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

Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies,
Los Angeles Unified School District

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Funding for this project: 2004-2005 NCEA state best practice studies have been made possible in part by a matching grant from The Broad Foundation, much acclaimed for their work in urban education as sponsors of the Broad Prize for Urban Education. Studies include elementary, middle and high school best practices in twenty states, and often involve teaming with state research partners to conduct site-based interviews and observations.

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CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY

SUMMER 2005

THE LOS ANGELES CENTER
FOR
ENRICHED STUDIES

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

The Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies: 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:	20% 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 53% of the students enrolled in grades 6-12. Twenty percent refers to the state average of parents who did not complete high school for students enrolled in grades 6-12.

District Characteristics

Student Enrollment.....	747,009
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage.....	77%
English Learner Percentage.....	44%
District Characterization.....	large city

49 percent. While 77 percent of adults in the state have a high school diploma and 27 percent hold a Bachelor's Degree, only 65 percent and 24 percent of parents reported, respectively, hold each of these degrees in the greater Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) community.

As the nation's second largest district, Los Angeles Unified School District 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.

The overwhelming majority of the district's students are Latino (73%). Twelve percent of the students are African American, nine percent are white, four percent are Asian American and two percent are Filipino. Forty four percent of students in the district have been identified as English learners (EL), a much higher percentage than state-wide (25%).

Seventy-seven percent of students in the district are eligible for the Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch Program (FRLP), which is also considerably higher than the state average of

District Enrollment

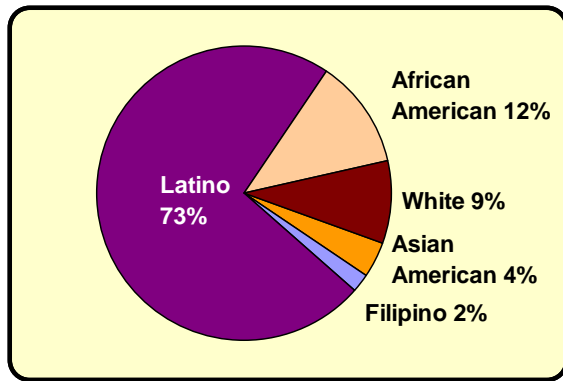


Fig. 1: LAUSD Student Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity.³

LAUSD employs 34,668 full-time teachers, of which only 75 percent, compared to the state average of 89 percent, are fully credentialed. The average class has just under 27 students, which is approximately equivalent to the state average. The average pupil-teacher ratio in the district is 22 to one.

School Characteristics

Student Enrollment	1,604
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage...	32%
English Language Learner Percentage...	1%
Percentage of Parents who did not Complete High School	4%
Percentage of Parents Completed College/Above.	64%
Percentage of Teachers w/ Full Credentials	97%
Average Number of Years Teaching	15
Average Class Size	29

Located in District 3 of the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies (LACES) is the district's oldest magnet school. Its doors opened to fourth through eighth graders in

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

1977 as a component of the city's Voluntary Integration Program. In 1991, the school took in the last class of fourth graders. It was then decided that the program would be a span school stretching from grades six through twelve.

As LACES is a magnet school rather than a neighborhood school, students are drawn from throughout the district and highest priority is given to children who reside in racially isolated neighborhoods. The result is that approximately 90 percent of the students at LACES are bussed into the school from different parts of the city. The district's Integration Office admits using a formula that seeks to create a student body comprised of 30 percent white and 70 percent students of other ethnic groups.

Thirty-six percent of the student body at LACES is African American – more than four times the state average of 8 percent. Another 30 percent of the student body is white, which is approximately equal to the state average but greater than the district average of 9 percent. The third and fourth largest ethnic subgroups are Latino (18%) and Asian American (14%) students, respectively.

School Enrollment

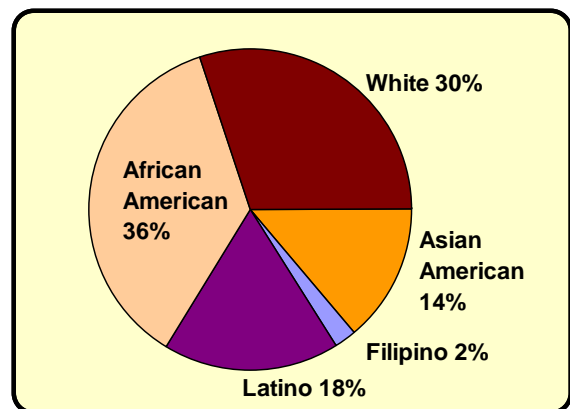


Fig. 2: LACES Student Enrollment Percentages by Race/Ethnicity.

Despite the high number of English Learners in the district, LACES is not a school of

exceptionally high linguistic diversity. The majority of students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken have been redesignated English proficient: Only 1 percent of students at the school have been identified as English Learners, a percentage far below the state average of 25 percent and the district average of 44percent.

Thirty-two percent of LACES' students are eligible for the Free- or Reduced-Price Lunch Program, a smaller percentage than the state's 49 percent, and a far lower percentage than the district's 77 percent. Parents of LACES' students are also better educated than the state average. Sixty-four percent of students' parents hold at least a college degree versus the state average of 35 percent. Overall, LACES serves a population of students that would be considered quite diverse and challenging in many parts of the state, but which presents far fewer challenges than the population served by many Los Angeles high schools.

Teachers at the school are also better educated and have been in the profession and in the district longer than their state peers. The average tenure of a LACES teacher in the profession is 15 years versus the state average of 13 years. Ninety-seven percent of LACES teachers hold a full credential versus the state average of 90 percent.

Why LACES?

One might argue that LACES has little to teach others due to its magnet status. However, this study found that LACES, though singular in design, is addressing challenges common to all. Those challenges include gap closure and bringing all students to high levels of achievement. LACES employs tested strategies. It has suffered setbacks and harvested successes. Finally, it has garnered learned lessons. These lessons, this study suggests, are keenly relevant to the

wide range of high schools be they magnets or 5,000-student, three-track comprehensives.

LACES offers a distinctive achievement record on the one hand combined with the bedeviling persistence of the achievement gap – or what the WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation report described as “the appearance of two cultures” in the student body – on the other.

These two aspects of the school together make LACES a distinctively rich learning case.

In 2005, LACES was recipient of the California Distinguished High School award. Twice in the last four years, LACES has been identified by *Newsweek* as among the top 100 schools in the country (2000 and 2003) for the number of AP exams administered divided by the number of graduating seniors. In 2004, *Los Angeles Magazine* recognized it as the top school in the district overall. Prior to this year's distinction, it received the California Distinguished School Award twice and the National Blue Ribbon School Award once. Specific data points help explain these various accolades.

And yet, there is an achievement gap between the highest performing groups, Asian Americans and White, and the school's lowest performers, the Hispanic/Latinos and African Americans.

CST Language Arts 2002-04

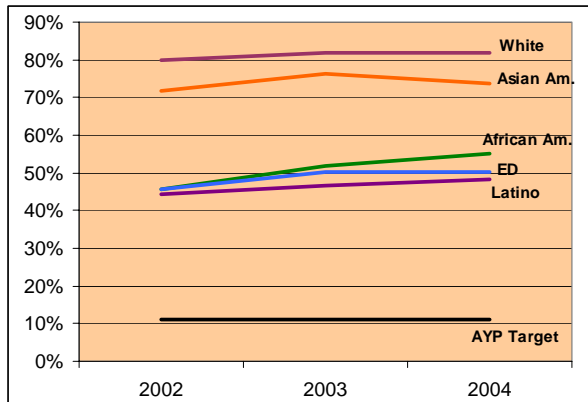


Fig. 4: 2002-2004 Language Arts LACES CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

CST Math 2002-04

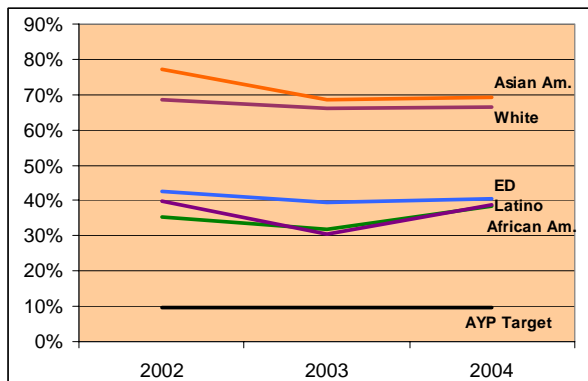


Fig. 5: 2002-2004 Math LACES CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Results on the CAHSEE exam are also strong. In 2004, LACES was the top performing secondary school in LAUSD with a 99 percent pass rate in English/Language Arts and 94 percent pass rate in mathematics.

CAHSEE Language Arts 2002-03 & 2003-04

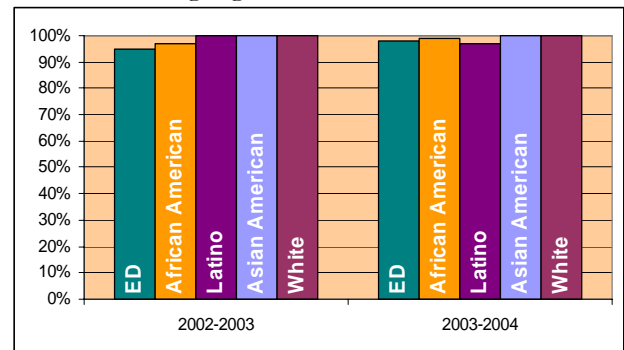


Fig. 6: Percentage of Students Passing CAHSEE, Language Arts.

CAHSEE Math 2002-03 & 2003-04

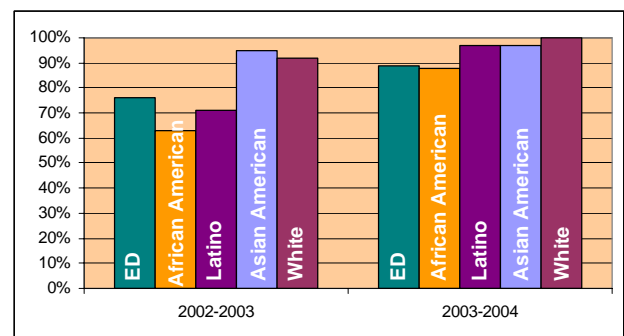


Fig. 7: Percentage of Students Passing CAHSEE, Math.

Student course-taking patterns and scores offer more evidence of high achievement. In 2003, AP scores of three or higher per 100 junior and seniors was 85 (vs. state average of 24); chemistry and physics course enrollment per 100 students was 79 (vs. state average of 36); and enrollment in advanced mathematics per 100 students was 116 (vs. state average of 55). SAT scores serve as another indicator: In 2003, 94 percent of 10th graders were tested (vs. state average of 37%) and, of those, 53% scored 1000 or higher (vs. state average of 19 percent of students tested).

Not surprisingly, the percentage of students who graduate from LACES with UC/CSU requirements fulfilled far exceeds both district and state averages. In 2004, every Asian American student, 96 percent of white students, 95 percent of African American

students, and 87 percent of Latino students completed UC/CSU requirements compared to state averages of 56 percent, 39 percent, 24 percent and 22 percent respectively. Overall in 2003, just under 90 percent (vs. a state average of 34 percent) of the school's students completed UC/CSU requirements with a grade of "C" or better.

In sum, LACES is an inner-city high school without academically selective admissions criteria, though it is a school that students must request to attend. In 2003 over 90 percent of the graduating class went on to four-year colleges, 11 percent went on to private California four-year colleges or universities. Seventeen percent went to out of state four-year universities including Harvard and Yale.

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 LACES' performance and the bar on the right shows the average of the top 10 comparable schools in the state. For every grade in Language Arts, LACES students were more likely to score "Proficient and above" and less likely to score "Basic" or "Below Basic" than their peers in similar schools. For every grade and subject area in math, so few similar peer schools bring a statistically significant amount of students to higher-level math – Algebra II and Geometry – that there are no comparables in the state. LACES brings 20 percent to proficient in Algebra II and 26 percent to proficient in Geometry.

Multi-Grade Language Arts Comparisons 2004

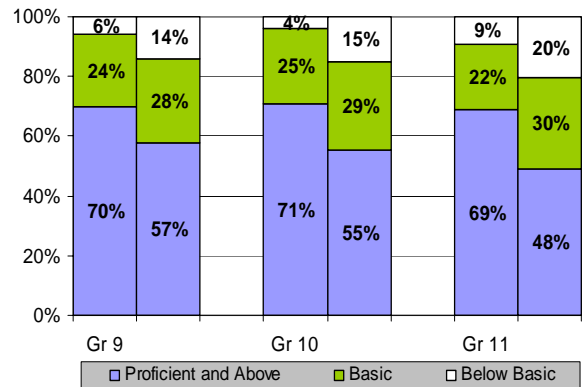


Fig. 8: Multi-Grade Results for LACES and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Language Arts. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Multi-Grade Math Comparisons 2004

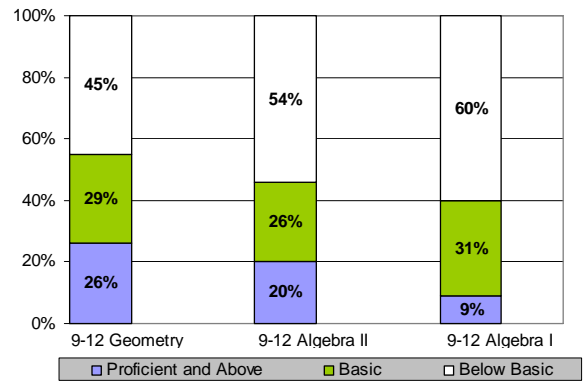


Fig. 9: Multi-Grade Results for LACES and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Math. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

By multiple measures, the school offers an island of excellence in the midst of the inner city neighborhood in which it resides. Thus the case raises several questions: What has contributed to this picture of high performance? What lessons from this school are applicable to others? What can be done at LACES and elsewhere to narrow or even close the achievement gap?

Findings

In studying LACES one studies a school at a turning point. LACES is a school with a long

and distinguished history, a history that has been shaped by a vision of preparing students for four-year colleges. It is also a school that has, over the past four years, worked hard to expand that vision to place a higher priority on improving the performance of the lowest performing student groups. The school's goal is explicitly "to eliminate the achievement gap."

In taking on this challenge, the school is challenging the conventional belief that excellence must be sacrificed in the quest for equity. The school aims for both, though it has not yet succeeded.

Why has the school taken on this challenge? Pressure to change is emphatically not coming from the usual sources. At LACES there is no threat of state sanctions or take over to galvanize or unite the school community. With approximately 2000 applicants for the 289 openings each year and continuous praise from the outside world for its fine achievement and school leadership, faculty, staff and students have many reasons to ignore the gap. What has sparked the conversations on what it takes to offer a high quality education to all students? What level of change – and what results – is possible in a school that approaches the achievement gap challenge from this perspective? A few components stand out as critical:

- the district-supported site leadership for gap closure,
- the design of opportunities for teacher collaboration around increasingly common assessments, and
- the growing focus on and professional development for highly differentiated instruction.

Site reports suggest that these components need not displace LACES' hallmark: the individual creativity of the expert high school teacher scholar. These components, coupled with LACES' highly rigorous and enriched

curriculum, attend to continuing school success while closing the achievement gap.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

Finding: School community at every level shares a common vision of success as well as key priorities for action.

A Clear Vision and Common Goals

Unlike many of its urban peers, LACES faculty and students are energized by both a clear vision of success and a well-established set of common goals. Its vision is embodied in the school's motto, "In search of excellence," and its goals for the school and its students are articulated in its Expected School-wide Learning Results (ESLRs):

- Learn to solve problems critically and creatively;
- Act ethically, respectfully and responsibly;
- Communicate effectively, precisely and succinctly;
- Embrace and encourage individuality and diversity;
- Support family, school and community.⁴

These kinds of broad goals – which have been adopted by California high schools as an outgrowth of the WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation process – are not always used by schools to shape their programs. But at LACES, the ESLRs seem to be alive and well.

⁴ When the school prepared for the upcoming WASC review in 2003-2004, a teacher from the math department, Frank Wilson, articulated this wording of the ESLRs so they would match the acronym of the school. The mnemonic device made it easier for students and adults to remember the ESLRs as a set of memorable goals.

Yet the practical measure of success at the school is college admission: when each of seven LACES teachers was asked to define “success,” all seven included the rate of students attending a four-year college among their measures. Six of the seven added that they follow API growth closely to monitor progress and measure success. In the words of one assistant principal, the school’s aim is to serve as a “college preparatory school of enrichment.” It accomplishes this for the rich majority of LACES graduates.

The schools’ strongly held goal of college and career readiness has implications for curricular and academic goals, all of which have enriched learning opportunities at their core. Every school activity and improvement effort is intended to support each of two standards of excellence:

- that every student will attend a four year college, have a fruitful career and be an engaged citizen, and
- that every student will take one or more Advanced Placement classes by the end of their LACES career.

At LACES, the responsibility for achieving these goals is shared by students and adults. Students participate actively in developing and revising an instructional plan that reflects their own learning goals and that will accompany them from sixth grade until graduation day. Students are also offered the opportunity to take a lead in selecting enrichment courses that will support these carefully outlined goals.

The enrichment courses ranging from Beginning Modern Dance to AP Art History and taken one per year are offered in addition to a full complement of mandatory, college preparatory courses and, according to one school leader, offer students “a reason to want to be there... you’ve got the range: art classes, music, cooking.” These enriched courses build bridges to the students’ life outside of school walls as well as to academic

abilities, artistic talents and athletic skills that might otherwise go untapped. In addition to access to an unusually wide range of AP and career-driven courses (e.g., Journalism, Law and Youth, and Microeconomics), students have the opportunity to build citizenship skills through participation on an active Student Leadership Council or a School Site Council, both of which ensure that students have a voice in establishing the school’s goals.

These student responsibilities and opportunities are supported by the school’s grade-spanning structure. This structure helps students and teachers develop personal, supportive relationships over a seven-year period. One teacher shared that in this smaller, familial school environment more consistent connections are built because “you can have sixth graders who you teach again as twelfth graders.” The personal relationships add a dimension to teachers’ concern for their students.

There are a variety of ways in which both the structure and many of the routines of the school combine high expectations with personalization and a high level of concern for students. For example, the school is aware of the pressure that is on students to perform well on tests. In an effort to provide them with the most comfortable, least stressful possible environment in which to take important tests, teachers take their students to a local college campus for test taking. Teachers describe the campus as offering both an environment with fewer interruptions and a powerful reminder to students of their ultimate goal – the four-year college.

Finding: The school community at every level shares a common vision of success and key priorities including closing the gap.

Expanding Goals for Success to Include a Focus on Equity

A group of leaders at LACES encourages the rest of the school to aim for not only excellence, but also equity. These school leaders take seriously the expanded set of goals that are summarized as “Areas for Improvement” in the school’s 2003 WASC report. All teachers are slowly being asked to examine why some student subgroups are failing at higher rates despite successful rates overall – looking, for example, at STAR data to highlight achievement gaps. Professional development is being focused on maintaining academic rigor while providing adequate scaffolding for struggling students. Departments are now being encouraged to collaborate around the alignment of curriculum, standards and assessments.

While pockets of teachers in particular departments have embraced the new equity agenda, new practices geared toward closing the achievement gap are just beginning to emerge. Teachers and administrators at LACES do not yet share a common definition of high quality instruction and some teachers are at times reluctant to take ownership of struggling students. Members of the school’s leadership team freely admit that, despite LACES’ success, the school still has substantial amounts of work to do. The acknowledgement that there is always room for improvement may itself be an important characteristic of a high-performing school.

Staff selection, Leadership and Capacity-Building

LACES’ strategies for capacity building

In recognition of the crucial role that school leaders play, LACES works hard to incubate instructional leaders. Dr. Frank Nishimura sought his EDD in this area during his tenure as LACES principal. He used LACES’ own math department vertical teams as case study in his doctoral studies. The principal’s own background was broad ranging. Prior to

assuming the principal post at LACES, Nishimura was a coach and a teacher of at-risk youth for many years before entering administration. Subsequently he became assistant principal in a Santa Monica school assisting then principal Dr. Sylvia Rousseau, who subsequently became superintendent of LAUSD’s District 7.

Dr. Frank Nishimura speaks clearly about his deep commitment to equity. The twenty years of experience he gained as a high school track and football coach and special educator have proved invaluable, but he credits the investment made toward his professional development as his preparation for his current responsibilities. By his own report, he received “deep coaching” to transfer classroom management experience into skills for managing adults in his years working with Dr. Sylvia Rousseau at Santa Monica High School. He explains that “change is a slow evolutionary process – unless you move the mass... you won’t be able to do it.” He also credits Sylvia Rousseau for teaching him to collaborate with colleagues in order to distribute ownership of the change process.

When asked about the biggest hurdle in moving the school’s work forward, Dr. Nishimura cited another lesson learned from his mentor Sylvia Rousseau: “If you don’t build the right structure, people will wall themselves off.” Building appropriate opportunities for professional development and collaboration around data have been this principal’s focus since taking on this role in 2001.

Professional learning opportunities are seized.

While many teachers at the school reported a willingness to pay for their own professional development, the school has recently made funding external professional development opportunities for teachers a priority. As a way of learning from the successes of others and infusing the school with new knowledge

about best practices, school leadership has allocated resources to ensure that an increasing number of staff members are able to attend conferences such as the superintendent's high school summit in the fall.

Faculty members from each content area attend conferences as a team in order to create common knowledge and increase the potential impact of the learning at the school site. The teams of teachers also meet regularly while at the conferences as an off-site opportunity to conduct their own staff development. One Vice Principal recalled that at the high school conference, even after full days of sessions, teachers worked with each other in the evenings to share and make sense of what they had learned, translating what they had heard into things they could implement at the school site. As an extension of this collaborative learning process, teachers returning from each conference regularly conduct school-based professional development for their colleagues.

Emergent focus to under gird the common learning with data and standards.

While the school has an "open door" policy and observation from both supervisors and peers has been incorporated into school practice, a deeper culture and commitment to talking about instruction through the lens of results-oriented data is emerging only slowly.

One teacher explained that "we all share our teaching practices in faculty and department meetings, and each have our own slant." This teacher described the LACES version of collaboration as not unlike that of a small liberal arts college in which colleagues are much more comfortable talking about subject matter – geometry, biology, US history – than they are talking about student learning. While this content-specific sharing can be quite valuable, it may be insufficient to guarantee a focus on improving the achievement levels of

the school's most struggling students. As a result, the new focus on equity is leading to an emerging change in emphasis. The school's teacher learning communities are beginning to focus on the alignment of assessments to standards and on data-based instructional changes.

While teachers at LACES, like teachers everywhere, find there is not enough time for collaboration, new leadership is encouraging the faculty to use the existing collaboration time to look at the data and the achievement gap. According to one site leader, "We wanted folks to look and not just look but have conversation. You have to take it to the next level: how it breaks down, how to take it back to the classroom." Those initial steps were taken this year. "We did it all and had conversations in groups and had people report out," but, as the leader concluded, the work has only begun: "The perception has to translate into action in the classroom."

As Principal Nishimura learned from Dr. Rousseau, part of the struggle has to do with "moving the mass." Nishimura recognizes that "it's hard to admit you might have been teaching 'wrong'... it takes a big person to be willing to change your teaching practices." But he also recognizes that structures can be put in place to support these difficult changes. "You can't change if you don't reflect; you can't reflect if you don't have time. The state is assuming the more instructional time the better for students - that's not necessarily true. The key is teachers. Teachers need more time to think."

Change is progressing at different rates in each department. The English department participates in monthly planning meetings in order to collaborate on planning classes and to hand score its periodic assessments as a team. This is time intensive, but helps to build a common picture of what excellent work by students looks like. The math department has moved farthest along in using the data from

their periodic assessments to modify instruction. As part of their commitment to vertical teaming, the department looks together at sequencing the standards and making them the focus of their instruction. Though these strategies are different, teachers generally agreed that they have improved the articulation of skills in both Math and English from the most basic sixth grade course to high school AP offerings. Thus, these two departments are making the move from reflecting on the data to using this reflection jointly to improve instruction. Vertical collaboration is at the heart of this process. The math department chair commented, “We are focused on vertical teaming.” Drawing from the professional development offered by the College Board in 2000, the math department learned about the “Pre-AP.” Pre-AP is a suite of professional development resources and services offered by the College Board to equip middle and high school teachers with the strategies and tools to prepare all students for active high level learning. It asks that math teachers as departments engage in common intensive professional development, planning vertically what the structure and pace should be of mathematics classes from sixth to twelfth grade. The aim of this structure is to get more traditionally underrepresented groups into AP calculus and statistics classes.

Through vertical teaming the math department looks at how the teachers offer content and maximize on structure using the College Board “Vertical Team Tool Kit.” This analysis has two goals. The first is to look at what concepts are being used in lower-level courses that could obstruct students in grasping more sophisticated concepts later on. “Too often in lower grades teachers use explanations that may work then but make it harder for kids to go to that next step in the upper grades. We aim to already anticipate what they need to learn to get into AP calculus when we think of explanations we offer in sixth and seventh grade.” The second goal of this line of thinking is to confront other

traditional structures that keep students out of AP courses.

The impact of the vertical team structure and common professional development has been measurable. From 1999 – 2000 to 2004-2005 the number of AP courses offered in the mathematics department has spiked from one to five. The professional development is integrated into teaching. “For us, being a span school, there is nothing lost in translation,” says the mathematics department chair. For example, when it comes to conveying the concept of inverse operation, teachers who teach sixth grade and the upper grades have agreed to lay the foundation in sixth grade to teach multiplication and division as “inverse operations.” The introduction of this concept allows upper grade teachers to go back to how students first learned about multiplication and division when they teach that “square” and “square root” are inverse operations in calculus.

The aim to intensify access for all is an ongoing effort. The math department chair concludes, “A next step will be to reach out to the three of four key feeder elementary schools to talk about what level of work LACES math teachers are doing so the elementary teachers could better scaffold.”

When asked what the driving force is behind vertical teaming in instruction and professional development the answer is crisp: “We think of all our math classes as pre-AP classes in calculus and statistics.” Though the math department is a leader in the time they allocate to collaboration for data review and planning, focus in this area is mounting across the departments under the current leadership.

The site leader agreed that the teachers need the time to reflect collectively on the disaggregated data and need to also reflect on how well the

instruction they tested has worked. This adjustment, providing teachers the structured time to collaborate around student work by department and across departments is one chief factor to which site leaders attribute the schools' recent success on the CST and CAHSEE scores.

However, through use of the common state- and district-adopted Holt Literacy Series, and given the time for collaboration, there is not a lot of accountability from the department chair or elsewhere. Teachers are beginning to build the common standards aligned work: "We sit together; most departments work by grade. The department chair will say that we now have time to work in our department. We don't do a lot of planning... But," he adds that some common work is coming up around "making extra credit projects based on Holt in grades six, seven and eight."

Thus, this school, with a strong record of high performance, is moving relatively slowly in response to a WASC report to address the achievement gap, and is doing so through the three related strategies of investing in teacher professional development, looking at assessment data, and developing a common standards-aligned curriculum.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

Finding: Teachers are distributed in such a way that all levels of students have access to the most experienced teachers, and all teachers have experience teaching struggling students.

At LACES every teacher teaches at least one entry level and one advanced course in an effort to enhance coherence within the continuum of skills.

The math department, for example, has instituted a vertical teaming structure. In order to increase the number and quality of

interactions between teachers and struggling students, each math department teacher volunteers one day a week, on a rotating basis, to work with students of all levels after school.

Finding: The school's master schedule is driven by the aim of ensuring that all students, regardless of their learning need, have equal access to a rigorous and engaging curriculum.

LACES' name, "Center for *Enriched* Studies" is taken seriously, evidenced by distinctions such as being the school within the district to offer the most Advanced Placement classes (26 Advanced Placement courses were offered in 2004 and over 600 tests were administered). In addition, LACES has achieved awards on a range of accomplishments not captured in direct achievement tests.

When asked: "To what do you attribute the school's success?" teachers cite a consistent set of factors. These include, 1) the structure – the school serves Grade 6 through Grade 12 and uses a block schedule, and 2) the rich and rigorous course offerings.

One of the most critical components of the school's support system is the "seven period block" structure. More than half of the teachers interviewed referred to the block periods as a key factor in the school's success. Under this structure, teachers see a group of students for three periods a week, two of which are ninety minutes in length. Teachers agree that this structure allows for better instruction. Longer class periods allow teachers the time to use a variety of instructional approaches, and thereby reach students with a range of learning needs. According to the math chair, "I can teach and then let students work on projects in teams, develop their own rubrics and complete their own projects." As the science chair reports, "the structure also allows for increased depth." In fact, the science department eliminated a section of AP Biology this year in

order to offer ninth grade biology in the double block structure. “The double block is an intervention strategy,” the biology chair reflects. The longer periods are also considered by some to be an advantage for college prep: “if the longest you’ve sat in a classroom is 50 minutes, you’re unprepared for college work. Our kids have learned to focus longer; they’ve had lessons that last the whole period.”

With a focus on college, graduation requirements at the school are aligned such that any school graduate can count on being eligible for UC/CSU admission. In addition to an exhaustive selection of AP courses, every student has to take one extra class with options ranging from Japanese, Jazz Ensemble Folk Arts, Play Production, and Catering to Architectural Design. An impressive twenty percent of the classrooms are dedicated to music, art and drama.

School is working to provide support for students who are struggling in or repeating Algebra I.

As the goals of the school shift slowly to better address the needs of its most struggling students, steps are being taken to put more extensive support systems in place. In a development that is typical of a surprising number of the high performing high schools profiled in this study, LACES is beginning to build pacing guides that specify which standards are to be covered in each class and in what order. Though these high school pacing guides are of necessity less specific and detailed than the elementary school pacing guides they are modeled after – elementary pacing guides are typically linked to an adopted curriculum – they still represent a major culture change for high schools.

In LAUSD, the district has begun to put together a pacing plan that both identifies the standards to be taught and includes quarterly assessments that are to be submitted to the district.

In addition to pacing guides, making classes “culturally relevant” for all students is seen by many teachers as key in improving results. For a school like LACES, with a culture and tradition of high standards, this focus may actually be less challenging than the parallel one of differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners. To engage all teachers in making academics culturally relevant, the math department has also made the commitment to rotate teachers among the various course offerings. One teacher explains that: “Everybody teaches a cross section of classes; there are some things you have to fight for; but we’ve agreed that this is critical because it allows for frank discussion in the math department.”

However, these adjustments are in beginning stages. Despite these kinds of adjustments, there is currently no structure to get students out of Algebra 1 even if the first trimester test shows they are not ready or are not succeeding. In this area, the culture of “high standards for all” and the commitment to closing the gap have not yet been reconciled. The school made a conscious choice to focus on providing “enrichment” classes rather than intervention classes. This means that though there is a “Calculus Camp” for students who need help at this level, students who need help in Algebra must take those courses in the summer in their neighborhood school program rather than at LACES.

Story of Mathematics

Vignette of math department chair:
One of the school's three National Board Certified teachers, the math department chair, has actually taken up math teaching as his third career. His first was as a conductor and trombone player. His second was in sales. He reports "that was my real teacher training. I learned to sell my product. As teacher, I'm selling and I have to convince my students to buy... And it's not student engagement but teacher engagement with students that is key. You can't skip making the connection with the student. You can't have an attitude of 'they can listen if they want to'.... You have to make the sale."

Monitoring: Gathering, Analysis and Use of Data

LACES tested procedures for monitoring

Finding: Assessments are aligned to the curriculum, to standards and to expectations for students.

Just as students own their own learning goals, students are also trained alongside site leaders and teachers to understand and track their own achievement data. Students at LACES are encouraged to engage in frequent formal and informal self-assessments and to track their progress against their goals and against course objectives. In order to facilitate this sense of personal accountability, expectations are explicitly articulated in each course syllabus and distributed to both students and parents/guardians at the beginning of the year.

Many teachers encourage students to develop criteria and rubrics to be used for evaluating essays, presentations and projects. In the English department, students are given the opportunity to have their work edited by their

peers, and to revise and improve it until they reach the highest score on the rubric. This is a standard which is considered to be within reach for all students. In the science department, when students receive a major research project assignment, they are similarly given the opportunity to write rough drafts of their research, revise and edit before submitting a final copy for a rubric-guided score. This formative use of assessments offers students multiple opportunities to achieve a score of "advanced" and is standard operating procedure at LACES.

Strengthening systems for monitoring for equity

Expanding the LACES vision: Standards aligned report cards

Traditionally, LAUSD report cards give students letter grades of A-F in each subject and excellent, satisfactory or unsatisfactory in work habits and cooperation.

In October 2004, LAUSD issued a bulletin on grading practices and procedures in secondary schools in the district. The bulletin made significant changes to the implementation of the district's standards-based curriculum. The district mandated that grading practices are to reflect individual student performance and progress towards mastery of the standards and that they may not reflect a comparison of that student's performance with the performance of other students. The bulletin also stated that standards-based instruction ought to lead to a grading system that reflects the notion that all students can learn and, more specifically, master the content standards.

To the extent that the district expects student progress to be measured against state standards, assessments being used at the school and classroom levels need to be aligned to these standards. The formative monitoring system at LACES is under construction. Beyond the district initiated benchmark tests, departments overall have

not formally aligned their testing. Some work is underway, however. Both the English and Science departments report a considerable degree of collaboration and joint planning. The science department even shares its test results with all Science faculty to learn which teacher has had better success teaching which standard so colleagues can learn from them.

Also, the school's new focus on data is not limited to the analysis of test scores. School leadership has begun to look at data on student discipline, disaggregating data on disciplinary actions. The result? As one school leader admits, "the pattern is true to norm," with African American and Latino students over-represented among discipline issues. "We haven't looked at addressing it [yet]."

These findings have guided the leadership and staff's conversation on design of instructional programs specifically designed to better support the students not being served at this point.

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment

Finding: LACES tested processes for recognition, intervention and adjustment.

Based on review of the disaggregated achievement data, the principal led the initiative to allocate site resources and create an eighth to ninth grade transition program to better support those eighth graders who might otherwise be struggling to have a better chance for success.

The school has an intensive college counseling system built around a dual structure: one college counselor and one high school counselor. To lower the counselor-student ratio, they designated a part of teacher's time to serve as part-time counselors, bringing the ratio to 1/500, in contrast to the state wide average which lies at

just over 1/950. LACES introduces college night and other events in the sixth grade and conducts annual meetings to plan for college readiness from this young age.

The college counselor works with the families and students at all levels as they plan. Her focus is to show that college is affordable and the expected track. To achieve this, LACES offers a wide range of advanced placement courses and the focus on similarly wide ranges of differentiated intervention courses is now emergent.

A very real debate is in play on whether differentiating and scaffolding would mean "watering down," particularly given limited resources and time. School leadership acknowledges this to be an important debate to have if the school is to move to a greater focus on closing the gap without this being schismatic to the school.

Conclusion

LACES is not a high-end private school, but an inner-city school with no admissions criteria in GPA. Yet, it shows many of the features of widely acclaimed private schools. Critical are the foci on college readiness from the beginning of sixth grader's enrollment, the span school structure, and the rich array of curricular choices offered to students. The teachers' history of close collaboration is now being sharpened to produce collaboration around data and standards. Viewed from this lens, the site offers a rich array of best practices from which peer-alike sites can draw.