in the small learning communities in several ways: Each takes on important roles in staff selection, first-year teacher training and in planning and delivering professional development.

Departments have been given one afternoon meeting a month, formerly a staff meeting, in order to collaborate. They also have to meet once a month at lunch, and as one department chair indicated, departments tend to meet more often. This department time exists to foster collaboration.

Educational practice is not a private act; it is shared openly so educators learn with and from each other. Commonly agreed upon data is used to monitor the effectiveness and identify practices worth sharing.

The departments are a primary provider of support for all teachers but especially for new teachers. Common assessments, pacing guides and lessons all support new teachers and help them identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Next year, Cleveland plans on utilizing additional resources, such as conducting Saturday classroom management and differentiated instruction workshops, as well as bringing in a retired educator who will work specifically with novice teachers. Furthermore, Cleveland plans to create a first-year teacher mentoring program which will formalize the support structure and serve as an onsite Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA).

Treating teachers as valuable resources with knowledge to share is a huge part of the school’s professional learning community strategy. The principal emphasized repeatedly that the teachers did not need more knowledge as much as they needed the opportunity to work together in order to

share knowledge and build greater knowledge together. One symbol of the school’s focus on making teachers feel valuable is that, depending on Mac or PC preference, the school provides every teacher with a laptop that includes grade managing software and instructional tools.

Professional development mirrors the school philosophy of teachers as knowledgeable resources with valuable strengths. Thus, the focus is not on the more traditional forms of professional development – workshops and conferences – but teachers definitely view their collaboration work as professional development. Teachers learn from each other and when they do go to conferences, they go together. In fact, the entire math department attends the annual conference for the teachers of mathematics. In this way, conferences serve not as field trips for educators but rather as an extension of the learning communities, places where teachers get the opportunity to learn from and share ideas with their peers in other settings. Conferences provide departments and teachers access to outside ideas for targeting areas where students are not performing as well.

The process of building this kind of professional learning community among teachers starts with staff selection. Résumés of applicants are given to the department chair, and it is the departments, not the administration, that choose the applicants. Applicants then come in not for a traditional interview, but to give sample lessons. Thus, the message that teaching practice at Cleveland is public and a resource for others is delivered early. Student interactions and questions are a crucial part of the selection process, since it allows the departments to see how the candidate will relate with students. Only after the candidate teaches a model lesson is he or she interviewed by Principal Weiner.

As in many urban schools, most of the new hires at Cleveland are first-year teachers, fresh out of school. But the school does not view this as a problem; instead, Principal Weiner notes that, “Our preference is to hire new teachers, because they don’t have bad habits.” To recruit these first-year teachers the school has a strong relationship with nearby Cal State Northridge, in addition to other local universities such as Loyola Marymount, Pepperdine and UCLA. The result is a large pool of applicants and student-teachers, which allows them to “test-drive” potential first-year teachers. While one source of new teachers for many LAUSD schools is district-wide recruitment fairs, Cleveland High does not take teachers hired by the district, but only those interviewed by the school.

Training for new teachers takes place both at the Local District 1 and school levels. At the local district, new teachers go through BTSA training. At the school level, there are a series of meetings for new teachers so that they can become familiar with school policies. On-site new teacher training is intended to familiarize teachers with school policies and examples of best practices modeled by colleagues who serve as demonstration teachers. Assistant Principal Duong described her experience as a new teacher at Cleveland: “What made me grow up here was the process. You hear nightmare stories about first year. I had ninth graders at 40 to 1 ratio and *I loved it*. . . but I had support.” First-year teachers are seen by the administration as bringing in fresh ideas and as already having the basic skills that they need. The focus on providing the support new teachers need to insure a good first year experience helps the school both develop and keep new teachers.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Instructional programs are designed to provide a rigorous curriculum to all students, and steps are underway to ensure all students meet A-G requirements. Supports have been put in place to ensure all students can access the curriculum and see relevance to their life outside of school.

As one of 63 schools in LA Unified and one of 15 schools in Local District 1, Cleveland does not have the control or even voice in textbook adoption that schools in smaller districts enjoy. For that reason textbook adoptions, like that for ELD, are supplemented with materials selected by the school. Teachers describe these supplemental materials as being necessary to “meet the instructional needs of the students,” or to increase rigor. In ELL for CELDT levels four and five, they integrate High Point and Prentice Hall. Teachers see this solution as allowing EL learners to “move seamlessly into mainstream English.”

The school has also chosen to adopt some additional programs that aim to boost student achievement. In particular, Cleveland has integrated AVID into their curriculum and instruction. While AVID exists in the traditional stand-alone classes, teachers discussed the importance of Cornell notes and other techniques being used across campus as part of their strategy to improve student learning. AVID is about to be introduced school wide, because, as school leaders explained, “all students can learn from it.” Some practices that generally get labeled as interventions are considered best practices and good teaching at Cleveland.

In the departments, teachers create shared lesson plans and assessments, drawing on an individual teacher’s strengths in the process to make solid reproducible lesson plans.

Teachers work together to craft lessons. There is an emphasis on sharing of knowledge and teamwork instead of evaluation of each other. The same is true when observing what skills students have developed or have not developed, yet. Departments discuss using the knowledge of student skills to create lessons and target areas where skills and knowledge are needed.

Innovation is supported as long as it is rooted in standards and data. As one administrator noted, one teacher wanted to create a new AP English Composition course and was allowed and encouraged to bring in the rigorous course. The course is designed to be intensive and to reflect the school's belief that students should develop critical thinking skills and hone their own writing skills by having a wider exposure to language and the purposes of writing.

In general, the school's curriculum is designed with the data supported knowledge that their students are coming into the school behind. One department chair noted that instructional techniques, such as scaffolding, give formal-sounding names to "good teaching," which many teachers have done for years. Making such techniques explicit gives all teachers access to alternatives to watering down difficult material. The goal is to provide students with a common ground to interact with even the most challenging material. Other departments use similar strategies to help students master a concept – even when they must work around gaps in important related skills.

Monitoring: Gathering, Analysis and Use of Data

There are tested and recognized systems and structures in place by which school leaders, district leaders, teachers and students share learning about what works. These lessons inform instructional decision making.

Data is a highly valued tool for the whole school community. Although principals, department chairs and teachers all access data through both the LAUSD and CDE websites; there is no one point person for data. Departments also track data on students' performance based on benchmark assessments, enabling them to provide extra support to students as soon as they start falling behind in a subject (see theme 5: Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment for more information). These assessments also allow Principal Weiner to know where the students stand. The principal monitors student performance in order to identify any weaknesses in areas such as by subject or under-performing student subgroups.

When math teachers make assessments, they use (a) the state's test items, (b) test items in district adopted text books, (c) items from other materials acquired at conferences and elsewhere (such as other text books), and (d) their own questions. In essence, these teachers are building their own item bank. Though this work may seem time consuming, their view is that it is necessary if they are to teach in ways that both draw on their personal creativity and also reflect state adopted texts and standards. This assessment data is used to place students in courses and to plan curriculum. At the beginning of the school year all departments review data from the state assessments and adjust their curriculum accordingly.

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment

School leaders, department leaders, teachers, and students track student achievement and progress in classes (such as Algebra I and ELD) in order to provide timely interventions and prevent students from falling too far behind.

The main focus at this school is on improving the quality of regular classroom instruction.

However, the teachers and administration at Cleveland are aware that many students arrive at school missing some skills they need to succeed. They believe that not all such gaps can be addressed in the regular classroom, and by intervening early they can help more students master these much-needed skills. When students are struggling, Principal Weiner views intervention as a crucial part of improving student achievement.

When students do fall behind, the focus is on intervening early and acting fast. While some interventions take place after school and on weekends, a majority take place during the school day when more students are present to attend. By using lunch time to run interventions, students who work, are bussed from other parts of LAUSD, or those who just otherwise would not attend can easily attend sessions targeting their weaknesses.

In order to monitor student progress and identify which students may need more help, teachers and departments use frequent aligned assessments. In one example of what it means to view the regular classroom as the first level of intervention for struggling students, the math department regroups (shuffles classes based on mastery of the material) at five-week intervals in Algebra. Regrouping in Algebra prevents students from falling too far behind. The department believes that if a student is behind at 5 weeks in a cumulative class like Algebra, then the student will likely be even further behind at 10 weeks.

Interventions provide support to individual students, but the school leadership also works to serve all of the student subgroups. When the performance of African American students declined by 51 points three years ago, the principal went to the students, teachers and parents to find out what was going on since, as he said, “people don’t get dumber one year to the next.” From the ensuing conversations, some African American

teachers formed “the Village” which focuses on creating a learning community in the African American student population, providing positive role models (as one teacher noted, there is a focus on males who are educated and married) that include both teachers and guest speakers.

Articulation with the feeder middle schools allows Cleveland to prepare for interventions that may be needed for students transitioning to Cleveland. This cross-school articulation is no small task since the school has at least three middle schools with which to work. Yet even at time of interview (Spring), they spent two afternoons articulating with two of their feeder sites.

Conclusion

Cleveland is an example of creating strong professional learning communities which strengthen student achievement as teachers collaborate around student assessments, achievement data, and rigorous curriculum. The teachers and departments at Cleveland have pooled their talents and creativity in order to benefit student learning.