

Building Instructional Quality: “Inside-Out” and “Outside-In” Perspectives on San Diego’s School Reform

A Research Report

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ABSTRACT

During the 1990s, a new policy hypothesis—that focusing on the quality of teaching would provide a high-leverage means for improving student achievement—began to gain currency. This study of San Diego, California’s highly focused reform initiative to improve the quality of teaching examines an effort to act on this hypothesis. Based on interview, observation, survey, and record data collected at the state, district, and school levels over a five-year time period, the study offers a look at how one large, urban district developed an aggressive set of policies to improve instruction. The research examines how the district consolidated and redirected resources, redesigned the district office as well as work in schools, and mediated and leveraged state policy to further its reform agenda. Among key reform strategies were:

- An overhaul of recruitment, hiring, placement, and evaluation to recruit and retain high-quality teachers and principals in the district, while weeding out weak staff members;
- A massive investment in intensive professional development, including institutes, workshops and on-site coaching in every school, focused initially on developing teachers’ and principals’ expertise in literacy instruction, and later branching out into mathematics, science, and other subjects;
- A redesign of administration, replacing area superintendents with Instructional Leaders working closely with principals on improving the quality of teaching in each building and charging principals with focused evaluation and support of instruction;
- A major reallocation of resources to downsize the central office, consolidate fragmented programs and pots of money, and focus resources on classroom work;
- A much more centralized approach to providing curriculum and teaching guidance based on research on learning and teaching, including the development of special courses and district-wide strategies for literacy development as well as aspects of mathematics and science instruction;
- An effort to develop a culture and shared expertise to enable professional accountability and to redefine the state’s accountability processes to support instruction without punishing students.

The study documents substantial gains in student achievement and transformations of teaching practices, especially in San Diego’s elementary and middle schools, over a five year period, in association with these policies. Schools and students that benefited most from the changes were often those that were previously lowest-achieving. However, schools that were most bureaucratically organized with the fewest opportunities for collaboration among faculty had more difficulty using new resources to transform instruction. The study also documents the difficulties of managing the politics and implementation of a coherent approach to change in a large district with an established culture of decentralization located in a state with a piecemeal, sometimes conflicting, menu of reforms. Looking at the process of school change from both the ‘outside in’ and the ‘inside out,’ the study details how the district and individual schools initiated, coped with, and transformed the many competing policies in the school environment. Finally, we document the district’s more difficult process of seeking to improve high schools and its new round of reforms, just launched as the research was ending, to rethink the organization and design of the urban high school as a means of transforming the quality of teaching and learning within.

The research ends with evidence of substantial transformation in the culture, organization, instruction, and outcomes of San Diego's schools but also with the changing of many members of the leadership team. The future will reveal whether the reforms will be sustained in the long run and whether San Diego's bet on professional learning—enforced from the top down as a key lever for change—will ultimately strengthen the teaching and learning capacities of local schools from the inside out.

INTRODUCTION: STUDY FOCUS AND METHODS

During the 1990s, a new hypothesis—that the quality of teaching would provide a high-leverage policy target—began to gain currency. As Sykes (1999) put it:

The premise is that the improvement of American education relies centrally on the development of a highly qualified teacher workforce imbued with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to encourage exceptional learning in all the nation's students. The related hypothesis is that the key to producing well-qualified teachers is to greatly enhance their professional learning across the continuum of a career in the classroom (p. xv).

The notion that investment in teaching quality is at least as important a policy strategy as others—such as curriculum and testing mandates, more rigorous course requirements, new management schemes, or targeted special programs—rests on research suggesting the importance of teachers' skills for students' achievement and on evidence that few other reforms can be successfully implemented without investments in teachers' capacities to carry them off (Darling-Hammond, 1998). In recent years, a number of states and districts have undertaken intensive policy reforms focused on teachers and teaching. Evidence of the consequences of these approaches is just beginning to appear (e.g. Elmore & Burney, 1999; Wilson, Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 2000).

This paper examines the nested interactions of several sets of policies that target teachers and instruction at all levels of a state system and the implications for teachers' practice of those sometimes conflicting, sometimes coherent policies. We do this by discussing systemic reform in an embedded state and district context—San Diego, California, selected because of proactive attempts at both the state and local levels to address the quality of teaching and learning through multi-faceted policy strategies. Based on interview, observation, survey, and record data collected at the state, district, and school levels over a five-year time period, we offer a look at how one large, urban district has developed an aggressive set of policies to improve instruction and has meanwhile mediated, used, and sometimes worked around state policy to further its reform agenda. Within this district and state context, we also explore school-level attempts to reform teaching practice in the classroom.

Our approach integrates two divergent perspectives that tend to divide improvement of teaching research. One perspective—rooted in disciplines of economics, political science, organizational sociology, and administrative or leadership theories—entails a view from the “top” or outside of classrooms and tends to focus on problems of control, accountability, and incentives (Elmore, 1983). This perspective generally preoccupies itself with the “macro” system in which teaching and learning takes place. The second, “bottom-up” or inside perspective derives from research on teaching and teacher development, as well as from cognitive and sociocultural learning theories. Situated in classrooms, it tends to highlight the nature of teaching and learning acts, the multiple demands on teachers, and the conditions under which they try to engage students in learning (Little, 1993; Ball & Cohen, 1999). This “micro” perspective is more localized, more focused on the individual circumstances of particular teachers and schools, and rooted in considerations of teachers' learning and practice.

The distinctions between these two perspectives highlight a fundamental problem that confronts those seeking to understand policy implementation and impact. Frameworks that treat policy as a discrete, traceable set of resources, requirements, and reform intentions emanating from a “higher level” source tend to lose sight of the way actors at each level of the system interpret and make use of policy events to achieve

their own purposes (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; McLaughlin, 1987). Whereas frameworks that focus on the fine detail of teachers' or other professionals' practice at the "ground level" often underestimate how larger environmental factors construct and constrain action, thinking, and educational results. By integrating "micro" and "macro" perspectives, this paper examines both sets of concerns, keeping these perspectives in productive tension as they are analyzed within a single state and district-embedded context.

Traditional "top-down" and "bottom-up" metaphors suggest a hierarchical view of change that, while capturing a common set of tensions, ignores the many environmental forces acting on schools—not all of which are the products of district bureaucracy. The ways in which practitioners experience the world in which they work may also be characterized through an "inside-out" / "outside-in" perspective that considers the classroom and the school as the core of a nested set of influences that affect teaching and learning. These influences include but are not limited to policy actors presumed to sit in superordinate status. Such influences also include considerations of culture and context that have deeper, though often less perceptible effects on relationships than formal rules or decisions. Thus, as we explore how teaching policy is perceived, used, ignored, and adapted within each embedded organizational setting, we employ a lens that places each setting at the center of an "inside-out" / "outside-in" analysis of policy influences and that considers the intersections of contexts and their cultures. Our analysis seeks a nuanced view of how the various parts of interlocking systems may influence each other, particularly in environments in which state and district agencies are in proactive policymaking modes and where schools, too, are agents of practice, reform, and, sometimes, resistance.

While we weave these stories together to form an interconnected analysis of embedded systemic reform, several tensions raised by one "perspective" and challenged by another run throughout this paper. Expanding on Hightower, Marsh, Talbert, and Wechsler (2000), these tensions tap the age-old concerns associated with collective efforts vs. individual needs and centralized vs. decentralized approaches:

1. How strategies address both *systemwide needs* (including equity and quality) and *local differences* between (and within) schools or districts. These strategies include differences among grade levels, subject matters, teacher distribution and local labor markets, and considerations of income and knowledge distribution, among others, particularly as these affect the capacity or will to implement state and/or district policy.
2. How agents maintain a commitment to *locally defined goals* in the face of district or state policies aimed at *cross-cutting, externally defined goals* that seem to require redirection.
3. How policies and agents seeking to redefine professionalism as *collective responsibility* for knowledge-based practice rather than *individual autonomy* attend to questions of principled knowledge, local context, and shared authority.

These tensions flow as undercurrents across the analysis that follows; we cycle back to them in our conclusion where we address them directly.

To focus our analysis, we treat three major kinds of policies that influence teaching and instruction: 1) curriculum and assessment initiatives, 2) teacher development initiatives, and 3) accountability initiatives. This paper is organized as follows. We first explain our methodology and provide some basic contextual information about the nested San Diego, California system (SDCS) we explore. Next, we turn to the embedded reform story. We begin in the middle of the policy system—with the San

Diego City Schools' district reform story—and then work outward to the state and back inward to schools. Following that, we describe the district reform underway. Next we more fully establish the state policy setting and examine how the district is responding to and using state policy to further its local agenda. Then we discuss some early results before examining the reform from the perspective of three San Diego middle schools. After that we return to the district's change initiative by examining a reform of the original reform, emphasizing the district's new push for high school change. We conclude by revisiting the tensions and cross-cutting themes identified above.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper come from five years of fieldwork in San Diego City Schools, beginning in fall 1998 as the district started its reform initiative and continuing until the summer of 2003. With the initiative still underway, the story presented here captures the early years of an ongoing reform. Three interlocking teams of researchers working with the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP) contributed to this fieldwork and analyses. Each team focused on a particular "level" of the system—district, state, and schools—and all team members regularly participate in ongoing cross-team dialogue. To date, we collectively have conducted over 250 interviews and focus groups with teachers, principals, central office administrators, locally relevant community members, and state officials. Also, we reviewed a multitude of documents at all levels of the system and conducted approximately 200 observations of school and district events (e.g., conferences, board meetings, classroom teaching). Our school level data come from a strategically drawn sample of three middle schools (where we have focused in great depth), three high schools, and four elementary schools selected to represent a range of demographics, leadership arrangements, and experiences; these data are supplemented by interviews with about 35 principals (roughly 20% of all principals) from schools across the district. In addition, our fieldwork is informed by two surveys administered in SDCS—a principals' survey (administered to the population of principals in May 2000) and a teachers' survey (administered to the population of teachers in a stratified, random sample of 11 schools in fall 2001).¹

Demographics and Policy Context of Study Sites

The State Context

California has the country's largest public school enrollment, with over six million students in over 1,000 districts and more than 8,000 schools. Its students are ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse: Approximately 43% are Latino, 36% White, 12% Asian, 8% African-American, and 1% "Other." Nearly half (47%) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 25% are designated English language learners (CDE, 2001a; 2001c, 2001d). The schools employ just over 300,000 teachers.

Once among the highest-achieving states in the nation, California now ranks nationally among the bottom three states in average reading and mathematics achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. A recent RAND Corporation report (Carroll, Reichardt, & Guarino, 2000) noted:

California's public education system is widely thought to be ineffective. When 40 states and other jurisdictions were ranked according to the reading performance of 8th graders on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), California ranked 35th. The reading

performance of California's 4th graders was worse when compared to the rest of the nation. California ranked 40th of 43 states and other jurisdictions on that measure. While the characteristics of California's students differ from those in other states in several important respects, these differences cannot account for California's students' poor performance on these tests. For example, when the states are ranked according to the reading performance of students eligible for free- or reduced-cost school lunch, California ranks at the very bottom of the list both for 4th graders and for 8th graders (p. 1).

An analysis by the Public Policy Institute (Sonstelie, Brunner, & Ardon, 2000) confirmed this view, noting that while California *schools* lost ground relative to other states in terms of revenues and expenditures during the 1980s and '90s, California *students* lost ground in terms of achievement. After adjusting for the demographic characteristics of the student population, PPI found that California students still performed considerably worse than those in other states on the NAEP, the tests used in the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), and on the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) (also adjusted for participation rates). On national tests, after adjusting for language backgrounds, ethnicity, and parental education, the performance of low-income students was "especially hard hit by the decline in school quality in California" (p. 136).

Following the passage of Proposition 13 in 1979, California's expenditures on public education declined markedly. Between 1979 and 1994-95, the state's spending per pupil fell about 25% relative to the average for other states, rebounding somewhat between 1995 and 1998 (Sonstelie, Brunner, & Ardon, 2000, p. 90). Although California has a higher cost-of-living than the national average, it spends well below the national average on education both in absolute dollars and as a share of personal income. By 1999-2000, California ranked first in the nation in the number of pupils it serves but 38th in expenditures per student, 48th in K-12 expenditures as a share of personal income, and 50th in the ratio of students per teacher, despite the influence of class size reductions during the late 1990s (Ed Source, 2001, p. 1). By the late 1990s, California ranked in the bottom decile among states on class sizes, staff/pupil ratios, libraries, and most other school resources. Moreover, the state employed more under-qualified teachers than any other state in the country. In 2000-01, 14% of California's teachers did not hold a full credential (CDE, 2001b), in part as a result of reduced supply associated with declining salaries and working conditions since the 1980s, and in part as a result of increased demand for teachers during the implementation of K-3 class-size reduction in the late 1990s (Reichardt, 2000; Shields, Humphrey, Wechsler, Riehl, Tiffany-Morales, Woodworth, Young, & Price, 2001).

Alongside the class size reduction initiative, California launched in 1996 the Reading Initiative in reaction to the state's poor performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Based on concern among State Board of Education members that the whole language approach dominant at that time did not adequately teach decoding skills, new content standards published in 1998 emphasized explicit decoding skills based on phonics and phonemic awareness, within a literature, language, and comprehension program, supported by ongoing diagnosis and early intervention for students at risk of reading failure (CDE, 2001f). The state standards are supported by state-adopted textbooks aligned with the approach embedded in the standards (e.g., Open Court); state-sponsored professional development institutes that eventually encompassed the California Reading and Literature Project as well as new reading institutes; and funds available to districts to contract with professional development providers approved by the state for their approach to literacy. Other professional development initiatives have also been linked to state standards and have taken a similar approach: large-scale summer institutes conveying a single

curriculum to all teachers in a content area (e.g. Algebra Institutes). These have been implemented alongside policies extinguishing bilingual education (Proposition 227) and tying greater incentives to state tests (see discussion of the state accountability system below).

Since 1999, the California legislature has also undertaken a multi-pronged strategy to improve teacher quality throughout the state. In addition to small but growing funds to underwrite teacher preparation for teachers who will teach in high-need schools, increased efforts to establish reciprocity with other states, and a modest boost in salaries, the state has invested substantial funding in a beginning teacher induction program. In 1998, the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Program—a long-standing pilot program featuring reflection, formative assessment, and more experienced teachers serving as ‘support providers’ (i.e., mentors)—was scaled up to serve all newly credentialed teachers in their first and second years of teaching. In 2000-01, BTSA served almost 23,000 teachers at a price tag of \$87.4 million (Shields et al., 2001).² However, many observers suggest that the state’s efforts to improve teaching skills are inadequate in scale and internally incoherent, with incentives for entering teaching without preparation outweighing those that would assist teachers in becoming well-prepared (California Professional Development Task Force, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Little Hoover Commission, 2001; Shields et al., 2001).

These analysts point out that there are many mixed incentives around teacher quality in the state policy system: for example, in 2000-01, the state spent twice as much money on supports for those who enter teaching without credentials (about \$50 million) as on loans or scholarships to support preparation (about \$25 million). In addition, individuals who cannot pass specific tests cannot enter teacher preparation programs or engage in student teaching but they can become full-time teachers on emergency permits or waivers. The capacity and curriculum of teacher education programs pressured to admit practicing, uncredentialed teachers is undermined by the difficulty of those same candidates to fully engage in student teaching, complete homework, or commit to an intensive, coherent learning-to-teach experience. Meanwhile, new incentives for teaching in high-need schools coexist with large disincentives for teaching in these same schools, including lower salaries and poorer working conditions as well as less access to mentoring.

While access to well-qualified teachers is extremely uneven across the state, testing tied to rewards and sanctions plays a large role in the state’s drive for standards-based reform. State policymakers expect high stakes accountability measures attached to student testing from grades 2 through 11 to focus teachers’ efforts on the state content standards and the progress goals defined by the state. Specific policies include extensive testing, with norm-referenced and standards-based tests every year from grades 2 through 11, a high school exit exam in English/language arts and math (diploma requirement), and end-of-course exams at the high school level. Each school in the state is ranked on relative performance statewide, as well as in comparison with “similar” schools, and the state defines a two-year growth target for every school. (Until recently, the state’s Academic Performance Index [API] that comprises these rankings was based primarily on the Stanford Achievement Test 9th Edition [SAT-9] scores and is now based on the CAT-6 [California Achievement Test 6th Edition], national norm-referenced tests that are not aligned to the state standards.) Schools successfully meeting their API targets shared \$677 million in school and teacher bonuses in 2000; schools that failed to meet their goals were asked to “volunteer” for the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP). With II/USP, a state-approved external evaluator helps schools take stock and propose a plan for improvement, which the state funds at up to \$200 per student for two years. Schools that continue to fail to meet their performance targets court state takeover.

Policymakers explicitly hope that the tests and incentives will drive instruction. A policy insider explained:

So the idea is the API will reflect all these new tests, and then we'll stage-manage it with incentives and sanctions—including the II/USP and everything else. And once we get this grand system into the API, the API will have some real test alignment to the state's content standards and therefore we'll be able to use measurement-driven instruction through the API.

These efforts, in combination with many categorical funding programs now tied to the standards, assessments, and accountability system, have substantially centralized decision-making in a state that had previously been more oriented to local control. As a California Department of Education official remarked:

We had much more local authority at another time in this state. There's no question that the state, as a state, is taking a much greater role in terms of state direction. Funds are tied to specific programs that come either from the Governor or the Legislature. And I know that's a struggle for many local [school districts].

The District Context

In this intense state policy context, San Diego City Schools (SDCS) has launched what might be considered one of the most ambitious instructional reforms in the state and perhaps in the nation. As the second largest district in the state, SDCS reflects the diversity of the state, albeit with a lower percentage of White students and higher percentages of African-American students and low-income students. Of the 142,300 students in 2000-01, approximately one-third were Latino, one-quarter Caucasian, nearly one-fifth were African-American, and the remainder were Asian or other. About 60% qualified for free- or reduced-price lunch, while 30% were designated as limited English proficient.

In summer 1998, San Diego City Schools launched across its system of schools a major reform initiative that continues today. This initiative was led by two individuals—both of whom were new to the district—in what shaped up to be a virtual joint superintendency. Incoming Superintendent of Public Education Alan Bersin was a lawyer with a passion for social justice causes and came from the local U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of California and Southwest Border. His hand-picked partner as Chancellor of Instruction was Anthony (Tony) Alvarado, whom Bersin recruited from New York City's Community School District #2, where Alvarado had implemented a highly successful systemic instructional reform initiative (see Elmore & Burney, 1999). While Bersin managed the political, business, and organizational aspects of running the district, Alvarado attended to the instructional side of things—focusing on establishing a professional accountability system, concentrating all decision-making around issues of teaching quality, creating an infrastructure of reforms to improve the knowledge and skills of all personnel, and instituting a tightly-coupled instructional change process with a strong focus on equity as well as quality. Together, this pair sought to anchor their system of schools in research on teaching and learning. Their plan resulted in the creation of radically different learning opportunities, structures, and fiscal arrangements to support instruction across the district's network of schools. As Alvarado described the reform:

The vision was to try to create an institutional focus on instruction that would begin to put into place the leadership, staff development, assessment, curricular supports that would be necessary to increase student achievement. That would actually begin to create the environment for a different kind of teaching that would generate both

a narrower and more powerful set of student achievement results. So it's not just about raising reading scores. It's about changing the kind of teaching to get more challenging and thoughtful student work.

This effort has been a substantial undertaking. SDCS employs approximately 7,400 certificated teachers across nearly 180 schools, 18 of which are comprehensive high schools. Unlike other large urban districts in California, San Diego's aggressive campaign to recruit and retain well-qualified teachers has substantially limited the number of uncredentialed teachers in its schools. Although suffering shortages in bilingual and special education teachers, the district hired fewer than a dozen emergency-permit teachers for the opening of the 2001-02 school year, out of approximately 1,000 new hires.³ Despite the fact that most of San Diego's students are low-income students of color with wide-ranging English language skills, achievement has been increasing in the city schools during the past several years.

The School Context

We provide data from three school-level sources: a district-wide survey of principals and teachers augmented by interviews in elementary, middle, and high schools; in-depth case studies of three middle schools; and research on high schools that are about to be the subject of San Diego's next wave of reform. Our three case study schools, with student populations from 800-1,200 students, have different organizational structures and educational histories that influence their efforts and their encounters with the state and district reforms. English language learners comprise 30-40% of each school's population, students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch comprise 60-80% of the student population, and White students are a minority in each school, ranging from 11-45%. Students are bused in to two of the schools, while the third school serves only neighborhood students. Looking across these different school contexts provides a glimpse of the strategies used by schools to make sense of the charged policy environment around them and of the tensions they experience in pursuing their own goals and those of others, in managing the change process, and in initiating and coping with new resources, approaches, and possibilities.

While we were able to get a strong sense of perceptions of the reform through the district-wide surveys of principals and teachers as well as from interviews and observations in elementary, middle, and high schools, our study design is limited by the small number of schools we studied in depth. Our most intensive case research was conducted in middle schools, where we have the greatest insight into the texture of teachers' responses to the reform.

SAN DIEGO: A DISTRICT VIEW

Instructional Reform in San Diego City Schools

This section discusses three integral aspects of San Diego's district-driven initiative: (1) the driving principles behind the reform, (2) a snapshot of the key reforms undertaken, (3) and early results as seen from a district perspective.

Principles Driving Reform: San Diego's Theories of Instruction and Change

Tony Alvarado came to San Diego City Schools with a well-developed theory of teaching and learning, grounded in a deep understanding of how children learn and the principles of effective instruction, as well as a clear theory of system change. The latter involves notions about professional development and professional accountability—how to improve the knowledge and skills of educators and create a press for good

practice. These ideas evolved from his work in New York City's District #2 (for a description, see Elmore & Burney, 1999) and were further developed in collaboration with Alan Bersin in San Diego.

Theory of Instruction. San Diego's instructional efforts build on several decades of research on learning and teaching by cognitive and developmental psychologists and other education researchers (see, e.g. Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999; Resnick, 1995; Resnick & Hall, 1998). Key elements of this work emphasize the importance of:

- Setting clear goals and performance standards aimed at higher-order thinking skills and performance abilities;
- Carefully assessing student learning by evaluating students' thinking, strategies, skills, and products and then scaffolding the learning process to ensure that students can achieve these goals;
- Using a mix of teaching strategies that explicitly model and demonstrate key skills, engage students in active production of meaningful work with opportunities for extensive practice and revision, provide multiple pathways for access to content, attend to students' prior knowledge and cultural experiences, and teach students to think metacognitively about their learning strategies.

Alvarado worked to disseminate this instructional knowledge base so that it could drive all district decisions. In both New York City and San Diego, he drew upon researchers at the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC), experts at other local universities, and literacy specialists from Marie Clay's Reading Recovery Program in designing teacher development programs.

A companion to this theory of learning is a theory of teaching that proceeds from the premise that student learning will increase when powerful interactions occur between students and teachers around challenging content. In this view, as teachers' efforts become more grounded in knowledge about effective instruction and an understanding of students' needs, their teaching practice better supports student learning. Since learning, as described above, depends on extensive teacher knowledge of both teaching strategies and of individual learners and since it requires diagnostic skill in figuring out how to best organize learning opportunities that meet learners' particular needs, this theory of teaching relies on the development of teacher expertise, rather than on the adoption of scripted or "teacher proof" curriculum. The latter would constrain teachers from adopting strategies that address the individual needs of students, and thus undermine their effectiveness.

Alvarado and Bersin explicitly identify their instructional theory as an attempt to professionalize teaching by grounding decisions in both greater shared knowledge about effective practice and an expectation that teachers will learn to apply knowledge to the individual needs of students. This professional conception includes the notion that practice must be shared and become public so that all can learn. Drawing parallels between the work of teachers, surgeons, and lawyers, Bersin observed in a talk to the district's high school principals:

A professional draws on professional skill and knowledge to apply to the changing facts before her. Professionals deal with problems and solve problems based on applying a body of knowledge to a particular case. When we all look back—some of us 10 years from now, some 25, some of our interns 30 years from now—and say, "What was it that we were experiencing in the opening years of the 21st century in San Diego and then around the country?" I predict it will be the

history of the professionalization of teachers and of the educational world, in the sense that teaching no longer is a private preserve. It is a public province of feedback, discussion, interaction, peer review, and constant improvement much more akin to the way in which traditional professions have operated but which has not operated in education. The notion that a classroom is a private preserve is a value that still exists in the world and is inconsistent with the professionalization of teaching. This does not mean that there is not creativity. In fact, that is the essence of the professional path: to exercise discretion based on the facts of the problem before you and draw from all your training and skill and knowledge and apply it to the case to produce a successful result.

A key component of this press to professionalize teaching is the notion that, when powerful norms of practice develop, teachers are individually accountable for operating according to these norms and using the knowledge on which they are based. In teaching, professionalism has commonly been misunderstood as representing individual autonomy and control over one's own practice rather than as a commitment to common norms of practice and methods for improving them. To develop this kind of widespread professional knowledge and skill, Alvarado and Bersin focused their attention especially on the professional development of teachers, principals, and other staff, on the assumption that quality teaching can be enabled by structures and opportunities established by the larger district system. Their beliefs about how to achieve this goal rested heavily on research about teacher learning (see, for example, Darling-Hammond, 1997a; Evans & Mohr, 1999; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Little, 1999; McLaughlin & Oberman, 1996; O'Day & Smith, 1993), which argues for the provision, development, and nurturing of:

- Professional development opportunities and networks that support continuous reflection and refinement of practice in communal settings (to dislodge norms of private teaching practice);
- Leadership that prioritizes instruction, which is defined as both teaching and learning;
- Expectations and commitments that all students can learn to high standards;
- Knowledge about pedagogical strategies embedded in literacy and learning theories;
- Teaching and learning standards that are challenging, coherent, and tied to diagnostic assessment tools.

This theory of teaching and learning, combined with the belief that literacy is a gate-keeping skill from which all learning proceeds and with a strong commitment to equity, has translated into a strong districtwide focus on literacy, professional practice, and accountability mechanisms for ensuring improvement among the lowest-performing students, schools, and employees. District leaders have devised a series of instructional measures, described below, to focus district norms and culture directly on these priorities.

Theory of Change. To institutionalize this theory into district operations, district leaders followed a change process that was highly directive, prioritizing speed of implementation and fidelity to the instructional theory over mechanisms to solicit input and ensure backing from organizational members about the changes underway (Hightower, 2001). While allowing district leaders to root their system in common design principles, this approach counters views of incrementalism (e.g., Lindblom,

1980) and assertions about the importance of upfront “buy-in” from organizational members (McLaughlin & Oberman, 1996; Fullan, 1991; 1993). Leaders’ theory of change centered around the belief that systemic, instructional reform in an entrenched district system must begin with a “boom” or a “jolt”—including the destruction of many preexisting structures, cultures, and norms—before reforms and new support structures can take hold. As Bersin explained:

There was no other way to start systemic reform. You don’t announce it. You’ve got to jolt the system. I understood that.... If people don’t understand you’re serious about change in the first six months, the bureaucracy will own you. The bureaucracy will defeat you at every turn if you give it a chance.

The speed with which the reform program was designed and implemented was in large part a function of the political imperatives under which Bersin was hired. Following a teachers’ strike in 1996, community confidence in SDCS was low. Public perceptions that the district was too bureaucratic, was poorly preparing its students for college and work, and was moving too slowly on needed reforms led to a move by the local Business Roundtable to elect new school board members. The new board discontinued the prior superintendent’s contract in 1997 and hired Bersin in 1998 with a mandate for immediate change. The board has been split 3-2 throughout most of Bersin’s tenure with the key three votes tied to support from the business community, which has strong vested interests in the system, not only because of the local economy but because many send their children to public schools in La Jolla and other affluent parts of the city. To keep this slim majority on his side, Bersin felt the need to act and show results quickly.

It is important to note that while SDCS followed many of the strategies Alvarado had used in District #2 to improve instruction, the model of change was very different. District #2 took a much slower approach to reform, with the process extending over the course of a decade. Furthermore, many of the instructional ideas were already well-known to a substantial cadre of teachers and were embedded in some of New York City’s longstanding teacher education and professional development programs, which served as a support in preparing novices and supporting veterans in their practice and which had strong relationships with a number of local schools. Alvarado’s many years of work in the city as superintendent of two local districts and chancellor of the Board of Education made him a well-known player trusted by many reformers and by the teachers union, with whom he worked closely to develop innovative practices and school capacity. Many of the difficulties encountered in communicating and implementing San Diego’s reform can be traced to the speed with which this complicated and wrenching set of changes was undertaken as well as to the changes themselves.

System Changes

The “jolts” to the system occurred in both instructional and operational domains. While we focus primarily on the instructional sphere in this report, it is important to note that the district’s fiscal policies and organizational structures were changed radically to provide an enabling force for implementation of the reform (Hightower 2001; 2002a). Changes occurred in terms of resource allocations, organizational structures, and personnel policies needed to support a reform focused on the development of expert teaching.

Resource Reallocation. Rather than subscribing to a typical district expenditure pattern whereby resources maintain the status quo (Guthrie & Sanders, 2001; Meyer, Scott, & Strang, 1994; Miles & Guiney, 2000), San Diego leaders sought to have instructional priorities drive resource acquisition and allocation in SDCS. All funds

coming into the district—including local funds, such as resources from foundations and those identified through internal cost-saving measures, federal monies such as Title I, and funds connected to state policies such as teacher induction and accountability—were redirected to finance the instructional strategies devised to serve the district’s theory of teaching and learning. The goal was to focus on improving the core technology of schools—the quality of teaching—and to invest in high-functioning classrooms rather than peripheral programs.

Staff in the central office described the previous process in which funds came into the district for a variety of projects, and budgets were developed to fund many different ideas for marginal improvements. Project leaders, principals, and others in the central office would come to the budget office with various programmatic ideas, and the financial staff would try to put together pots of money to fund them. A high degree of local school autonomy and the ability of previous administrations to attract outside grants combined to produce a dizzying array of funded activities. One district administrator observed, “We were very highly regarded by foundations and cutting-edge stuff around the country, so we had a lot of projects” (Hightower, 2001, p. 18). These programs contributed to a large central office, which some viewed as fragmented, bureaucratic, and “top-heavy,” with one administrator for every 10 teachers. A financial officer noted, “In San Diego, over the 20 years prior to the *Blueprint*, [see below for explanation of the *Blueprint*] we just received really tremendous amounts of money that basically didn’t show a lot of results.”

The change in approach was described by Karen Bachofer, who headed the new Standards and Assessment division:

When we began this work it was clear that we decided that we were going to start with what was needed, what the *Blueprint* would be—not to start with how much money we had. And that’s a dramatic change from how we’d done business in the past. Before, we’d say, ‘Well, we’ve got this much money; so what can we do?’ This said, ‘What program do we need for the students?’ And then we worked to find the money to fund the program, rather than the other way around.

In the 15 years prior to this, I’ve never seen any kind of give-and-take... Usually it was sort of like people going to the financial folks and saying, ‘We need to do this. Do you think you can find x-number of dollars?’ And it was never a *dynamic* process. And it was never transparent. So it was clear to us: if we were going to do this, we would have to make some decisions about what we would and would not do. We had to prioritize what we would not do and make decisions about what we weren’t going to do based on the efficacy of *that work*—not whether or not [the chief financial officer] could find an extra pot of dollars somewhere.... And we talked in depth to the budget people. It was very much a give-and-take situation: ‘You say you want to do this, and it’s going to cost that, and here’s something else you say you want to do. Now which of these do you think is going to get more return for the students? Which do you think is going to be more viable? Which do you think is going to make the whole thing more coherent?’ So we had to make some choices about what we were going to keep, based on how much money the budget people were able to free up and to find.

Several hundred small and large categorical programs that proliferated because of federal, state, and local initiatives over many decades and that existed as independent enterprises were consolidated to serve core system needs for professional development and teaching improvement, or were discontinued. Two years into the

district's reform initiative, the SDCS school board passed a major policy package called the *Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards Based System*, which codified the new uses of funds. In 2000-01, about \$61 million (6% of the district budget) was spent to support the *Blueprint* strategies, including peer coach staff developers, extended day programs, summer/intersession programs, literacy/math framework development and implementation, summer institutes for teachers, and leadership academies for site administrators. Nearly two-thirds of the funding for these initiatives came from Title I funds and Integration program funds and nearly all of the total (\$59 million) went to school sites. Other federal and state funds, including a large segment from state-funded "hourly programs" that can be used to augment students' school day and year, accounted for nearly all of the remainder. In 2001-02, the *Blueprint* was funded at a level of \$91 million (9% of the district budget), using a similar strategy for consolidating federal and state funds, plus a larger share of foundation funding. Again, nearly all of these funds (\$88 million) went directly to schools. (See Appendix A.) In the following year, the *Blueprint* funds increased once again to \$111 million. These funds were allocated in a way that increased funding to schools, especially those serving the neediest students, but substantially decreased school-level autonomy in the use of these resources. Chief Administrative Officer Henry Hurley described how "approximately 80% of the money went directly into services that fit into the *Blueprint* strategies, and then there was a small amount left over, the 20%, that the school had discretion over how to spend."

While schools had less discretion in the use of *Blueprint* funds, the Central Office was substantially reduced in size to send more resources to the school level. Bersin's tenure had begun with a promise to reduce central office spending by 5%, and in the first year of the reform, 112 jobs were eliminated from the central office, while only 10 were added. Each central office employee was asked to respond to the question, "How do you support teaching and learning in the classroom?" Those whose responsibilities did not directly address this priority found their positions terminated. These displaced employees were either shifted to other roles in the district deemed essential in support of student learning or discontinued. During the 1999-2002 period, 282 positions and \$11.6M in central office expenditures were eliminated and redistributed to school sites. A large part of these reductions freed up dollars to fund the substantial staffing requirements under the *Blueprint*. These reductions also marked a clear revolution in the culture of how the central office viewed its role in supporting student achievement.

An additional major reallocation of resources occurred with a reduction of 600 of the district's 2,800 instructional aides in 2000-01, with the savings invested in teachers and peer coach staff developers—a trade of less skilled for more skilled personnel. These moves created substantial political resistance, including large protests at the Board meeting where the budget including massive reductions in instructional aides was voted on. Bersin commented in 2002,

...the tumult that came in terms of the implementation of the *Blueprint* was actually energizing resources and reallocating resources away from existing arrangements and existing programs to fund a new approach to improving student achievement..... In place where you move resources and you take jobs away from people you get the pushback that's going to be natural from that group of people who are affected by the change.... So it's not 'we're doing this and we're going to throw a few new resources at it and have the *Blueprint*.' You're actually taking employment arrangements and you're disrupting them in favor of a new approach. So it's not 'well, we wish we could have all gotten along better.' This is what a revolution is!

Restructuring of Central Office Functions. The organization of the central office and its approach to supporting schools also changed substantially as part of the reform. In 1996-97, the SDCS organization chart included seven divisions reporting to the superintendent, only two of which were responsible for educational functions. Five area superintendents, each supervising a set of cluster leaders, oversaw the work of schools. (See Appendix B.) Upon taking office, Bersin immediately “jolted” the district office by reorganizing it into three divisions that gave more prominence to the educational functions: the Institute for Learning, Administrative and Operational Support, and the Center for Collaborative Activities. Alvarado led the Institute for Learning, and this division focused on curriculum, teaching strategies, and the professional development of teachers and principals. It included the Instructional Leaders who replaced the five area superintendents. [See below for explanation of Instructional Leaders.] Administrative and Operational Support included business services and operational departments, and the Center for Collaborative Activities was a much smaller division, designed to facilitate collaboration between departments and programs.

In April 2000, the central office was reorganized a second time, reducing positions again and creating a new department, the Center for Student Support and Special Education (CSSSE), to “transform the work of staff who support teaching and learning while providing interventions to meet the complex needs of students and families” and to “marshal and mobilize district and community resources to support students and families” (Board Report, 3/9/00). The district had had difficulty managing special education, was under a court order, and wanted to marshal resources to focus on the needs of struggling students. Later the CSSSE was absorbed into the Institute for Learning, as further restructuring occurred in subsequent years. Each successive reorganization was guided by internal self-examination and the questions: “Have these resources been successful in impacting student learning? If not, how can changes be implemented to see that they do?”

Reform of Personnel Policy. A reform built around professional expertise requires major rethinking of how professionals are recruited, supported, and evaluated. To build resources for hiring and training high quality teachers, the district re-examined staffing patterns and recruitment strategies, while increasing the incentives to become fully prepared before entry. As we have already described, in order to hire a greater number of trained teachers and to lower pupil/teacher ratios, there were cuts in the number of central office personnel, project administrators, and paraprofessionals. The personnel office, under the leadership of a new human resources administrator, Deberie Gomez, began to recruit aggressively for well-trained teachers, collaborating with universities on new training programs in high-need fields and creating smooth pathways with local schools of education, offering contracts to well-prepared teachers as early as possible (as much as a year in advance of teaching), and reaching out to well-prepared teachers in other states. In addition, Gomez streamlined the hiring process, put the entire system on-line, and improved the system’s capacity to manage data, interviews, and other components of the selection system that, when poorly managed, had slowed the process and caused many candidates to give up and go elsewhere. By fall 2001, while districts like San Francisco and Los Angeles hired hundreds of teachers on emergency permits and the state as a whole hired more than 50% of its beginning teachers without full credentials, San Diego filled almost all of its 1,081 vacancies with credentialed teachers.⁴ Through purposeful action over several years of efforts to improve the teaching force, when school opened, the district had filled all but two special education positions, and it had eliminated all but 17 emergency permits and waivers.

The district also worked to create a professional accountability system that intensified the supervision and development of principals and teachers and

counseled out or dismissed those who were unable to meet more rigorous standards for performance. Unsure they will be able to find replacements, many districts don't insist on high performance from personnel during times of shortage. San Diego's strategy has been to increase incentives and efforts to ensure qualified teachers are hired and to focus unrelentingly on both supporting and evaluating the quality of practice. A number of beginning teachers we interviewed confessed that they had sought out San Diego rather than other districts because they felt the quality of professional development they would receive would surpass what they could experience elsewhere and they were enticed by the challenge of developing cutting-edge practice.

Focusing on New Instructional Priorities

These new funding and staffing emphases helped the district to provide an extensive array of professional development opportunities for principals, teachers, and other districtwide leaders, which served as the key mechanism for spreading the theory of instruction across the district. New resource allocation patterns also helped establish literacy as an important gate-keeping skill and equity systems to close performance gaps and raise performance levels of the lowest performers. These efforts are described below.

Developing Professional Practice. By design, all professional development activities in SDCS incorporate time and structures to interact with peers and reflect about practice; they also emphasize the role of continuous, context-specific learning networks. Within a couple of years of the start of the reform, most professional development opportunities were embedded in schools and classrooms. So that organizational members internalized the district's theory of instruction, these opportunities were designed to generate knowledge across the profession as opposed to impart information to individuals (see Hightower & McLaughlin, 2002).

Among the first most fundamental instructional reforms instituted were mechanisms for *principals* to learn about how to develop and monitor high-quality teaching among their staffs. The district's 175 principals were divided into seven heterogeneous "Learning Communities," each of which was led by a newly promoted and trained central office "Instructional Leader" (IL), who replaced the traditional assistant superintendent positions. Each IL was a former principal who had demonstrated high levels of understanding and skill as an instructional leader. Alvarado took these leaders to District #2 during the initial summer to observe schools and to participate in summer literacy activities so that they could lay a foundation for the work they would do with principals and teachers in San Diego.

The learning community groups convened during required monthly Principals' Conferences, which offered principals opportunities to learn about leading school staffs in high-quality instructional practices. The format of the Principals' Conferences varied, and included both interactive "fieldtrips" to local classrooms and discussions with local and international experts on relevant topics (e.g., teaching techniques, principals' role as instructional leader). Sometimes site and central office administrators jointly examined student performance data to focus attention on the lowest performers and means for increasing their learning. Principals also interacted individually with ILs through "Walk Throughs," which were occasions when ILs visited a school to observe classroom practice, evaluate site progress, and assist principals in identifying specific instructional support needs. ILs visit each of their schools at least three times a year, although some schools have monthly visits.

San Diego's leaders invested in developing instructional knowledge among administrators because of their belief that instructional alignment requires shared knowledge about the technical core of the work up and down as well as across the system. The goal is to enable decisions supportive of good teaching to be made with

minimum dissonance. Furthermore, if principals are to serve as Instructional Leaders, they must know instruction well. The change model assumes that individuals in key positions across the system—both within schools and the central office—are needed to introduce and sustain instructional reform within classrooms. Through this model the larger district system became more equipped to facilitate professional development within each school’s community. Principals became more competent on-site leaders, better able to help teachers incorporate professional learning into their everyday routines as a community of learners within their school, and better able to evaluate the quality of teaching in classrooms.

The district also provides for the professional development of *teachers*. SDCS offers extensive professional development workshops during summers and intersessions, amounting to about 150 classes each year that range from one to seven days. Most classes are held on school campuses, and participants receive \$15 per hour to attend. At least once a year, principals receive lists of their teachers who have attended particular district workshops in order to keep tabs on their exposure to ideas and better calibrate the level of knowledge about instructional strategies among their staffs. Beginning in year three of the reform, the district combined these training opportunities with the provision of summer school classes for students performing below grade level. During these classes—which, on most campuses, are taught by a subset of the school’s regular teaching staff—teachers have opportunities to view demonstration lessons taught by experts and to practice techniques with experienced coaches working by their side. These workshops are intended to mesh with ongoing within-school professional development activities, as teachers meet with principals, peers, and school-based coaches to discuss instructional matters.

Indeed, a key part of the professional development for teachers has been the development of a network of trained and certified *peer coach/staff developers*, who are placed in schools to work directly with classroom teachers on teaching practice. The district intends for coaches to reinforce the district’s literacy strategy and theory of instruction within the context of each school site and to break down norms of private practice. The district arranged for coaches in elementary schools to work with new teachers on induction (in addition to coaching other teachers who were receptive to support). Those at the secondary level work primarily with English teachers; in secondary schools, induction is handled separately. By year two of the reform, at least one half-time coach had been placed in two-thirds of district schools; by year three, all schools had at least one full-time peer coach/staff developer. Coaches—accomplished teachers who had been identified by principals and had expressed interest in this position—were university-certified and trained by literacy staff from the district. They worked in schools and classrooms four days a week. On the fifth day, coaches trained with their peers and district literacy experts. Staff developers spoke very highly of this training and, through it, have been able to form important professional relationships that have given them a means to reflect on their roles and circulate curriculum and pedagogical strategies

In a survey of teachers conducted for this study during 2001, 96% of respondents reported attending professional development workshops, conferences, or training, and 75% reported engaging in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers on issues of instruction. These professional development opportunities for teachers were designed to help make teaching public and to parallel research about instruction, which argues for focusing on “authentic tasks,” “long-term assistance,” and communal activities (Stein & D’Amico, 2002).

Literacy as the Focus. District leaders contend that literacy holds a special place in the learning process: improved literacy skills not only influence test scores (not surprisingly, students generally do better on tests they can read than those they can’t), they also provide the keys to access to higher-level content in other areas. For

this reason, the teaching of literacy provides an important, common initial learning agenda for adults as they begin to function in learning communities (Elmore & Burney, 1999) and learn to “speak a common language” about instructional practice. Thus, from the beginning and across all grade levels, literacy instruction was a privileged skill in which teachers were trained and around which professional development activities were oriented. During the 2001 school year, more than 93% of teachers we surveyed reported having attended professional development activities that focused on language arts or reading, and 79% had attended more than eight hours of such activities, noticeably more than any other category. Furthermore, teachers reported this training to be more useful than any other category of professional development: 69% rated the training’s usefulness at 3 or above on a 5-point Likert scale, and a large majority of elementary teachers rated it “very useful.”

The district’s reading strategy is grounded in a balanced literacy approach that includes emphasis on decoding skills and phonemic awareness alongside equal emphasis on comprehension and expression through participation in language-rich listening and speaking activities, reading of trade books and other materials, and extensive writing. The Literacy Framework supporting these activities outlines specific teaching techniques to improve students’ literacy skills. This framework is grounded on research on literacy learning and teaching, which appears in the district’s training efforts through literature that translates research into practice. For example, faculty and trainers use works like: Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell’s *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children* (1996) and *Word Matters* (1998); Anne E. Cunningham and Keith E. Stanovich’s *What Reading Does for the Mind* (1998); Janet Allen and Kyle Gonzalez’s *There’s Room for Me Here: Literacy Workshop in the Middle School* (1998); various works by Janine Batzel on balanced reading and by Ro Griffiths and Faye Bolton on guided reading.

The Literacy Framework includes certain pedagogical teaching components (see Stein & D’Amico, 2002), such as Read Alouds, Independent Reading, Word Study, Observation and Assessment, Shared and Guided Reading, and Modeled, Shared, Guided, and Independent Writing. These strategies translate into practices such as the use of word walls and classroom displays of exemplary student work tied to specific standards, as well as close assessment of student skills through running records, miscue analyses, and other diagnostic tools. Supported by specialized professional development activities, district administrators expect principals and teachers to become knowledgeable about each component of the Literacy Framework and to move in stages toward its full implementation.

Alvarado emphasized that this was a professional reform, not a hierarchical reform—that is, that the authority for the frameworks and teaching strategies is the research base on which they rest, not the say-so of the central office, as is often the case with centralized curriculum initiatives:

We’ve organized into frameworks what the profession knows about instructional work. It is the profession that is [the source of] the expectations, not the district. When you speak and work with [your staff], they have to understand this is coming as a function of the profession, not as a function of the district demanding it. If an outside force is focusing me to do something, then I’m an automaton. If I’m responsible for using professional knowledge, then I have a big role in accessing that knowledge and implementing it. You only have a profession when there is a common set of knowledge and procedures that guides the work of the professionals in it. The idea of what good professionals do is access that [common practice and knowledge base] and continue to learn about its application in a particular context. The parts that are in there are driven by professional knowledge, not

because four people consult and invent it. You're being driven by the canons, knowledge, and skill of the profession, [and this is] a function of professional practice.

As we describe below, communicating the sources of the reform and enabling principals and teachers to understand deeply the knowledge undergirding the initiative was a major challenge that took all of the nearly five years in which we observed the reform process and was still ongoing when the research concluded. For reasons of both tradition and implementation, the reform was often perceived, especially in the first years, as hierarchical, rather than professional.

The reform initially emphasized literacy as the primary focus of elementary schooling, especially in the earliest grades. By the third year of reform, the district had added a mathematics focus as well. To support the literacy focus at the secondary level, the district has instituted a set of courses called "Genre Studies"⁵ as a way to bolster students' reading comprehension and writing skills. All 6th graders and high school students reading below their grade level were required to take these courses, which were designed as accelerated rather than remedial classes.⁶ The Instructional Leaders pressured principals to assign their best teachers to teach Genre Studies courses. Taught at reduced class sizes and for extended blocks of time, these courses received extra funds from the district in proportion to the numbers of students demonstrating a need for them as determined by scores on a set of districtwide diagnostic assessments to the numbers of students demonstrating a need for them as determined by scores on a set of districtwide diagnostic assessments. In addition, the district adopted a set of local end-of-course assessments to diagnose students' reading levels and, if needed, to place them in Genre Studies classes.

Local Accountability: Student Equity and Teacher Professionalism. San Diego reforms took place in the context of high-stakes, student outcome-oriented state accountability policies, and state assessments certainly had the attention of district leaders, principals, and teachers. Unlike the state-level accountability approach predicated on a theory that rewards and sanctions would supply the motivation for raising test scores, San Diego's conception of accountability sought to strengthen performance and reduce inequities by improving the quality of teaching received by all students, especially those with the greatest educational needs. District reformers' goals for increasing "equity" were defined operationally as increasing the performance of all students, moving the bottom quartiles up, and reducing the gap between high and low performers. The district monitored "quality" in terms of the percentage of students in the lowest quartiles, arguing that, "by lifting the floor we also are raising the ceiling."

The conception of accountability embedded in San Diego's theory of change is tightly tied to notions of *professional accountability*, that is, accountability of professional staff for the quality of the teaching and schooling practices in which they are engaged and for continual improvements in their professional knowledge and skill (Darling-Hammond, 1997b; Benveniste, 1987). This kind of accountability requires educators to take responsibility for self and peer learning and for engaging in discourse around instructional practice. Specifically, teachers are responsible for using teaching strategies that reflect professional standards of practice, both individually and collectively within their schools, and for engaging in professional development. Principals and peer coaches are responsible for developing the teaching in their schools and for supporting teachers' learning. Through structured Learning Communities, principals are accountable to each other for self and peer learning about how to lead staff development and for their commitment to reduce inequitable student learning opportunities.

Professional accountability as a demand on principals, coaches, and teachers rests on a notion of *reciprocal accountability* within the system (Elmore, 1996; 2000). In a context of reciprocal accountability, leaders are responsible for developing conditions that will enable individual and collective learning; it is this learning for which teachers, principals, and district leaders are held accountable in return. As Elmore (2000) noted, a district system that is geared towards professional learning is predicated on distributed leadership, wherein each level of the system is concerned with the core function—instruction and its improvement—but operates within its bounds of “comparative advantage.” The district takes responsibility for providing the necessary supports for professionals to succeed in changing their practices to become successful with all students. Thus, in San Diego, all principals participate in Learning Communities, and all schools receive classroom-based professional development from peer coaches, while all teachers are expected to engage in professional development, coaching, and collaboration.

Furthermore, the district invests disproportionately in the lowest performing schools to enable their climb in closing the gap. In addition to continuous, high-quality professional development for teachers to raise the quality of instruction in every classroom, the district supports the lowest performing students through more focused curricula, (e.g., Genre Studies), extended instructional time (summer school and after-school instruction), and parent contracts. The eight lowest performing schools (“Focus Schools,” determined by the state Academic Performance Index) receive an additional full-time peer coach, 24 more instructional days each year, enhanced parent training and involvement programs, four mathematics specialists who work directly with students, and programs for preschoolers. First-grade teachers in these schools receive \$8,000 for purchasing enhanced materials (\$3,000 more than first-grade teachers at other schools). The district also identified 11 other low-performing elementary schools, which received an additional full-time peer coach and increased per-classroom allocations for enhanced first-grade materials.

In short, the district heavily invests in organizational structures that leaders intend to foster professional accountability across principals and among faculties within schools. While the district has focused attention on developing the practices of teachers and site administrators, it has shown willingness and capability to weed out ineffective or unnecessary employees from the top of the system as well. Principals work closely with the district’s human resources office in documenting extremely low-performing teachers in order to pave the way for their ultimate dismissal from the district. Equally, Instructional Leaders have reassigned to the classroom a number of principals who have not demonstrated effective instructional leadership on site. At the end of the first year of the reform (1999), 15 site administrators were abruptly reassigned to classrooms for failure to demonstrate effective instructional leadership. By the end of the second year of the reform, about 30 of the district’s principals (15% of the total) were counseled out of their leadership positions (Hightower, 2001).

Forging Coherent District Strategy: How the District Mediates and Redirects State Policies

From the perspective of an outside agent such as the state, we might say that the district’s primary reform strategies comprise the foundation that external policies must penetrate to have any effect on the district’s activities. From an inside-out perspective, we might say that the district’s strategies must contend with state and other external policy interventions and conditions that may either impede or support the reform initiatives. In this section of the paper, we examine how district leaders in San Diego leveraged, mediated, or ignored state policies to further the instructional improvement goals of the district. Three key examples from San Diego City Schools’ reform strategy

illustrate the district's active management of the broader state context as state-initiated policies hit the ground in San Diego. We explore how the state's teacher development policies, reading initiative, and accountability measures intersected with, supported, and sometimes diverged from San Diego's district-wide strategy for onsite, teacher-driven professional development, strongly articulated vision of balanced literacy, and disproportionate investment in the lowest performing students and schools.

District Professional Learning: Leveraging State Teacher Quality Policies

For the reasons described earlier, San Diego City Schools do not suffer from teacher shortages on the same scale as other urban areas in the state. Great progress has been made in the past three years as a function of aggressive recruitment, collaboration, and overhaul of the personnel system, making it possible and expected for all schools to be staffed by trained teachers. Less than 5% of SDCS teachers were uncredentialed in 2000-01 (CDE, 2001e), compared to a statewide average of 14% (Shields et al., 2001) and an average in some other cities of well over 20%. In fields where shortages are particularly severe, such as special education and bilingual education, the district works with local universities to create and operate teacher education programs. By creating a well-designed set of recruitment, preparation, and retention efforts and by leveraging state teacher policies (funding for hard-to-staff schools through the Teachers as a Priority program; support for teacher education candidates and the creation of preparation programs, support for beginning teachers), the district reduced the number of new hires on emergency credentials to fewer than a dozen by 2001-02.

While state policies resemble emergency room triage in the face of the large proportion of under-prepared teachers and their concentration in high-poverty schools, San Diego is in a position to work on improving professional skill for all teachers. It has taken advantage of recent state incentives in support of teacher recruitment to help achieve this goal, but its efforts have largely been locally designed and self-initiated.

San Diego also leveraged the well-funded state BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment) program to serve its reform initiative, parlaying state BTSA funds to augment the onsite peer coaching infrastructure for literacy that had already been established at the elementary level. The decision to subsume BTSA activities into the activities of literacy peer coaches in elementary schools is an example of the district's effort to create coherence across policies. New teachers receive the same substantive messages about the district's theory of teaching and learning as their peers throughout the school, while being coached in ways appropriate for their development as novice teachers. Because new elementary teachers are integrated into the overall reform initiative of the district, their students are exposed to the same balanced literacy approach as students in the classrooms of more experienced teachers. Furthermore, San Diego beginning teachers are enabled to learn content-specific pedagogy for literacy instruction, which goes beyond the generic approach to teaching supported by the state-sponsored assessment of teaching used in BTSA.⁷ Finally, by using BTSA funds to support new teachers' work under the elementary literacy reform umbrella, San Diego resisted fragmenting the focus of teachers, peer coaches, and district leaders. Within the literacy initiative at the elementary level, the district does not conceive of BTSA as a separate, disparate program as many other districts might.

Districts can also ignore or marginalize external policies to protect their reform agendas, as San Diego did with the state Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program. In the late 1990s, California replaced the highly popular California Mentor Teacher Program with the PAR program, which focuses on peer assessment and review of under-performing veteran teachers and supports mentoring for novice teachers to supplement BTSA. The enabling legislation mandated that PAR must be negotiated locally between every district and bargaining unit. In the context of a highly acrimonious relationship

between the district and the local teachers' union, San Diego PAR became a separate and more marginal program, providing funds at the school-level for the support of mentors who assisted teachers on request and discretionary funds for professional development supports not provided by the district's literacy initiative. District use of both BTSA and PAR provisions—in one case aiming at integration and, in the other, at programmatic distinctiveness that kept it from interfering with the reform—were intended to protect the coherence of the literacy initiative in San Diego.

Despite the inevitable difficulties of implementing new programs like BTSA and PAR, San Diego is well ahead of many other districts in its efforts to ensure that beginning teachers receive mentoring. Statewide, only 39% of first and second year teachers participated in BTSA in 2001, and a smaller number participated in other support programs, including PAR. A teacher survey in that year found that 70% of beginning teachers reported being assigned a mentor, but fewer than a third received regular coaching from assigned mentors (Shields et al., 2001). In San Diego, 86% of teachers hired between 1998 and 2001 (a pool that included experienced teachers moving from other districts) reported having a formally assigned mentor during their first and/or second year of teaching, and at least 54% saw their mentor for classroom observations and/or discussions about their teaching at least monthly. This compares to 47% of beginning teachers in BTSA and 16% of other beginning teachers statewide (Shields et al., 2001, p. 102).

Reading Initiative

The ways in which San Diego's leaders mediated and leveraged aspects of the California Reading Initiative to support their own balanced literacy approach is a lesson in strategic opportunism anchored in a theory of instruction and of change.⁸ The approach to balanced literacy in San Diego, as embodied in its Literacy Framework, is arguably richer than the state's vision of literacy as embodied in the state standards, framework, and current assessments. San Diego's Literacy Framework, grounded in research on teaching and learning, encompasses a broad array of pedagogical strategies and expected outcomes from students, including extensive, high-level strategic reading and writing; evidence- and reason-based discussion and other forms of oral discourse; as well as basic decoding and comprehension.

The carefully-developed Literacy Framework serves as an anchor against the pendulum swings in state reading policies—from “basic skills” to “whole language” to “phonics” and back again. The specificity of the framework and the purposefulness of the district's strategy allowed San Diego to take advantage of the funds available for training in the state's components of literacy to support the portions of teachers' learning that map onto the state's goals such as the teaching of phonemic awareness and decoding skills. The district's other professional development work extends beyond the state reading initiative using the multiple components of the Literacy Framework. Thus far, San Diego has been able to keep the richness of its balanced literacy approach and maintain the breadth and depth of literacy training the district believes its teachers need.

Accountability

San Diego schools are subject to the same accountability rules as other California districts. It is worth noting that the state's measures largely skirt districts and rest heavily on the schools themselves, which are rewarded and sanctioned based on their performance. This could potentially cause a rift between district and school reform directions. Particularly with the state's Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), which provides funding to support implementation of improvement plans at schools not meeting state targets, teachers and principals may be torn between the recommendations of the state-required evaluator and district

initiatives. Attempting to preempt this potential conflict, San Diego City Schools acted on behalf of all of its 42 II/USP schools in selecting one firm as the external evaluator for all of the schools and negotiating the approach of the evaluator to ensure that it would be consistent with the district's theory of instruction. District administrators strongly believe that the lowest-performing schools are the very ones that most need to keep their focus on literacy and that the district's literacy approach will prove successful for students at risk of not reading. Rather than allow the schools to spin off on potentially disparate paths, the district worked to subsume this state policy into its overall reform initiative.

Although the state accountability policies circumvent the district in many ways, the role of the district has been instrumental in mediating a largely punitive accountability approach and transforming it into one that is based on professional support and an explicit priority on equity in student learning. Rather than dealing with testing pressures by holding back large numbers of students so that their scores look better or pushing out those with low scores to special education or GED programs so that the average improves, SDCS' *Blueprint* specifies multiple strategies for heavily investing in low-performing schools and low-performing students so that they have real opportunities to improve. Not only does this orientation recognize that building capacity in the lowest-performing schools requires much more investment than at high-performing schools, but it undergirds the investment with a coherent theory of instruction and professional development aimed at helping traditionally underserved students learn. In this sense, the district actually focused and sharpened state policy to develop a more rational performance-based accountability system than what the state itself had enacted.

To further mitigate the punitive nature of the state's accountability measures, the district intervened on behalf of the schools under threat of state takeover. It proactively developed a plan for those schools, gave them additional human and fiscal resources, and won a waiver from the state for a self-monitoring effort. To the extent that the plan reflects the district's main reform initiatives, this effort again keeps schools from becoming out of step with the district's theory of instruction. In mediating state policies in the ways we have described, San Diego had some advantages not available to some other districts. First, its lack of emergency permit teachers allowed it to use its BTSA funds to better advantage. (BTSA cannot be used for emergency credentialed teachers.) Second, because of its size and its purposeful management, San Diego was able to use state professional development funds to meet its own needs. These advantages, coupled with its strategic approach, allowed San Diego to manage the state's initiatives and use state resources to further its instructional goals.

Early Results

Improvements in Student Achievement

San Diego has witnessed substantial increases on the state assessments (SAT-9 tests) since the reform's inception; district leaders see these increases in student performance as validating the reform underway. The proportions of students scoring above the 50th percentile increased from 41% to 47% in reading and from 45% to 53% in mathematics (See Appendix C.) Furthermore, gains have been most dramatic in the grade levels specifically targeted by particular aspects of the reforms: the early elementary grades and middle school literacy. For example, the proportion of 2nd graders scoring above the 50th percentile in reading increased from 43 to 55% over the four years and, in mathematics, from 50 to 61%. While scores increased statewide during this period, neither average scores nor participation rates increased as steeply as in San Diego. Furthermore, San Diego's student body includes a much larger proportion of low-income students and students of color than the state as a whole.

(The district student population is 75% “minority,” 60% of its students are free- and reduced price lunch participants, and 30% are designated themselves as limited English proficient.)

Importantly, gains in average scores and in the proportions of students scoring above the 50th percentile have been accomplished while the number of students taking the test has also increased substantially. Participation rates grew by more than 20% on both the reading and mathematics tests between 1998 and 2001 as an additional 8,000 students were tested. In most schools, more than 98% of students were participating in the tests by 2001. District scores sometimes go up as more low-scoring students are held out of the test, are moved into non-tested programs (e.g. special education), or are counseled to leave school for GED programs or other alternatives. Conversely, average scores tend to decline as low-achieving students are added to the testing pool. This appears not to have been the case in San Diego. Scores continued to increase in 2001 when there were large increases in the test participation rates of English learners and other students who were not previously tested.

A sizeable number and proportion of students moved from the lowest two quartiles to the upper two quartiles in both reading and math between 1998 and 2001, especially in the early grades where the literacy initiatives have most consistently taken root. For example, the proportion of students scoring in the bottom quartile in reading dropped from 36% in 1998 to 29% in 2001, while the proportion scoring in the top quartile increased from 20% to 24%. Based on four years of SAT-9 data, 7,800 more “Q1-2 students” (students initially scoring in the bottom two quartiles) now score above the 50th percentile in reading and over 9,000 more “Q1-2 students” are above the 50th percentile in mathematics.⁹ Increases have occurred across all grade levels but have been much larger at the elementary and middle levels than at the high school level, especially in reading, where high school students perform noticeably less well than younger students. As we discuss later, secondary school achievement frames the new high school initiative undertaken by the district.

Changes within the Central Office

Within the central office, budget and operations managers have learned to collaborate with instructional administrators to specify and prioritize educational needs and to direct district dollars toward instructional priorities. Both instructional and operational administrators commented on a shift *away* from letting the available money guide program and policy decisions and *toward* having districtwide, articulated, instructional needs govern the budget. Alvarado described the shift as getting “operational departments [to] become the handmaiden of instruction,” noting that the reform:

...created a group of people working together for the first time in which the...instructional issues drove [decisions], and the budget people and the operational people knew that their job was to make the budget thing happen. That’s a *very* important thing to happen in districts. It almost never happens.

Substantial shifts in the allocations of funds occurred, enabling much larger investments in professional development, teacher recruitment, mentoring and coaching, and other factors that support the district’s increasingly successful efforts to hire, support, and develop well-qualified teachers well-supported in their learning and teaching.

There were also short-term costs to these focused changes. The district initially lost its National Science Foundation grant because the *Blueprint* focus did not include math and science in the first year. The \$6 million grant was later reinstated, and the district also secured a \$3 million grant from the Foundation for the Improvement

of Mathematics and Science. Central office capacity in mathematics was initially reduced until a new person was hired to lead the district's math division and the Math Framework guiding new investments in curriculum and professional development was approved by the Board in 2000. Science support also languished until new curriculum initiatives were launched in 2001. Special education was left out of the reform until recently, when efforts to bring the district into compliance and to build capacity brought it under the wing of the Institute for Learning and led to the placement of 49 site-based diagnostic resource teachers to support this function in schools.

The prioritization of instruction over operations also had short-term costs, as it became more difficult to get attention to repairs and other non-instructional items in the early years of the reform. Over time this imbalance, too, was redressed. Instructional Leaders described how their roles evolved over the first three years of the reform, gradually taking on more aspects of instruction and, ultimately, operations as well, reincorporating aspects of the former assistant superintendent roles. As one noted:

When we first started we were almost exclusively focused on instruction—and exclusively on literacy. Over the course of the three years we moved into math and took on other operational issues, first with a focus on the second language program and special education, then the school budgets, to the point now where we're clearly responsible, through the principal, for whatever happens at the school. Although we don't get into a lot of details on operational issues, if there's a crisis or a particular issue, then we're expected to step in and help to solve it, and it seems like that echoes back more to what the assistant superintendent's role was prior to the reorganization.

The expansion of the IL job was not, however, a return to the status quo, because, in contrast to earlier years, these Instructional Leaders were chosen for their deep knowledge of teaching and learning, were assisted in learning how to oversee and develop instructional programs and support principals as instructional leaders, and were held accountable for improving instruction. Thus, as they assumed other functions of the previous organizational roles, they did so with a different foundation of knowledge, with new structures in place to support schools and the change process, and with a new mandate.

School-level Reactions

As we noted earlier, leadership in a context of reciprocal accountability is not intended to be a zero-sum game of power in which different role incumbents win or lose control with varying governance schemes. Instead, the combination of complementary strengths should make possible strong roles for district personnel, school leaders, and teachers. However, the process of developing a sense of shared accountability can be uncomfortable in an organization that has not previously experienced a strong press for focus and results. Our survey data collected during the second and third years of the reform (2000-2001) indicate that principal and teacher reactions to the reforms exhibited both an appreciation for new supports and, not surprisingly, discomfort with changes in norms of practice.

Principal Reactions

Principals were mostly pleased about the district-initiated changes but were also wary of the increased scrutiny of their work. More than 75% of those surveyed¹⁰ felt that the district held high expectations and was committed to high standards, held priorities consistent with those of the school, helped the school focus on and nurture teaching and learning, and promoted principal and teacher development. More than two-thirds of principals at each level felt that "the district supports my

school's efforts to improve." At the same time, just over half (55%) said that they saw the district as centralized and hierarchical, creating mandates without providing adequate support. This sentiment was strongest among high school principals. Only 56% felt that "the district inspires the best in job performance." Nonetheless, more than two-thirds of principals at each level felt that "the district supports my school's efforts to improve."

The enthusiasm of many was expressed by this principal after the first year of the reform:

It's very exciting [to hear conversations at] the staff meetings and grade level meetings [at our school], or just conversations in the teachers' lounge. The very different questions or the reflections they have, or the conversations around curriculum or instruction. It's really quite amazing to see the change in teachers.

The commitment of other principals to the reform tended to grow over time, as their deeper understanding of the reform's intentions increased with greater communication. Many grew more supportive as they saw how the professional development available to themselves and to their teachers enabled them all to develop stronger practice. In many cases, a view of the reform as hierarchically imposed shifted as the professional basis for the work became clearer. One principal described her own evolution this way:

I resisted Alvarado because I don't like being told what to do, and who knows better than I do, for crying out loud! So there was resentment there. But I think [Alvarado] is sincere, and I think he's got a very simple plan, but it makes a lot of sense: focus on good teaching; support good teaching, and learning will come. And he's absolutely right... And so I shared with [my staff], 'We're going to do this, this, and this, and they said, 'Why?' And I said, "Because we're being told to do it, that's why." *Because I didn't get the 'why' either, and there were missing pieces. Information came out piece by piece.* We had this attitude of we'll be saluting and we'll do it. Then when I finally heard Alvarado talk to the middle-level principals in a forum where he just talked to us, I came back here and said to the staff, 'I need to tell you that I've finally heard the whole plan, the whole picture, what it's about, and each and every one of us would be happy to be chancellor and mandate this if we could.... It makes absolute sense....' It's common sense; it's a good thing. Who doesn't want a kid who will read and write in grades 8 and 9 because we've addressed it in grade 7?' So they agreed with me.

The vast majority of principals we interviewed (approximately 40) recognized the structural supports for their learning. They appreciated their Instructional Leader, liked the Learning Community groupings, and noted the monthly Principals' Conferences as a source of professional growth and inspiration as well as an important conduit for information between schools and the central office. They viewed Walk Throughs—a practice in which principals and instructional leaders walk through the school stopping to assess teaching in each of the classrooms—as positive, non-threatening opportunities to interact with the IL on a more personal, context-specific basis. One principal noted that the IL model made the district more responsible for teaching quality:

There's a sense that they [the Instructional Leaders] really know what's going on at our schools, where I didn't really feel that as tightly in the old model. So it feels like the *system* is becoming more accountable. Each piece is making the whole organization more accountable.

In addition, a majority of principals spoke favorably about the reform’s “equalizing” quality and its focus on helping principals get access to professional knowledge. They noted that everyone—not just specific schools or areas of town, as in the past—is getting access to comparable information about effective teaching and learning strategies. One veteran elementary school principal explained:

It strikes me that the clusters were totally dependent on the vision of their leader, the assistant superintendent. So each cluster lived or died by that individual’s futuristic goal or vision about education. Now, that doesn’t exist. Our immediate Instructional Leader gets the vision from the top; we all hear the same thing... the same message. And that consistency helps me to know that when I look at someone who’s on the other side of town, they’re trying to do the same thing I’m trying to do. And that’s very reassuring, rather than to think: ‘Gosh, they’ve got the corner on the market for something I haven’t even heard about.’ At least we’re all in the same sailboat.

These perceptions are corroborated by survey data of principals (see Table 1). More than 90% cited as valuable the school- and district-sponsored staff development, Instructional Leader school visitations, the district’s focus on low-achieving students, and the three-hour literacy block. However, elementary principals valued supports like the principals’ Learning Communities, the monthly Principals’ Conferences, and the discussions with other principals and institute staff much more than secondary principals did. And elementary principals valued reform strategies that most affected their schools, such as the developmental reading assessment. Meanwhile, secondary principals highly valued the Genre Studies courses, which were implemented in grades 6-12, affecting most middle and high schools.

Table 1: Principals’ View of San Diego Reforms (2000-01)

% Rating Item Highly Valuable or Positive*	Overall (n=180)	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
School-sponsored staff development	99%	99%	100%	100%
Institute-sponsored staff development	96%	99%	91%	87%
District’s focus on Q1-Q2 students	94%	95%	86%	93%
Instructional leader school visitations	92%	94%	91%	80%
Discussions with my instructional leader	92%	93%	91%	80%
Three-hour literacy block	92%	98%	66%	60%
Principals’ learning communities	88%	96%	69%	54%
Discussions with my school staff developer	85%	80%	100%	100%
Developmental reading assessment (used in elementary schools)	84%	90%	58%	33%
Genre studies course (used in grades 6-12)	83%	57%	100%	84%
Monthly principal conferences	83%	89%	70%	46%
Discussions with principals in my learning community	81%	93%	50%	46%
Portfolio assessments	60%	66%	53%	23%
Discussions with institute [district] staff other than instructional leader	58%	66%	32%	27%

*Note: Percent responding 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale where “5” is extremely valuable or responding 3 or 4 on a 4-point Likert scale where “4” means very positive. Source: CTP Principal Survey, May 2000.

Overall, the survey data showed that a large majority of principals at each level felt that the district supported their school reform efforts. However, a sizable minority of high school principals (39%) felt that the district *did not understand* their school's reform agenda, a response echoed by only about 5% of elementary and middle school principals.¹² One major bone of contention was that the initial focus on literacy appeared to ignore subject matter distinctions at the high school level. As one high school principal commented: "[W]hen Bersin says that literacy is going to be...the only game in town, it's *not*...at the senior high school. At the other [level]s, it *can* be the only game. But at senior high, it's only going to be a piece of it" (Hightower, 2001, p. 42).

In the initial years of San Diego's district-wide reform, leaders intentionally pursued a system-wide strategy with little differentiation by grade level or subject matter. "Learning Communities," the district's variation on clusters established in 1998, were heterogeneously grouped by geography and school level. While Alvarado recognized the potential value of grade-level groupings, he feared that creating such groups would minimize "the K-12 thinking that has to go on" (Hightower, 2001, p. 137). Increasingly, however, high school principals bristled at the apparent "one size fits all" approach. They felt that district reformers lacked knowledge related to the particular needs of high schools and that the K-12 instructional conferences largely failed to meet their learning needs.

In response to these sentiments, district leaders decided to reorganize the Learning Communities to create two high school-only groups. Following Board approval, Bersin and Alvarado announced this restructuring at a Principals' Conference in fall 2000. In making this change, however, they underscored that it was not a retreat from K-12 thinking; rather, it was an attempt at being responsive to the expressed needs of high schools. As Bersin explained:

...High schools, in fact, require not separate treatment but *different* treatment. There is a [grade-level] difference, and we have to take it into account... Without cutting ourselves adrift from our [K-8] colleagues and understanding that what happens in the elementary school is absolutely critical to the success of our students in high school, we also will confront the fact that high schools require their own approach[es to reform] (Hightower, 2001, p. 248).

This change represents an important recognition by the district that, in the context of system-wide reform, high schools may require reform strategies specific to their level.

While the survey data reveal general trends in the principals' perceptions of the reform, they do not fully reflect the concerns principals shared in one-on-one interviews or meetings. In addition to the secondary school tensions, principals often lamented a lack of support for non-instructional or "operational" matters. While appreciating the renewed central office support for instruction, some administrators found that a day or more off-site each month for Principals' Conferences created tension between on-site responsibilities and their own professional learning. Principals also spoke about feeling overworked and somewhat fearful about the pressures and consequences for principal and school performance under the new district administration.

One of the main tensions under a system of reciprocal accountability is balancing a focus on high performance with adequate supports. Principals often talked about the high stakes attached to the role of the principal—a reality driven home by the fact that a number of site administrators had been moved out of their jobs in the first two years of the reform. Prior to the Bersin administration, principals rarely were removed from their schools other than through voluntary transfers; in extreme cases, questionable principals were placed in central office roles. Accordingly, these personnel actions

came as a shock, particularly to site administrators, many of whom wondered if they might be next. Still, the principals who remained largely supported the intentions of the reforms and expressed the view that improvements were tangible.

Teacher Reactions

Teachers’ reactions to the district’s instructional reforms have been much more mixed. In general, they voiced appreciation for the district’s emphasis on professional development and on improving instruction; however, many disagreed with the implementation of the reform initiatives, claiming the process was “too cut-throat” (elementary teacher), “top-down” (elementary teacher), and “bureaucratic” (Genre Studies high school teacher). Elementary school teachers appeared more comfortable with the reform principles and literacy focus than were middle or high school teachers, who raised questions about the literacy initiative’s relevance for all teachers, schools, and students. A common theme, also raised in a recent American Institutes for Research (AIR) study of the San Diego reforms, is that most teachers agreed with the goals and substance of the reform agenda, but many had discomfort with centralized implementation that seemed not to take their views into account. Their responses illustrate some of the challenges associated with a large-scale reform strategy that turns on establishing common norms of practice that defy the traditional individualistic culture of schools. The responses also reveal some of the felt trade-offs among competing uses of time and resources in the reform strategy.

Views of Professional Leadership and Support. Consistent with the district’s goal of providing supports to enable teachers to be successful in what they are held accountable for—professional learning—most teachers had positive perceptions of their principals’ instructional leadership and of their own opportunities for professional development. A majority of teachers surveyed saw their principals as leaders in school reform who set high standards for teaching and for student achievement (82%), and who maintain a strong focus on student learning within the school (68%). More than three-quarters also reported that their principals were involved in professional development with teachers. (See Table 2.) This is an unusually high vote of confidence in local school principals. However, reflecting teachers’ sense of centralized decision making, a minority (38%) said their principal was strongly committed to shared decision-making. Their comments suggest that collegial work was focused more on professional learning than participatory governance.

Table 2. Teachers’ Views of Principal Leadership

Proportion of teachers agreeing* that:	All Teachers (n=404)	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
The principal sets high standards for teaching	82%	89%	70%	61%
The principal participates in professional development activities with teachers	77%	84%	69%	60%
The principal ensures that student learning is the “bottom line” in the school	68%	79%	60%	50%
The principal is a strong leader in school reform	62%	67%	54%	60%
The principal is strongly committed to shared decision making	38%	41%	36%	30%

* Note: Percentage responding 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert Scale where 5 is “strongly agree.”

Source: CTP Teacher Survey, Spring 2001.

Teachers also reported engaging in substantial amounts of professional development, with 96% having engaged in some kind of workshops or other training and 25% having offered professional development to colleagues. Whereas a minority of teachers nationally reported spending more than eight hours in professional development activities on any given topic (NCES, 1999), most San Diego teachers reported spending more than eight hours in professional development regarding reading (79%), methods of teaching (62%), and new curriculum and instructional materials (54%). (Table 3.)

Table 3. Teacher Participation in Professional Development

Types of professional development engaged in the last 12 months:	All Teachers	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Attending workshops, conferences, or training	96%	98%	92%	93%
Regularly-scheduled collaboration with other teachers on instructional issues	75%	83%	63%	69%
Mentoring or peer observation / coaching	61%	70%	56%	41%
Observational visits to other schools	57%	64%	56%	34%
Presenting at workshops or conferences	25%	25%	24%	33%
Individual or collaborative research	55%	58%	49%	60%
University courses (beyond initial certification courses)	30%	30%	35%	33%
Participating in a teacher network	27%	24%	26%	34%

That teaching is becoming more public is also reflected by the fact that 75% of San Diego teachers engaged in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, and 61% participated in mentoring or peer coaching. More than half (57%) had participated in observations in other schools. Within their own schools, observations were even more frequent: Eighty-two percent of teachers reported that they observed another teacher teaching, and 75% reported that they had been observed by another teacher at least several times a year. Teachers reported further substantive collaboration on a regular basis (i.e., at least once a month), such as working together to develop curriculum materials or activities for particular classes (60%), discussing lessons that were not particularly successful (54%), teaching with a colleague (33%), and analyzing student work with other teachers (39%). Embedding professional learning into the everyday activities of a school is far more difficult than mounting formal professional development activities. Half of San Diego teachers surveyed agreed, "Our stance toward our work is one of inquiry and reflection," although this average reflects the positive responses of 60% of elementary teachers as compared to fewer than 40% of secondary teachers.

San Diego teachers' view of their formal professional development experiences were, on the whole, more favorable than averages found in recent statewide studies of California teachers (see Shields et al., 1999 and 2001). Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed agreed that the professional development they engaged in presented new information, increased their knowledge of instructional and assessment techniques in their teaching field, increased their effectiveness with students, and deepened their subject matter knowledge. Once again there was a divide between elementary and secondary teachers: about three-quarters of elementary teachers agreed with these statements as compared with about half of secondary teachers. Approximately half of all teachers felt that professional development experiences improved their skills for working with a diverse student population and for identifying instructional goals

appropriate for their subject matter. Approximately half also felt that the experiences led them to seek additional learning opportunities; this was true for 61% of elementary teachers but only for 36% of high school teachers. (See Table 4.)

Table 4. Teachers' Views of Professional Development

Effects of professional development participation:*	All Teachers (n=404)	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Provided information that was new to me	66%	77%	58%	50%
Increased my knowledge beyond basic instructional and assessment techniques appropriate for my subject matter	64%	73%	58%	50%
Increased my effectiveness at promoting student learning	64%	72%	58%	56%
Deepened my grasp of subject matter	63%	76%	58%	45%
Improved my skills to meet instructional needs of a diverse student population	52%	59%	53%	50%
Improved my ability to identify instructional goals appropriate to the subject matter I taught	52%	63%	53%	47%
Caused me to seek further information or training	52%	61%	45%	36%

*Note: Percent of teachers replying 3 or 4 ("somewhat" or "a lot") on a 4-point Likert scale.

Source: CTP Teacher Survey, Spring 2001.

Beginning teachers seemed especially enthusiastic about the training and the creation of schoolwide practices. As one noted:

For me, being a newer teacher, this has been great. The first two years I taught, I felt really lost.... I'm here, brand new, trying to create everything myself... It was really stressful and really difficult. And so when the district came in and said, 'here this is what you're supposed to do' and I started getting some training... All of these things for me have been great! I'm finally given some direction. Everybody's doing the same thing. And I'm feeling more in touch with everybody else.

Consonant with these generally positive views about their professional learning, San Diego teachers expressed efficacious views about their ability to influence student learning. Large majorities agreed that "by trying different teaching methods, I can significantly affect my students' achievement" (81%), and 67% reported that their expectations for their students' learning had been increasing. Comparable proportions took issue with statements suggesting that their "students cannot learn the material they are supposed to be taught" (68% disagree) or that there is "little I can do to insure that most of my students achieve at a high level" (80% disagree). Many teachers—particularly in elementary grades and the Genre Studies courses at secondary level—offered examples of how the reform had changed and deepened their own practice and how they were incorporating many of the strategies in their classrooms.

Views of the School Environment. Most teachers also felt that their colleagues provided a high quality of instruction and were committed to improving student learning. Their views were more divided as to whether the emphasis on standards had translated into coherent curriculum plans relevant to all students and consistent across grade levels and classrooms. Middle school teachers reported the least confidence about the coherence and clarity of their school's curriculum and standards. Across the board, relatively few teachers (30%) reported that they had enough resources for their work. (See Table 5.)

Table 5. Teachers’ Views of their School Environment

Proportion of teachers agreeing* that:	All Teachers	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
The school staff is committed to helping students learn	89%	91%	88%	86%
Teachers provide high quality instruction	88%	90%	81%	78%
This school has high standards for students’ academic performance	70%	77%	53%	65%
This school has well-defined learning expectations for all students	59%	67%	40%	63%
Students are well aware of the learning expectations of this school	57%	62%	50%	59%
Standards for student achievement are challenging, attainable, and measurable	56%	64%	43%	55%
Our stance toward our work is one of inquiry and reflection	51%	60%	38%	39%
This school has high quality school-wide curriculum plans	50%	55%	33%	57%
This school has consistent standards from classroom to classroom	45%	57%	25%	28%
The curriculum is relevant for the population of students	37%	45%	26%	39%
Resources are distributed equitably within this school	37%	45%	29%	24%
The curriculum is planned between and among grades to promote continuity	32%	36%	21%	36%
The resources available to me are sufficient for me to do my job	30%	27%	38%	29%

*Note: Percentage responding 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert Scale where 5 is “strongly agree.”

In interviews, teachers voiced concerns about: (1) a lack of curriculum materials to accompany the literacy focus; (2) the homogeneous tracking of lowest performers into Genre Studies, which appeared to contradict some research on learning; and (3) lack of attention to other subject areas beyond literacy. As resources were pulled in different directions, some teachers also complained that the reform had eliminated school-level programs they felt were successful. Others noted incompatibilities with their personal conceptions of good teaching. This sentiment may be a reflection of the tension between an emerging view of professionalism as collective responsibility for standards of practice vs. the predominating view in teaching of professionalism as individual autonomy.

A paradox is that, while most teachers agreed that the district held high expectations for schools and felt that the district invested in high quality professional development for teachers, many also voiced mistrust of the district’s motives and support for school-level reforms. In this sense, distributed leadership—that is, complementary district and teacher roles based on comparative advantage—was slow to take hold. In the second year of the reform, almost three-quarters of the teachers surveyed felt the pressure of mandates and perceived inadequate support. While recognizing that the district held high standards for their schools (71%), fewer than half agreed that the district helped schools focus on teaching and learning (45%), emphasized academic standards at all levels (41%), or had consistent standards across schools (40%). A very small minority agreed that the district inspired teachers to perform their best (12%), and consulted with (4%) or learned from school staff (11%). Although the district’s theory of instruction locates professional accountability with teachers, teachers had little sense of district efforts to institutionalize their participation or promote teacher leadership. In these areas, as others, secondary teachers were least optimistic. (See Table 6).

Table 6. Teachers' Views of District Support for Teachers and Schools

Proportion of teachers agreeing* that:	All Teachers (n=404)	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
This district creates mandates without providing adequate support	74	77	70	71
The district holds high expectations for our school	71	77	62	60
This district helps schools focus on teaching and learning	45	45	22	18
The district emphasizes academic standards at all levels of the system	41	50	25	25
This district has consistent standards from school to school	40	46	34	31
The district is committed to high standards for every student	37	45	26	23
This district invests in high quality professional development for teachers	34	47	21	9
The district ensures that student learning is the "bottom line" in schools	27	38	11	9
This district helps schools use information about students achievement relative to standards in order to improve instruction	21	27	8	13
This district provides support to enable teachers to adjust curriculum and instruction to meet all students' individual needs	13	18	7	5
I feel that this district inspires the very best in the job performance of its teachers	12	15	8	5
This district provides all schools the same level and kind of support for reform	11	10	14	13
District administrators visit and learn from school administrator and staff	11	15	6	5
The district promotes teacher leadership across district schools	9	11	7	2
The district office consults with schools on issues that affect schools	4	4	4	3

*Note: Percentage responding 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert Scale where 5 is "strongly agree" or "a great deal."

Source: CTP Teacher Survey, Spring 2001.

One Instructional Leader explained how the reform collided directly with the strong emphasis on site-based governance that had been negotiated in the previous contract under the prior administration:

The last contract from the union with the district gave the site governance teams the most power they've had in years: to look at budgets, to look at master schedules, to look at teacher placement.... If the principal said 'no' to what the governance team said, it would go through an appeals process at the district level. I mean, they had negotiated the most powerful site governance package that had ever come down the pike. And that was last year [1997-98]. This year [1998-99], here comes, 'Central Office will tell the sites what to do.' And that's not the fault of the teachers or the school. Someone else brought that site governance culture to us. I mean, it was pervasive throughout the United States, and you were told repeatedly, 'The sites know best; the sites will make the decisions about budgets, decisions about staffing, decisions about programs; the sites will interview for principals; the sites will interview for teachers.' So here comes the new one that says, 'We are the Institute for Learning. We will approve or

disapprove what comes your way. We have a new process for selecting principals. We may or may not get your input at some stage.' There was a little to-do about that.

District – Union Relations. Teachers' views about the process of change reflected the deteriorating relationship between the San Diego Education Association (SDEA) and the district management. Tensions between the district and the union were initially made public in the protracted conflict over the new peer coach position that Alvarado wanted to create in schools during the 1998-99 school year. The district leadership and the teachers' union disagreed on selection and reporting procedures for these new positions. The teachers' union was concerned about having input into the selection of peer coaches and about the possibility that coaches would play an evaluative role with respect to their colleagues. The district leaders wanted to select the peer coaches to ensure their quality. This disagreement postponed the implementation of peer coaches until fall 1999 and set the stage for later conflict over the *Blueprint*.

By March 2000, when Bersin and Alvarado presented the final draft of the *Blueprint* to the Board they were greeted with large protests by teachers, classroom aides, and some parents. Among the issues was the large reduction in the numbers of paraprofessionals as part of the plan to redirect resources to teaching and professional development. One of two Board members who requested (unsuccessfully) to postpone the decision to adopt the plan commented: "Anything that gets implemented (in the fall) will be hampered from the onset by this climate.... There are a lot of unhappy, suspicious, and unsatisfied people."¹³ The teachers' union president, Marc Knapp, asserted, "This plan as presented will not achieve the success we all want for our students because the people who know how to make it go were not asked."¹⁴

While Alvarado and Bersin regretted the teacher and parent opposition, they asserted that the district needed to do what was best for improving instruction, not what was best for the classroom aides. They confronted critics with SDCS's troubling statistics. Alvarado argued:

When we have 65% of our students not meeting grade level standards, over 30% of them dropping out, and fully 75% of those who graduate and go to community college and the state system not being able to take a college course because they have to take remedial reading and math, we have to change that. The burden of proof is [on] someone who wants to defend the existing system because it's not even close to what an American urban system has to be in order to promote some kind of justice to its students.¹⁵

The responses of many teachers who felt, at once, both professionally invigorated and stunned, can be seen as a result of the district's "act now, explain later" approach that prioritized speed of implementation over up-front buy-in from stakeholders. Reflecting on this approach, one top-ranking district official explained:

...one of the things that is important about having people participate in change is that they give their buy-in right from the start. But on the other hand, ...trying to get buy-in sometimes sacrifices the reform or the effort that you're trying to do. So, [we've been] challenge[d] to figure out a balance between that—the buy-in, the speed of the change, the importance of the innovation, keeping the innovation itself pure so that it isn't...compromised. ...And I think that we had to make a decision about which was more important and...urgent. And the urgency was to do something about student achievement and to get the innovations and interventions in place. And so what was sacrificed might have been a lot of the time it takes for buy-in and a lot of the compromise [that results] from buy-in.

As a consequence of this strategy for change, in the first three years of the reform, the teachers association often felt that the district included them only after major decisions already had been made. In our interviews and document review, we saw a growing similarity in how teachers talked about reform implementation and what the union publications said against the reform; at times the responses seemed almost scripted. One outside observer noted that the dissenting teachers' union, which has a myriad of mature communications networks, "is writing the story because the district doesn't have the resources or skills to write it itself."

This fractured relationship ultimately complicated and sometimes thwarted various aspects of the reform, at times impeding the district's attempts to reallocate fiscal and human resources toward its instructional agenda. For instance, San Diego has been unable to redesign its internal assignment processes or introduce incentives for individuals teaching in hard-to-staff-schools to fully address the tendency that San Diego shares with most other urban districts for more experienced teachers to flock to the least needy schools. Similarly, the district would have liked to create additional peer coaching roles using state resources associated with the state's Peer Accountability and Review (PAR) program. However, union negotiations around PAR resulted in a more traditional allocation of these funds, most of which went directly to schools to use as they saw most appropriate, within broad guidelines established by SDCS and the SDEA.

Furthermore, the acrimonious relationship between the district and union influenced teachers' views about the change *process* as one that was top-down and non-inclusive of teachers' views. This is reflected in our survey results. However, our results also indicate that most teachers voiced significant support for most of the particular instructional changes introduced by district officials, as well as for outcomes of the reforms, such as greater principal skills, peer collegiality, and high-quality professional development. Focused central office attention to the details of instruction—with the subsequent accountability measures in place to remove inadequate performers—created a delicate blend of emotions including excitement, efficacy, fear, pride, and sometimes resentment from those within schools.

The change from a local control model of school management to a more centralized approach was not an easy one. Overall, during the first two to three years of San Diego's reform implementation, our research suggests that principals and teachers valued structural changes such as Learning Communities, Walk Throughs, the literacy block, and professional development activities. However, the survey data did not portray the kind of strong distributed leadership that is intended to undergird reciprocal accountability. Teachers' negative reaction to the district's centralized reform was based on their view that district leaders dismissed their professional knowledge. As the reform unfolded, teachers increasingly demanded to see research upon which the strategies were built. They also expressed interest in reading about New York's Community School District #2 (upon which many aspects of the San Diego reform was modeled) and learning about its structure and operations. Additionally, they wanted to see research and cases of exemplary practice from *within* SDCS, where policy and professional contexts were immediate.

The district has begun to make these local exemplars available, selecting teachers to become staff developers and coaches who conduct demonstration lessons and creating special "lab" classrooms outfitted with multiple video cameras and a one-way mirror where teachers can watch expert teachers conduct their daily teaching and evaluate their moves as well as debriefing their decisions. We documented a trend toward greater consistency in teaching practices and greater comfort with the practices being modeled over the three years of this study, although important variations across schools suggested that the reform did not have uniform effects.

While the survey data reviewed above provide a snapshot of how staff felt about the reforms early on, case study work extending further into the reform period indicated that professional accountability and distributed leadership gradually took root at the school level. At the same time, school norms and capacities mediated district reforms in significant ways.

SAN DIEGO: A VIEW FROM THE SCHOOLS

Where Reform Hits The Road: Interpretations of Reform from Inside Three Middle Schools

In order to examine the change process “where reform hits the road,” we conducted in-depth case studies in three middle schools, chosen to reflect similarly diverse student populations but very different organizational structures and cultures. While district context mediates state policies, school contexts mediate state and district influences (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). This “inside-out” analysis confirms that personal and organizational capacity matter, and that school structures, as well as leadership and teacher knowledge, influence the capacity of schools to respond productively to reforms. This analysis also suggests that San Diego’s efforts to improve inadequate practice are succeeding in measurable ways; however, there are trade-offs and side-effects of the reform process that have yet to be fully appreciated or addressed. One of these is the increased in-school stratification created by the literacy block classes that are targeted at low-achieving students. Another is the loss of team teaching and planning opportunities in some schools as they bend their structures to the new initiatives.

We focused on three middle schools—Steward Jr. High, Robinson Middle, and Laurel Ridge Middle School—all of which serve student populations consisting of predominantly students of color with large numbers of English language learners and students eligible for the free- and reduced-price lunch programs.¹⁶ (Appendix D profiles these schools and their student performance outcomes.)

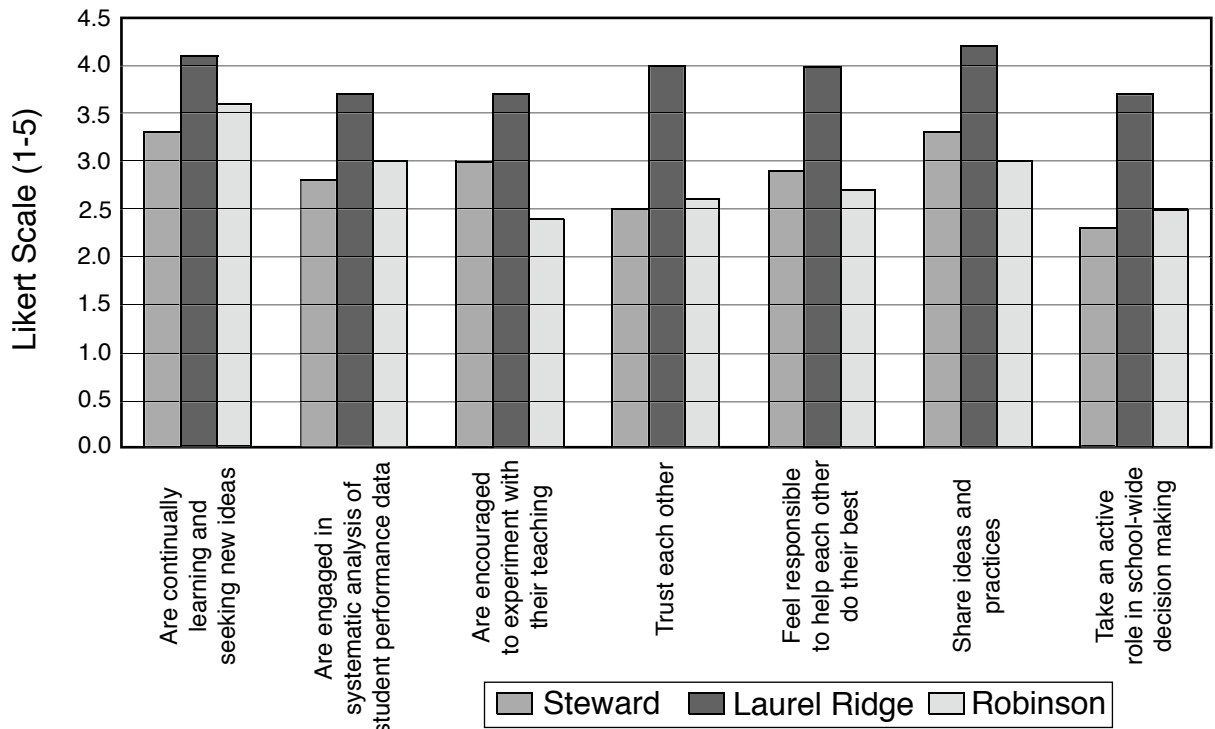
Steward typifies many urban junior high schools: at the start of our study, it maintained a traditional six-period schedule; its curriculum was largely rote-oriented; student achievement was low; and few opportunities existed for student personalization. Steward teachers rarely collaborated; a large number were uncredentialed and underprepared; and senior staff at this school historically had few learning opportunities through which to deepen their practice.

In contrast to Steward, Robinson Middle School was structurally “reformed,” with houses that enabled teams of teachers to work with students in some cases for three years, to run advisory groups, to plan together, and to develop innovative curriculum ideas. However, there were also many inexperienced, uncredentialed teachers at Robinson when this study began, and teams were extremely uneven in their experience and in their practice. Experienced Robinson teachers tended to team together, leaving inexperienced teachers to comprise other teams without much veteran support. Robinson students varied widely in their achievement levels, but on average, student achievement here was also low.

Laurel Ridge, the third school in our sample, was somewhere between the other two in terms of its structure: a number of teaching teams and an advisory period promoted student personalization, shared teacher time for teams, and a professionally active, generally well-qualified teaching force. Laurel Ridge maintains a substantial professional development agenda and a number of relationships with universities,

including attracting many student teachers to its campus. Achievement is average relative to other schools with similar student populations. The strong professional culture at the school is reflected in the fact that teachers there are much more likely to say that they are continually learning, sharing with one another, examining student data, and experimenting with their teaching than teachers at the other schools. (Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Q29: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the teachers at your school? (Mean Rating, by School)



The district-initiated reforms affected the schools in different ways, with the least disruption to Laurel Ridge, a school with already strong capacity, and large impacts on Steward and Robinson. These disruptions were partly structural—for example, Steward became somewhat more personalized for some students with the addition of a 6th grade cluster and block literacy classes, although it remained the most highly tracked of the three schools. Robinson lost its team and house structure that provided long-term relationships with students. While it maintained advisories and introduced literacy blocks, there were no longer teams with common preparation periods at the time we prepared this report. While some of the opportunities for best practice were disrupted by the reform, the reform also dislodged conditions that had created poor practice in other parts of the school. The disruptions were also pedagogical and normative—with new expectations of staff and students, and major changes in the curriculum and teaching practices. We examine these reform effects in three arenas: teacher quality, the literacy initiative, and accountability.

Teacher Quality and Teacher Development

The district's efforts to improve the teaching force had major effects on the availability of qualified teachers within a very short period of time. When our study began in 1998, the three schools' proportions of fully credentialed teachers ranged from 87% (Robinson) to 98% (Laurel Ridge), with the proportion teaching on emergency permits ranging from 11% to 24%. In 1998, two of the schools also had a few teachers on intern credentials. By 2000, all three schools were staffed by 100% credentialed teachers, and the percentage holding emergency permits for any portion of their teaching assignment had declined to 0-3%. These data reflect the fact that the district reduced misassignment of teachers while also recruiting more fully prepared teachers and helping others to complete their training. Some teachers had been counseled out of teaching at Steward, and all of the schools had peer coaches and stronger professional development programs with a focus on literacy.

Survey data indicate that more than 90% of the teachers in all three schools were involved in some form of professional development in 2000-2001, although the emphases varied from school to school, with teachers at Laurel Ridge much more likely to be involved in university courses, collaborative research, and teacher networks; those at Robinson more likely to be involved in peer coaching and observational visits to other schools; and those at Steward more likely to be involved in workshops. These differences may be associated with teachers' views of their professional development. As Figure 1 shows, teachers at Laurel Ridge were the most positive in their views of the utility of the professional development in which they participated, and least likely to say it was "a waste of my time."

Roughly 70% of the beginning teachers from each case study school were involved in BTSA. This proportion is higher than the proportion of beginning teachers receiving BTSA services statewide (Shields et al., 2001) and is a testament to the district's efforts to scale-up the program quickly. At all three schools, BTSA provided structured time for new teachers to get to know each other better and opportunities for positive mentee/mentor relationships. Some teachers described their mentoring experiences as very helpful. For example:

[My mentor] spent a lot of time with me. He probably called me at least once a week. I was able to do observations in his classroom. He came by and did observations I think four or five times and just had real good suggestions. ...[W]e were focusing on strategies for [English Language] students because I had a sheltered class last year and I had never taught sheltered. ...And I did some observations of other teachers [in my subject area] at his site who were teaching sheltered. So that was kind of helpful. ...He facilitated that. He's very good. So I enjoyed working with him.

However, this teacher's experience was not universal. Access to mentors ranged from 21% of beginning teachers in one school to 67% in another. Some novices expressed concern about the match with mentors in terms of content background, school context, or both. In addition to cross-school differences in mentoring opportunities and experiences, we also observed differences in the levels of communication about BTSA and the form the support took. Among the areas of complaint was the "paperwork" produced by the state-mandated assessment instrument, CFASST. Said one teacher, "It has...potential, ...but it's basically a pain." Many beginning teachers commented on this "busy work," which they felt took too much time from their harried schedules and did not address their immediate needs and concerns.

Steward, a junior high school with 25% beginning teachers,¹⁸ provided little formal support to beginning teachers beyond BTSA, although 65% of the new teachers took advantage of opportunities to observe other teachers. Robinson, fighting an uphill

battle with teacher turnover, was further taxed by the needs of beginning teachers who comprised one-third of its teaching staff. Many new teachers did not take advantage of BTSA, citing its demands as too burdensome. Although the principal called together new teachers a few times to talk about their experiences, the peer coach supported individual new teachers, and some experienced teachers occasionally pitched in to help, most Robinson beginning teachers described their first-year experience as “sink or swim.” In contrast, Laurel Ridge, a middle school with fewer than 20% beginning teachers, resembled a teaching hospital as it hosted significant numbers of student teachers, their cooperating teachers, and university supervisors. First-year teachers at Laurel were informally looked after by most staff members, had an assigned mentor, experienced peer coaching (46%), attended monthly meetings organized by a vice-principal, and reported a high level of supportive communication with administrators and/or department chairs. These differences point to the disparities in capacity among the three schools, and how state and district policies play out differently in distinctive contexts.

The Literacy Initiative

There is evidence of SDCS’s Literacy Framework at each case study school, and the district attributes improvements in student reading scores to its literacy-centered reforms. All three schools show school-wide gains in reading and language from 1999-2001, with large average API score gains for Robinson (an 85 point increase, while increasing from 90% to 100% of students tested); steady but somewhat more modest gains for Laurel Ridge (a 45 point increase, while increasing from 93% to 99% of students tested); and overall but uneven gains for Steward (a 40 point increase, and then a drop while increasing from 86% to 97% of students tested and the addition of more than 200 students as the school added a 6th grade).¹⁹

Some of the common features evident in all three case study schools include: a principal whose focus is on improving literacy, at least one peer coach position, smaller class sizes and longer class periods for lower-performing 6th- and 8th-grade students, improved classroom libraries, and a greater amount of teacher professional development. Students are spending more time reading books at their reading level in classrooms that are increasingly designed to support their learning. However, they are doing so in increasingly homogeneous classrooms, since students are placed according to their reading levels. Teachers more consistently teach reading and writing in a workshop format, share common terminology for teaching strategies across and within schools, meet more frequently with students one-on-one, and make use of multiple measures of student achievement to inform their instruction.

Notwithstanding these changes, teachers do not uniformly embrace these efforts. Some are enthusiastic and engaged with the reform; others resent its top-down nature and complain that they are “workshop-ed to death;” still others remain unclear about teaching expectations. Some teachers describe the Literacy Framework as “disjointed.” Nevertheless, the framework has considerably impacted the culture of teaching at all three schools over the years during our research. Whereas most teachers previously taught behind closed doors, more language arts teachers are now growing accustomed to having peer coaches and administrators in their classrooms on a regular basis, observing one another’s teaching practices, and even leading professional development activities. A peer coach describes her work:

...our focus [with yesterday’s staff development] was mini-lessons and teachers actually demonstrated mini-lessons that they have done or will be doing in a classroom. I go into the classroom and work with the teachers side-by-side. For example, in one of the classrooms that I went in this morning, the teacher was actually teaching the kids how to recognize traits of characters...she did a mini-lesson...and then I

assisted in going around and helping to conference with kids as they did their independent reading. ...I also go in the classroom and do demo lessons. I may go in and do a read-aloud, a shared reading, or a mini-lesson... [But] generally, I will ask [teachers], what is it that you would like for me to observe?

These changes redefine teachers' work in terms of how they relate to students, one another, peer coaches, and principled knowledge. Teachers are expected to know their students as readers, meeting with them frequently one-to-one to determine students' learning needs, which will guide their instruction. Teachers are encouraged to observe one another, share struggles they encounter with implementing the framework, and discuss professional books such as *Mosaic of Thought and Strategies That Work* with respect to their teaching. At each school, some teachers embrace or accept these new approaches, while others retain more private and autonomous notions of teaching.

While these schools share much in common in terms of new experiences around literacy development, they differ in terms of implementation of the Literacy Framework in two important ways: (1) the extent to which schools have enacted the Literacy Framework, and (2) the manner in which the reform has both intentionally and unintentionally redefined school structures and school culture. School-level implementation of the framework depended on the degree of stability of site principals and peer coaches, the literacy background of site leaders, site teachers' experiences, and the way each school organized opportunities for teacher learning. All three schools have undergone significant changes in leadership associated with the reforms over the past four years.²⁰ Previous principals were either dismissed or offered new leadership opportunities, and current principals were recruited because they were perceived to be strong leaders committed to the district's reform agenda. There are noticeable differences across the schools in the knowledge, backgrounds and working relationships of the principal-peer coach teams, and the ways schools organize time, expertise and other resources to reach their goals.

Laurel Ridge has the greatest consistency across its literacy classes, and teachers with lower performing students have common preparation periods and an additional professional development hour each day to support their instruction. School-wide professional development is led not only by the peer coach, but also by the principal and teachers at the school. Teachers across all subject areas have received training in literacy strategies, and many incorporate these strategies in their teaching, although not always comprehensively. Robinson and Steward exhibit greater inconsistency in implementing the framework both across literacy classes and throughout the school.

Steward teachers have less regularly scheduled time set aside to meet with one another than the other schools. Relying mainly on consultants and the peer coach for professional development in the past, Steward is beginning to rely more on a few "lead literacy teachers" to design and implement professional development—an arrangement that seems to support greater distribution of leadership (see, e.g., Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) and increased dialogue about instruction among teachers. Furthermore, Steward has also acquired a district-provided math administrator devoted to supporting and evaluating math teachers, allowing the principal to spend more time and energy with literacy teachers.

Robinson experienced dramatic restructuring from a former system of semi-autonomous interdisciplinary teams to a more traditional, departmentally-organized school. However, teachers continue to have regularly scheduled professional development built into their weekly schedule to learn, plan, and share ideas with one another. Even with the changes, a larger share of teachers at Robinson reported that they have common planning with teachers in their subject than at either of the

other two schools.²¹ Robinson also acquired a math administrator and will be awarded resources to fund a 6:1 teacher-to-coach ratio²² through an outside grant. These changes are likely to expand coaching opportunities and further impact the school culture. Many teachers at Robinson bemoaned the loss of their house and team structure and feel like SDCS has imposed a “one size fits all” structure to achieve its goals for greater equity, rather than taking individual school needs or organizational values into account. At the same time, practice is more consistent, and, as a function of raising the floor of practice, API score gains in this school have been larger than in either of the other two schools, especially for low-achieving students. In fact, low-SES students perform better at Robinson than do low-SES students in either of the other two schools.

Recently, after considerable dismantling and restructuring had already occurred at the schools, the district not only tolerated, but also supported, creative school efforts to re-establish some of the elements of personalization for students and collaboration for teachers lost in the adaptations to literacy blocks and other requirements, and the district has begun to provide individual schools with more flexibility and different supports.

Accountability

State accountability policies are aimed directly at schools, with little acknowledgment of districts, and with rewards or sanctions doled out according to school performance on the SAT-9. However, the district has attempted to mediate state accountability policies to ensure that schools’ responses to them will not derail the district’s current reforms (see also Hightower, 2002b). As we have noted, the state defines accountability much more narrowly than the district or schools in our sample. Closer to the classroom, educators tend to define accountability for results in terms that extend beyond student achievement scores, measuring success through multiple measures including student participation, behavior, attendance, and myriad formal and informal assessments. Furthermore, San Diego’s concept of reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 1996), goes beyond the “accounting” reflected in test scores with a framework for professional accountability that pays extraordinary attention to who is permitted to work in schools and to the quality of practice they provide. This more fundamental accountability for professional practice is what the district believes will improve student learning.

While having some common experiences and reactions to current state accountability policies, the three schools are also distinct, reinforcing the notion that school capacities (and their perception of their capacities) affect their ways of mediating policies. All three schools pay attention to the Accountability Performance Index as parents, teachers, and administrators worry about how their school ranks and what implications that will have on their reputation, resources, and autonomy. However, principals at all three schools express convictions that the state accountability assessment provides only one measure of student success.

Overall, teachers are ambivalent about the testing. While many teachers believe that norm-referenced tests are neither adequate nor accurate means of measuring student achievement, most of them agree that having an assessment that measures students’ reading and math proficiency is important. Many teachers argue that the test is not aligned with the state curriculum standards and needs to be. There is no question that the test used to assess school accountability is having a substantial effect in the case study schools. One math teacher shared her impression of the impact of the state test,

Our [school] assessments have been changed by the SAT-9. In math, I am totally against giving multiple choice type questions because I want to see the students’ work. If they have the wrong answer, I

want to see what they did and help them with that. Math lends itself to that nicely. You can give them partial credit for getting through part of the problem. However, on a multiple choice test, you can't do that. It is either right or wrong. In order to prepare them for the [state assessment], what we have done is made some multiple-choice tests...which goes against the grain of how we feel.

So, while teacher-selected assessments (such as "show your work" tests, 8th-grade exit exhibitions, and literacy portfolio entries) are more aligned with teachers' beliefs that students should be tested on what they are expected to learn, the effort and energy required to design, implement, and evaluate these assessments on top of state and district required assessments cause teachers and students to feel pressured and anxious. Some district and school-wide assessments (e.g., literacy portfolios, student-led conferences), which offer a counter-balance to the SAT-9 and which teachers believe to be worthwhile, have been "un-mandated" although not necessarily eliminated. This de-emphasis on some assessments is particularly worrisome to school leaders who insist that multiple, frequent, and formative assessments are necessary to track student progress and inform instruction.

Ironically, despite noteworthy gains in average API scores and in proportions of students performing in the upper quartiles, each case study school has been identified as an "underperforming" school for failing to meet certain achievement targets on the API. Even Laurel Ridge—a school with large numbers of language minority and low-income students that scores above the norm and has experienced substantial gains in both reading and math—saw its API index drop when compared to "similar schools." There are many anomalies in the calculation of the API that can cause this effect. Other researchers have noted the wide variability in school scores that can be expected from year to year and that make measures like the API and its yearly targets problematic (Kain & Staiger, 2001; Linn & Haug, 2002).²³

The API has several anomalies, when viewed from a school-based perspective. One such anomaly is that, since the API does not take into account test participation rates, schools that test fewer of their English language learners and Special Education students can achieve the appearance of higher average performance than similar schools who test more of these students, as San Diego has done.²⁴ Another anomaly is that the designation of similar schools not only includes student demographics such as poverty rates, but also the proportion of uncertified teachers, a variable that should not be part of the "controls" in the statistical system but considered as a strategic input. In practice, what this means is that schools like San Diego's that reduce the number of uncertified teachers throw themselves into a comparison set with wealthier, more advantaged schools that, in California, generally have high proportions of credentialed teachers. Schools' API scores relative to "similar" schools can be inflated by holding low-performing students out of testing and by hiring uncredentialed teachers—two practices that have been virtually eliminated in this district.

Until the API system is redesigned, however, the district and its schools are doing the best they can to work to support productive changes within the curious dynamics created by the API. While the "underperforming" label has negatively affected teacher morale at each school, each school reacted somewhat differently. Steward teachers express a "tell-us-something-we-don't-already-know" attitude, citing daily uphill battles with students and parents. At Robinson, teachers were especially demoralized and "devastated," as one teacher noted, explaining how "Every year they tell us how terrible we are: Title I, Q1/Q2. [They tell us], 'Now do the impossible and make everyone brilliant!'" By contrast, Laurel Ridge teachers voice concerns mainly with public relations issues they face once identified as "low-performing," since their positive reputation in the community is on the line.

These different reactions might be partially explained by teachers' beliefs about standards, accountability, and their own capacities to address them individually or school-wide. Compared with Laurel Ridge teachers, Steward teachers indicated on a survey that they believed teachers at their school are somewhat less committed to improving student achievement, less likely to believe that standards for student achievement are challenging, attainable, and measurable, less likely to believe that they can significantly affect student achievement by trying different teaching methods, and much less likely to identify their school as having consistent standards from classroom to classroom. Teacher responses from Robinson consistently fall between those at Steward and Laurel Ridge.²⁵

Each school also received a grant to support a state-approved evaluator's facilitation to plan ways to boost student achievement. Despite the district's best efforts to prevent external evaluators from competing with district and school reform goals, these three schools struggled to maintain their focus on district reforms as API goals pressured them to focus on test-preparation instead. Individual differences among the evaluators, the nature of school's original instructional improvement focus, teachers' beliefs and capacity, and the strength of school leadership have defined this struggle.

Finally, while each school received funds from the state, they have spent them in different ways. Laurel Ridge and Steward have spent money in ways consistent with the district's vision by using the money to support staff development (e.g., additional preparation periods for literacy teachers, time to support teacher observation, coaching opportunities). Robinson, on the other hand, purchased things that were less directly tied to literacy instruction (e.g., school nurse time, refreshments for students, technology). Taken together, these school comparisons illustrate the tension between locally defined goals and state and district policy.

Going beyond the state's definition of accountability according to student outcomes, there is strong evidence of growing professional accountability in these schools. We found over time in all of these schools:

1. *Increased professional peer support and collaboration to improve instruction, including shared expectations that teachers read professional literature and learn from experts as well as share their professional expertise with one another.* Teachers are feeling support and pressure *from one another* to improve instruction. For example, Laurel Ridge professional study groups are led by teachers, and many of the groups require teachers to do some professional reading. When a complaint came to the union representative regarding the "requirement to read," she decided to help her colleague understand the importance of meeting this professional expectation rather than grieving it. The principal noted, "The cool thing about it around here is that peer pressure is something that's working for this, because when you go into [teachers'] rooms, for the most part, you can see evidence of professional reading that they've done in an area." Meanwhile, at Steward, teachers struggling with aspects of their teaching—ranging from general classroom management to the structure of Readers' / Writers' Workshop—are asking for help from other teachers they perceive to be strong. In addition to teacher-to-teacher discussions and in-class coaching, two teachers presented their fellow English department teachers with resources and curriculum for Readers' Writers' Workshop instruction at the beginning of 2001-2002 school year.

2. *Greater accountability for teaching through formal and informal observations and evaluations.* We saw more informal observations by both administrators and peers, an increased number of teachers documented for ineffective teaching than in years past, and efforts by principals in our study to informally evaluate teachers along a continuum. Most teachers, especially those in math and language arts, at all our

case study schools have experienced more frequent observations by site and district administrators, and some experience frequent observations by other observers as well (e.g. peers, peer coach/staff developers, Instructional Leaders, candidates for administrative positions performing walk-throughs to prove their abilities to critique instruction and articulate next steps for teachers). Many principals/administrators have begun to evaluate teachers on a continuum for specific skills in order to assist in planning staff development. Principals at each of our case study schools have encouraged teachers to develop formal evaluation goals related to student outcomes in literacy. But, as the following exchange between a principal and her Instructional Leader indicates, teachers may be the ones to suggest learning goals for students and to ask the principal to hold them [the teachers] accountable through the formal process of teacher evaluations:

[Instructional Leader]: What are you holding your teachers accountable for in terms of their progress? I mean, where do you expect those kids to be at the end of the year?

[Principal]: Well, typically, the general thing is that they need to have made at least two years of progress in their reading.

[IL]: Good. Good.

[PRINCIPAL]: And you know what? The teachers decided. The literacy block teachers are the ones who told me that they thought that would be a good goal.

[IL]: Good! Excellent.

[PRINCIPAL]: And some of them have written them into their [teacher evaluations].

[IL]: Excellent. . . .

[PRINCIPAL]: Well, you can't just make one year of progress, and I think two years is minimal.

One of our case study principals noted:

I think I did a much better job evaluating people this year. Part of it is because I know more about language arts. . . . And so, of course, now that I know more, I'm able to provide them with a little more feedback than I could last year.... The way I do principaling at a school will never be the same. . . . Because what we're doing is really important work that impacts kids' lives. We weren't in classrooms before. . . . No one ever came in my room even when I was [a teacher being evaluated]. So I think that's one of the reasons that's been hard for older teachers to change. So just all of the training I've gotten, and Tony's [Alvarado] position around kids and the needs of our kids and our responsibilities as educators, all the discussions around professionalism. I'm not just a manager of an operation, but I have the instructional piece and the accountability piece that is more important than the operational piece.

3. *Use of student data to hold teachers accountable for their teaching*, especially student work and test scores in reading. The use of data is yet another element in increasing professional accountability. In some cases it involves teachers evaluating student work against a performance rubric, in accordance with district or state content standards, a practice we saw in our case study schools. All three principals in these schools met with teachers in some capacity to review student reading levels. During the 2001-2002 school year, the Laurel Ridge principal required language arts teachers

to track student reading levels according to the books they were reading while she provided teachers with SDRT and SAT-9 reading score data. The principal provided teachers with an analysis of their students' SDRT data, sharing with them reading level improvements by class, by group as it applied (e.g. ELL, GATE, grade level), and by individual students. At Robinson, the principal met individually with teachers after comparing student data herself and providing comparison scores (SDRT scores from 2000 with those of 2001) for students with matched data. At Steward, the principal provided student test score data to teachers for the first time in 2000-2001 and explained that she would be discussing student scores with them to reflect on their teaching practice and figure out ways to support students who were struggling. In addition, we saw a prevailing expectation that teachers use standards to guide their instruction and evaluation of students. In a growing number of classrooms we saw responses to the districts' emphasis on assessing where students are in order to plan how to get them to standard, rather than merely teaching the content standards as outlined in the state framework.

4. *A growing sense of principal accountability to other principals* and to their Learning Communities, both formally and informally. In formal or structured settings—such as Principals' Conferences, Walk Throughs scheduled to include peers, meetings between coaching principals and their mentees—principals discuss professional reading, observe and critique each other's videotaped staff conferences and critique them, discuss their school's instructional needs and professional development priorities, and discuss their efforts to evaluate teachers. Informally, principals form their own book clubs, visit one another's schools, talk and provide support to one another. One principal noted:

I would say that informal relationship[s with other principals is where I seek support]. And also, interestingly enough, the middle level principals—a portion of that group—is a strong support. I am thinking about [one principal who] said [this summer], 'you know I am having a difficult time finding time to read *Non-Fiction Matters* and think about it some kind of constructive way. Maybe if we get together a little and make ourselves do it, that would be beneficial. And I said, 'Sign me up!' because I'm experiencing the same thing. And we basically excluded anybody higher than a middle level principal from coming, even though people asked, and we met at [the aforementioned principal's] house. I felt more obligated to do it for my colleagues. I knew I needed to do it for myself, too, for the learning community. It really provided the real world opportunity to do that.

Meeting the Needs of High Schools: Reforming the Reform

With all of the strides evident in the elementary and middle schools, San Diego's high school students remain the lowest performing group in the district. While just over half of the district's students in grades 2-8 scored at or above the 50th percentile in reading by 2002, only 37% of students in grades 9-11 did so. (See Appendix C.) In addition to the very slow rate of improvement for high school students over the past five years, the achievement gap has also been extremely large, with only about 20% of African American and Latino high school students scoring at or above the norm, as compared to about 60% of White students.²⁶ There is also a disjuncture between students' grades and their college readiness. Significant proportions of graduates from San Diego high schools receiving grades of 3.2 and above still require remediation at the college level. Also of concern to the district is the decline in the number of students per grade at the high school level. While the district evidences a decline in the number of students per grade across the span, the drop is most precipitous

after students enter the ninth grade, and it continues throughout high school (SDCS, proposal application, 2000).

All of these factors, plus the fact that the K-8 reform strategy clearly did not have adequate reach into high schools, have propelled a systemwide effort at high school reform. To address the problem of low performance at the high school level, district leaders have created new administrative structures and pursued grants to support focused work on high school reform. The stated mission of the effort is that, “what the best and most exclusive schools do for their students, we will accomplish for all students” (SDCS, 2002, p. 2). As difficult as the initial reforms were in San Diego, these high aspirations for secondary school change promise to pose even greater conundrums.

No Model to Follow

High schools have presented a perennial challenge to school reform efforts. In a study of system-wide K-12 reform efforts in Chicago, Sebring, Bryk and Easton (1995) found consistent patterns of lower student achievement, lower engagement with reform, and lower ratings of self-efficacy among teachers in high schools when compared to elementary schools. And while Alvarado’s work in District #2 has been described as an “existence proof” that district-wide instructional improvement can happen (Elmore & Burney, 1999), it is important to note that District #2 serves a predominantly K-8 population with no comprehensive high schools under its jurisdiction.²⁷ Widespread reform of high schools began as a more bottom-up process in New York City led largely by networks of reformers and philanthropists with the help of an Alternative Schools Division within the Board of Education (Darling-Hammond, 1997b). While the role of the district was crucial in the expansion of the small schools movement in New York, the long-term history of small schools and the structure of the New York City Board of Education for supporting such schools is unique. So unlike the field-tested reform approach for San Diego’s elementary (and, to a lesser extent, middle) schools, there are no directly analogous “working models” for instruction-focused, district-led, multi-school reform at the high school level.

In addition to the lack of reform “models,” comprehensive high schools are complex social institutions. Their large size, subject-based departmentalization, extensive extracurriculum, internal stratification (tracking), and lack of instructional focus stymie reform efforts that attempt to target the teaching and learning core. Further, the notion of a neighborhood high school is deeply culturally ingrained; thus, efforts to change these schools encounter institutional pressures that typically reinforce the status quo.

A high school reform group, along with a newly hired high school reform coordinator, planned and conducted two kick-off principals’ retreats and applied for and won two sizeable planning grants, totaling \$500,000. Using these grants to conduct research and gather stakeholder input, the district established three key areas for improvement, aligned with the district’s overall strategy: (1) increased academic press, achieved by reshaping instruction and course-taking patterns to challenge and motivate students; (2) improved instructional leadership among high school principals; and (3) provision of more personalized educational settings for students.

Unlike other attempts at high school reform, such as Philadelphia’s and New York’s across-the-board moves to create smaller learning communities (see, e.g., Fine, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1997b), San Diego reformers have emphasized improving instruction more than changing school structures. This move is deliberate on the district’s part, as Alvarado and others believe that reculturing high schools is a necessary precursor to making structural changes that may support overall improvement. There is now a movement, however, to create smaller learning communities, greater

personalization, and longer blocks of learning time in the high schools to enable stronger success. Alvarado endorses this approach but cautions that “restructuring” is not the primary goal, but a means to an end:

Structure cannot, does not, make reform happen. When you restructure a school, you cannot reform it. We have evidence of that in the literature. You actually have to re-culture a school and then you can actually get some reform. But, there are structural issues that get in the way of reform because the improvement of instruction and the work that you need to do bumps up against these things that are there created by the system. So we need to start addressing those structures... [But remember] this is Tony one-note, okay? [laughter] The one note is the improvement of instruction, leading instructional improvement. This should not be interpreted as changing that basic theme. [Structure] is something to look at that we can change to enhance the ability to actually do that...

Using State Policy as Warrant for High School Reform

As the district has moved further into the work of high school reform, they have discovered a need to build a sense of urgency among principals to advance these reform goals. Once again, Bersin and Alvarado have leveraged the external policy environment to make the case for change. Across the nation, heightened graduation requirements and proficiency exams are becoming increasingly commonplace as states attempt to ratchet up the performance of their high school graduates. California has begun implementing a high school exit exam, which students must pass in order to receive a diploma.²⁸ State content standards and related course-taking requirements are approaching those of the university system. As in other areas of the reform, San Diego’s leaders are attempting to harness these initiatives and use them in the service of their overall goals.

Since the first high school-specific reform retreat in February 2001, the district has provided principals with disaggregated student performance data on a range of measures: standardized test scores, dropout rates, college eligibility and so on, in order to help principals see the patterns of chronic underperformance in their schools. Further, leaders of San Diego’s high school reform initiative have tethered local benchmarks for improvement in an \$8 million Carnegie Corporation “Schools for a New Society” grant to the University of California [UC]/California State University [CSU] subject area requirements. These course-taking requirements, often referred to as the “A-G’s” as they specify expectations in seven content areas,²⁹ are the baseline requirements for admission to the state’s public universities. The district has pledged to increase the share of district graduates eligible for the UC/CSU system from the current 38% to 66% by 2004. In its Carnegie Corporation grant, the district is holding itself to the expectation that by 2005, all students will pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) by their senior year (SDCS, 2001). The district is instituting support programs for students not on target to pass the CAHSEE, although reform leaders expect the number of under-prepared students to decline sharply as the work of reform deepens at the K-8 level.

Another example of the district’s “active use” (Firestone, 1989) of state policy is the change in its course of study in science. Citing the state’s content standards, which require more than the previously required two years of high school science, the district increased the local requirement to three years of laboratory science for all high school students. This move aligned district policy with both state standards and university entrance requirements, yet also presented the district with the puzzle of how to provide rigorous laboratory science to all of its students, regardless of performance level. To address this challenge, the district reordered its sequence of

science courses and adopted a curriculum developed by the American Association of Physics Teachers called “Active Physics” to be used with all 9th-grade students. While contentious, this change advanced the district’s agenda of providing access to improved pedagogy, as Active Physics incorporated the type of hands-on, learner-centered approach advocated by the district. It also served the district’s equity goals by increasing access to challenging, college-preparatory content across the system of high schools.

Inching toward Shared Professional Accountability

As we’ve noted, a frequent criticism of school reform in San Diego under Bersin and Alvarado has been its top-down nature. As Hightower (2001) observed, San Diego’s reform strategy has created a tension between the “what” and the “how” of reform, with teachers and principals generally admitting value in the content of the changes brought about by district leaders, but finding the way they were introduced unsettling. At the high school level, however, principals and teachers have been more likely to question both the *what* and the *how*, raising concerns about the appropriateness of district strategies for high school improvement.

For these reasons and others, San Diego’s efforts to build professional accountability in the district’s high schools, enacted largely through literacy-based reforms, found limited traction.

District leaders supported courses for low-performing 9th-grade students in literacy (initially Genre Studies, now Literacy Core and Block courses) and math (Algebra Explorations). These changes, in addition to those made in science, have created some opportunities for the development of teacher collaboration and professional accountability, through extensive on- and off-site professional development and the provision of common planning time. But they have also fragmented schoolwide high school reform efforts, as the majority of additional resources and accountability pressures have been placed on the teachers of these support courses and on the core subjects. So, for example, a teacher of a 9th-grade literacy block or active physics course may be visited multiple times during a school year, but a teacher of 11th or 12th grade “regular” or advanced course is far less likely to have visitors to her classroom. A social studies or world languages teacher is even less likely to be observed.

In addition to criticisms about the reach of the literacy and math reforms, there has been resistance among principals, teachers, parents, and community members to the science curriculum change, and, as with any new program, there have been implementation problems. The fact that the science reform “detracked” science courses to a substantial extent was one source of concern voiced by some teachers as well as affluent parents who did not want to disturb the more segregated system that they felt had served their children well. The change also necessitated a reordering of the course of study in science, from the traditional biology-chemistry-physics sequence to physics-chemistry-biology, a change long advocated by much of the professional science community, but one that came as a shock to local principals and teachers. Although the district did engage some science teachers in discussions prior to making the change, not everyone perceived this inclusion. As one principal explained:

Another example [of the speed of reform implementation in San Diego] is two weeks ago we changed the science instruction and curriculum in San Diego City Schools. The change came as a surprise to everyone. Not one science teacher knew that a discussion was on about how science was implemented in San Diego City Schools. They didn’t even know there was a discussion, let alone there was going to be a change. And one day it’s the way it’s always been for the last 50 years, and the

next day they said, 'Okay, we're going to reverse this. The 9th grade is going to do this, the 10th graders are going to do this. This class is out. Change this name.' And it just caught us off-guard. It feels as if there's a disconnect between the practitioners at the sites and the district leadership. And there doesn't need to be, because most of the things—the science thing, the things that we got yesterday—these are good things. These are things that need to happen. These are things that, with minor modifications, these are things we all believe in. But when they come without any involvement, without any input from the teachers, without any input from the counselors...they're just difficult to deal with.

Nonetheless, by 2002-03, there was a sense of progress among many at the high school level. As one Instructional Leader noted:

The changes I have noticed at the high school that are positive are: teachers becoming less resistant, many teachers really wanting to figure it out and adjust not only for the implementation issues but looking at needs of students, and not just teaching the course or the curriculum or the book, but really trying to adjust to the needs of students. The [other] major change I've seen at the high school level is that I don't think there's any doubt in anyone's mind that the major responsibility [principals] are being held accountable for is to lead the improvement of instruction....

Changing the Tone of Reform: Doing “With” Instead of Doing “To”

If high school educators are striving to find ways to work with reforms that challenge the traditional secondary school culture, district leaders seem to be adopting a more collaborative approach to the work of school improvement. Although it is too early to characterize the impact of this change, district leaders are attempting to engage high school principals in the *process* of reform in new ways, which could provide a platform for the development of a different kind of professional accountability.

Increasingly, district administrators are turning to the schools themselves—and the expertise that exists within them—for guidance and direction as the high school reform initiative unfolds. For example, at a high school Principals' Conference at the end of 2001, Alvarado asked a group of principals to conduct research and prepare recommendations regarding changes in daily schedules and school-year calendars that might better support instruction. The principals seemed willing to do the work but also skeptical that their input would be heeded by district leaders. Alvarado reiterated the position that neither he nor other district administrators had an answer in mind and that their request for input was genuine. One of the principals attempted to express the sentiment of the group and how being viewed as resources to inform change would, for them, present a departure from the district practice to which they had grown accustomed:

So now to have us engaged in this kind of discussion to, if we go forward, understanding that there's got to be some fundamental trust and that you're reaching out and you're trying to work with folks as opposed to 'you are going to do it or else'...that's when people will want to work harmoniously together, because then that would be great and might help you out quite a bit, because there is some intelligence in this room that's pretty doggone good...So if your intent is to do that, then I applaud you for that. I think it's a big step in the right direction, but I don't want to be led down the path, down the road and we come to some consensus about things that we want to do and

then, ultimately, we can't do them. So I applaud you for allowing this dialogue to occur. And hopefully we'll continue to have it so we can continue to feel that we are in this thing together...

A more recent move to regroup the high schools into "study groups" designed around common reform issues appears to be one more step toward engaging high school principals in the development of context-relevant reform approaches. These moves—looking to the schools themselves for expertise on high school improvement and allowing conversations about the role of school structures in mediating instructional reforms—have the potential to advance San Diego's high school reform agenda. They could even foster the development of school-based professional accountability as principals and teachers design context-specific reform approaches. Building on a sustained, multi-year focus on improving instruction, particularly in courses serving the lowest performing students, and a district-led push to reculture the high school principalship into an instructional leadership position, the district may be positioned to begin to make the real improvements in secondary student performance that have thus far eluded them.

CONCLUSION

When looked at from multiple perspectives within the system, the San Diego reform provides a fascinating case of district leadership that has prioritized high-quality instruction and professional learning through a forceful district-led agenda that has turned upside down many traditional notions of the relationship between bureaucracy and innovation. It seeks to empower teachers and principals at the "bottom" of the system to solve problems more effectively by organizing intensive professional development and creating a culture of shared norms of practice from the "top" and "bottom" simultaneously. It wrestles with outside influences to use them to the advantage of "inside" purposes without being carried off course by the force of their momentum.

Negotiating District and School Relationships

Whereas early advocates of site-based management saw bottom-up decisionmaking as a panacea for the ills of bureaucracy, by itself, this strategy led to schools with high capacity becoming stronger and those with limited capacity often languishing, buffeted by the winds of external forces. Meanwhile, centralizers have often sought to enforce teacher proof (and student proof) curriculum that preclude local decisionmaking, often preventing the classroom adaptations that many students need to learn and chasing the most capable professionals from the system. Alvarado and Bersin have sought to implement the sophisticated notion that a district can build professional knowledge and skill that enable teachers to make more nuanced, personalized, and well-grounded decisions about how to help individual children, and can proactively organize resources (dollars, time, ideas, and people) that will enable schools to improve while shielding them from distractions and impediments. The reform puts on the table questions of which decisions should be made at the top, what should be standardized and what can be flexible, and how various actors should relate to one another in a professional system. While the road thus far has been rocky, it is clear that in many respects the district's theory of learning, theory of teaching, and theory of change are succeeding, although to different extents in different parts of the system. At the heart of San Diego's approach is an insistence on seeing the district as a system of schools. Part of Alvarado's theory of action is that a systemwide approach is essential to improve quality and equity. As he described at a meeting on the school district's role in building instructional capacity:

One thing I think I am right about is that if you do something right, you have to do it across the board. Otherwise, the other part of the organization continues, and it eats away at the innovation.

In a very short period of time, the systemwide approach has created new norms and understandings of practice, has disrupted patterns of inequity and begun to improve the quality of teaching as well as the level of learning for the students who were previously least well served, and has created the beginnings of new capacity and infrastructure for teaching in the district. The district's human capital has improved, and its capacity for offering professional learning has been expanded through the district's reallocation of funds, its development of new vehicles for learning among principals and teachers, and its partnerships with universities and other organizations. Our school-level study suggests that the district has responded to school needs in much the same way it asked schools to support students: support those with the greatest needs first. The successes have been most obvious at the elementary level, where the reforms are also most accepted, but they have also made a dent in the middle schools, supporting improvements in previously failing schools, those with uneven practice, and even those with greater strengths. The impact of the high school agenda, as we have described, is in large part yet to come.

Schools' responses to district and state reforms have varied, as each strives to maintain and develop its perceived strengths. School mediation of state and district policies is defined, enabled, and constrained by individual and organizational school capacity—capacity to support new teachers, learn new ways of teaching, and demonstrate student success. When policy goals and means are not consistent across various levels, schools cannot always support their own school visions. Schools with greater capacity are more able to withstand and profitably use outside interventions. For weaker schools, especially, districts are needed to leverage certain resources, including people, time, and expertise, so that the school can respond to policy demands, on the one hand, and develop an internal coherence, on the other.

The district's reforms have extracted some heavy costs, especially in terms of local participation, and in terms of the homogenization of some structures and practices that were previously successful, at least in part (for example, Robinson's houses and close-knit student and teacher teams). There are signs that the district is becoming more comfortable with negotiating flexibility in some aspects of implementation with local schools and more responsive in listening to both concerns and ideas from those in the field, as long as these are within the parameters of professional practice and equity set out as the goalposts for the work.

This increased openness may be occurring in part as a response to strong voices from the field, especially the secondary schools, about the need for adaptations. It may be in part possible because of the "jolt" that created a sense of clarity about purpose and mission and that initiated the process of re-culturing. Organizational theory predicts that, to the extent there is a stronger set of common norms and values and a deeper level of shared professional knowledge and competence, greater flexibility and professional autonomy can be granted without jeopardizing quality or equity (Benveniste, 1987). As that common knowledge and set of commitments take root, it would follow that more discretion can be granted without concerns that decisions will be made in idiosyncratic ways, uninformed by professional knowledge or a commitment to equitable inputs and outcomes.

Part of the "jolt" concerned a redefinition of professionalism from the notion of *individual autonomy*, even in the absence of professional knowledge or standards of practice, to a notion of *collective responsibility* for knowledge-based practice that attends to questions of principled practice which presumes shared authority by members of the profession. While some of the concerns voiced by local practitioners have been

associated with the discomfort of making practice public and the insecurity of change, three years into the reform, we hear very few teachers or principals suggesting that their goal is to revert to a version of individual autonomy that would permit idiosyncratic, frequently ineffective practice. Most are quick to applaud the intent of the reforms and the notions of practice they put forward, even if they simultaneously voice concerns about the speed of change and the processes by which input is sought. The norms of collective responsibility appear to be taking hold. This notion is accompanied by the idea of reciprocal accountability for professional practice, voiced by Superintendent Alan Bersin at a Principals' Conference in 2002:

Professional review and evaluation is an art and a science and it requires fairness and it requires precision and it requires insight and it requires confidence. And it requires that we learn to use the humanity that is within us as good leaders not to leave bruises, to be able to make a critical comment in a way that helps the person move forward rather than slide back. The whole essence of what we have attempted to do and will continue to do more strongly is to introduce a notion of reciprocal accountability. You cannot hold someone accountable unless you provide that professional with the skills and knowledge of the tools that they need to have a chance to improve their practice. A person is obligated to improve their practice.

And, by inference, the system is obligated to help them. As the work has taken hold, more and more school-based professionals feel the district's goal is a worthy one and that the direction of the reform is improving their practice. The next steps of the reform will determine whether they also feel they are being heard about what they feel they need and how they feel they can best make that collective journey.

As we have noted, high schools present particular challenges to systemwide reform. If the district is the relevant "implementing system" (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 175), then there remains an open question of how to address the needs of this subset of schools while maintaining district-wide coherence. Reformers in San Diego have managed this within-system variation by keeping high school-specific moves within the parameters of the district's overall reform theory. Even though high schools meet in separate Learning Communities and have more subject areas to attend to, the message remains the same: the goal is to improve student achievement by supporting teaching and learning in the classroom.

The changing tone of the reform at the high school level—one of working with schools rather than doing to them—raises a few important questions. First, is this change in strategy a result of district leaders' learning from experience the importance of engaging principals in reform work or recognition that there is no real model for multiple school instructional improvement at the high school level? Second, by working closely with a subset of high schools to redesign their campuses into academies or smaller learning communities, is the district creating a divide within the high school ranks that may hamper further efforts at improvement? At each juncture, the district has to balance the issues of systemwide change with local preferences, needs, and initiatives. This is an ongoing dilemma to be managed, not a problem that will be forever solved.

Mediating State Policies

Where state policies threatened to shift the focus of the district or its schools away from locally defined goals, San Diego City Schools committed itself to those goals by subsuming the state policy within the local reform. This strategy is evident in how BTSA at the elementary level supports the literacy initiative, as well as how the district applied portions of the state reading initiative to its own work without

compromising its research-based theory of instruction in literacy. With a strong and articulated theory of change against which to evaluate state policies as they roll out and how they can support or detract from the district's reform agenda, San Diego was able to counter the risk of expending energy in divergent directions to keep up with a state environment of rapid-fire policies.

Instead of being thrown off-course by state calls for high school improvement, reformers in San Diego have tied their local improvement goals to state mandates and university requirements. Indeed, San Diego's leaders appear to be using these state policies as warrant to engage schools in the difficult work of high school change. By connecting local goals to those of the state and university system, reformers are able to use exogenous policies as rationale for improvement and use these external demands as a shield against local resistance to reform. While the accelerated timeline of some state accountability reforms, such as the California High School Exit Exam, may not align with the local agenda, the district nonetheless seems to be using state reforms in the service of local goals.

Our study suggests that the district's efforts to forge a coherent reform and mediate state policies has thus far been most successful with respect to the Literacy Framework, and somewhat less successful in leveraging and mediating the state's intrusive accountability policies and beginning teacher support, at least at the secondary level. The handling of each of the three state policies discussed in this paper exemplifies one of the tensions we outlined at the start, attending to system-wide needs and school-level differences. San Diego City Schools' theory of change allowed it to ameliorate the state's relatively punitive high stakes accountability measures to a substantial extent. The manner in which the district recast the state accountability policies and intervened to support its neediest schools reaffirmed its commitment to a *tangible* equity in learning opportunities for all students throughout the district. Rather than relying on the punishment and rewards embodied in the state policies (for motivation), San Diego City Schools provides a more comprehensive view of the knowledge, material, and human resources necessary to enable the lowest performing schools to better teach their students.

We also found that by holding fast to its own theory of instruction in literacy, the district improved upon the quality of induction and reading as put forth by the state. The state's definition of literacy instruction is much narrower than that of the district. The district's understanding of what it means for students to become engaged readers, the types of learning experiences they must have to become readers, and the pedagogical knowledge teachers must develop to create those learning opportunities are both research-based and internally consistent. Importantly, the district's theory of instruction has provided a rubric against which to assess the opportunities available from the state (or other providers for that matter) and a unifying force with which to bring coherence to external influences.

POSTSCRIPT: THE ROAD AHEAD

Although our study focuses on the early part of San Diego's reform (1998-2002), there were a number of notable changes in the state and district climate during the 2002-2003 school year that will undoubtedly affect the ultimate outcomes of these initiatives:

- In November 2002, a contentious school board election resulted in a continuation of the 3-2 "pro-reform" majority that has sustained the reform's momentum thus far.
- In December 2002, Chancellor Tony Alvarado announced that he would reduce his role in the district and leave the Chancellorship by September 2003.
- In March 2003, SDCS sent layoff notices to 1,487 teachers in response to the state's budget crisis and predicted cuts in class size reduction monies; in addition, district officials held a series of briefings with certificated, classified, and administrative bargaining groups as well as community members to strategize on imminent budget reductions throughout the winter and spring
- Also in response to the state budget crisis, the district offered an early retirement package to district employees with an annual benefit bonus of 7% of final year pay; over 700 teachers and a number of ranking central office staff accepted, including the directors of Counseling & Guidance, Human Resources, and the two Instructional Leaders assigned to the high schools
- In June 2003, the school board passed a budget for 2003-2004 that was \$65 million less than the prior year's, including \$21 million in cuts from the *Blueprint*. Over 400 positions were eliminated and over 1,400 employees accepted the retirement plan, allowing the district to rescind all teacher layoff notices
- Working with the San Diego Education Association, the district passed a three-year teacher's contract in June 2003, holding salaries and benefits steady for that time period. The negotiations, which were complete before the current contract expired, signaled to some observers an increased spirit of cooperation between the district and the union (San Diego Union Tribune, 5/2/03)
- In the winter of 2002-03, the two high school Learning Communities were reorganized into "study groups" based on school needs and common reform approaches, such as "community engagement" or "school redesign." A new high school reform administrator was appointed in June 2003.

Clearly, any reforming school district is a "moving target," where improvement efforts will continue to be shaped and reshaped over time. Yet the sweeping nature of these changes – notably, the departure of Alvarado and the retirement of many district administrators as well as significant belt-tightening across the system – will raise challenges to the institutionalization of the prior years' reforms and raise the question of whether the remaining infrastructure will have the capacity to support the ongoing work.

At a Principal's Conference at the end of the 2002-2003 school year, both Superintendent Bersin and now-Chief Academic Officer Mary Hopper underscored that the work of raising achievement in the district is far from over and that upcoming

year's focus will be on action to improve student outcomes. Only time will tell if the reform's upward trends in K-8 achievement will continue and whether or not the ongoing adjustments to the high school reform approach will result in improved student achievement as measured by district benchmarks. For now, it seems that the district's bet on the power of professional learning to strengthen school practice and performance may rest on whether the district can both sustain and rebuild capacity in the face of significant turnover and budget shortfall. Time will tell whether the district's intense, but relatively short-term, investment in the knowledge base and skills of the profession has been sufficient to strengthen the ability of local schools to forge their own meaningful learning and teaching agendas that strengthen them from the inside out.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The principals' survey was sent to 180 schools; responses were received from 161 schools for a response rate of 89%. The teacher survey was sent to 581 teachers in 11 randomly selected schools and to an additional 114 teachers in our three case study schools. The response rate for the random sample was 70%, and the response rate for the random sample plus case study schools was 69%.
- ² While the state intends for BTSA to reduce attrition among new teachers by providing them with support to improve their teaching, BTSA does not address the large numbers of teachers without full credentials currently in classrooms. Initially, districts used BTSA funds at their own discretion to support any novice teacher, regardless of her credential status. In 2001, the BTSA program began enforcing use of BTSA funds only for 1st- and 2nd-year teachers with full credentials. In response, California expanded the Intern Programs and, more recently, the Pre-intern Programs, to provide some support for underprepared teachers, and to increase the likelihood that those teachers would complete their credential and stay in the profession. Peer assistance and review (PAR) funds can also be used to support uncredentialed teachers, but this patchwork of initiatives does not reach all candidates in ways that are helpful to them (Shields et al., 2001).
- ³ In 2000-01, the district had a total of 403 teachers working on emergency permits and six working on credential waivers, as well as 149 on intern or pre-intern credentials, according to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, *Teacher Supply in California, 2000-01*). In 2001-02, among 9,369 professional staff, the district records showed only 15 working on emergency permits and two working on credential waivers (about 1/10 of 1%). This sharp reduction in emergency credentialed teachers was in part a function of recent reforms that increased recruiting power and aimed to support and retain qualified teachers, described later in the report. In addition, San Diego moved many under-prepared teachers previously working on emergency permits into more structured programs. In 2001-02, district records showed 182 teachers working as interns and 204 as pre-interns—individuals who are teaching while in training. Including all of these classifications, the proportion of under-qualified teachers working in San Diego totaled only 4.3% as compared to about 25% in Los Angeles, for example. The share of under-qualified teachers decreased by 28% between 2001 and 2002 as the size of the teaching force grew.
- ⁴ While the district has increasingly emphasized the hiring of fully credentialed teachers, there are still teachers in the system who have not completed their credentials. Some of those previously teaching on emergency permits were placed in pre-intern or intern programs to complete their training, so while the total number of emergency permits and waivers dropped from 409 to 17, the number of interns and pre-interns increased from 149 to 386 (San Diego personnel records, tabulations, 7/2/02).
- ⁵ "Genre Studies" courses were later renamed Literacy Block courses and then two-hour or three-hour Readers/Writers' Workshop courses.
- ⁶ In some schools, all students reading significantly below their grade level are in the two-hour classes.

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- ⁷ The state-sponsored formative assessment, California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers (CFASST), is not required of districts, but used by the majority in lieu of developing their own materials that would have to be approved by the state.
- ⁸ No claims can be made about relationships between the state's development of its reading initiative and the development of the balanced literacy initiative in San Diego. They developed on different tracks with different time frames and under different immediate influences.
- ⁹ <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sandiego/mai>, downloaded on 8/1/01.
- ¹⁰ This is a significantly larger proportion than principals surveyed in a comparison sample in the San Francisco Bay area. The San Diego survey was administered in 2000 by CTP to all principals in the district with a response rate of 89%. Bay Area principals were surveyed in 1998 as part of an evaluation of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). Of 221 member principals surveyed, 131 responded representing 129 schools in 53 Bay Area districts for a response rate of 59%. For further information on this study, see McLaughlin et al. (1999).
- ¹¹ Although this appears low, the comparable proportion in the Bay Area comparison group (see footnote 10) was even lower, at 50%.
- ¹² Percent answering 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale where 5=strongly agree and 1=strongly disagree to "The district does not understand my school's reform agenda." Source: CTP principal survey, May 2000.
- ¹³ Maureen Magee, "Sweeping School Reform is Approved; 3-2 Decision Made Despite Thousands of Protesters," San Diego Union-Tribune, March 15, 2000, p. A-1.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. A-1.
- ¹⁵ Magee, S. "Battle Over the 'Blueprint'; School Overhaul Plan, Up for Vote Today, Splits District," San Diego Union-Tribune, March 14, 2000, p. B-1.
- ¹⁶ The names of all three middle schools in our study are pseudonyms. This report describes the schools during the first two years of our research; all of these schools are undergoing significant change, however, that affects the trends we describe. We expect that the outcomes they experience will change over time.
- ¹⁷ Some emergency permits are held by teachers who are fully credentialed in one field but are working out of their credential field for part or all of their current assignment.
- ¹⁸ This refers to teachers with less than three years of teaching experience.
- ¹⁹ From 1998-2001, the proportion of student scoring above the 50th percentile in reading increased by more than 10% at Laurel Ridge, nearly 8% in reading at Robinson, and less than 5% at Steward.
- ²⁰ All three schools have had at least one change in principals and at least one change in peer coaches. Some peer coach positions remained vacant for considerable time.
- ²¹ Our teacher survey data reveals that 40% of Robinson teachers report having common planning time with teachers in their subject, while fewer than 30% of Laurel Ridge and Steward teachers do.
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- ²² This compares with Laurel Ridge at 50:1 and Steward at roughly 30:1.
- ²³ Kentucky's similar accountability index, which produced schools that boomeranged from "rewards" status one year to "sanctions" the next, was repealed the year before California's was enacted.
- ²⁴ Although schools must test a certain proportion of students to be eligible for cash bonuses, the API index does not factor in test participation rates in deriving API scores.
- ²⁵ The only exception was that teachers at Robinson rated themselves lower than Steward teachers for having consistent standards across classrooms.
- ²⁶ Data from spring 1999 SAT-9 administration.
- ²⁷ In New York City, each borough's comprehensive high schools constitute their own separate district. However, Alvarado sponsored a number of small high schools of choice in both District #2 and #4 when he was superintendent.
- ²⁸ This policy came under review during the writing of this paper.
- ²⁹ The seven areas are social science, English, mathematics, laboratory science, languages other than English, visual and performing arts, and college preparatory electives.

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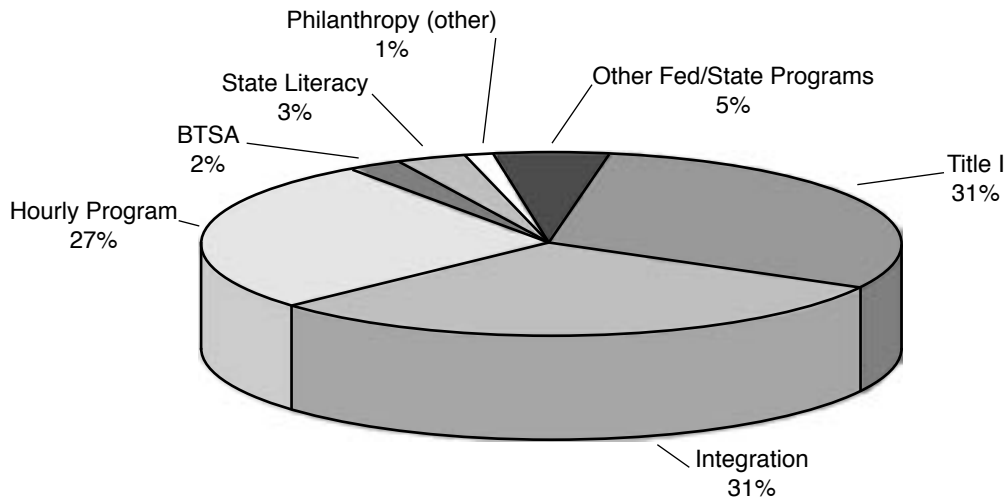
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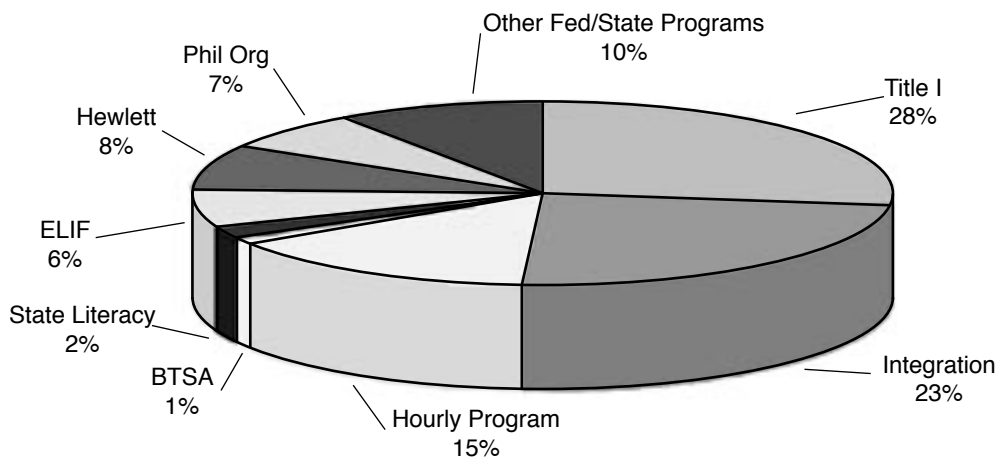
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APPENDIX A

Blueprint Funding ('00-'01)
Budgeted Amount \$61 million

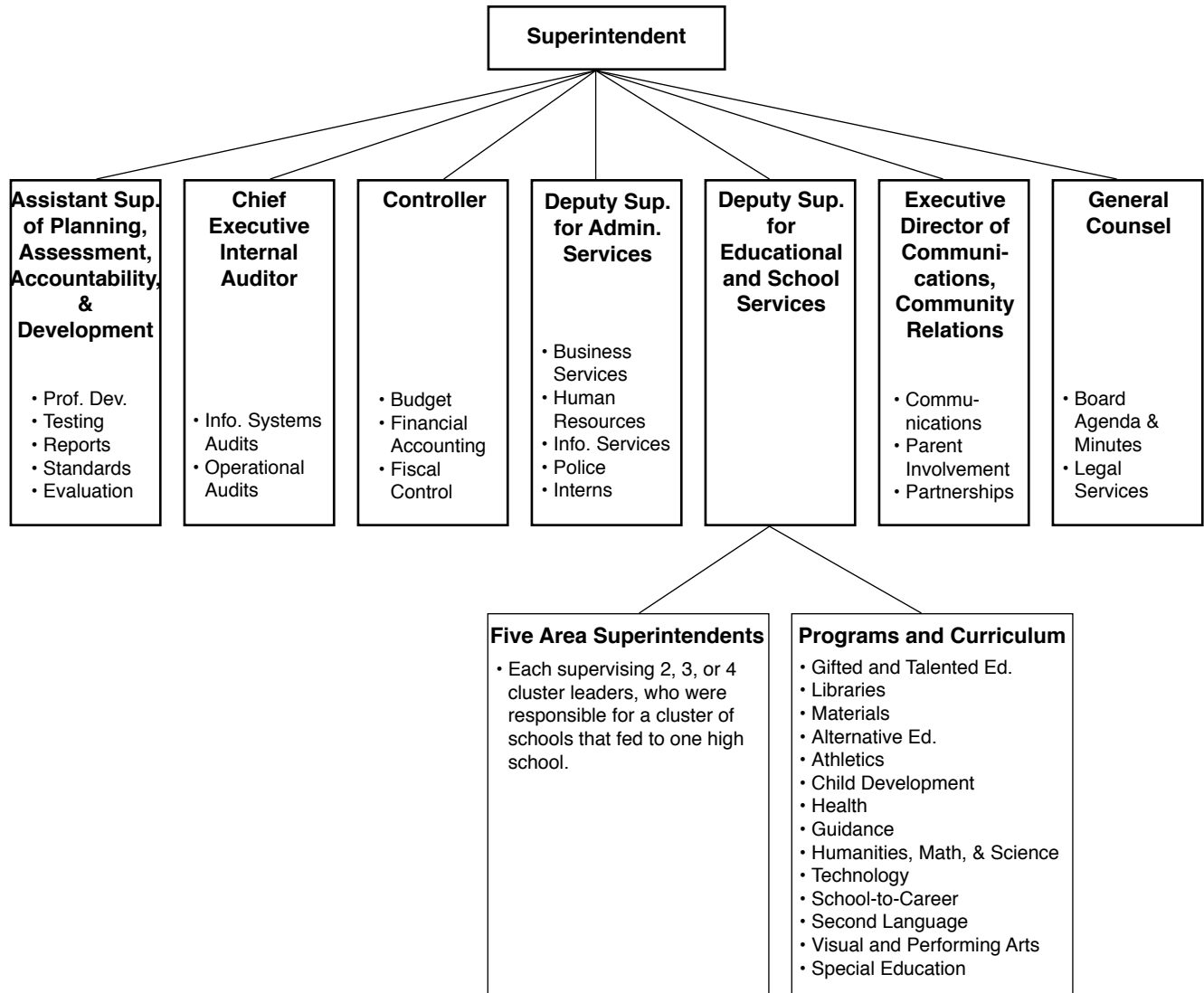


Blueprint Funding ('01-'02)
Budgeted Amount \$91 million



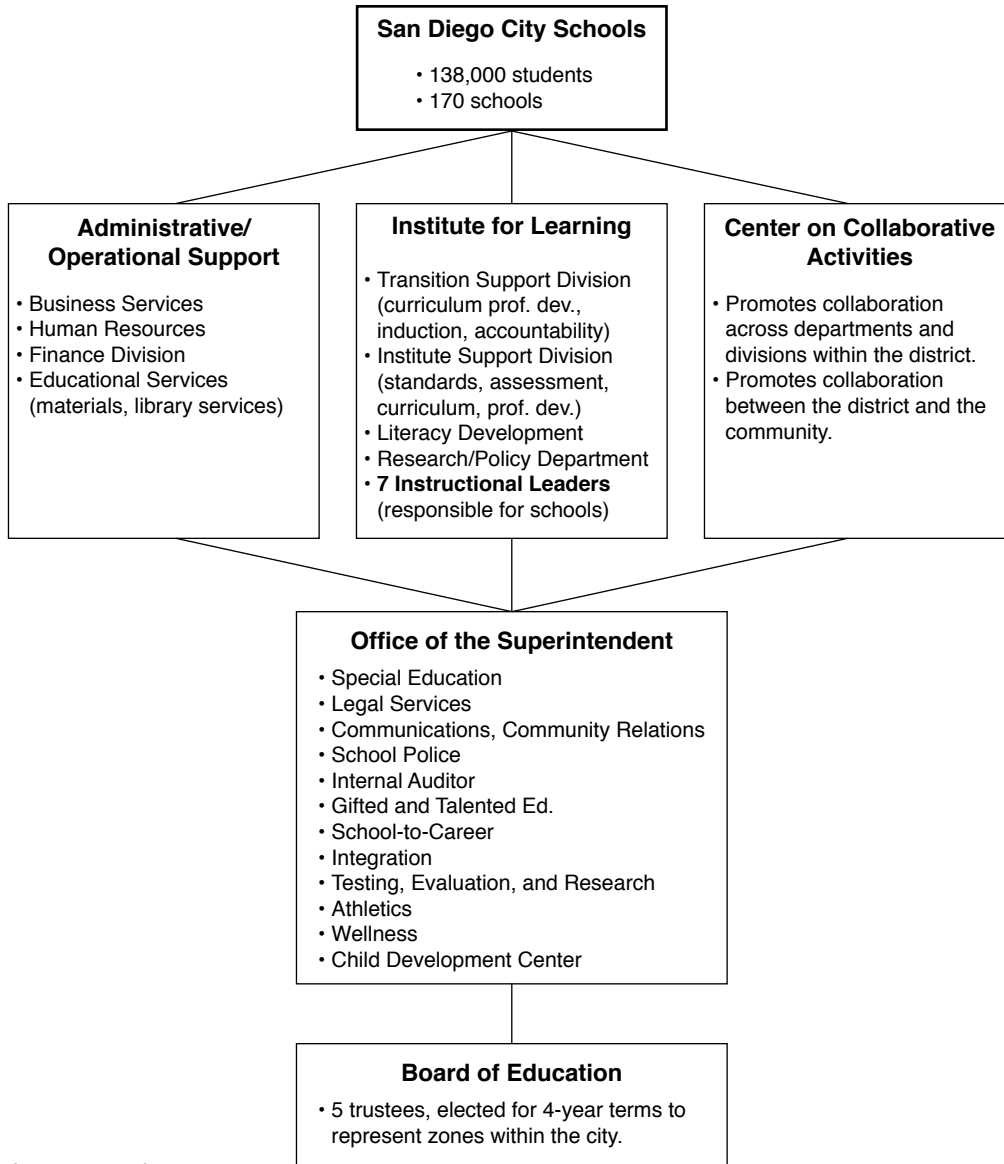
APPENDIX B

SDCS Organization Chart, 1996-1997



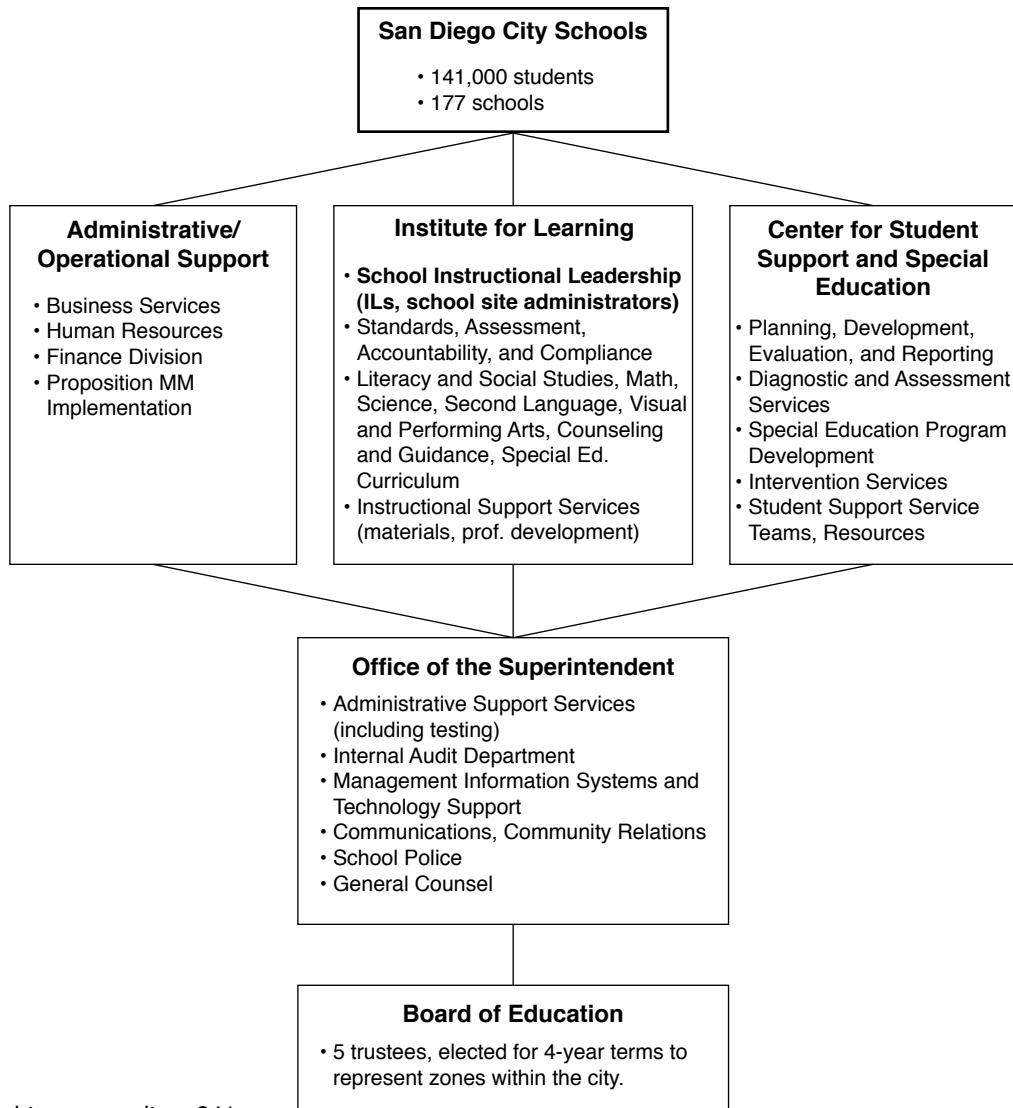
Source: Hightower, op.cit., p.12.

SDCS Organization Chart, Fall 1998



Source: Hightower, op.cit., p.128.

SDCS Organization Chart, Summer 2000



Source: Hightower, op.cit., p.241.

APPENDIX C

San Diego City Schools Districtwide Student Performance, SAT-9
Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above the 50th Percentile

Total Reading		Total Mathematics								
Year	1998 n=35, 543	1999 n=38, 899	2000 n=41, 763	2001 n=43, 343	% change 1998-2001	1998 n=39, 919	1999 n=44, 577	2000 n= 49, 002	2001 n=48, 931	% change 1998-2001
Grade										
2	43	50	57	55	+12	50	56	63	61	+11
3	41	47	52	49	+8	46	57	64	61	+15
4	41	42	48	49	+8	42	46	56	52	+10
5	44	44	44	47	+3	45	47	50	52	+7
6	43	45	47	48	+5	47	50	53	52	+5
7	44	44	48	48	+ 4	42	42	46	47	+ 5
8	45	48	51	52	+ 7	40	43	45	43	+ 3
9	36	36	40	38	+ 2	48	49	55	53	+ 5
10	34	35	37	38	+4	42	46	52	48	+6
11	37	38	40	37	+0	45	49	56	49	+4
Gr. 2-11	41	44	47	47	+6	45	49	55	53	+8

**Total Reading: Number and Percent of Students Scoring in Each Quartile
on the National Distribution (SAT-9), Grades 2-11 Combined**

Year	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1998	29,867	36	19,739	23	17,654	21	17,090	20
1999	28,280	32	21,058	24	19,047	22	19,106	22
2000	24,901	28	22,242	25	20,292	23	21,511	24
2001	26,737	29	22,661	24	21,541	23	21,677	24
Total	-3,130		+2,922		+3,887		+4,587	

**Total Mathematics: Number and Percent of Students Scoring in Each Quartile
on the National Distribution (SAT-9), Grades 2-11 Combined**

Year	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1998	26,549	31	21,006	24	18,440	21	20,723	24
1999	23,914	27	21,203	24	19,778	22	24,054	27
2000	19,686	22	21,192	23	20,954	24	28,180	31
2001	22,375	24	21,935	23	21,289	23	27,703	30
Total	-4,174		+929		+2,849		+6,980	

APPENDIX D

Summary of Contexts and Changes: Steward, Laurel Ridge, Robinson Middle Schools

	Steward Junior High		Laurel Ridge Middle School		Robinson Middle School	
	Pre-reform	Amidst reform	Pre-reform	Amidst reform	Pre-reform	Amidst reform
Working Description, Metaphor	Neglected re: leadership and teacher quality. A traditional junior high school: highly tracked, teachers isolated; rote-oriented curriculum.	Feeling strong force of the district "boom", especially regarding expectations for classroom teaching practice.	Professionally active. Many teacher teams and much curriculum innovation. Takes advantage of grants, sees itself as "out ahead of the district."	Mature professional culture strategically adopting the best of the district reforms, most positive regarding District.	Semi-autonomous "schools within a school". Progressive ideology. Some very strong teams; some much weaker. Very uneven practice.	Restructured school feeling the full force of the district "boom." Practice more consistent, but teaming lost. Case of district values trumping school values.
Teacher Quality Factors – Improvements in all three schools	In 1998, 96% fully credentialed, 22% emergency. Many poor quality teachers. Little discussion of teaching.	In 2000, 100% fully credentialed, 2% emergency. Several teachers evaluated out, including probationary and tenured.	In 1998, 98% fully credentialed, 11% emergency. Stable staff; many student teachers. Strong support for beginning teachers.	In 2000, 100% fully credentialed, 0% emergency. Stable staff; many student teachers. Strong support for beginning teachers, plus peer coaching.	In 1998, 87% fully credentialed, 24% emergency. High turnover. Experienced teachers teamed together; newer teachers left together.	In 2000, 100% fully credentialed, 3% emergency. Still high turnover. Fewer preps for beginning teachers and more even access to expertise.
Teaching Quality – Changes in all three schools	Mostly isolated practice. Mostly teacher led, with some pockets of innovative practice. Overall, low expectations for student achievement and poor outcomes.	More public practice. More cross observations, coaching, and improved pockets of teaching. More student independent work time & one-on-one with T in LB. Teachers report having higher expectations for student achievement.	Some teams of teachers share students, and much shared professional development, but most classroom practice individual, teacher-led. Relatively high expectations and coherent curriculum.	Peer coaching and peer observation increased. Teacher-led PD common; looking more at student data. More cross observations, coaching, and improved pockets of teaching. More student independent work time & one-on-one with teacher in LB. Teachers focused on studying and improving student engagement.	Varies substantially by "house", with some houses providing more coherent curriculum than others. Houses vary with respect to taking advantage of common prep times and providing excellent teaching quality. Some professionally active, but others doing little.	More evenly distributed across the school. More coaching and work with consultants. Observation of other teachers at other schools and within school. Looking more at student data. Loss of personalization undermines close student relationships & quality of some teaching, but reforms may improve teaching for others.

Summary of Contexts and Changes: Steward, Laurel Ridge, Robinson Middle Schools (cont.)

	Steward Junior High		Laurel Ridge Middle School		Robinson Middle School	
	Pre-reform	Amidst reform	Pre-reform	Amidst reform	Pre-reform	Amidst reform
Stratification	Highly tracked with GATE, ELL and Bilingual classes.	More stratification with literacy block classes (Q1/Q2) with "echoes" throughout other classes. 6 th grade also tracked by GATE, bilingual, Q1/Q2.	Some GATE tracking, efforts to mainstream ELL tracking; 2 heterogeneous teams and advisory classes.	More stratification with literacy block classes (Q1/Q2) with "echoes" throughout other classes.	Some ELL tracking (with beginning students especially), but generally heterogeneous "houses."	More stratification with literacy block classes (Q1/Q2) with "echoes" throughout other classes, more GATE stratification. Advisory classes no longer always heterogeneous.
Personalization	Little personalization—traditional schedule with 6 periods, no teaming. Some Special education students have very high personalization, and Seminar Students have smaller class size in English/SS.	More personalization with 6 th grade. Block classes allow more personalization for low performers. Special education unchanged. Fears that teams would vanish unrealized.	Medium—some teaming and an advisory period. Some special education students have very high personalization, and Seminar Students have access to smaller classes in English/SS. Spent \$\$ to lower class sizes across subject areas.	Medium—teaming & advisory remain, Block classes & Seminar classes allow more personalization for low performers. Special education unchanged. Loss of discretionary money that had kept class size down.	Very high—Students have same teachers all year, and in some cases for 3 years. Advisory period. Some special education students have very high personalization.	Medium-low—still have advisory, but no more teams. Block classes allow more personalization for low performers. Reduced personalization impacts student-teacher relationships and teacher collaboration & learning.
Teacher-Teacher Time	No common preps, PD time after school and on AB 777 days.	Common preps for 6 th grade Ts; Ts in same grade more proximate in location.	Only teams have common preps.	Literacy block teachers have common prep and additional PD hour each day.	Teacher teams have 1 hour common prep per day and built-in PD each week (2.5 hours)	No common preps for teachers, still have built-in PD each week (2.5 hours).
Achievement	Well below state averages. API = 2 86% of students tested	Still below state averages. Went through II/USP planning in 2000-2001. API = 2 API increase of 20 pts. 97% of students tested. (New 6 th grade added.)	At about the state average. API = 5 93% of students tested	At the state average. Improvements led to state awards in 1999-00 & 2000-01, but below targets in 2001 for one sub- group. II/USP planning in 2001-2002. API = 5 API increase of 46 pts. 99% of students tested	Well below state average. API = 2 90% of students tested	Below average but improving. Engages in II/USP planning in 1999-2000. Meets targets and collects rewards in 2000-01, & 2001-02. API = 3 API increase of 85 pts. 100% of students tested

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