

CALIFORNIA “BEST PRACTICES” STUDY

SUMMER 2004

CASE STUDY:

SIGNAL HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

*Long Beach Unified School District
Long Beach, CA*

*Presented by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative in association with
National Center for Education Accountability and Just for the Kids - California*

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CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY - AN INTRODUCTION

The California Best Practices Study is being conducted by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) in collaboration with the National Center for Education Accountability (NCEA) and Just for the Kids-California (JFTK-CA). The study offers a data-informed portrait of a group of high-performing schools and districts that serve a high proportion of students who qualify for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL)¹. The portraits are derived from in-depth research analysis of evidence gathered from both high-performing and average-performing schools and districts in California.

The study seeks to identify strategies that are common in high performing schools that serve a high proportion of students who qualify for FRPL. These strategies may be useful in similar schools and districts across the state and the nation. District, school, and classroom level strategies that we found to characterize high-performers are summarized as findings at the beginning of each case study. This summary aims to guide the reader to the particular practices that are distinctive. Of course, schools are complex systems, and particular practices and strategies often depend on others, so readers are encouraged to read these case studies as portraits of high-performing systems rather than as a list of disconnected “best practices.”

The two complementary questions guiding this study are:

- What are the strategies found at high-performing schools and districts that appear to foster high performance?
- What is the context for these strategies?

¹ Eligibility for the federally-funded free and reduced price lunch program is used by the education system as a proxy measure for poverty.

Following the NCEA framework, this study will examine the following key strands in an effort to understand how they may contribute to these schools’ success:

- 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
- Factors Influencing Educational Practices

The study is projected to span three years and will profile ten high performers and five average performers annually, targeting elementary schools in 2003-04 and covering middle and high schools between 2004-05 and 2005-06. A California Best Practices Framework which summarizes cross-cutting themes will be posted on the BASRC website: www.basrc.org.

The California study focuses on several issues in addition to those identified in the NCEA Framework. These are:

- Support to English Language Learners
- Support to African American Students
- Instructional coherence
- Sustainability of the educational reform efforts underway

Findings on these additional issues will be reported over the span of the three-year study.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The research methodology for site selection outlined here was designed by NCEA/JFTK-CA. The following process and criteria were used to select high-performing elementary schools for this study. To begin, a profile code was assigned to each district based on

demographic information. This code took into account three demographic variables:

1. Free and Reduced School Lunch Program (FRSL) enrollment percentages
2. Limited English Proficient (LEP) enrollment percentages
3. Ethnic Minority Group enrollment percentages

District performance was then analyzed using the most recent year of data available (spring 2003 test results). Grade level and subject area performance statistics in language arts and mathematics were used to determine district-wide scores in each of 6 “areas” (elementary math, elementary reading, middle school math, middle school reading, high school math, high school reading). These scores represent the total percent of California Standards Tests taken in either language arts or mathematics in that area that were scored either “Proficient” or “Advanced.”

Single regression analysis of this overall score at each area against the FRSL percentage was then run for all 6 levels. The residuals from these regressions (the amount above or below expected performance at that level) were then used to determine the statewide 75th percentile score in each area. A district with a score above the 75th percentile score was determined as “high performing” in that area. A district that was high performing in at least 3 areas (out of the 6 maximum areas) was termed “high performing for the purposes of this study..

Eight of the ten high performing schools visited were chosen from this pool of districts. The remaining 2 schools were selected from districts that fell short of being identified as high performing districts. All ten schools identified were deemed high performing based upon the following criteria:

- The school had to have met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- The school’s weighted averages -- for both Language Arts and Mathematics across all grades -- had to be among the best compared to demographically similar schools with respect to the overall percent of students meeting the benchmark (percent reaching proficient or above) in each subject.
- The schools selected had to indicate consistent high performance over two years of data, and could not show significant declines in any separate grade, year or subject of the analysis.
- In addition, each individual grade, subject and year group had to have at least 11 or more tested students. Primary Center and K-1 and K-2 schools were eliminated from the dataset.

When selecting average performers, the main criterion used was that they had an overall rank (weighted average of all grades) in each subject of 45th to 55th percentile when compared to all demographically similar schools. In addition, each individual grade, subject and year group had to have at least 11 or more tested students. As with the high-performing list, all Primary Centers or K-1 and K-2 schools were eliminated from the dataset.

For a full description of the research methodology used for site selection please refer to:
www.jftk-ca.org/bp-methodology or
www.basrc.org

One of our ten high-performing case study sites was Signal Hill Elementary School, which is part of the Long Beach Unified School District located in Long Beach California, located in Los Angeles County.

DATA ABOUT SIGNAL HILL

Student profile
 Student Enrollment: 912²
 Free/Reduced-price School Lunch Percentage: 88%
 English Language Learner Percentage: 51%
 District Characterization: Urban Fringes of Large City

Signal Hill is a high-performing, high-poverty Schoolwide Title I School³ where close to 88 percent of the students qualify for free/reduced-price lunch.

Academically, Signal Hill reflects an impressive growth in all major state benchmarks and assessment. The school's AYP, for instance, has increased markedly between 2002 and 2003.

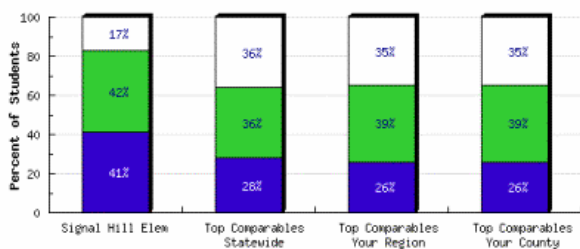
- Language Arts AYP increased from 28.6 percent to 36.2 percent proficient
- Mathematics AYP increased from 41.9 percent to 54.3 percent proficient

The following bar graphs depict the school's AYP compared to like schools.

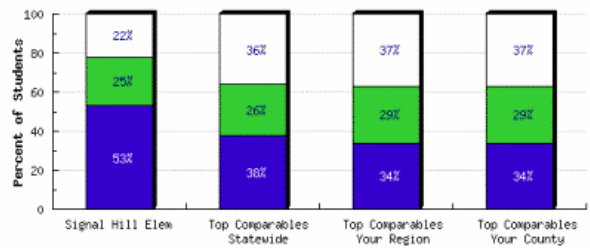
Source: www.jftk-ca.org



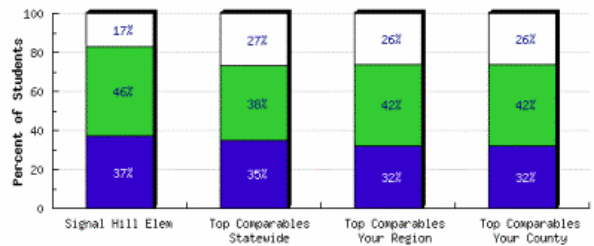
Grade 5 Language Arts 2003 Results



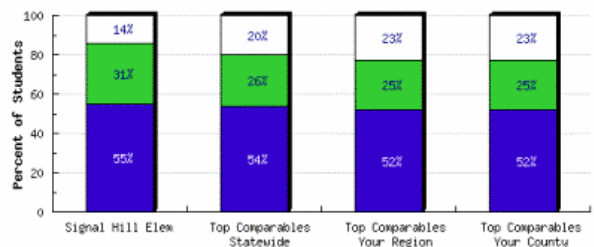
Grade 5 Mathematics 2003 Results



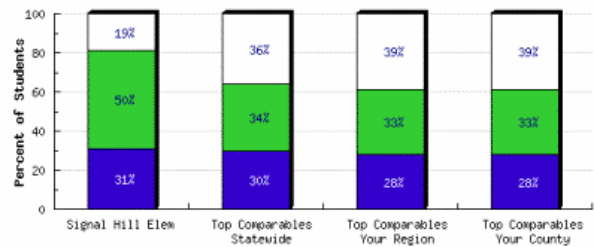
Grade 4 Language Arts 2003 Results



Grade 4 Mathematics 2003 Results



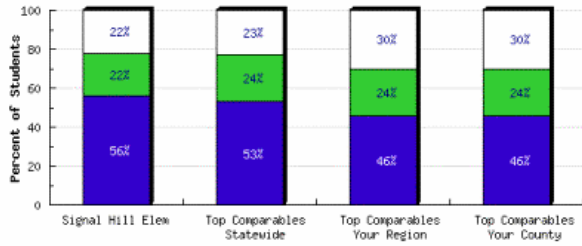
Grade 3 Language Arts 2003 Results



² Unless otherwise referenced, all quantitative data in this study is drawn from the California Department of Education website: www.ed-data.k12.ca.us

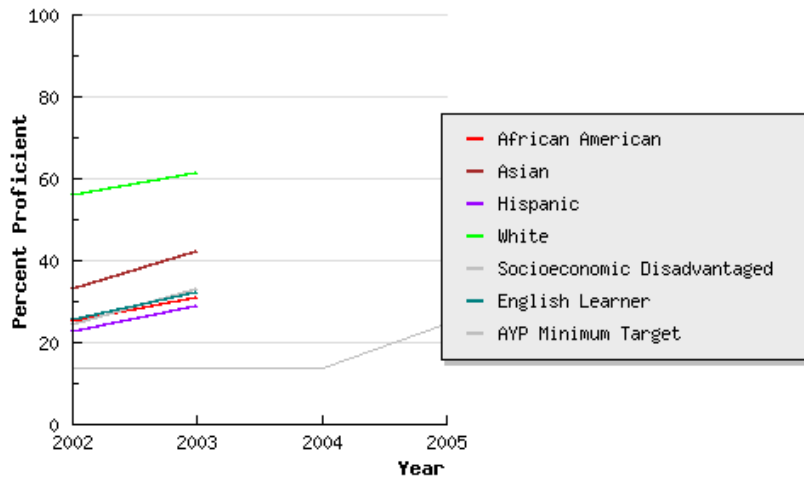
³ See <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/rt/> for more information on Schoolwide Title I Schools.

Grade 3 Mathematics 2003 Results

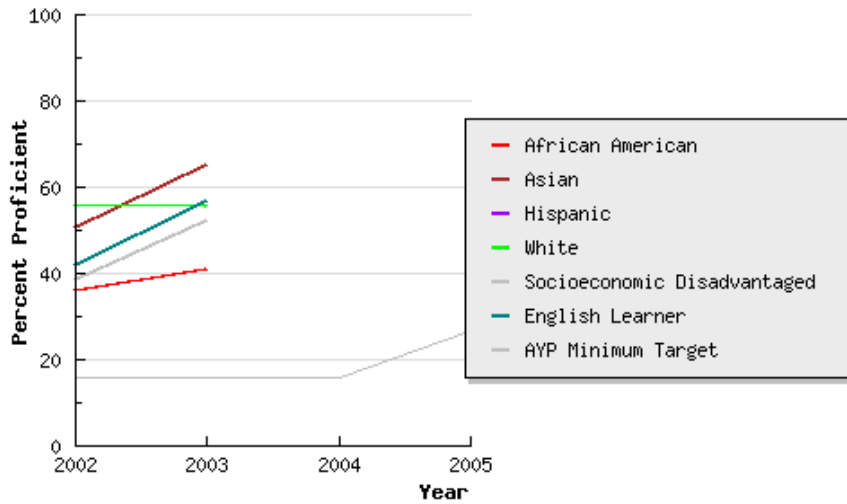


These graphs track the rate of Signal Hill student improvement in Language Arts and Math disaggregated by subgroups

Language Arts 2002-2003 California Standard Test (CST) Performance Summary by Subgroup
www.jftk-ca.org

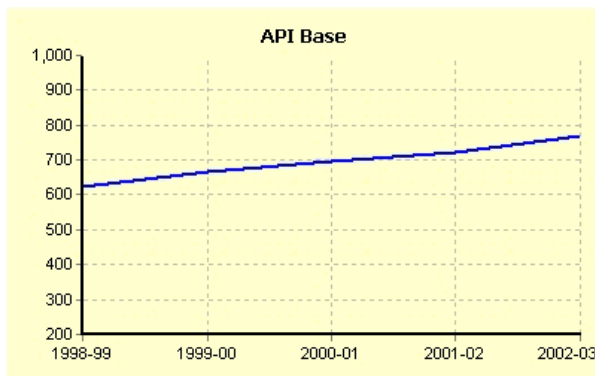


Math 2002-2003 California Standard Test (CST) Performance Summary by Subgroup
www.jftk-ca.org



Signal Hill’s growth in Academic Performance Index (API) has been equally impressive. It has increased from 699 in 2001 to 728 in 2002. In 2003, the API was 765, exceeding the school’s own growth target in all of its sub-groups.

Signal Hill API Data 1998-2003



California Department of Education, Education Data Partnership,
<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/>

DISTRICT CHARACTERISTICS

Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) is a large and rapidly growing district serving approximately 97,200

students across 95 schools. According to the 2000 Census, Long Beach was ranked the most diverse city in the country. This diversity is reflected in the demographic profile of its schools.

District Student Profile	
African American:	19%
Asian:	16 %
Filipino:	3 %
Latino:	48 %
Pacific Islander:	2 %
White:	17 %

Almost 70 percent of all students in the district are eligible for free/reduced-price lunch; over 36 percent are English Language Learners (ELLs); and 1.5 percent are summer migrant students. In light of its academic accomplishments, LBUSD received the prestigious 2003 Broad Prize for Urban Education.

The district’s Research Department is a distinctive feature of this district and deserves a mention here. The department coordinates the district and state testing

programs, conducts research and evaluation studies, and processes requests to do research in the district. What makes the department distinctive are the qualifications of its staff and how it goes about its work. The department staff, comprised primarily of highly-trained software engineers with education experience, engage in empirical and objective research in collaboration with the district teachers and principals. They not only provide high-class training on data monitoring; they will also disseminate the latest research on creative teaching pedagogies. The department also makes recommendations on policy implications based on their own analysis of data. “We don’t just disseminate data, blindly,” notes the Assistant Superintendent. “We ask them (teachers and principals) what they are going to do with it and how.”

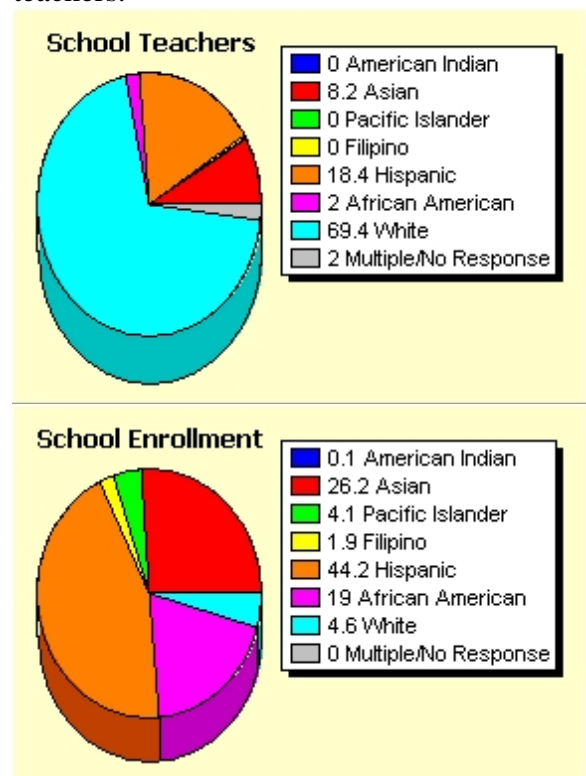
By school site leadership and teacher reports, the schools within the district feel fortunate to be working with this department.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

With 912 students, Signal Hill is one of the largest of the sixty elementary schools in the district. A great majority of its students come from a low socio-economic background. Eighty-eight percent of students qualify for free/reduced-price lunch compared to the state average of 49 percent.

Fifty one percent of the students are identified as English Language. Thirty nine percent of Signal Hill parents did not graduate from high school in contrast to the 23 percent state average. The school’s student body, consistent with the district’s demographics, is diverse, with Hispanic/Latino students making up almost half of the student body.

Teacher demographics at Signal Hill, with 70 percent white faculty, do not mirror those of the students. However, they offer a closer match than do most faculty in the state where the average is 74 percent white teachers.

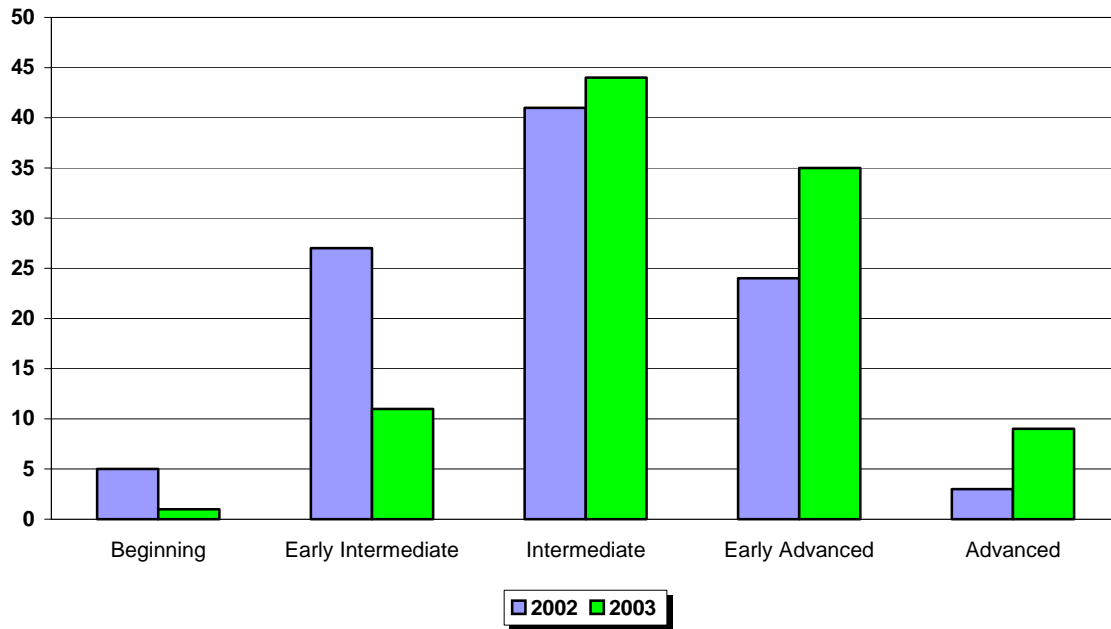


California Department of Education, Ed Data, www.ed-data.k12.ca.us

As can be seen by the 2002-2003 California English Language Development test results, ELL students at Signal Hill have made significant improvement. (See graph below)

2002-2003 CELDT Test Results for Signal Hill

California English Language Development Test Results



California, Department of Education, DataQuest <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/Celdt>

A SNAPSHOT OF SIGNAL HILL

Signal Hill's successes started thirteen years ago when the district's current superintendent, Chris Steinhauser, was made principal of Signal Hill. At that time the school was in program improvement. Through aligned improvement strategies between the two succeeding principals, the culture of the school has significantly changed and the school has made steady and impressive gains.

Signal Hill was also recognized as a STAR Achievement School in 1999 and 2000 by LBUSD for its dramatic increase in standardized test scores for all subgroups. In 2001, Signal Hill won the National Title I Achieving Award. That year, it was one of only five California schools to receive this prestigious award. The school was identified for the Title I Achieving Schools award after tripling its API target three years in a row.

In 2003, Signal Hill was recipient of the California Distinguished School award. Also in 2003, the school was sole recipient in the district of the federal Math and Science Magnet Grant, designating Signal Hill as a Magnet School. The grant of nearly 1 million dollars provided resources to launch a science and technology program – Foremost in Research, Science, and Technology (FIRST).

The school proved itself to be an effective user of the FIRST funds. They were able to secure and put into use:

- New computer software and electronic learning equipment
- Science in every class

- Teacher and parent training
- More computer technology in every grade
- A credentialed computer teacher and science teacher
- Scientific field trips
- Hands-on science activities

What is a Magnet School?

A Magnet School is one that is chosen by its district and the state or Federal government to receive extra funding, equipment, teachers and training to "specialize" in a chosen theme. Magnet Schools were developed so that children who show aptitude or an interest in certain areas such as math, science or the arts have a place to develop those interests long before college. Each day, students receive instruction in the magnet program's theme in addition to language arts, math and all the other classes that they would receive in a non-magnet school.

Magnet Programs bring children, parents and staff from a rich diversity of backgrounds and place them together in instructional settings. As a magnet attracts steel, magnet programs attract students who want a choice in education.

SALIENT FINDINGS

Signal Hill exhibits a combination of practices, strategies and attitudes that this study found to be distinctively characteristic of high-performing schools when compared to their average performing peer sites. In the suite of practices that this study found to be particularly well developed at Signal Hill and/or within Long Beach Elementary School District are the following:

District:

1. The district, with input from schools, sets explicit, measurable teaching and learning goals based on improvement in student performance and aligned to the standards;

2. District leaders and staff are part of a learning community that provides multiple ways for teachers and administrators to develop the skills to ensure that all students receive high quality instruction.
3. The district provides a user-friendly district-wide set of assessments that includes formative, diagnostic, and progress-monitoring assessments, that together reflect the standards and the adopted curriculum.
4. The district and school invest a large proportion of their resources in professional development.
5. The district pursues semi formal or formal school/district/university partnerships.

School:

1. Data analysis guides everyday practices at the district, school and classroom levels.
2. School leaders participate in a learning community that encourages ways to grow professionally; it is peer alike but also offers structured times for school leaders to learn from and teach teachers and district staff.
3. School leaders lead school staff to set explicit, measurable goals that are based on data and aligned to district goals.
4. The school invests a large proportion of their resources in professional development.
5. School staffs use and supplement the district assessments to provide teachers with useful information on student progress.
6. School leaders and teachers identify and engage with parents as an essential part of their own and their students’ learning community.

Classroom:

1. Teachers continuously differentiate and adapt instruction based on data analysis to ensure all students reach grade level standards.
2. Teachers meet regularly with colleagues to learn how to improve teaching and learning using research-based resources provided by the district as well as additional resources that they sought out to improve student achievement.
6. Teachers participate in data-based learning community that supports them to grow professionally.

CURRICULUM AND ACADEMIC GOALS

If you talk to the principal or a teacher at Signal Hill about the school’s curriculum and academic goals, the word “standards” is guaranteed to appear more often than any other. This focus on standards is a long-standing tradition at this school, and school leaders point to it to explain its academic excellence. “We (the school and the LBUSD) had standards even before the state had them,” the principal notes. Signal Hill formulates its school-wide goals to reflect their focus on standards. In order to maintain this policy, the school works closely with the district. As in many other areas of the reform work for Signal Hill student achievement, the collaboration between the school and the district is evident in the goal-setting process. The district sets both academic goals and general goals. Signal Hill adds its own specific goals. This process begins at the annual summer principal – district meeting, during which the principal receives district-wide goals.

The principal subsequently reviews her school data with her faculty, matches it to the district recommendations and expectations, and devises the school's own goals, which are challenging but realistic.

A critical element of this process is the involvement of staff in giving feedback, which is always heard and incorporated. While setting academic goals for the year 2003, for instance, the principal recommended a CST Language Arts improvement of 10 percent. The teachers, however, suggested a 5 percent improvement, justifying their lower target by stating that they would rather set a lower bar, which would be easier to exceed, than setting a higher one and not meeting it at all. The teachers affirmed that not being able to meet that goal could be potentially demoralizing. The goal for that year was hence set at 5 percent.

The state and district provide the standards and the core curriculum. "At the school we make the curriculum accessible to all children. That's our job," notes the principal.

Following is the list of most notable goals set for the school year 2003-2004 at Signal Hill:

- The school will decrease by half the percentage of below and far below basic scores in ELA (1.95 percent) and Math (1 percent) on CST
- The school will increase the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores in ELA and Math by 5 percent
- 90 percent of the students will attain proficiency or advanced proficiency in grade level appropriate "Math

Facts", the district-designed math proficiency assessment.

- 70 percent of the students will read at grade level or above according to district benchmarks
- All students will make a year's growth in Reading, Writing and Math
- The school's actual attendance will increase to 96.5 percent for the school year

To reach these goals, a program called Essential Elements of Effective Instruction (EEEI) is utilized by the teachers. EEEI is mandated by the district and provides a common vocabulary and framework for addressing issues such as: principles of learning, task analysis, set objectives and provide feedback, monitor the progress of learning and adjust the teaching, lesson design, active participation, and classroom management.

Once the goals are formulated and agreed upon, all concerned parties, including the teachers, the principal, and assistant/deputy superintendent, sign a form which describes in detail what support teachers need to meet these goals and who at the school or district level will provide it.

STAFF SELECTION, LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Through its partnership with California State University at Long Beach and through internal professional development, the district invests in building a strong pipeline for high quality principals conversant in the district's core strategies. In district experiences such as those of serving as "school facilitator" for example (a

position where you have to build skills in areas of school-level budget management), are recognized stepping stones to becoming a strong principal candidate. The entire hiring process of principal hiring takes place at the district, and the school staff does not play any part in recommending or rejecting a candidate.

The district also invests strategically in retaining effective principals. The principal corroborates the district's success in this context. She points to the frequent and high quality professional development made available to her and her staff. Further, she notes: "I have a great relationships with the district leaders and, most importantly, I feel extremely comfortable calling anyone at the district." she says.

The district has evolving partnerships with local universities, which are its main source of teachers. Signal Hill's close proximity to California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) and California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) has made it among the top choices for graduates of these colleges. According to the district assistant superintendent, "The partnerships with CSULB and CSUDH are critically important to secure the steady flow of high quality and well-prepared new teachers. "

In order to recruit effective teachers, the principal uses a trademarked tool, the Haberman screening test, which objectively measures candidates' ability to teach at-risk students (see tool)

Like other high-performing districts, LBUSD invests heavily in professional development for its instructional leaders

and teachers. The culture of continuous on-the-job training is omnipresent at Signal Hill. A teacher would never go through the entire year without receiving any training programs.

For the principal, the most prominent of these professional development programs is the district-designed on-going principal meetings called the "Key Results Group." During these meetings, the principals from like elementary schools meet as cohort groups and share ideas. One way elementary cohorts are organized is by whether a school is year-round and traditional.

This type of collaboration helps "tremendously," according to the Signal Hill principal. "As a group, we collaborate to form a design and construct strategies to effectively address the needs of our students," she says. During 2003, the principal attended a highly- regarded forum with Dennis Fox from the Office of Data Analysis, followed by a monthly clinical supervision series, during which she gained valuable training on data – its usage and implications.

Over the last three years, LBUSD has made strategic changes in terms of selecting and recommending professional development opportunities for its instructional leaders. The primary reason behind this adjustment was lack of focus in many of the programs that were being offered. According to the principal, professional development offerings have become more "principal-oriented" and the results have been decidedly positive.

Quality, not quantity, is the focus of professional development opportunities

provided to the Signal Hill teachers. “The ideal quality of professional development for our teachers is “enlightening,” but not overwhelming or overloaded,” explains the principal.

Signal Hill new teachers, as all new teachers at LBUSD, receive three years of mentoring, training and support (one year more than is required under the State-mandated BTSA program). Through this program, new teachers meet weekly with their coaches, receive release time for classroom observation, and are observed twice a year by their coach to develop an Individual Instructional Plan.

That training focuses on the District’s core pedagogical structure, EEEI and Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), which both emphasize effective math and literacy strategies.

The district acknowledges the training on new instructional materials to be extremely important. Accordingly, in 2003-2004, all teachers received intensive training on the implementation of *Open Court*.

The district offered a series of four two hour site workshops on the program that culminated with a two- day summer workshop. Ninety percent of the Signal Hill teachers have participated in this optional program. This year the district is conducting a three day follow up workshop which is optional.

In 2003, the district adopted Houghton Mifflin Mathematics for grades K-5. Since the series encompassed more complex algebra and geometry standards to the intermediate grades, all 4th and 5th

grade teachers attended a two-day LBUSD Math Institute. During the Institute, teachers learned to incorporate hands-on activities in EEEI lesson design for the Houghton Mifflin Math curriculum.

Most Signal Hill teachers also participate in the district-sponsored training that includes peer coaching, training at teacher council meetings and curriculum committee meetings, mentoring through Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), and technology training.

The wealth of training is important in terms of skill building but also in terms of the high levels of professional self-confidence and sense of being highly valued as professionals. “I always feel we’re on the cutting edge of the latest method,” says one teacher. “I always feel challenged...[It feels like] we’ve got more staff development than any place,” notes another. The fact that the professional development services are sustained over time is key by teacher report. One teacher states, “I learn so much from district in-services...And the learning is usually over a period of time. I learn, try it in my classroom, and go back for more...”

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS, PRACTICES AND ARRANGEMENTS

Instructional programs are selected at the district upon the recommendation of a committee consisting of district members, teachers and principals.

In 2003, for differentiated instruction that could supplement the newly adopted Houghton Mifflin math curriculum, many teachers also utilized the district-developed materials. “Having a solid

supplementary text is critical,” commented a math teacher at Signal Hill. The teacher has numbers to support her view. The school has consistently outperformed like schools in math state assessment tests as measured in CST data.

Open Court is the required text for reading and literacy. The buy-in for this program, especially among the teachers, is extremely high at Signal Hill. The added focus on literacy, given that there is a large segment of ELL students, makes it a perfect choice, as one teacher noted. Literacy, however, is not the only area of concentration within the English curriculum, that teacher is quick to add. Writing gets equal attention at this school. “Write from the Beginning” is the program of choice to supplement the *Open Court* core text in this area.

The process by which the district has adopted instructional materials and pacing guides spans one-and-a-half years (see “Overview Textbook Adoption Process”). It is constructed carefully so that the teachers who will be using the texts are key parts of the process.

A critical first step in instructional materials selection involves assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses of a text under review (see tool, “Evaluation Form”). Thanks to this assessment by teachers, school leaders and district administrators involved in the process, any text that has been adopted is already accompanied by a summary of that text’s strengths and weaknesses. So, when Long Beach chose *Open Court*, it already knew that support for English Language Learners was an area that left room for improvement

In addition, the district prepared to provide professional development and additional tools to monitor implementation (see “Textbook Adoption Support”). One particularly innovative act on the part of the district was to train librarians in how they can support teachers’ implementation of the *Open Court* “Inquiry” section (see “How Librarians Can Support *Open Court* Inquiry”) for grades 4 and 5.

Support on curriculum mapping is provided through the district’s *Open Court* Recommended Pacing Guide, 2002-03. An “Outline of Content and Recommended Time Allotment” chart accompanies the Pacing Guide. This chart indicates which standard is addressed in the *Open Court* text, which aligns to the text and measures progress towards the standards which are the key vocabulary and recommended aids. Everything is organized around recommended time allotments

Finally, key in this process is the initial and then ongoing activity of “Unpacking a Standard” (see tool under same title). For example when unpacking the standard for Grade 8, Reading Standard 2.4, the teacher or teacher and student are asked to think through the required skills, the skills presumed, the objectives for the requisite skills and the simple way to measure whether the student has that skill.

An important element of instructional practices at Signal Hill is a concept called “Thinking Maps.” Thinking Maps are visual teaching tools to organize thought processes.

These thinking maps are so deeply entrenched into the instructional

atmosphere at the school that teachers think of them as a required “practice.”

Thinking Maps facilitate the transfer and development of thinking processes across grade levels and content areas. The following table depicts the eight most common Thinking Maps utilized by teachers at Signal Hill.

8 Thinking Maps

Thinking Map	Thought Process	Key Words
Circle	Defining in Context	List, Define, Tell everything that you know, Identify, Relate Prior Knowledge, Describe
Bubble	Describing	Describe, Use vivid language, Observe Using the 5 senses, Describe feelings
Double Bubble	Comparing and contrasting	Compare/contrast, discuss similarities/differences, distinguish between, differentiate
Tree	Classifying	Classify, Sort, Group, Categorize, Discuss strategies
Brace	Part to Whole Relationship	Parts of, Take apart, Show structure
Flow	Sequence	Sequence, Put in order, Recount/Retell, What happens next, Cycles, Patterns, Describe Processes, Describe change. Solve multi-step problems
Multi-Flow	Cause and Effect	Causes and effects, Discuss consequences, What would happen if, Predict, Describe change, Identify motives, Discuss strategies
Bridge	Seeing Analogies	Identify the relationship. Guess the rule, Interpret symbols

Signal Hill attends to accelerated learners as it does to underperformers. The school has a SHARP program, which offers accelerated learning opportunities to students ready for higher level reading instruction. The SHARP program originated at Signal Hill and was originally funded through desegregation moneys. The objective of the program was to offer all students, also those whose achievement is not yet at the levels to win them access to

GATE classes, access to a rich and challenging curriculum. SHARP was later adopted by Garfield Elementary among other sites. A core piece of the SHARP curriculum is a professional development program for teachers, “Depth and Complexity”. The District offers professional development in curricular program, “Depth and Complexity,” which trains teachers to provide curricular content focused on building comprehension skills. The Signal Hill principal has asked one teacher to be trained in this approach so they could teach others.

In addition to learning content and high level thinking processes, at Signal Hill – as at other Long Beach sites -- focus is placed on learning different kinds of test behavior: using scratch paper, checking your work, using the whole time when you are taking a test. The school conducts mock testing before each window of testing. “Mock testing helps students familiarize themselves with test behavior and test processing...” one teacher explained. “For example, forth grade gains first-time exposure to fill-n answer sheets.” In one sixth grade classroom, examples of scratch paper with notes were posted on the bulletin board. “These are strategies students also need to learn, so they can perform well on tests,” notes one teacher.

MONITORING: COMPILATION, ANALYSIS AND USE OF DATA

The AYP and API are always at the forefront of school performance monitoring from the district level. The superintendent monitors schools and highlights those that have made growth on certain benchmarks. He does so in board meetings, in meetings with

principals where subgroup growth is highlighted and evaluated, and at other occasions. Signal Hill’s principal monitors her own school and regularly compares her students’ progress to those of other sites. “Basically, it’s all about growth,” claims the principal. “If your (school’s) scores are moving up, everybody in the district, including other schools, takes notice. Same thing happens if the scores are going down,” she adds. The school culture exhibits an acute understanding of data monitoring and its importance. Teachers and the principal know the most recent school data off-hand and are always ready to discuss it.

At the beginning of each academic year, the principal meets with each teacher individually to discuss student data and to agree on goals and monitor learning. Prior to this important meeting, teachers are expected to have strategies in place for students who were below and far below basic in state assessments.

In addition to the state assessments, the school monitors performance in the following areas:

- District Reading Benchmark Tests (See tool)
- Math Facts administered in all Signal Hill grades except Kindergarten-
- Math department end-of-the course (EOC) math assessment for K and Grade 1
- End-of-course science assessment for grades four.

These formative assessment tools were developed by the LBUSD. The district established a common definition of what grade-level reading means both in terms of difficulty of the text, decoding of the text and comprehending of the text. The rigor of the benchmark assessments is

aligned with the rigor of the CST and the state standards.

Formal teacher evaluation at the school is tied primarily to instruction proficiency using Essential Elements of Effective Instruction (EEEI). If students aren't able to demonstrate the learning of the objective of the lesson taught, interventions occur for teacher. PAR (Peer Assistance Review) is the first line of action for such teachers.

The district utilizes state-of-the-art software to disseminate data to schools. The district Research Department is in charge of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating the data. This research department impacts the schools it serves in more than one way. “We don’t just provide data to schools,” says the Director of Research at the district. “We also tell them what to do with it,” she adds.

<p style="text-align: center;">RECOGNITION, INTERVENTION AND ADJUSTMENTS</p>

Any question relating to recognition or intervention is met with an enthusiastic and animated reply from the teachers and the principal alike. That’s because Signal Hill has a myriad of strategies and programs in place that address these issues.

Most recognition programs are tied to student achievement and attendance. The most notable among these is the award distribution ceremony during the monthly assembly attended by parents and teachers. Students who exhibit academic excellence are nominated by their teachers and are awarded with certificates and recognition during the ceremony. Whenever a student passes a

benchmark or, in the case of English learners, moves up a CELDT level, the teacher will look for ways to celebrate.

Attendance is a district and school focus. “If you don’t come to school, you can’t learn,” states one teacher. The principal reviews Math Facts and attendance data with teachers on a monthly basis. If problems arise in attendance, Signal Hill will communicate with parents about improving attendance. The “Best Attendance” banner travels from class to class. Deliberately, that award is given to the whole class rather than individual students.

Signal Hill teachers work very hard to maintain high levels of student self-discipline in classes. Faculty has arrangements to take students from other classes when a student is having trouble. The culture teachers try to instill in students is “kind” and “respect,” as one teacher pointed out. If a second grade student is struggling with math, or a Spanish speaking third grader is struggling with English, the teacher can ask for an older and more advanced student from another grade to spend some time offering support and assistance.

Students who perform below or far below average on state-mandated benchmarks are identified as “at-risk”. Interventions for such students are strategic and systematic. There are three levels of interventions for these “at-risk” students – classroom, out-of-class, and long-term interventions.

In-class support comes from teachers, reading specialists, aides, and college interns. These professionals work with students in small groups while the rest of

the class is in session. In-class interventions are used throughout the year if the student benefits from them. However, if the student doesn’t show growth after a 3 to 6 week period of in-class interventions, the teacher will request a Student Study Team (SST) meeting. This team may include the RSP teacher, the nurse, the school psychologist, and other district personnel. This team will always include the classroom teacher, a counselor, a site administrator, and the student’s parents. “We feel that our teachers’ dedication beyond their regular duties and the intervention plans that come from the SST have made a significant difference in our students’ success,” commented the principal at Signal Hill.

Long-term intervention strategies are applied to students who either continues to perform below the required level on state benchmark assessments or persistently exhibit behavior and discipline issues. A contract, signed by the student, teacher and parents, spells out, in concrete terms, the areas needing improvement and strategies to address them. All parties involved revisit and update this contract frequently. The SST team meets with the student to provide intervention services. The school carefully monitors the interventions. (See tool). Team members are provided with a number of tools to help them identify problems and plan interventions. (See tool).

Another layer of intervention comes in the form of on-site school psychologists. These psychologists meet and confer with teachers and periodically evaluate students.

This SST team, in addition, will sometimes suggest that a student participate in the “Winning Readers and Performers” (WRAP) after-school program. This three-and-a-half hour program offers small instruction from trained group and provides homework assistance and extended silent reading. A full-time teacher serves as curriculum liaison for this program, ensuring that WRAP activities are aligned with the standards. The program provides evidence of success. During its first year of implementation, all participating students improved their reading levels an average of two grades.

FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

The district and the school have worked diligently to foster a strong and sustained partnership with the community and local businesses. Among the most noteworthy of these partnerships is Signal Hill’s relationship with the Teachers Association of Long Beach. The relationship, according to the principal, has been “cordial, open and collaborative.” The principal attributes this open relationship to the district superintendent, who, according to her, is very approachable. The superintendent’s approach to such issues is fairly simple – invite as many teachers as possible to the meetings and talk with them face to face, rather than communicating via a third party. Signal Hill has hardly had any outstanding issues with the union.

The involvement of parents in the academic set-up of the school is considered pivotal at Signal Hill. The task, however, is never easy. As the principal explains, “we have to work ever so hard to make that happen,”

referring to enticing the parents to get involved in school activities. The school organizes frequent parent conferences. During these conferences, the teachers discuss issues relating to students, primarily academics and school policies, with the parents. The teachers meet with parents of all students and not just with the ones exhibiting academic or behavior issues. Parent conferences have become increasingly popular over time. According to the principal, they have a “very high parent participation rate.”

Back-to-school night at the beginning of each academic year is another event that involves parent participation. During this event, teachers hand out homework packets, tools, and reference materials to the parents so they can help their children. The school’s Rotary Club provides the funding for these homework kits. There is a strong realization, within the ranks of the school staff that factors such as parent involvement and community building do contribute to Signal Hill’s academic success. However, the most critical element that best explains the school’s success, according to the principal, is “strong teaching strategies.” She adamantly claims, “Taking away our teaching strategies would be the most harmful thing that could happen to Signal Hill.”

CONCLUSION

The academic culture at Signal Hill is best described as collaborative and systematic. The sense of collaboration at this school is omnipresent. The principal and the teachers have an open and interactive relationship that is built around trust, respect, and above all, the common goal of obtaining results. The

teachers are well aware of the importance of state and district benchmark assessments. Teachers at this school never blame social disposition or family background for a student's poor academic performance. Instead, they ponder: "What could we have done to obtain better results? What could we do now?"

For a Schoolwide Title I School to attain such academic growth, as has Signal Hill, collaboration with the district is not just desirable but it is essential. The Signal Hill principal gets tremendous support from the district, mostly in the form of:

- Numerous professional development opportunities for herself and her staff.
- Data based research supporting student achievement plan.
- Disaggregated student data for all major state benchmark assessments.
- Direct support and intervention from the superintendent on issues ranging from budgeting to staffing, to student intervention.

In collaboration, the school and district set challenging academic goals for their students. They make an earnest effort to achieve them and excuses are never given for not meeting the goals. Along the way, their road map to success is fairly streamlined – filled with professional development, multiple layered intervention strategies, innovative teaching techniques, and a solid support system derived from a strong leadership in the principal. Signal Hill follows this pattern down to every micro detail and its success is apparent.