

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

Southwest High School, Central Union High School
District

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CALIFORNIA BEST PRACTICES STUDY

SUMMER 2005

SOUTHWEST HIGH SCHOOL

CENTRAL UNION HIGH 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/JFTK-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.

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

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 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.

Southwest High School: A Case Study

State Characteristics

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

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

District Characteristics

Student Enrollment.....	3,947
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage.....	51%
English Learner Percentage.....	35%
District Characterization.....	Mid size city

The City of El Centro is the largest city in the Imperial Valley at 41,030 and growing. The Imperial Valley is an agricultural center of the United States, producing over thirty crops in its twelve-month growing season and more beef than Texas. In the past ten years the community has been experiencing explosive growth in housing and commercial enterprise. Water use has been contested, as Las Vegas, Los Angeles and San Diego, all experiencing growth, also draw their water from the same source as El Centro, the oversubscribed Colorado River. Schools are quickly overcrowding and the rest of the area's infrastructure is hard-tasked to keep pace with the growth and change.

Central Union High School District (CUHSD), in El Centro, lies 120 miles east of San Diego, 60 miles west of Yuma, Arizona, and 11 miles from Mexicali, Mexico, from which it draws a significant number of its students. Six feeder schools populate the district's three high schools: Central Union High School, Southwest High School, and Desert Oasis, an alternative high school. Eighty-five percent of district students are Latino, almost double the state average of 45 percent. Ten percent are white, 2 percent are African American, and 2 percent are Asian American.

District Student Enrollment 2004

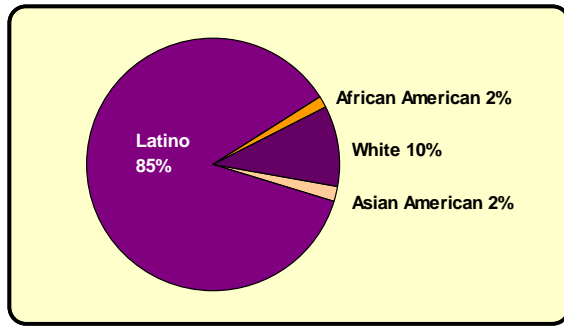


Fig. 1: Central High School District student enrollment percentages by race/ethnicity.

According to the 2000 census, a language other than English is spoken in over 70 percent of El Centro homes. The high school is representative of its community in terms of both ethnic and linguistic diversity. Largely due to a high rate of reclassification to FEP (Fluent English Proficient: 20 percent in 2004), a relatively small percent (35) of students in the district are currently identified as English Language Learners (ELL). In 2005, 24 percent of students are FEP, which is a higher percentage than the statewide average of 17 percent. Spanish-speaking English Language Learners (ELLs) comprise 99 percent of the ELL population.

CUHSD has a significantly higher rate of poverty than the state average. The area's unemployment rate for 2001 was 21 percent, compared with the statewide rate of 6 percent, with many of the employment opportunities being seasonal. Median income in the county is \$13,700, versus the state's average of \$19,500. The student population in the district mirrors that of the city. Fifty-one percent of students are enrolled in the Free- or Reduced-price Lunch Program (FRLP). Significantly more of the school's parents lack a high school diploma (38 percent) than the statewide 18 percent, though similar proportions of parents have graduated from college (34 percent vs. 35 percent in the state). These data are significant when one considers the goal of the district to create a college-going culture among high school students.

School Characteristics

Student Enrollment	2,118
Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage...	48%
English Language Learner Percentage...	33%
Percentage of Parents who did not Complete High School	21%
Percentage of Parents Completed College/Above.	21%
Percentage of Teachers w/ Full Credentials	85.9%
Average Number of Years Teaching	12
Average Class Size	31

Southwest, with an enrollment of 2,118 students in grades nine through twelve, represents an increasing variety of ethnic groups. The students at Southwest High School are 84 percent Latino, 12 percent white, 2 percent African-American, and 2 percent Asian-American.

School Student Enrollment 2004

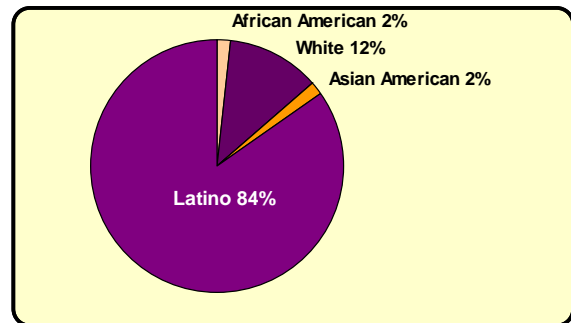


Fig. 2: Southwest High School student enrollment percentages by race/ethnicity.

Thirty-three percent of the students are identified as English Language Learners (ELL). Forty-eight percent of students are eligible for the Free or Reduced-price Lunch Program, one percent lower than the state average of 49 percent. The campus reflects the cultural and socioeconomic makeup of the community. Despite these challenging demographics, the campus has shown a strong record in advancing students to college. College rates for Southwest High school are: 15 percent to a four-year college

or university, 75 percent to a two-year community college. Of the remaining students, 4 percent enlist in the military, 4 percent join the workforce, and 2 percent travel or go into other areas.

Why Southwest High School?

By multiple measures, Southwest and Central Union High School, its neighbor in the district, are islands of excellence in the county in which they reside.

On the California Standards Test, all subgroup performance, with the exception of whites, has improved in English Language Arts, and all subgroup performance including that of whites has shown gains in Mathematics. Particularly noteworthy, in Mathematics the Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students have made gains towards gap closure.

CST Language Arts 2002-04

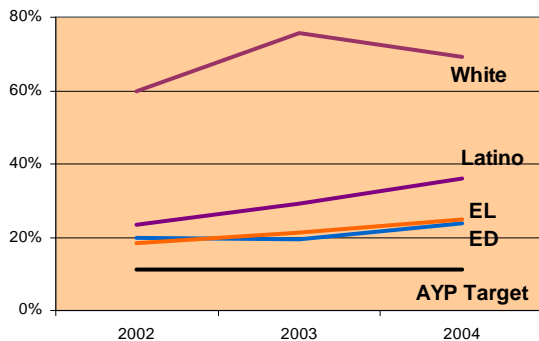


Fig. 4: 2002-2004 Southwest's Language Arts CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

CST Math 2002-04

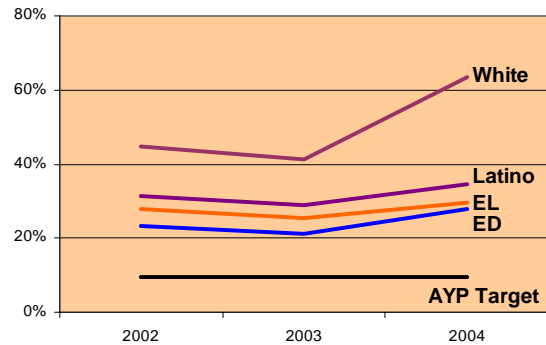


Fig. 5: 2002-2004 Southwest's Math CST Proficiency by Subgroup. Data referenced is from <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

CAHSEE Language Arts 2002-03 & 2003-04

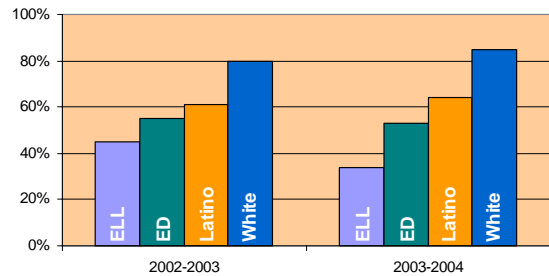


Fig. 6: Percentage of Students Passing CAHSEE, Language Arts.

CAHSEE Math 2002-03 & 2003-04

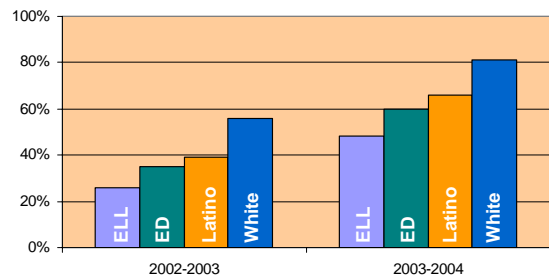


Fig. 7: Percentage of Students Passing CAHSEE, Math.

In 2004, 67 percent of the Southwest graduating class of 2006 passed the English Language Arts section of the California High School Exam and 68 percent passed the Mathematics section. Performance on the exams (which have become a graduation requirement for spring of 2006, but have been

administered since 2002) have been steadily improving for all subgroups, as Figures 6 and 7 above show. Noteworthy is the performance of re-designated English proficient students at Southwest, of whom 97 percent passed CAHSEE English Language Arts versus the state average of 87 percent.

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

CELDT Results 2002-2005

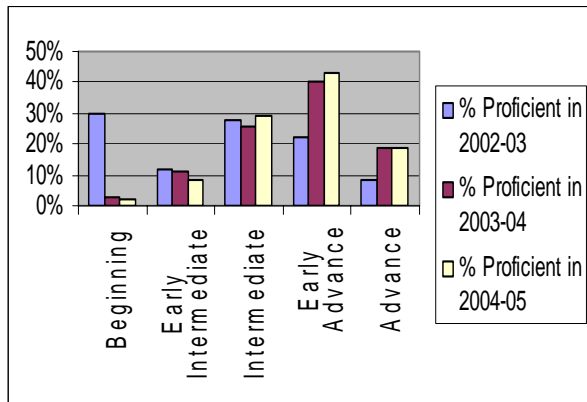


Fig 8a; Performance on CELDT test, 2002-2005.

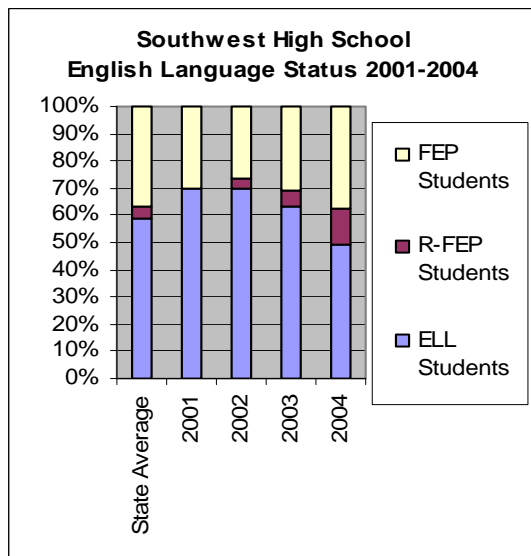


Fig 8b: 2001-2004 English Language Learners by FEP Status.

In addition, Southwest has made marked improvement in the percentage of Re-designated Fluent English Proficient, now outperforming the state average (see left column in Figure 8b above). It should be noted that the state averages do not control for poverty.

The site’s Advanced Placement Exam scores also have increased each year over the past three years. Notable scores include Southwest AP Calculus and Spanish classes with 61 and 95 percent passing, respectively, in 2004.

Multi-grade Math Comparisons 2004

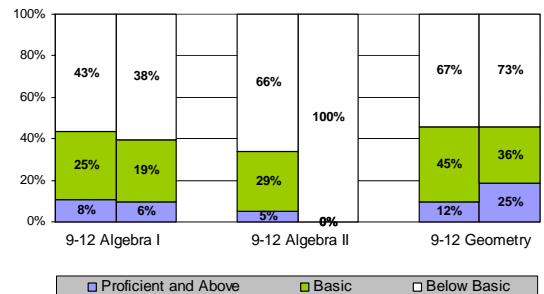


Fig. 9: Multi-Grade Results for Southwest High School and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Math. Data referenced is from on <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Multi-grade Language Arts Comparisons 2004

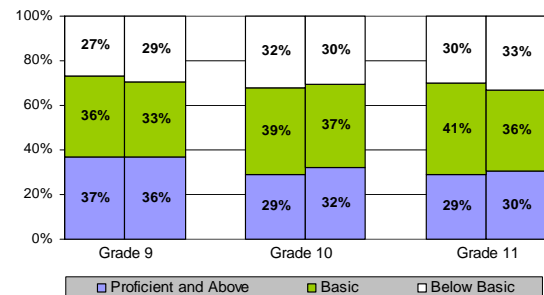


Fig. 10: Multi-Grade Results for Southwest High School and Top 10 Comparable Schools, 2004, Math. Data referenced is from on <http://www.jftk-ca.org>.

Comparing Southwest High School to the top 10 percent of schools serving similar demographics, Southwest has effectively moved more of their students to proficient and above than their peers in Algebra I and Algebra II. In Algebra II, there is no statistically significant peer group that brings

measurable groups of students to proficient. In English Language Arts, Southwest is on level with the top 10 percent in number of students it brings to proficient of those tested in ninth grade English. It is just shy of the top 10 percent in the number of students achieving proficient in grades ten and eleven. This achievement profile speaks highly of their Math and Language Arts programs.

Findings

Southwest High School is a case of a school that has risen from being on the state's Program Improvement list to being a California Distinguished School in 2005. Southwest seems to be among those high schools that have successfully leveraged state accountability requirements to produce dramatic improvement.

In 1999, together with its fellow comprehensive high school, Central Union High School (also part of this study), Southwest High School voluntarily placed itself on the state's Immediate Intervention/Under-performing Schools Program (II/USP) list. The decision to "accept being put in public view" as low achieving, as Assistant Superintendent Sheri Hart recalls, was not taken lightly. However, the incentive was the blend of pressure and support the state had to offer. The II/USP status won the two high schools and district additional dollars, the mandate to build a plan, and the obligation to execute it under a time line. All these were steps the leadership at district and site levels knew needed to happen. The state's pressure and support offered through II/USP held the promise to accelerate and focus their effort to serve *all* students well.

In retrospect, volunteering for II/USP was "critical" for their improvement, recalls the Southwest principal. The II/USP program provided these schools with both extra

funding and opened up the possibility that eventually the school could be subjected to state sanction. Although the funding was immediate and the threat of sanction long delayed, together they provided the school with the impetus to create a new level of focus on the goals of improving achievement and narrowing the achievement gap. In response, the school began work to build a vertically aligned system.

Cases such as these challenge the conventional belief that it "takes time" to create such a dramatically improved performance picture in a chronically low-performing school. Southwest High School is particularly of interest in that the route they chose toward improvement involved an intensive focus on the improvement of instruction across the school. This strategy is often identified as the opposite of a "quick fix," yet it has proven to be rapidly effective in this school.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

School leaders share a common vision of success and are knowledgeable about a set of key strategies for closing the achievement gap, providing access to rigorous curriculum, and improving student achievement overall. The vision and practices are implemented consistently across programs, grade levels, and departments.

John Anderson, CUHSD superintendent in 1995 (now Imperial County Superintendent of Schools), led the district in beginning the process of aligning curriculum and assessments to standards. It was, and is, as the Southwest principal stresses, a process. In 1995, the district created the position of "Program Improvement Resource Teacher" or PIRT, a veteran teacher whose sole task was to oversee the allocation of resources so all was geared toward improving instruction and accelerating the learning for all. The next year, 1996, the district and site leaders at both

sites launched the work of developing local standards. A second veteran teacher was recruited to fill the post at Southwest so that now each of the two comprehensive high schools had one experienced educator dedicated to resource allocation and intervention. In 1998, the district and both sites adopted the California Standards. When the opportunity arose in 1999 to volunteer for the state's II/USP funds, "it seemed just what we needed," recalled the Southwest coach. With the II/USP funds, the district contracted with one outside support provider and added two other full time coaching positions: an "Academic Coach" for each school. Armed with the people power and pressed for success, the reform work began to pick up speed.

Timeline of Reform Efforts

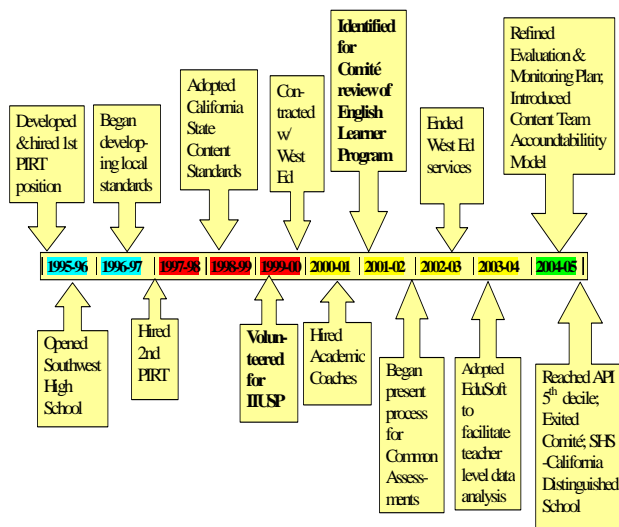


Figure courtesy of CUHSD 2005.

The focus on standards and academic improvement was key. However, despite this tight focus on academic improvement, Southwest did not turn its back on the broader goals of education. A review of the school's mission and process for defining it bears that out.

Many school missions have excellence, achievement and citizenship in their language. Southwest also speaks of resilience. It acknowledges that they are preparing students to beat the odds and help them succeed and excel.

The process of defining the mission included a wide array of perspectives. When the school opened in 1995, the staff, students, parents, and community members, including business partners and community college representatives, collaborated to establish the school's vision of what all students should know and be able to do based on California academic standards upon graduating from Southwest High School. As a group, all read and shared numerous articles and documents, such as *Second to None* and *A Vision of the New California High School*. From individual, to small group, to consensus among the larger group, the mission statement and Expected Student Learning Results (ESLRs) were formed, published and displayed throughout the school.

Four years later, under II/USP, the school (along with its partner school and district central office) articulated, with increasing clarity, the strategies to reach those goals. Those included building common standards-aligned courses, pacing guides, common assessments, standards aligned instruction and support systems to ensure accelerated learning of students in the bottom quartile. It also became critical that there be clarity and consistency about *how* these strategies would work together to advance the goals. That focus on consistency still guides the work. Says Principal Joe Evangelist: "We want to get to the point where there are no surprises."

The principal agrees that these goals are particularly ambitious at the classroom levels. He does not claim reaching these goals is easy, or that they are finished. Even though Southwest was named a California Distinguished School in 2005, he insists, "It's

a daily climb. We're making progress. We're not there yet."

One recent step on this path towards high and consistent expectations for all was the school (and district) decision to set its graduation requirements higher. The graduation requirement is now a 2.0 cumulative GPA. This policy means that students cannot just hunker down in their junior year and coast the rest of the time. Contrary to many other sites, at Southwest (and its partner school Central Union High School) the students must have a "C" average overall to graduate.

Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity-Building

School leaders support the creation of a learning community that encourages professional development focused on helping teachers improve their practices in ways that respond to student knowledge and skill needs. Structures and processes are in place to ensure that teachers individually, and by grade and department, as well as school and district leaders, regularly collaborate peer-to-peer as well as across roles, at all levels, to ensure this learning is continually strengthened and shared.

District leaders and staff are a part of the professional learning community that provides multiple ways for teachers and administrators to develop the skills and knowledge needed to ensure all students receive high quality instruction.

As an II/USP school, Southwest received funds but also took on obligations, such as being obliged to hire a support provider, of which they took full advantage. Says the Southwest academic coach, "All along the way, he was beside us, ahead of us, behind us, helping us do the hard work of starting to use the data to guide our work." The support provider helped each of the two comprehensive high schools conduct an inventory of their students' achievement levels and then build the plan for action. (See

Instructional Programs, Practices & Arrangements for detail on design and execution of the plan.)

At the same time, as noted above, the district made the decision to set aside funds for the two full-time academic coaches. These coaches were a substantial financial investment because the district made the position available to experienced educators rather than young professionals.

By site and district report, this investment was among the most crucial in securing Southwest's entry and continuation on the road of improvement. Central to the role of the coach was building systems and processes to support teachers in three areas:

- becoming skilled in working with data to guide their actions,
- acquiring new knowledge needed based on the data, and
- working together to translate the new knowledge into action.

The superintendent, assistant superintendent and coaches report that the district hired the coaches for three reasons.

(1) To ensure that teachers would buy-in to the reforms. The leadership wanted the reform led and supported by coaches whom the teachers already knew and could respect as "one of them" and good in their craft.

(2) To provide teachers with the support in skill-building. It was clear to the leadership that the ambition to bring all students to standards and fulfill the school's mission required a tremendous amount of new learning for the adults. The coaches had to be individuals able to provide a great deal of pedagogical and content knowledge for adults because there was a lot of new ground to be covered. This need for adult teaching and learning, the Southwest academic coach noted, was

not trivial matter. “We know far more about pedagogy (teaching for child and youth learning) than we know about andragogy (teaching for adult learning),” she notes.

(3) The coach positions were created so the district would receive on-time feedback from the classroom on how things were working and where they needed adjusting or changing.

It was clear that the important change was the change happening in the classroom. A strong feedback loop had to be in place between classroom teachers and the district if this ambitious reform agenda was to be successful. The coaches were seen as key bridge builders and communicators between the levels.

The coach’s selection process is worthy of note. They were recruited from the ranks of accomplished veteran teachers at the school. All teachers with six or more years experience were invited to apply and teachers, as well as site leaders, were on the selection committee. The transparency and collaborative nature of the selection process was important to the classroom teachers. There were no surprises. One teacher volunteered: “I myself applied for the job; in the end it was good Marilyn [Burt, Southwest academic coach] got it.”

The coach’s job would be to build teacher skills in three areas:

- data analysis (here the coach functions as resource teacher);
- adjusting instruction to respond to data (here the coach serves as staff developer), and
- conducting data-based reflective dialogue (here the coach serves as support provider).

One key condition created for the coaches to succeed was the differentiation in roles between the coach and the assistant principal. The assistant principal evaluates. The coach

only works to improve instruction. The two processes can be linked: in an evaluation, the assistant principal might require that a teacher work with the coach. But what happens between coach and teacher is confidential.

In addition to budgeting for both outside and inside support providers, the district committed resources to secure regular time within the school day for teachers to engage in reflective dialogue and collaborate with colleagues. It also set aside site funds so the academic coach and leadership team could hire additional outside support providers and content experts to respond to specific site learning needs. In this way, acquiring new knowledge and working together to translate new knowledge into action were built into the structure.

District, site and department support for building a professional learning community:

Data in a Day

Just contracting with the outside support provider and hiring an academic coach for Southwest and one for its sister schools, Central Union High, by itself did not produce dramatic change. Instead, large changes resulted from a methodical, step-by-step process that included trust building and that focused on developing common expectations and good working relationships as well as practical tools and structures for success.

The beginning was tough for all. One critical component was to start agreeing together where they were in the reform work and how to focus. With assistance of the outside support provider, the district and both schools engaged in an exercise they came to call “Data in a Day.”

Aligned with the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, the “Data in a Day” tool provides a practical instrument for determining instructional practices, student

engagement, levels of thinking (measured by Bloom's taxonomy, see box below), the connection between the teaching and curriculum standards, and the climate of the classroom.

One feature of the tool that makes it particularly attractive to teachers is its simplicity. The format of the collection is easily displayed graphically. For example, on the "CUHSD Data Collection Form for Classroom Visits," visiting teachers and administrators are asked to note, based on their count within five minute intervals, the frequency of specific instructional practices. They are also charged to note the evidence they saw of these practices. The five categories of "Instructional Practices" are explicitly defined so visiting teams can count the frequency of occurrences with some degree of common understanding. Also, because the observers have to cite the evidence they see for the practice, the team has to reach agreement on what good teaching looks like each time they aim to reach agreement on how often they have seen those practices in use. If an observer claims viewing five minutes in which there was evidence of whole class conversation, and another disagrees, each has to offer their proof and come to agreement. Those counts are tallied and graphed. Because it is simple and information-rich, the tool provides learning teams a basis for understanding the nature of their own teaching. It also provides common material to discuss how instruction can be improved.

The preparation for the visitation is central to the process. To prepare for visitation, the team completes a one period training. During this time, they discuss the methods of data collection and review the form.

Confidentiality, a key part of what makes teachers open to Data in a Day, is stressed in the training. Visitation teams consist of experienced Data in a Day teachers and

administrators partnered with teachers new to the tool.

During Data in a Day data collection, each class is visited for 25 minutes. Over the course of the year, the majority of the classes in the school are visited four times. Teachers know when visitations are happening but will not necessarily know which one of their classes will be visited. They do know that the data collected on their class will only go to them individually, and that the rest of the department will only see the aggregate score.

The visit starts with a walk around the classroom from teams of two. Visitors look for daily objectives and posted standards. They watch for student note taking, listen to class discussions and observe the lesson underway. After the visit, the data collection partners discuss and compare what each has seen in relation to the data collection sheet. Then, the team must come to consensus on the overall score the lesson should receive. Coming to an agreement on the final data gathered during the visit, the team completes a data form for the teacher observed and the coach. The only people the team discusses the data with are the teachers they observed and the coaches.

Data in a Day

Data in a Day aims to:

- Build teacher ease with thinking about data or evidence,
- Build teacher trust that evidence review can be non-evaluative,
- Improve instruction and learning,
- Collect evidence about instruction, such as instructional strategies being used by the teacher, and
- Collect evidence pertaining to what students do in the classroom.

The Data in a Day process includes:

1. Departments setting annual goals.
2. Determining who will be involved in engaging in the Data in a Day.
3. Training new teachers each time the team gathers data.
4. Having a visitation schedule prepared ahead of time.
5. Calibrating across the Data in a Day team.
6. Completing observation sheets and providing them to coaches
7. Coaches organizing the data and disseminating the data (initial sheet given to individual teacher; aggregate sheet given to department chairs).

Data in a Day partners compile a tally sheet of the classes observed for the academic coach, who disseminates data to the entire staff. The coach shares the data with all faculty. She and her academic coach colleague at Central Union High School may organize a graph charting the scores by department but never, to date, by individual teacher. It is up to individual teachers whether and with whom they want to share their own classroom's score. The coach's specific focus is to

emphasize the positive. The staff then can discuss the data as a team.

In 1999, the first time staff participated in this exercise, the faculty identified *student engagement* as the primary issue that needed to be addressed. Originally, teachers were concerned with how the data would be used and were nervous that the data would impact their evaluations. Teachers have since learned that the data exists as a collaborative learning tool, with data given to the individual teacher, but to the department in aggregate. The individual teacher is the only one who gets a copy of his/her own record, and he/she can decide personally whether or not to share it. Teachers began to learn to look at their own data together. Slowly trust has been built, and increasingly, sharing data with each other has become a norm for teachers at both Southwest and Central Union High School.

In 2004-2005, all departments at Southwest have become sufficiently accepting of the coaches' role that teachers are routinely looking together at the data by department. Cross-school comparisons of departments allow them to see in which department students are engaged for the most time. The school can also see how much time students are asked to spend thinking analytically (following Bloom's cognitive levels) and which departments ask students to spend the most time on knowledge, comprehension, and application.

Springboard for Success

In August 2004, the school theme for its professional development days prior to the beginning of school was "Building Professional Learning Communities." The school began with a session on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which included the emphasis on data. In these trainings, teachers received another tool, under the caption *Springboard for Success* (Adapted from Elkhart Community School

District, Indiana. For more information see <https://plus10.safe-order.net/makingstandardswork/Clients/BestPracticesArchive/BPElkhart.htm>.)

Springboard for Success consists of a color-coded one-page profile of every class for each teacher. *Springboard* data includes scores for the individual students from recent CST and CELDT administrations, the number of years in U.S. schools, grades in core content areas and overall grade point average. The goal of the *Springboard* is to enable teachers to see at a glance where attention is needed. It also allows teachers to focus on individual student needs and, in department meetings, look across student groups. The profile is coded with three colors. Green indicates proficiency or advanced scores. Yellow indicates “caution,” meaning the scores are border-line and could go either up or down. Red scores indicate below basic or far below basic scores. A student with all red scores is in need of intervention. A class with the majority of scores in red needs to be taught differently than one with the same title but mostly green scores. *Springboard* was one more easy-to-use way for teachers to be able to lay the foundation for differentiating instruction. By allowing this close look at individual and subgroup advancement, the tool helps track the rate of gap closure and helps send warning signs when a student group’s performance is dipping rather than accelerating. Efforts, such as the content classes in mathematics for English learners in various CELDT levels that were established in 2003, were spawned and tracked in part through *Springboard* reviews.

Department support for building professional learning communities

Reflective dialogue is also supported at the department level. As discussed, the department reflects quarterly on their Data in a Day results. With the common data and common standards, opportunities for mentoring and support are easy to find. The

school’s math department reports one example of such mentoring. One of the members of the department was struggling with how to teach students who are entering his class below grade level. He asked another teacher, “How can I teach the quadratic equation if students don’t know what a single variable is?” A veteran teacher had a suggestion: “Use the first twenty minutes to review...then you can move on.” Comments the reporting teacher: “We’re learning how to constantly mentor each other.” The academic coach is available to join these discussions and conduct demonstration lessons or observations to assist in helping teachers take action in response to the data.

In addition to these professional development and collaboration opportunities, during summer break teachers always have a set of training days. Teachers can choose from a range of professional development opportunities to pursue. The school, with district support, works diligently to get candidates who are CLAD and SDAIE certified or to get teachers to take the training during this break time. Other trainings are ongoing and targeted to advance teachers’ knowledge about how to better serve their students. In 2004-2005, some teachers joined the team taking follow-up training with Dr. Ruby Payne. Upon return and trained teacher agreement, these teachers became designated Dr. Ruby Payne coaches. In this way, other teachers know they are available to share and model lessons or observe a lesson through the lens provided by this methodology. Over the same period, Dr. Maria Montano-Harmon, a linguist working out of Cal State Fullerton who draws from Dr. Ruby Payne’s work, provided her training within the district to both schools.

The site’s Staff Development Team runs surveys every semester on teacher development needs. In this way, departments have a further opportunity to tailor

professional development and express their needs.

Building vertically aligned structures for learning across district, site and department

When questioning the coach, school administrators, or district leadership, there is strong agreement on the need for vertical alignment. As one visiting principal noted: “At Southwest (as at Central and the district), vertical alignment means district, site leadership, department, teachers and students all experience the same practice.” At each level of the organization, strong alignment is the focus. The visiting principal continued: “All experience positional leadership. Each feels leadership in their position to advance the common mission with a common set of strategies. Everyone involved understands why the practices are in use and have committed to a fairly uniform way to proceed.”

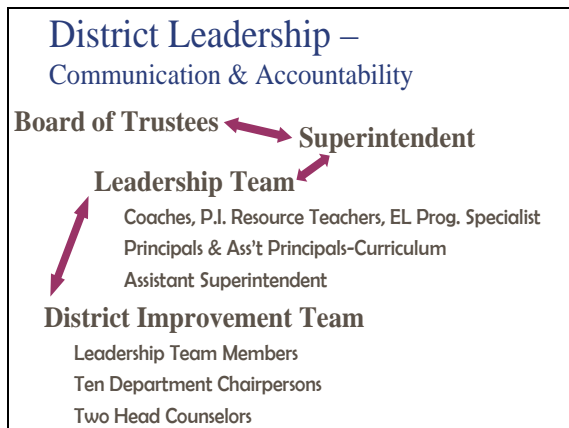
Under a prior superintendent, the district set up the *School Site Councils* (SSC), *Leadership Teams* for each of the high school sites, and the unconventional structure of a *District Improvement Team* (DIT). The SSC, which is comprised of students, teachers, parents, classified staff and administrators, meets monthly to discuss and make budgetary, curricular, and staff development decisions. It updates and approves the Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) yearly. The SPSA includes school wide and categorical goals that reflect high academic standards and the belief that all students can succeed. All site resources are used to support these goals, which are aligned to the district’s goals and tied to the Local Education Agency Plan (LEAP). The SPSA targets the achievement of all students, particularly at-risk, Special Education and English Language Learners.

The (DIT), made up of administrators, counselors and teachers from all three schools, meets bi-monthly at the district office

to discuss, collaborate, review test data, plan, read new research material, coordinate and come to a consensus on next steps to raise student achievement. The DIT offers a venue where administration and teaching staff discuss a myriad of issues. The DIT ensured that the district office was learning along with the school and classroom level staff, and taking steps that all layers of the system could support. All core department chairs attend, and everyone has input. To date, the DIT has looked at grading policy and common assessments, among hundreds of other topics.

Through the SSC and DIT, the school community reviews disaggregated data by significant subgroups on an on-going basis to see how students are meeting the standards. For example, in 2003, the SSC determined that due to low-test scores for freshmen, they needed an at-risk counselor to work with struggling students. The SSC was able to adjust the SPSA and hire another counselor in the middle of that year. In 2004, the counseling department was increased by two. The DIT reviews data collected by the district data analyst and makes recommendations for changes to the program. In March, each department determines the academic goals for the next year and prioritizes the materials, staff development and other resources deemed necessary to meet these goals in order to prepare budgets that will be presented to the SSC for approval. All decisions are based on increasing student achievement aligned with California State Content Standards. The SSC reviews data from testing and the department input to revise the budget for the SPSA.

Cross-site, the *Leadership Team* includes the principal, academic coach, program improvement resource teacher, English Learner program specialist, and assistant principals and assistant superintendent. This team meets monthly to discuss current issues, review data and plan ways to infuse the results into the teachers’ perspectives.



Figures courtesy of CUHSD 2005.

The Site Leadership Team also reinforces development of leadership throughout the system. At the site, the school leads (principal, assistant principal, program improvement resource teacher, academic coach, assistant principals, and English Learner Program specialist) meet as the site leadership team. As of 2005-2006, department chairs will be joining this team. At the department level, faculty meet within departments in “Content Teams” under the guidance of the “Content Team Lead” (i.e. Biology, English 9, etc.)

Time for collaboration across the system is allocated regularly through minimum days on alternate Wednesdays. For some meetings in which both schools and the district come together, the focus of the meetings rotate with the district, school and department. Each meeting has a lead and an agenda.

*Building new knowledge:
Spotlight on Language & Rigor*

The district sent a team to Texas to work with nationally known support providers and focused on two areas: student engagement and teaching higher order thinking skills.

Spotlight I: Language

A key focus was on language acquisition in light of the culture of poverty that many students brought to school. Here, the professional development sought from Dr. Ruby Payne was found powerful for the framework it fashioned. Says the coach, “I learned from Dr. Ruby Payne that if you tell a student ‘if you don’t do your homework you will get an F in my class and fail,’ that may be absolutely no motivation, or threat, at all. They have been told they will fail for so many years. If you tell the student, ‘if you don’t do your homework and pass my class, people will be able to take advantage of you and you won’t be able to take care of your mother,’ then I’m speaking in terms that may be much more meaningful to the student.” The frame was helpful in putting to better use the tools offered by Montano-Harmon.

Montano-Harmon’s training focused on building academic competencies in children through a focus on three areas: language, content, and study skills. The key points for teachers involve the need to take responsibility for expanding their students’ vocabulary and develop an awareness of the different “language registers.” Lists of the different registers used by teachers and students are posted in every classroom. The training gave teachers perspective on student knowledge (e.g., some students come to school with a working vocabulary of 600-800 words). This gave teachers context for understanding why it is their responsibility to expand student vocabulary for them to succeed. Also discussed was the concept of discourse patterns, how they differ and how

they influence communication. Teachers learned methods to teach the American English discourse pattern to those students who do not read enough to acquire it on their own. Says one department chair, “We are all committed to building effective patterns of communication.” An example of the work conducted around communication includes student mastery of 250 Latin and Greek roots and affixes during the 9th and 10th grades. When faculty ask students for the root word, the majority of students respond with the correct answer, according to the school coach. This work increases comprehension of content area terms, not only in language arts but in math and science as well.

Spotlight II: Rigor

In addition to the focus on vocabulary and language registers, the “Data in a Day” showed the school and district that they needed to offer a strong focus on higher order thinking skills. It surfaced that some lessons only promote thinking in terms of “factual knowledge,” “comprehension,” and “application.” To advance to college level course, it is critical for students to develop skills in analysis, synthesis and evaluation. According to this perspective, the California Standards Test are a relatively weak measure of how well students are developing higher levels of thinking, even though the school knows students have to develop those skills to access advanced curriculum and even to do well on the CST in the upper grades. For this reason, staff development is focused on learning to teach the standards and help students function effectively at the higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy.

Applying Bloom’s Taxonomy		
The following table relates Bloom’s Taxonomy with materials and situations calling for the particular level of thinking. The final column lists measurable behaviors the learner may exhibit for assessment purposes. Well-built lessons target a behavioral goal (objective), introduce the desired behavior and begin practice (activity), and end with the learner’s exhibition of the behavior (assessment). Well-framed questions accelerate a learner’s movement into critical thinking.		
Bloom’s level	Material	Measurable Behaviors
Knowledge	Events, people, newspapers...	Summarize, restate, paraphrase
Comprehension	Speech, story, drama, cartoon	Apply, change, put together
Application	Diagram, sculpture, illustration, dramatization	Examine, classify, categorize, research
Analysis	Survey, questionnaire, an argument, a model display, report	Combine, hypothesize, construct, organize, role play
Synthesis	Experiment, game, song, report, poem, prose, art, invention	Adapt, generate, modify, revise
Evaluation	Recommendations, self-evaluations, group discussions, debate, court trial	Compare, recommend, assess, value, apprise, solve, weigh, debate

To build on and extend what teachers learn in professional development programs, the Academic Coach provides continuous and varied modeling of instruction learned in professional development. Voluntary model lessons linked to professional development run under the captions, “Fish Hooks and Coat

Hangers—how to get them interested in the learning as well as giving them ways to easily retrieve the information,” “Differentiated lessons for English Learners,” and “Using the concept of ‘voice’ for classroom management.” These structures and skill building opportunities are all exceptionally important, reflect the two CUHSD coaches.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

School leaders ensure that teachers implement and design standards-aligned curriculum individually and by department and use pacing guides and aligned assessments to help ensure that all students meet standards. School leaders also support teachers to differentiate instruction within this framework.

Programs and Practices

The II/USP plan outlined sites that would identify ‘power’ standards, or standards to focus on in common, and then build common course outlines, pacing plans, and benchmark assessments. The district has aligned its courses to A-G requirements. Department chairs take the lead in preparing common course outlines aligned with standards and articulated across faculty, sites, and grade levels and with the UC/CSU college system. At this point, the site and its sister site are well on their way to completing aligned curricula for both schools.

Arrangements

The expectation that the teachers and site and district leadership would arrange to support higher level learning for all was not “business as usual” but rather a new and radical expectation. As the Science chair put it, “It was a shift from the ‘old school’ way to the ‘new school.’”

As the chair explained, “If you had asked me then, ‘would you have tried to place these students in AP?’ No, many would not have been placed in these classes. But today we think [by our mission] it’s better to put them [there] because we believe there they’ll learn what needs to be learned.” He was voicing the point of view that it is beneficial to expose students to rigorous curriculum. In many cases this means students can only succeed with intensified levels of support, but according to this view it is better than putting students in classes with weaker curricula -- even if they could easily get an A in these weaker courses.

The goal of expanded support and college-preparatory curriculum for all meant arranging district, school, department and classroom processes and structures to ensure English Learners get the language skills they need to access rigorous content. In many cases, students who did not come to school with the expectation that they would go to college must learn to own those high expectations. Teachers, who had in the past learned to focus on offering “the best” lesson for “the best” student, had to adjust the arrangement of each lesson and course so that all students could succeed in those courses.

Site level

Arrangements are such that high quality teaching is the norm for all and does not vary in ways that are predictable on the basis of students’ academic skill levels. Reports the

principal, “We’re promoting the use of rubrics to ensure equity for all students.”

Department level

Both school sites have Sustained Silent Reading each day for twenty minutes. It is implemented in conjunction with the Accelerated Reading (AR) program launched in 2000 from Renaissance Learning. Circulation in the library has increased five-fold since starting this program. Over \$200,000 worth of books aligned with the AR program has been added to the campus library and to classroom libraries over the past five years.

In order to implement the strategies taught by Dr. Montano-Harmon, classes in every area are working with construction paper, scissors, markers, etc., to teach organizational skills that lead to using the appropriate discourse patterns and retaining information. “I provided the high school teachers things elementary teachers would pay for” said Burt. She provided these resources so they could put into practice the strategies they had learned. When asked whether these resources were being used in ways that water down curriculum or undercut the goal of rigor, her response was clear: “No. We watch for that. These materials are all about giving students alternative ways to represent challenging concepts.”

The attention to building the vocabulary necessary to access this advanced content is still seen as key. At the classroom level, the English Department leads the whole school in training on the Accelerated Reading Program. With their support, all students have a reading log in which they have to write down how many pages they have read. The classroom teacher signs the log and the students use it as the ticket to take the AR test on the book.

Monitoring: Gathering, Analysis and Use of Data

Through regular meetings reviewing student data, school leaders hold teachers accountable to help their students reach clearly articulated goals. Data-based systems are in place to hold school and district leaders accountable for providing teachers with the support they need.

Common assessments each semester are used across the district schools and are regularly adjusted to make sure they are aligned to standards. At Southwest, the coach supports departments in building course outlines, pacing guides and assessments that match commonly agreed upon power standards. Says Principal Joe Evangelist, “With the common assessments, we are striving for collaboration within departments in content area teams.” Assessments are conducted every nine weeks. Assessments every semester are common across the two high schools.

For more information on gathering and analysis of data, see: *Staff Selection, Leadership and Capacity-Building*.

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment

School staff continuously evaluate intervention and recognition programs to ensure that they are instructionally effective; they look within and outside of the school to ensure the highest quality intervention and recognition programs available, based on research, are in place to serve their students.

The district, school and departments organize as one large recognition and intervention system. Rather than viewed as marginal additions, programs are embedded in the whole school reform plan to serve every student well. Drawing from tested practices, the site intentionally directs resources to ensure these

programs are in place, effective, integrated in the suite of strategies to bring all students to high levels of learning, and sustained. Particularly distinctive systems and processes follow here.

Recognition

Southwest High distinguished itself for the number of students involved in well-regarded extracurricular activities that range from theater to orchestra to sports. Two are of particular note, both focused on the arts.

Theater

Located in the heart of the Southwest High School campus, the Southwest Academy of Visual and Performing Arts (SAVAPA) has become a shining example of what it means for the best of the arts to blend with the best in technology. The Southwest Performing Arts Theater is a state-of-the-art facility, housing an intimate 1,150 seat auditorium, and designed to provide a wealth of diverse and enriching opportunities for both El Centro and the Imperial Valley. This stage has featured world-renowned performers alongside innovative programs melding art and technological elements. It has also served as a performing arts laboratory for bright SAVAPA students who, in growing numbers, matriculate with musical and dramatic talents that they continue to improve while studying for professional careers. The venue is operated by the school district, so besides having acclaimed touring shows perform, it is also used by the students for their own productions. The Adopt-a-Star program enables patrons of the theater to support talented Southwest and Central Union High students garner support to go to college.

Orchestra

Southwest Orchestra competes statewide and nationally to the pride of its students,

teachers, and community. Says one 12th grader, “This is El Centro, and most of us don’t have private lessons; but at the festivals we get first place.”

Interventions & Adjustment

In many sites, AVID is a stand alone, pull out program for struggling students. At Southwest and its partner school Central Union High School (an AVID demonstration school), AVID is embedded in the school structure as a whole school reform strategy.

AVID
(Advancement via Individual
Determination)

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

Factors Influencing District and School Practices

Resource Allocation

On capacity building, the district takes seriously the charge to be frugal and strategic with their funds. To ensure that funds are invested in capacity building, the district requires that each *allocation request* be tied to

the school-wide plan, demonstrating specific need.

The commitment to consistency is key. Hence, the district re-directs resources near the end of federal or state funding to ensure consistency.

Local Influences, Relationships and Communication

The school and district will not accept the excuse, “because of these families.” Neither school will rely on parents, but instead on their own instruction to bring students to proficient and above. Yet, they invest in parent engagement. As is proudly stated on the website: “We believe that parents, teachers, counselors, students, staff and administrators can assist in a more effective manner in our school if we work together.”

Parents are actively involved in the School Site Council meetings. Migrant Parent and English Learner Advisory Committees meet on a monthly basis. Additionally, the Booster clubs for music and athletic programs provide supplemental funding and support to enhance the total school program. Southwest also has freshman and Senior Parent Nights where parents receive academic and activities information. The school’s website features the differentiated opportunities for parent involvement ranging from gatherings focused on GATE students to ones focused on English language learners.

Opportunities for Parental Involvement

School Site Council Monthly Meetings
English Learners Advisory Council
Migrant Parents’ Advisory Group
Freshman Orientation Night
Back-To-School Night
Title 1 Parents’ Night
AVID Parents Night
Senior College Day
GATE Parents’ Night
Sophomore Conferences
Eagles Booster Club
Eagles Band Boosters

Having grown up in Mexicali, Mexico, similar to many Southwest families, Assistant Principal Sandra Kofford oversees the work with parents with a personal deep knowledge of Mexican culture and background.

Parents are encouraged to attend site and district professional development for teachers and staff on differentiation. Southwest and Central Union High parents are also encouraged, through the district’s website, to engage in their own continued education. As the website shows, the school and the district work in close collaboration with the Central Union Adult High School which offers a range of one-year online courses starting at \$49 per year.

Conclusion

Southwest illustrates the power of focus. The route they chose to improvement involved an intensive focus on the improvement of instruction across the departments, with aligned and intensive support from school and district. As is demonstrated in its achievement levels today, this strategy, often identified as too time-consuming, has proven to be remarkably effective at Southwest.