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# **Just for the Kids – California**

## High School Study, 2004-05

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El Monte High School, El Monte Union High School  
District


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# CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY

SUMMER 2005

EL MONTE HIGH SCHOOL  
*EL MONTE UNION HIGH 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, 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](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
- 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)<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 (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

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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 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 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)

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## El Monte High School: A Case Study

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### *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

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<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.....	10,254
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage.....	66%
English Language Learner Percentage.....	30%
District Characterization.....	Urban Fringe of Large City

Located east of Los Angeles, El Monte Union High School District is comprised of five high schools, one continuation school and one community day school, and serves 10,254 students in the seven schools combined.

The overwhelming majority of the district's students are Latino (77%), but a significant proportion is Asian American (17%). Thirty percent of the students in the district have been identified as English Learners, which is slightly higher than the state average of 25 percent.

### District Enrollment 2004

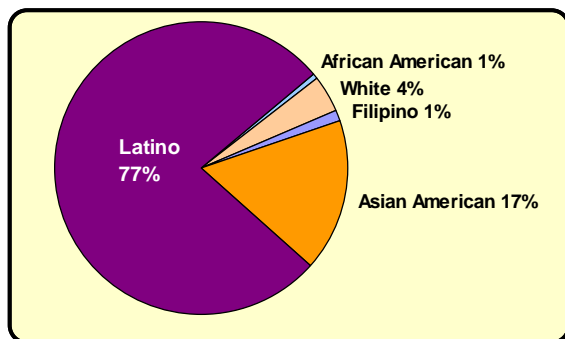


Fig. 1: District Student Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity.<sup>3</sup>

Almost all of the English learners, approximately twenty-six percent of students in the district overall, are native Spanish speakers. Two-thirds of the student body in El Monte Union High School District is eligible for the Free- or Reduced- price Lunch Program (FRLP), compared to the state

<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).

average of 49 percent. The city of El Monte has high rates of poverty and related rates of delinquency and teen pregnancy. El Monte Union employs 425 full-time teachers, 79 percent of which are credentialed, compared to a state average of 89 percent. Teachers in the district teach an average class size of thirty students.

## School Characteristics

Student Enrollment	2,023
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage...	80%
English Language Learner Percentage...	38%
Percentage of Parents who did not Complete High School	51%
Percentage of Parents Completed College/Above.	5%
Percentage of Teachers w/ Full Credentials	75%
Average Number of Years Teaching	15
Average Class Size	30

As in the district, the overwhelming majority of El Monte High School students are Latino (81%). Seventeen percent of the student population is Asian American, and only 2 percent of students are white.

### Student Enrollment 2004

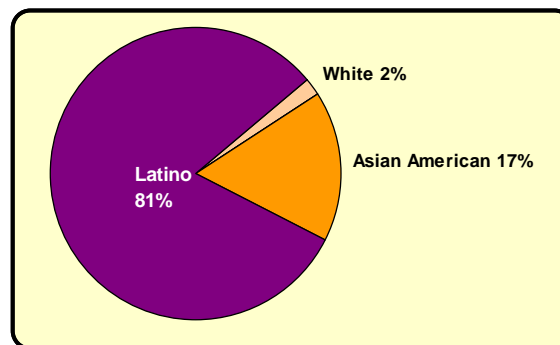


Fig. 2: School Student Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity.

Thirty-eight percent of El Monte's students have been identified as English learners, somewhat more than have been identified

district-wide, and an astonishing 80 percent of the school's students are eligible for the Free/Reduced Lunch Program. Half of the students at the school have parents who have not graduated from high school, compared to 18 percent statewide. Only five percent of the school's parents have completed a Bachelor's degree, a percentage far below the state average of 45 percent.

The school employs 81 full time teachers, only 72 percent of whom have a full credential. Fourteen percent of the school's teachers are currently University interns. Teachers at El Monte teach classes that have, on average, 30 students.

### *Why El Monte High School?*

For El Monte High School, proficiency percentages on the Math portion of the California Standards Test (CST) show evidence of significant improvement with particular regard to the economically disadvantaged, Latino and English Learner subgroups. As few as two years ago, the English Learner population was not meeting their Adequate Yearly Percentage (AYP) target, but as of 2004, they are nearing 30 percent proficient and exceeding the target.

CST Math 2002-04

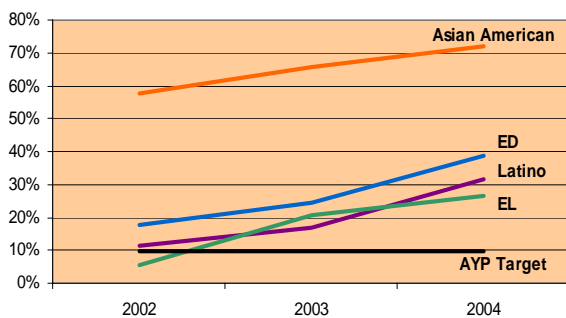


Fig. 4: 2002-2004 El Monte Math CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Looking at the Language Arts results of the CST, there have been steep increases in the percent proficiency with regard to the years

2002-2004. In 2002, 1 percent of English Learners were proficient; in 2004 over 10 percent were proficient. This speaks to the need for more improvement but also an upward trend.

CST Language Arts 2002-04

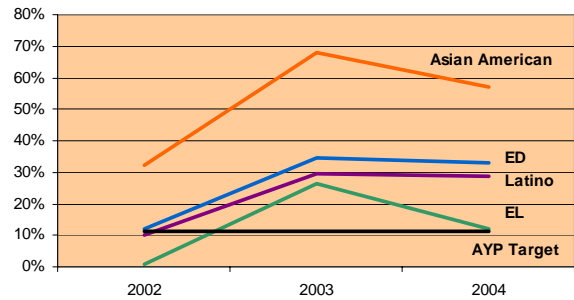


Fig. 5: 2002-2004 El Monte Language Arts CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Looking at the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) Language Arts data, one sees significant improvement in the percent of students passing from 2002-03 – 2003-04. All subgroups made substantial increases of over 10 percentage points. The Math portion shows even more of a remarkable improvement. The economically disadvantaged, Latino and English Learners subgroups all show nearly a three fold increase in percent passing and have narrowed the achievement gap with the Asian American population.

CAHSEE Language Arts 2002-03 & 2003-04

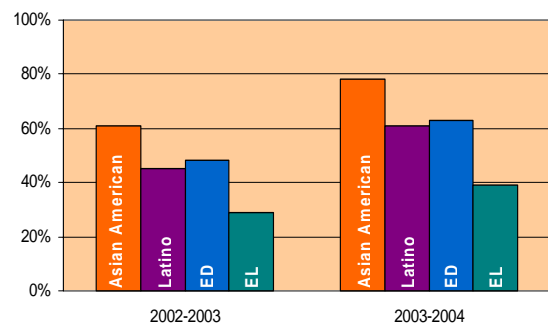


Fig. 6: Percent of Students Passing CAHSEE, Language Arts.

### CAHSEE Math 2002-03 & 2003-04

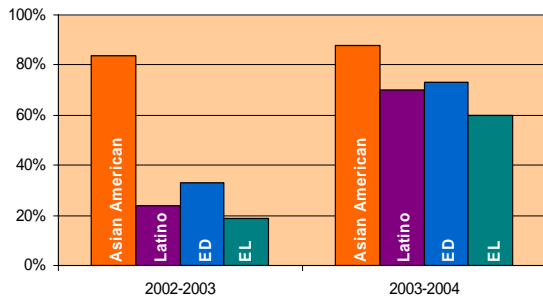


Fig. 7: Percent of Students Passing CAHSEE, Math.

Comparing El Monte with the top 10 comparable schools, one sees they outpace their peers with regard to percent proficient and above in both Language Arts and Math. Of particular note is the percent proficient and above in Geometry; they are 15 times more likely to have students proficient and above than peer schools.

### Multi-grade Language Arts Comparisons 2004

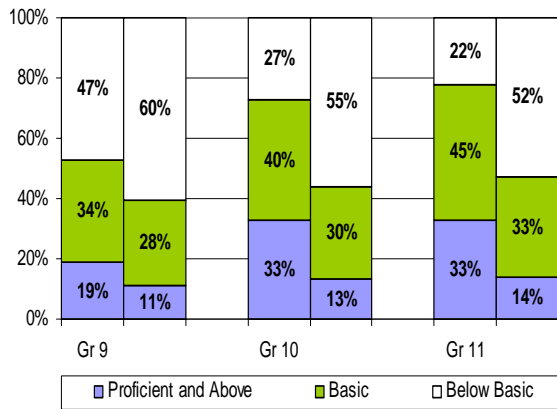


Fig. 8: Multi-Grade Results for El Monte High School and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Language Arts. Data referenced is from on <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

### Multi-grade Math Comparisons 2004

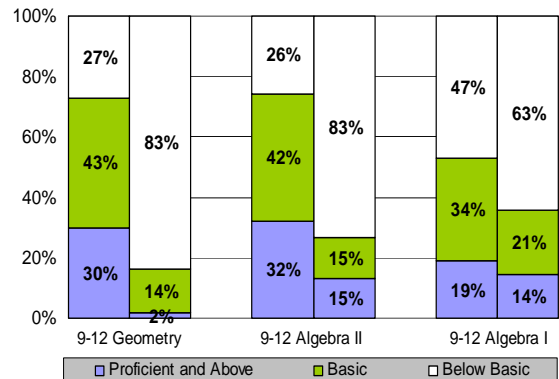


Fig. 9: Multi-Grade Results for El Monte High School and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004 Math. Data referenced is from on <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Examining the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) data shows that El Monte has had great success in moving their English Learners to Early Advanced and Advanced levels, a remarkable achievement considering the large percentage of English Learners at the school.

### 2002-2005 CELDT Results for El Monte Union High School

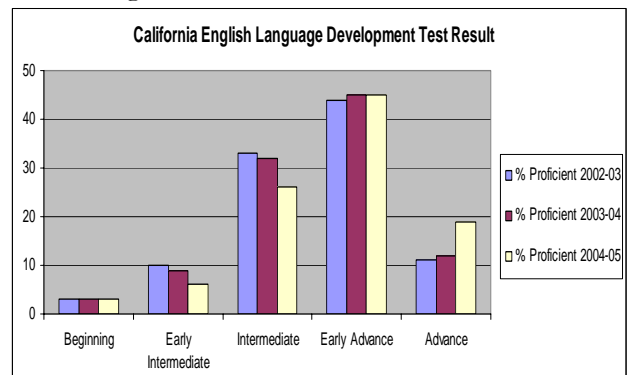


Fig. 10: 2002-2005 CELDT Results for El Monte High School

El Monte High School is also outpacing the state with regard to moving their English Learners into the Fluent English Proficient (FEP) level.

## English Language Learners by FEP Status for school years ending 2001-2004

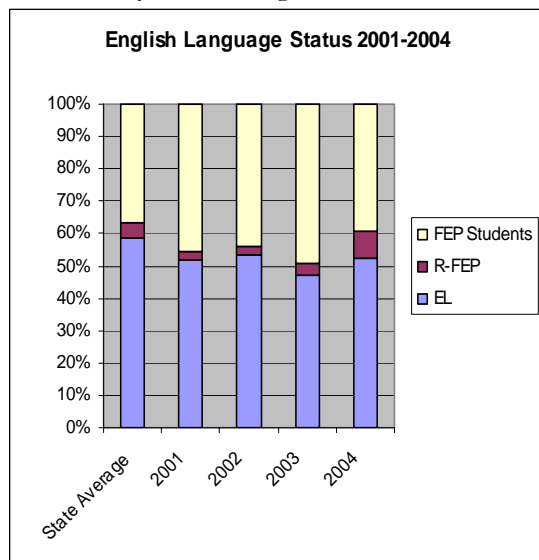


Fig 11: 2001-2004 English Language Learners by FEP Status Results for El Monte High School.

## Findings

El Monte High School is a case of a site focused on the themes of data, standards, and the alignment and articulation of curriculum. But it is also a school that has made goal-setting by students and personalization of support central to its reform strategy. To achieve those ends, it has concentrated on building teacher buy-in, designing and constructing standardized benchmark assessments, articulating across departments and with feeder schools, and, most distinctively, providing kids with necessary supports so all can believe they can succeed and, in fact, do so.

The school is currently in the midst of a leadership transition from Principal Doug Halvorsen to his successor Joel Kyne, the former Assistant Principal for Instruction. The transition has had little impact on the school's hallmark consistency of vision. The school is continuing its work to align assessments to standards, to articulate policies and course offerings within the school and

with its feeder schools, and to provide students with the personalized supports they need in place to succeed.

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## Curriculum and Academic Goals

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*School community members at every level share a common vision of success and agreement on a set of key strategies for closing the gap and improving achievement. Goals are linked with goal of closing the graduation gap.*

*Goal of strengthening command of data and standards:*

Immediately after being placed on the Decile 1 List, El Monte High School pursued and, with district support, received a three-year, \$750,000 grant from the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRDP) to focus on literacy. As the grant approached expiration in 2002, site leaders realized they had not secured the full measure of gains they were seeking. While the expiration of large grants can often slow a reform effort, this was not the case at El Monte.

The principal realized that in order to move efforts forward, "we had to personalize things. We realized that kids come to school with so much going on at home that the staff had to do something so kids can concentrate. That's critical so that we know that along with the higher expectations we are also helping kids get there." Higher standards would not have the powerful effect the school was hoping for without structures capable of meeting the specific needs of students and teachers at El Monte.

That recognition prompted the school's leadership team to make personalization a critical goal at the site. As part of this effort, the school leadership team attended several conferences by Rick Dufour (a nationally

recognized professional developer). Through this work with Rick Dufour sprung a host of adjustments.

The belief system at El Monte is consistently reiterated: “You can only succeed if you believe.” Wyatt Bernthal, a teacher of AVID, English and Study Skills adds that the crucial leverage point is to get kids to believe in themselves and to see “we’re here to help you do that – we are here to help you show yourself that you can do this, you can succeed.” This vision of the teacher’s role is followed up with action. Bernthal sits with one student every day during Sustained Silent Reading and uses grades from the student’s teachers to talk with the student about where the student feels he succeeded, what he did to succeed, where he failed and, most importantly, how he can change his behavior to turn failures into successes. “We get these things down on paper so we can look back at them in six weeks.”

Personalization also extends beyond the teacher-student relationship. The administration has taken on the responsibility of generating relationships, between the school’s administrators and students. Principal Halvorsen realized that time-consuming personalization could not be something he asked faculty to engage in if he was not willing to get personal himself. Recalls Halvorsen, “We started running a road show, with STAR prep talks.” In these talks Halvorsen takes the lowest achievers and talks with them personally about the importance of taking the state tests seriously. He stresses the rivalry with nearby high schools in terms not of football but rather of achievement.

In addition, the principal looks at every student’s scores to see where each has improved and where each one is struggling. He then analyzes each student’s individual student profile and makes comments, such as, “You did a great job in English. You moved from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile... next

time shoot for 50.” Another note might read, “You’ve gone down. It’s okay, what can we do is...” and he’ll have a suggestion. Before the California Standards Test, the principal passes out the student profile and explains what the scores mean for the students and for the school. “Progress is being made,” he stresses, “because of the work the students are doing. Each 2<sup>nd</sup> period teacher does the same thing for each student.”

*Goals and strategies are measurable, time specific and aligned horizontally as well as vertically*

Personalization of the change process is pivotal for teachers and administrators as well as students. The El Monte Union High School District’s goal setting process is highly sensitive to that link. The district led the way in establishing clear and measurable time specific goals horizontally and vertically, and linked those goals directly to “evidence of goal achievement.” But at the same time, the district made explicit “site administrator commitment,” “content specialist and department chair commitments,” “district offices commitments” and “support training assistance needed to achieve the goals.” This public and specific connection of goals and support sends the message that it is a process and it takes a system in which all are working together in aligned fashion horizontally and vertically.

*Goals Aligned from student to district:*

Many sites struggle with the perceived choice between a focus on personalization and focus on teaching and learning based on standards and data; but this is not seen as a choice at El Monte. When the district central office, site leadership, or teachers speak of personalization, it is a key vehicle to supporting teaching and learning.

*Student Goals:*

Engaging students in their own goal setting has helped El Monte give students an individual stake in larger school and district goals. Concurrently, it helps student motivation as it gives them a target.

Students are, for example, encouraged to participate in their own assessment. The school's Senior Quest assignment – an oral and written assignment each senior undertakes – comes with a rough draft scoring guide and a final draft scoring guide, and students are expected to score themselves and each other.

Student *four-year work plans* are readily available, both at the school and on the district website, with clear instructions on how the counselor will fill it out and use it with the student through their high school career. The planner supports student and parent tracking of A-G requirements. For more information see website <http://www.emhs.emuhd.k12.ca.us/gradworksheet.pdf>.

*Classroom:*

To achieve personalization, throughout the curriculum each core content course is matched with an RSP and Special Day Class course, each aimed to provide students with an active IEP (Individual Education Plan) with extra support that allows them to access the core content areas effectively. Similarly, accelerated opportunities are provided to students who seek them. Also, all students have a goal reflection journal, in which they write their goals for the year and reflect together with their counselor on how they are advancing toward their goals.

*School:*

To achieve personalization, the school has set clear and measurable goals:

- A. to lower its D and F rates.
- B. to increase the students' opportunity to access a rigorous and rich curriculum through a diverse set of initiatives (see themes three and five for more information).

*District:*

The administrators at the district central office are emphatic about the need to provide personalized supports for learning so El Monte students can succeed. Assistant Superintendent Salerno points out that "The district embraces API, AYP and CELDT as key goals." However, given that they know they are a high poverty, high crime area, they recognize, as he puts it, "that kids have a lot of issues; so now we're trying to work on improving student support, giving kids guidance."

Last year the district began building a guidance curriculum to improve student support. The curriculum is being developed with Trish Hatch of UC San Diego, who worked on the National Standards for School Counseling.

At Council meetings, all schools worked on "student profiles" to personalize strengths and areas of growth. Rosemead High School shared the template they had used because they showed gains in certain areas.

*Strengthening vertical and horizontal alignment*

Key priorities in advancing this ultimate goal are, in the eye of this principal: continuously working on strengthening course alignment to standards and to each other; increasing the emphasis placed on benchmarks; standardizing grading within and across each

department; increasing the number of Advanced Placement students; and continuing to find ways to strengthen motivation.

A quick glance at the course outlines<sup>4</sup> confirms that courses are not yet fully aligned, and some, such as the math courses, are more explicitly anchored in standards than others. There is clearly still work to be done ahead.

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### *Staff selection, Leadership and Capacity-Building*

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*Educational practice is not a private act: it is shared openly so educators learn with and from each other and use commonly agreed upon data to monitor their effectiveness.*

A critical question for any site is how to organize professional development to launch and achieve the proposed radical changes that sites must engage to achieve the ambitious goals outlined earlier. “If you want all this, you need to have a goal of getting the right kind of professional development,” the principal observed. Among the first tasks of the professional development must be strategies to raise teacher expectations. The most important questions educators can ask, he concluded, following Dufour’s beliefs are: “How are we teaching; how do we know whether students are learning; and what do we do when students don’t learn? The most important of these is the third. It defines what kind of school you are.”

In many schools (and most high schools), teaching is still very much a profession of the independent consultant. El Monte’s administration works to move beyond that convention to make private teaching public. Time has proven a common challenge in institutionalizing this shift, but at El Monte,

structures are being put in place. The school has established common times for teachers to visit one another’s classrooms, and school administrators commonly use Sustained Silent Reading as an opportunity to go into classrooms “to get a snap shot.” A crop of newer teachers at the school is opening their classrooms to do model lessons based on California Standards for the Teaching Profession.

*All levels of the school system are aligned around common goals. Teachers work collaboratively, principals provide support for teachers, and the district supports schools.*

El Monte High has focused intently on broad teacher engagement. Through a working relationship with professional developer Rick Dufour, El Monte faculty worked to realize his motto, “rely on each other,” to create an effective professional learning community and to develop both vertical and horizontal personalization.

### *Horizontal and Vertical Learning Communities:*

One area of focus has been the strengthening of collaboration between special and general education programs. El Monte High School brought on board Assistant Superintendent for Special Education, Dr. Judy Elliott, from Long Beach in February of 2004. Faculty and staff worked to move from an old paradigm, one in which special education students “get services,” to a new one in which teachers ensure that a student not only “gets services” but is learning from an expert in that content area. This new demand is met at El Monte through intensified teacher-to-teacher, or horizontal, learning.

According to English teacher Nari Cho, staff members from core departments have accessed external resources, in differentiated instruction for example, and have brought the learning back to share with others. These teachers return from trainings and incorporate

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<sup>4</sup> see the district website:  
<http://www.emhs.emuhisd.k12.ca.us/courseinfo.php?ID=208>.

new techniques, such as Cornell note taking from AVID, into their practice. A growing number of teachers soon adopt the techniques, which can be used with special and general education students alike.

Learning to collaborate effectively around differentiation and personalization has not been easy, Cho reflects further. “A huge thing has been just training content teachers in IEP [Individual Education Plan] meetings; and just learning the language on different kinds of accommodations you might give the students and how to accommodate and modify. Previously this was just a question for the special education student and, basically, the responsibility of the special ed. teacher. Now it is the responsibility of both the general and special ed. teachers to communicate about the student. It calls for a lot of collaboration.” Professional development time has been set aside for just this purpose.

As the special education example illustrates, school leaders have embedded themselves in a learning community that extends beyond the school to the El Monte district office. As a first step, school and district administrators meet at the district office to analyze data and learn from each other’s successes and challenges. In order to ensure that the focus on teaching and learning is not lost, one meeting a month is dedicated to standards and instruction, and to ensure that skill building and knowledge around data is not lost. That one meeting a month is also dedicated to data review. These meetings have proven particularly valuable venues for new principals: “This coming year, two of the five of us are new: Mountain View High School is also getting a new principal. So these meetings are important, a sort of mentorship,” notes Assistant Principal Kyne.

*School and district leadership construct new roles for ‘boundary spanners’ and ‘boundary spanning committees.’*

One new district level “boundary spanning” role is that of the content specialists. The goal of content specialist meetings is to work across traditional boundaries between teachers and between departments. These specialists help “take the learning up and out” and to leverage best practices throughout the system. The committee, which rose out of a need to align content across schools, focuses around the needs of classroom teachers, but also often principals and district administrators. The “content specialists,” core academic area teachers from each of the district’s high schools, are chosen because of their experience, instructional expertise and leadership ability.

While school representatives have always had a small place in the district office, the role of these content specialist boundary spanners has changed. Meetings at the district office now serve as professional development structures through which professionals come together to learn from one another. Director of Research and Development Elizabeth Alonso has introduced “bragging rights,” for example, as a formal part of each session to ensure that knowledge about successes at each site is being shared.

After meeting and learning from each other, content specialists go back to each site to guide and collaborate within their own departments around benchmarks, course outlines, pacing guides and textbook matrices, more of which will be consistently applied across the district because of their work.

While collaboration between district central office and content specialists can be challenging, and specialists can feel trumped by district mandates, teachers more often than not take the lead in El Monte. Though Director Alonso convenes and facilitates, she is careful to make sure that the specialists build the agenda.

Another related collaboration venue is the content specialist meetings, which is a forum for articulation between the sites and district related to curriculum decisions, including implications and responses to state and federal bills and policies that impact the education system at the curricular level.

*Emergent finding: Collaboration time aimed at improving instruction, monitoring student achievement and revising assessments and curricula is built into the school and district master schedule.*

Despite all of the above efforts to collaborate, Assistant Principal Joel Kyne emphasizes that teachers are getting to share best practices with each other, “but don’t yet have enough time to deepen it.” The idea has taken root – teachers see successful practices and don’t want to recreate the wheel – but the school, by its own admission, still has a ways to go.

As a step in this direction, next year’s master schedule will include collaboration time for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade English. English teachers from the two grades will have the same planning time in order to collaborate on pacing plans, assignments, common expectations and common exercises for writing. Eleventh grade teachers will be included the following year. The principal has given up the all-school meeting so that teachers can have more time to work together. Teacher Nari Cho concludes, “The time to work together and reflect to make it our own is critical,” as is time to build, apply and refine the knowledge together.

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

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*The school’s master schedule is driven by the aim of ensuring that all students no matter what their learning needs have equal access to rigorous and engaging curriculum that is standards-based and offers access to college, career and citizenship. All teachers*

*participate in supporting English learners and in monitoring their achievement.*

### *Master Schedule:*

According to the principal, “if you go to the master schedule you can tell what kind of school it is.” At El Monte, the master schedule is seen by the district and site leadership as *the* critical lever for reform. The core question has become: are the most qualified teachers also teaching the students most in need? The principal elaborates.

El Monte leadership considers the following points when they create the school’s master schedule:

- Are all teachers teaching both struggling and higher level students? For example, the AP Calculus teacher also teaches intermediate math and every teacher teaches one or two “lower-level” classes.
- Ensure that conference periods are spread throughout the school day, not bunched at the end. This helps keep students in school for the entire day.
- All subgroups need the opportunity to combine general studies with higher-level classes. Every department is accessible to English learners and study skills students.
- Ensuring that programs are available to students in AVID, honors and AP courses.

### *Focus: Schedule Adjustments for Special Ed Inclusion*

This year, the school is gearing up to implement the inclusion model for special education students program wide.

In line with changes at the middle school level and following a 2003 district audit of services to special education students, El Monte High School began to build a collaborative model for special education students with support from a Quality Assurance Grant. The audit revealed that general education faculty needed

to acquire skills for reaching *all* students. The schedule has since been redesigned so that select special education teachers join students in their core content area classes. The school is gearing up through intensive summer professional development and adjustments in the master schedule to enable a school-wide launch of the Collaborative Model.

As part of the collaboratively developed inclusion model (partially described above), El Monte High now asks every teacher with a special education student in their classroom to collaborate with the special education teacher on a range of activities including, (1) rewriting, reformatting or modifying tests, quizzes, worksheets or labs; (2) assisting each student with note taking; (3) working with the special education students individually in class; and (4) helping with the lesson planning.

El Monte High School began work with Riverside County Office of Education this year to meet with schools that have worked with the Collaborative Model for a few years. That was encouraging, Cho reflects. A teacher from one of the more experienced schools shared, “First I balked at the idea of this teacher in my room but now when the special ed teacher adopted my test for her special education student, I saw it was a better test for all students because of the even lay out.” Nari Cho is herself finding that collaboration really helps teachers better support all of the school’s students. “We are our best resource that is untapped. We have so many great things untapped; we need to learn from each other.”

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

Rather than letting textbooks guide the process, at El Monte the process of aligning

courses to standards has begun with a focus on “essential standards” for ninth graders. After focusing on instructional strategies, the English department opted for depth over breadth. Instead of hitting each standard once, the teachers decided students would be better prepared for later grades if the department focused on hitting each of five essential standards twice.

*Adjusting all courses to be aligned with A-G including Vocational Education*

Access to the A-G curriculum, (the curriculum approved by the University of California and California State University as college preparatory) is often a critical equity point as it defines whether a student is eligible to apply to attend the California State University or University of California. In the push for A-G required courses, many school sites feel compelled to abandon vocational education courses. The assistant superintendent responsible for vocational education asks pointedly, “How are we going to keep the kids engaged who are turned off by academics; the ones who need to earn a living to support themselves through college even if they want to go on to college before entering a career?”

El Monte High School has been leading efforts to align, rather than abandon, vocational courses, which may in fact help students access both college and career. Auto Technology courses, for example, are being reformatted to comply with both the standards of the industry and A-G requirements. By summer 2005, the auto tech program aims to have secured national certification through NATEF (the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation, whose standards are honored in career and technical education along with the California content standards) and A-G recognition. (For more information on NATEF-approved student trainings, see [http://www.natef.org/.](http://www.natef.org/))

Part of this push has included designing a plan in collaboration with Riverside County Office of Education and Riverside County Achievement Team, to offer ROP courses in auto tech and other subjects that were aligned in pacing plans with the core content courses. Auto technology then provides students “hands on” experience of concepts in math and science and content courses provide abstract reinforcement of concepts students learn in auto tech. According to ROP auto technology teacher Sal Mendoza, “Going into auto tech is not turning wrenches and being a grease monkey; we’re getting the English department to collaborate with auto tech to read some of the books that are technical; we have our own dictionary of terms” (For more information see El Monte High course outline for Auto Technology, see <http://www.emhs.emuhsd.k12.ca.us/dept.ph?p?ID=4&deptcode=0004>.) The teachers find that students are motivated by the applied work and realize that if they can’t read a manual, then they cannot diagnose a system.

The changes are being made in order to better prepare students for life after high school. Similarly, Mendoza emphasizes the students’ need for math and science if they want to pursue a career in auto mechanics. “Since we use a lot of geometry, we have to get into some trig and basic fractions, multiplication and algebra; if they don’t have the basics, they can’t manage. We also have a lot of physics involved in the automotive area.” This collaboration between the auto shop teacher and the core content teachers has been crucial. Auto technology supplies the assignment, and then Math will work with students on ways to solve the problem mathematically. The students’ grasp of conceptual problems are grounded in real world applications.

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

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*Training has occurred across levels to ensure that data systems are used to track student achievement and to inform key decisions; the district data department provides the data most needed and provides training about data use and data systems as necessary.*

*Assessments are aligned with curriculum; they are written collaboratively in departments and are used to track student and teacher performance.*

Data is the essential foundation for El Monte’s work around improving instructional practices and meeting the needs of all students. The work began with simply looking at student placement and achievement data, and has since evolved into careful analysis and, most importantly, data-based action.

As an example of this, the principal shared, “We hadn’t even looked to notice that 50 percent of our kids were only in five periods. One day Mike Jones (from the Riverside Office of Education) said, ‘Doug, a lot of kids are going home after 5<sup>th</sup> period; you’ve got to look at that’. And I looked, and only 51 percent stayed after 5<sup>th</sup> period; 49 percent were going home. I said, ‘Robin, we need to rearrange that master schedule’—because when we looked we saw why so many kids were leaving: it was the imbalance of the conference periods. The following year we had increased the number of students attending 6 or more classes to 71 percent”.

Similarly, when the school introduced its study skills classes in 2003, it looked at the data. A thorough review showed that student achievement on their average GPA moved from 1.1 to 1.4. The principal shared this data with and the school and district staff to reflect on the impact of El Monte’s study skills class on student achievement.

*Decisions are based on student achievement data as well as evaluation rubrics for assessing progress toward common quality indicators.*

To reach struggling students, data and standards have to be personalized, notes one teacher. In addition to using data and grounding instruction in the standards, the school must “constantly be chipping away at the bigness” to personalize learning for all kids, affirms the principal.

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### *Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment*

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*School institutionalizes programs like AVID or standards aligned ROP classes to provide all students access to more rigorous and relevant classes.*

*Ninth grade transition course:*

Following a study skills model learned from Rick Dufour, this year El Monte High has laid the foundation to launch a study skills class series in which older students serve as mentors and supports to younger ones. The program is being implemented with full support from district and school leaders, all of whom cite the power of peer-to-peer relationships.

Structural supports have been put carefully into place to optimize the intervention’s chances of success. Because the program will run before school hours, the district, for example, has offered to provide breakfast. In addition to parental consent, the district and school also have parent buy-in and support to increase the likelihood that students will get to school at such an early hour. Assistant Superintendent Salerno worked closely with the principal and assistant principal to get the wording right on the parent contract. According to Salerno, “It needed to be worded so parents would feel real incentive to sign. So we drafted up a letter together outlining the consequences of their child failing Algebra I.”

### **AVID**

(Advancement via Individual Determination)

AVID as a program works to build academic and study skills in order to facilitate student achievement and expose students to challenging course material. The program targets “average” students, with GPA’s over 2.0 (slightly higher at some schools), for a rigorous college prep curriculum. In order for students to enter AVID, schools invite qualified students to apply. The application to AVID varies by school, all serving the purpose of screening for students who will take the program and challenging coursework of honors and AP courses seriously. Students take an AVID course as an Elective, where they are taught study skills such as Cornell notes and critical reading, and organizational skills to help them succeed in the challenging courses.

AVID adoption was launched three years ago and has been approved with full certification for all three years. Now the program is of such excellence that the AVID teacher has been told that they are in line for becoming a demonstration school.

*Teachers and school and district systems carefully monitor attendance and gear recognition and intervention to attendance patterns.*

*Early adopter of a program targeting the graduation gap:*

El Monte was one of the state’s first SB65 Schools with the first State Dropout Prevention Plan. As a recipient of the SB65 funds, El Monte had funds for an “Outreach Consultant.” The “Outreach Consultant” position is unique, as it calls for a person (teacher, administrator, counselor or social worker) familiar with the school and school community.

### **Outreach Consultants/SB 65 Grants**

The “outreach consultant” position is unique in California education. SB 65, the Pupil Motivation and Maintenance Program (M&M), issued by the state of California in 1985, funds dropout prevention specialists, also called outreach consultants. As outlined by the bill, the outreach consultant signifies a person reaching out to the community for help and resources (“outreach”), and still is a resource, a catalyst or change agent to the total school staff (“consultant”). The consultant helps identify the school’s at-risk students. From there they arrange for targeted interventions using school and community resources which meet the needs of the identified students. The program provides funding for the outreach consultant at each school site. Students from K-12 have been targeted for interventions to increase the likelihood of high school graduation. Part of the SB 65 intervention program requires schools to have a Student Success Team (SST) which reviews at least one “at-risk” student per week. These students are monitored for their progress. Each school and district tailor the role of the SST and the Outreach Consultant to their own needs and student population within the guidelines stated above. By design, the M&M Program is a performance-based effort, and schools must provide evidence of their efforts and success to receive continued funding.

SB65 Coordinator Greg Vaniman has been the lead on the SB65 grant, which has as its goal ensuring that all students graduate on time. According Vaniman, “We aggressively track never-enrolled students and non-attendees to try to get them to school.” Key structures include the Coordinating Services Team COST team. On the COST team are: the School Resource Officer (SRO) the Child Welfare Attendant (CWA), school nurse, school psychologist, and appropriate

members of outside agencies. Student family and probation officers can be included and involved in that team when needed.

The structure is intensive: COST meets weekly Friday morning at 10:00 a.m. to discuss students. The first step is to review the case management, which includes vetting to ensure the members on the team are not replicating services and that “we have all our stories straight...” Those meetings tie all ends together.

The COST team is a tremendous tool in getting students back on track. For each student, the plan consists of individualized interventions based on student strengths. The plan works to remedy what is holding students back. Observes Coordinator Vaniman, “In the COST meeting we ask ourselves: What kind of case management do we need to develop? Some might say the first is that we need to bring parent and guardian in, and teacher, and any other pertinent stakeholder to find out all the facts. Some times, it’s very apparent on the surface what is not there, but we want the positives too.”

Coordinator Vaniman reflects, “Let’s say if someone is a good athlete but nothing else. We might tie him to the football coach, or if the problem is money and family, we bring him into a work program to help financially with family. Or maybe he does well with other students, so we try to get him with a student mentor. We try to find the support; it all comes back to asset development and instilling resiliency in those kids. The goal is resiliency building using the ‘resiliency rubric.’”

Vaniman closed with a very personal example: “One student at El Monte High was invited to the student of the year luncheon by me. I am looking forward to honoring him. In 2001, he had four F’s and a D. Now he is taking eight classes this semester to graduate, and he will. The hook was athletics. We got him hooked

with the wrestling teacher who agreed to support him and track him in progress on his grades. He's in now. You'll meet him at the lunch. And he himself is so proud."

For the administration, making adjustments that strengthen support for the bottom quartile is a crucial intervention. Schedules are arranged to:

- ensure that all students participate in at least two extracurricular activities;
- accommodate AVID, now entering its third year with distinction;
- allow every classroom in the school to engage in *Sustained Silent Reading* every morning (an exercise for which they are now building assessments); and
- offer a one-year Study Skills class for students who do not qualify for AVID. In this class, students learn strategies to help them move more easily through their core course offerings.

Finally, to extend, deepen and embed the supports from the SB 65 program and other strategies that support vulnerable or at-risk youth, the school and district target support to parents and support to incoming ninth graders. The school embeds such strategies in ongoing and extensive activities to honor and recognize progress, particularly for those who are the lowest performing of the students.

#### *Parent Institutes:*

The district and school have built a Parent Institute, which parents attend for eight straight weeks to support their child's learning. Connect Ed is a strategy to build capacity on better communication with parents. They have also provided CAHSEE parent meetings and PAC meetings along with the more standard fare of open house and back to school events.

#### *Support for entry into high school: 8<sup>th</sup> grade orientation/Pre-high school outreach:*

There is a personalization strategy undergirding support for attendance. To overcome the fear of transitioning into the 'big' high school, El Monte offers 8<sup>th</sup> grade orientation on Friday before summer school starts. On that day, older kids take the eighth graders on tours of the school and walk them around. "We've learned that all 500 will get more in depth in that one day than in an orientation in August. It's interactive: boys show the younger boys the PE lockers, where the student store is, where to go if they need help, and they introduce them to the school resource officer."

Next school year with the assistance of a graduate the school hired, the aim is to more effectively use a new interactive website to check attendance, and have the departments put on the site their weekly updates on their lessons, course outline notations, and testing information.

#### *Staff recognition:*

The focus at El Monte is not just on student recognition but also on staff recognition. The site has devised a host of original ways to do so: each department puts on a morning staff social once a month; the students write birthday cards for the teachers; and the principal offers regular staff socials where departments give out prizes and wines.

#### *Opportunities to honor getting rid of F's and D's:*

Opportunities for student recognition abound. The message is: "If you do well, what do you want? If you have no F's, I'll take you out to Shakey's after first grading period. After second grading period, we want to go to the Home Town Buffet. For the semester Doug said 'We should do something really nice', so we went to the Clipper's game, and he took the teachers. And at the summer

everyone who doesn't have an F in the Study Skills Program was taken to the to Dodgers game. It's been a remarkable success and has made students want to enroll in Study Skills. We started two years ago with five sections of Study Skills and now we have eight to ten sections.”

*Opportunities to honor any student's progress and hone their public speaking skills:*

Every month there is a student of the month luncheon where each of the 12 departments selects one to four students based on progress or achievement. The teacher introduces the student(s) and says a word about their accomplishments, and the student has the opportunity to say a few words about the teacher, the class or themselves. This form of recognition builds students' confidence and opportunity for public speaking. Many of the students in this lunch are ones who have moved “out of the F zone” and, in a traditional high school structure, would never have received any recognition.

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## *Conclusion*

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In closing, as the elaboration across these five themes illustrates, El Monte High School is a case of a site focused on the themes of data, standards and articulation. But it is also a school that has made student goal setting and personalization central to their reform strategy. Areas for further growth include: continuing to strengthen use of data; alignment to standards and articulating grading policy and course offering throughout the school and with the feeder schools; and continuing to extend and strengthen ways of providing kids with the critical personalized supports so they can believe in themselves and succeed.