

**Building Instructional Quality:
Inside-Out, Bottom-Up, and Top-Down Perspectives
on San Diego's School Reform**

Paper prepared for the
Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association

April 4, 2002
New Orleans, Louisiana

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Part I Introduction

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) puts 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 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 reforms of policies focused on teachers and teaching. Evidence about 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 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 four 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 have tended to divide research about the improvement of teaching. 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 schools and tends to focus on problems of control, accountability, incentives, and compelling expectations for teaching practice (Elmore, 1983). The preoccupation of this perspective is generally with the “macro” system in which teaching and learning takes place. The second perspective is “bottom-up.” It is derived from research on teaching and teacher development as well as cognitive and sociocultural learning theories; it is situated in classrooms and 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 notions of teachers’ learning and growth over time.

The chasm between these two perspectives highlights a fundamental problem that confronts the understanding of policy implementation and impact (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2001). 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 (McLaughlin, 1987). Frameworks that focus on the fine detail of teachers’ or

other professionals’ practice at the “ground level” often underestimate how larger environmental factors constrain action, thinking, and educational results. By integrating “micro” and “macro” perspectives, this paper attempts to reconcile these tendencies, or at least to keep them in productive tension for purposes of analysis within a single state and district-embedded context.

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. As we explore how teaching policy is perceived, used, ignored, and adapted within each unique but embedded organizational setting, our lens shifts from the traditional “top down” vs. “bottom up” perspective emphasizing concerns of centralization and decentralization to one that places each setting at the center of an “inside-out” / “outside-in” analysis of policy influences. 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 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 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 and address them directly there.

This paper is organized as follows. We first explain our methodology and provide some basic contextual information about the nested San Diego, California system that 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. Part Two describes the district reform underway. Part Three more fully establishes the state policy setting and examines how the district is responding to and using state policy to further its local agenda. Part Four moves inward to the environments within three San Diego middle schools and classrooms. Part Five returns 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 four years of fieldwork in San Diego City Schools, beginning in fall 1998 as the district started its reform initiative and continuing today, with the initiative (and our research) still underway. Therefore, 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 have contributed to this fieldwork and analyses. Each team has 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 have reviewed a myriad of documents at all levels of the system and have conducted approximately

100 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 20 percent of the principals from a number of schools across the district. In addition, our fieldwork is informed by two surveys administered within 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 randomly selected, stratified sample of 16 schools in fall 2001).

Demographics and Policy Context of Study Sites

The State Context. California has the country’s largest public school enrollment, with over 6 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 are ranked according to the reading performance of eighth graders on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), California ranked 35th. The reading performance of California’s fourth 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 fourth graders and for eighth 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 across the country 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 perform considerably worse than those in other states on the NAEP, the tests used in the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), and the 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 the 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, and 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 the Reading Initiative in 1996 in reaction to the state's abysmal 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 emphasize 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 official state adoption of 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 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).¹ However, many observers suggest that the state’s efforts on this front are both inadequate in scale and internally incoherent, with incentives for entering teaching without preparation outweighing those that would assist teachers in becoming well-prepared² (California Department of Education, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Little Hoover Commission, 2000; Shields et al., 2001).

Assessment and accountability play 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-

¹ 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 clear credentials. In response, California expanded the Intern and more recently, the Pre-intern Programs to provide some support for underprepared teachers, and to increase the likelihood that those teachers will 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).

² 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 inability of candidates to engage in student teaching, complete homework, or engage in an intensive, coherent learning to teach experience. New incentives for teaching in high-need schools co-exist with large disincentives for teaching in these same schools.

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 2-year growth target for every school. (The Academic Performance Index (API) that comprises these rankings is currently based primarily on SAT-9 scores, a national test that is not aligned to the state standards.) Schools successfully meeting their API target 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, an external evaluator from a state-approved list helps schools take stock and propose a plan for improvement, which the state funds at up to \$200 per student for 2 years. Schools that continue to fail to meet their performance target court state takeover. Policymakers hope that the tests and incentives will drive instruction. As a policy insider explained:

So the idea is the API will reflect all these new tests, and then we’ll stage-manage it with incentive 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 State Education agency 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 locals.

The District Context. In this intense state policy context, San Diego Public Schools have launched what might be considered the most ambitious set of instructional reforms in the state, and perhaps the nation. As the second largest district in the state, San Diego City Schools reflects the diversity of the state, although with a somewhat larger African American population and smaller white population than the state averages, and a greater share of 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 English language learners.

In summer 1998, San Diego City Schools launched a major reform initiative across its system of schools that continues today (see Hightower, 2001; 2002a; 2002b). 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. The incoming Superintendent of Public Education, Alan Bersin, was a lawyer who came from the local U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of California and Southwest Border and who had a passion for social justice causes. His hand-picked partner was Anthony (Tony) Alvarado, whom Bersin recruited to be Chancellor of Instruction from New York City’s Community School District #2, where Alvarado had implemented a highly successful systemic instructional reform initiative (see Elmore & Burney, 1997; 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 on the quality of teaching, 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 Avarado 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 (interview, 2/24/99).

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 successfully limited the number of teachers without full credentials in its schools. Although suffering shortages in bilingual and special education teachers, the district hired fewer than a half-dozen emergency-credentialed teachers for the opening of the 2001-02, out of approximately 1,000 new hires. 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 last several years.

The School Context. We provide data from three school-level sources: a district-wide survey of principals and teachers; 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 800-1200 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, free- and reduced-price lunch qualifying students comprise 60-80% of the student population,

and white students are a minority population 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 hyperactive policy environment around them and of the tensions they experience in pursuing their own goals and those of others, managing the change process, and initiating and coping with new resources, approaches, and possibilities.

Part II 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 (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, 19xx; Resnick, 1987; and 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 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 developing 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 the interaction between students and teachers is improved so that teachers' efforts are more grounded in knowledge about effective instruction and an understanding of students' needs; therefore, deepening teaching practice becomes an effective mechanism for increasing student learning. Since learning, as described above, depends on extensive teacher knowledge of both teaching strategies and of individual learners, and it requires diagnostic skill in figuring out how to best organize learning opportunities that meet learner's 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. As Bersin observed in a recent talk to the district's high school principals, drawing parallels between the work of teachers, surgeons, and lawyers:

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 ten 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.

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 rest heavily on research about teacher learning (see, for example, Darling-Hammond, 1997; 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, coupled 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 of the instructional theory over mechanisms to solicit input and ensure backing from organizational members about the changes underway (Hightower, 2001; 2002b). 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 up-front “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” (Alvarado) or a “jolt” (Bersin)—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 (interview, 8/25/99).

The “jolts” to the system occurred in both instructional and operational domains. While we focus primarily on the instructional sphere below, it is important to note that the district’s fiscal policies were changed radically to provide an enabling force for implementation of the reform (for details, see Hightower 2001; 2002a). Rather than subscribing to a typical district expenditure pattern whereby resources maintain the status quo (Guthrie and 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 funds from foundations and those identified through internal cost-saving measures, federal funds 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.

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 into policy the new uses of funds, substantially decreasing school site autonomy in expenditures yet providing for continued support of strategies that research suggests are critical for improving teaching and learning districtwide.

To build resources for hiring and training high quality teachers, the district also re-examined staffing patterns as well as recruitment strategies. 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 hiring), and reaching out to 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 expeditiously data, interviews, and other components of the selection system that, when poorly managed, had slowed the process and caused many candidates to give up on the system and go elsewhere. By fall of 2001, while districts like San Francisco and Los Angeles hired hundreds of uncredentialed teachers and the state as a whole hired more than 50% of beginners without full credentials, San Diego filled almost every one of its 1081 vacancies with fully qualified teachers. Through purposeful action over several years of efforts to improve the teaching force, the district was short only 1.8 FTE teachers in special education, and it eliminated all but 11 emergency permits.

The district also worked to create a professional accountability system that allowed focus on the intensive supervision and development of principals and teachers, and the counseling out or dismissal of those who were unable to meet the new, more rigorous standards for performance. Many districts feel they cannot insist on high performance from many personnel during times of shortage, because they are not sure they can find replacements. San Diego's strategy has been to increase incentives and efforts to ensure qualified teachers are hired

and to focus unremittingly 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 suburban districts, because they felt the quality of professional development they would receive would surpass what they could experience elsewhere, and they were exhilarated by the challenge of developing leading 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 raising performance levels of the lowest performers. These efforts are described below.

Developing Professional Practice. By design, all professional development activities in SDCS have incorporated time and structures to interact with peers and reflect about practice; they also have emphasized the role of continuous, context-specific learning networks. Within a couple of years, most professional development opportunities were embedded in schools and classrooms. These opportunities were designed to generate knowledge across the profession as opposed to impart information to individuals in order for organizational members to internalize the district’s theory of instruction (see McLaughlin & Hightower, forthcoming).

Among the first, most fundamental instructional reforms instituted were mechanisms for *principals* to learn about how to inspire high-quality teaching among their staffs. The district’s 175 principals were divided into seven heterogeneously mixed “Learning Communities.” Each group was led by a newly-promoted and trained central office “Instructional Leader” (IL), which

was a newly-created position. Each IL was a former principal who had demonstrated high levels of understanding about instructional leadership. These 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, including 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 the means of increasing their learning. Principals interacted individually with ILs through "Walk Throughs," which were occasions several times a year in which ILs visited each school to observe classroom practice, evaluate site progress, and assist principals in identifying specific instructional support needs.

The logic behind developing instructional knowledge among district leaders was that instructional alignment requires shared knowledge about the technical core of the work up and down as well as across the system, so that decisions supportive of good teaching can be made with minimum dissonance. Furthermore, if principals are to serve as instructional leaders, they must know instruction well. The developmental model assumes that individuals in key positions across the system are best suited to introduce and sustain instructional reform within classrooms. These key positions were assumed to exist both within schools and the central office. While the ultimate goal was to increase student achievement within each school site, particularly among the lowest-performers, through this model the larger district system became more equipped to facilitate professional development within each school's community, and 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 high-quality 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, the district combined these training opportunities with the provision of summer school classes for students 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 practice techniques with experienced coaches working by their side. These workshops are intended to mesh with ongoing professional development activities within each school, 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 intended coaches to reinforce the district’s theory of instruction and literacy strategy 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 receptive teachers); those at the secondary level work primarily with English teachers (and induction is handled separately). By year two, 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 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 served as means through which they can reflect on the mechanisms of their positions and circulate curriculum and pedagogical strategies.

In a survey conducted for this study during 2001, about 90% of teachers reported that they had attended professional development workshops, conferences, or training, and more than half reported they engaged 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 and D’Amico, forthcoming).

Literacy as the Focus. District leaders contend that literacy holds a special place in the learning cycle of students; for this reason, it provides an important, initial, and common learning agenda for adults as they begin to function in learning communities (Elmore & Burney, 1997a) and “speak a common language” about instructional practice. Thus, from the beginning and across all grade levels, literacy has been a privileged skill in which teachers are trained and professional development activities are oriented.

The district’s reading strategy is grounded on a balanced literacy approach and extends from a Literacy Framework that outlines specific teaching techniques to improve literacy skills.

This framework is grounded on research on the learning and teaching of literacy skills, 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'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, forthcoming), 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 representing 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 emphasizes that this is a professional reform, not a hierarchical reform – that is, that the authority for the frameworks and the teaching strategies that are being encouraged 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 which 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, which a function of professional practice (interview, 5/18/00).

The reform emphasizes literacy as the primary focus of elementary schooling, especially in the earliest grades³. To support the literacy focus at the secondary level, the district has instituted a set of courses called “Genre Studies⁴” as a way to bolster students’ reading comprehension and writing skills. All sixth 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. The Instructional Leaders pressured principals to assign their best teachers (usually, those teaching Gifted and Talented and Advanced Placement courses) to these Genre Studies courses. Taught at reduced class sizes and for extended blocks of time, the district channels extra funds to schools in proportion to the numbers of students demonstrating a need for these courses as determined by scores on a set of districtwide diagnostic assessments. In addition, the district has adopted a set of local assessments to diagnose students’ reading levels and, if needed, to place them in Genre Studies classes.

Accountability: Raising Achievement and Closing Achievement Gaps. San Diego’s theory of change aims to increase system-wide knowledge, while targeting the neediest students and schools. Efforts to enhance “equity” are operationally defined as increasing everyone’s performance, moving the bottom quartiles up, and reducing the gap between high and low performers. Similarly, the district monitors “quality” in terms of the performance of students in the lowest quartiles, arguing that “by lifting the floor we also are raising the ceiling.” Therefore,

³ By the third year, however, the district had added a mathematics focus, as well.

⁴ “Genre Studies” courses later were renamed Readers/Writers’ Workshops.

the district has targeted support to those who need the most help, including low-performing students, schools, teachers, and principals.

In addition to continuous, high-quality professional development for teachers to raise the quality of instruction in every classroom, the district directly attends to supporting low-performing students through, for example, Genre Studies courses, summer school, extended school hours, and parent contracts. The district also adheres to the premise that focusing on low-performing schools is a way to target central office support and resources to sites with the largest concentrations of low-performers. Reformers have used the state’s accountability rankings to identify eight extremely low-performing elementary “Focus Schools,” which now 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 (first-grade teachers elsewhere got \$5,000 for this purpose). Reformers also have 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.

To a great extent, San Diego has defined accountability around concepts of professional accountability (Darling-Hammond, 19xx; Urbanski, 19xx): that is, the responsibility of school systems to ensure high quality teachers and teaching and the responsibility of educators to follow professional standards of practice. 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 employees from its system. 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. Within the central office, employees who cannot justify how their position “supports teaching and learning in the classroom” have been dismissed.

Part III: Forging Coherent District Strategy: A Problem of Mediating and Refashioning State Policies

From a top-down perspective, we might say that the district’s primary reform strategies described above comprise the foundation that external policies must penetrate to have any effect on the district’s activities. From a bottom-up or inside-out perspective, we might say that the district’s strategies must contend with policy interventions and conditions from the state level that may either impede or support the reform initiatives. In this section of the paper, we examine how district leaders in San Diego leverage, mediate, translate or ignore state policies to further the instructional improvement goals of the district. Three key examples from San Diego City Schools’ reform strategy will 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 intersect with and diverge 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: Exceeding State Teacher Quality Policies

For the reasons described earlier, San Diego City Schools do not suffer from teacher shortages on the same scale as the rest of the state. Great progress has been made in the last three years of aggressive recruitment, collaboration, and overhaul of the personnel system, making it possible and expected for all schools to be staffed by fully qualified teachers. In areas

where shortages are particularly severe statewide and nationally, such as special education and bilingual education, the district works with local universities to create and operate teacher education programs. The percentage of SDCS teachers without full credentials was less than 5% 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%. While the state efforts resemble emergency room triage, given the large proportion of underprepared teachers and their concentration in high-poverty schools, San Diego is now able to maintain a focus on improving teacher quality 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.

Using the large-scale state BTSA program as one lens on the question of how a highly purposeful district responds to state initiatives, we saw that under an umbrella strategy of professional learning for *all* adults in the service of improving learning for all students, San Diego was able to parlay state BTSA funds to augment the onsite peer coaching infrastructure for literacy at the elementary level that had already been established. The decision to subsume BTSA activities into the activities of literacy peer coaches in elementary schools is illuminating for several reasons. From the perspective of the new teacher, she is receiving the same substantive messages about the district's theory of teaching and learning—at the elementary level in literacy, that is—as her peers, while being coached in ways appropriate for her development as a novice teacher. In other words, new elementary teachers are integrated into the overall reform initiative of the district, so that their students are therefore exposed to the same balanced literacy approach as students in the classrooms of more experienced teachers.

Moreover, state-sponsored materials for BTSA are generic, not subject-specific.⁵ By folding BTSA into its literacy reform at the elementary level rather than using the state-generated materials, San Diego hoped to improve on the depth of the BTSA program by grounding new elementary teachers' development in their knowledge of literacy instruction. Third, in 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 and somewhat disparate program as many other districts might.

Reflecting the stages of development in San Diego's own reform agenda, the picture is more mixed in the other subject areas and at the secondary level. Outside of literacy at the elementary level, BTSA in San Diego resembles that of other districts. Similar problems arise, such as the use of a generic assessment instrument that is not tied to content or embedded in the local context. Other issues include an inadequate numbers of support providers for the number of beginning teachers in some schools and the inability to match support providers at the same site and in the content area as the beginning teacher in some cases. We discuss these tensions from the perspective of middle school teachers later in the paper.

Districts can mediate the influence of external policies by reshaping them to serve its reform needs, as in the BTSA example at the elementary level, or districts can marginalize external policies to protect their reform agendas, as the example of the Peer Assistance and Review program illustrates. California reengineered the highly popular California Mentor Program to specifically target peer assessment and review of underperforming veteran teachers. The enabling legislation mandated that PAR must be negotiated locally between every district

⁵ This refers specifically to the state-sponsored formative assessment, California Formative Assessment and Support System for Teachers (CFASST), which is not required of districts, but used by the majority in lieu of developing their own materials.

and bargaining unit. It also permits any funds not used for the support of underperforming veteran teachers to support novice teachers. This implies that the features of induction support were potentially up for negotiation too if the district wished to use the substantial residual PAR funds in that way. 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 for the support of mentors who assist teachers on request and discretionary funds for professional development supports not provided by the district's literacy initiative. Both decisions—one aimed at integration and one aimed at programmatic distinctiveness—served to protect the coherence of the literacy reform in San Diego.

Reading Initiative

The example of how San Diego's leaders used aspects of the California Reading Initiative to appropriately support their own balanced literacy approach is a lesson in both strategic opportunism and continuity anchored in a theory of instruction and of change.⁶

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. As discussed previously, it is founded on leading edge research on teaching and learning and encompasses a varied array of pedagogical techniques and expected outcomes from students, including extensive, high level strategic reading and writing, as well as evidence- and reason-based discussion and other forms of oral discourse.

The careful development of the Literacy Framework serves as an anchor against the sway of rapidly developed state policies in reading. The specificity of the Framework and the

⁶ No claims can be made about the state's development of its reading initiative and the relationship to the balanced literacy development in San Diego. They developed on different tracks, different time frames, and different influences.

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 mapped onto the state's goals such as the teaching of phonemic awareness and decoding skills. The district presses against the limitations of the state reading initiative using the research-based rationale that supports the multiple components of the Literacy Framework. Thus far, they have been able to keep the richness of their balanced literacy approach and maintain the breadth and depth of literacy training they believe their teachers need.

Accountability

San Diego schools are subject to the same accountability rules as other districts in the state. It is worth noting that the state's measures largely skirt the district and rest heavily on the schools themselves, potentially causing a rift between district and school reform directions. Particularly with the II/USP, teachers and principals may be torn between the recommendations of the evaluator and district initiatives. Attempting to preempt this potential conflict, San Diego City Schools deliberately acted on behalf of all of its 42 II/USP schools in selecting one external evaluator for all of the schools, and negotiating the approach of the evaluator to ensure that it is consistent with the district's theory of instruction. In large part, district administrators fervently 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 would prove successful for students at risk of not reading. Rather than allow the schools to potentially spin off on disparate paths, the district again 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 softening a largely punitive accountability approach to one that is based on rich 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, the investment is undergirded by a coherent theory of instruction that the district believes to be effective at helping traditionally underserved students learn.

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, placed additional human and fiscal resources there, 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.

Part IV: Early Results

Improvements in Student Achievement

San Diego has witnessed substantial increases on the Stanford Achievement Test (9th edition) since the reform's inception—and district leaders are quick to point out that these increases in student performance “validate” the reform underway. (See Table 1.) 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 (by more than 20% on both the reading and mathematics tests between 1998 and 2001). District scores sometimes go up as more low-scoring students are held out of the test, are moved into

non-tested programs, or are counseled to leave school for GED programs or other alternatives. This appears not to have been the case in San Diego. Although average score gains were less steep in 2001 than they had been during the previous two years, they did increase slightly while the district tested (rather than waived out) more low-performers, and more high-performers had parental waivers from taking the SAT-9. (Scores increased statewide during this period, as well, although not as steeply.)

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 focused. For example, the proportion of students scoring in the bottom quartile 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” now score above the 50th percentile in reading (an increase from 41 to 47 percent at or above grade level) and over 9,000 more “Q1-2 students” are above the 50th percentile in mathematics (or from 45 to 53 percent) (<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sandiego/mai>, downloaded on 8/1/01). Increases have occurred across all grade levels but have been much smaller at the high school level than at the elementary and middle levels, especially in reading, where high school students perform noticeably less well than younger students. In addition to these indicators, Genre Studies performance data are promising: after six months in this course, sixth-graders showed 1.7 years growth, while ninth-graders averaged a year’s growth on district language arts measures.

Changes in Central Office

Within the central office, budgeting and operational managers have learned to collaborate with instructional administrators to specify and prioritize educational needs and 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 [things], 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.

As noted earlier, substantial shifts in the allocations of funds have 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.

Principal Reactions

Principals were mostly pleased about the changes, but were also wary of the increased scrutiny of their positions. More than 75% of those surveyed (and a significantly larger proportion than in a comparison sample in the San Francisco Bay Area) felt that the district holds high expectations and is committed to high standards, holds priorities consistent with those of the school, helps the school focus on and nurture teaching and learning, and promotes principal and teacher development. At the same time, just over half (55%) said that they saw the district as centralized and hierarchical, and creating mandates without providing adequate support. Only 56% felt that “the district inspires the best in job performance.” (The proportion in the comparison group was only 50%.)

While perceiving the reforms as centralizing, the vast majority of principals we interviewed (approximately 40) said they appreciated their Instructional Leader, liked the

Learning Community groupings, and valued other structured opportunities to talk with their peers, noting 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 as positive, non-threatening opportunities to interact with the IL on a more personal, context-specific basis. One principals 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 enthusiastically about the reform's "equalizing" quality. They noted that everyone—not just specific schools or areas of town, as in the past—was getting the same message about effective teaching and learning strategies. One veteran elementary school principal explained:

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 supported by survey data from principals. (See Table 1.) More than 90% cited as highly valuable the school- and institute-sponsored staff development, instructional leader school visitations, the district's focus on low-achieving students, and the 3-hour literacy block. The literacy block, however, was much more valued by elementary than secondary principals. Similar patterns were apparent with respect to the value placed on the principals' learning communities, the monthly principal conferences, and the discussions with other principals and institute staff. Elementary principals valued these supports much more than secondary principals, as they did certain reform strategies, such as the developmental reading

assessment, that most impacted their schools. The one exception to this pattern was the perception of Genre Studies, where middle and high school principals were much more enthusiastic than elementary principals, presumably finding this strategy much better suited to their schools' needs. Overall, the large majority of principals at each level felt that the district supports their school reform efforts.

% Rating Item Highly Valuable or Positive	Overall	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
School-sponsored staff development	99%	--	--	--
Institute-sponsored staff development	96%	--	--	--
Instructional leader school visitations	94%	--	--	--
District's focus on Q1-Q2 students	94%	--	--	--
3 hour literacy block	92%	98%	66%	60%
Principals' learning communities	88%	96%	69%	54%
Developmental reading assessment	84%	90%	58%	33%
Genre studies course	83%	57%	100%	84%
Portfolio assessments	60%	66%	53%	23%
Monthly principal conferences	--	89%	70%	46%
Discussions with principals in my learning community	--	93%	50%	46%
Discussions with institute staff other than instructional leader	--	66%	32%	27%
Overall district support of school reform efforts	--	83%	67%	78%

In our interviews, principals discussed how they felt the reform could be strengthened. Some noted that the Principals' Conferences failed to address differences in participants' needs and learning levels. A frequent request was to rearrange the heterogeneous Learning Communities into ones that were homogeneous by grade level—a request that, in time, was honored by district officials. In addition, while appreciating the renewed central office support for instruction, principals frequently lamented a lack of support for non-instructional or

“operational” matters. For many site administrators, a day off-site each month—sometimes more, when principals of a single grade level would meet for additional half-day sessions—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. They often talked about the high stakes attached to the role of the principal—a fact driven home by the fact that about 30 of the district’s principals (about 15% of the total) have been counseled out of the district since the reform began. Prior to the Bersin administration, principals rarely were removed from their schools other than through voluntary transfers; and in extreme cases, questionable principals were placed in central office roles. By contrast, in the summer after the reform’s first year (1999), 15 site administrators were abruptly reassigned to classrooms for failure to demonstrate effective instructional leadership (Hightower, 2001). Accordingly, the new administration’s actions came as a shock, particularly to site administrators, many of whom wondered if they might be next. Still, overall, principals 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 appreciated the emphasis on professional development, but have disagreed with overall implementation, claiming the reform was “too cut-throat” (elementary teacher), “top-down” (elementary teacher), and “bureaucratic” (Genre Studies high school teacher). Elementary school teachers appeared more aligned 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 uncovered in a recent AIR study of the San Diego reforms, is that most teachers agree with the

goals and substance of the reform agenda, but many have discomfort with implementation approaches that seem not to take their views into account.

On the one hand, 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. Even those who resented the top-down nature of the reform described ways they were incorporating many of the strategies in their classrooms. On the other hand, teachers had 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) subject-matter distinctions limited to literacy. Some teachers also complained that the reform had eliminated “successful” programs underway within a school because resources were pulled in different directions. Others noted incompatibilities with their personal conceptions of good teaching. This may be a manifestation of the tension between professionalism as collective responsibility for standards of practice and the view of professionalism as individual autonomy that has predominated in teaching.

As the reform unfolded, teachers increasingly demanded to see research upon which the strategies were built. They also expressed interest in reading about District #2 (upon which 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 exemplars available, from selecting teachers who have become staff developers and coaches who conduct demonstration lessons to creating special “lab” classrooms outfitted with multiple video cameras and a two-way mirror, where teachers can watch expert teachers conduct their daily teaching and evaluate their moves as well as debriefing their decisions. We noted 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 suggest that the reform has not had uniform effects.

Part IV
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 (e.g. 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 in the reform process that have yet to be fully appreciated. One of these is the increased in-school stratification created by the literacy block classes which are targeted at low-achieving students. Another is the loss of team teaching and planning opportunities in some schools.

The three schools all serve a majority “minority” student population, with large numbers of English language learners and students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch. The group included one school (Steward) that could be described as a typical urban junior high school, maintaining a traditional 6 period schedule, with little teacher collaboration or personalization for students, a large number of uncredentialed and underprepared teachers as well as senior staff that had had few learning opportunities, a largely rote-oriented curriculum, and low student achievement. At the other end of the organizational extreme, another school (Robinson) was

structurally “reformed”, with houses that allowed teams of teachers to work with students for 3 years, to run advisory groups, to plan together, and to develop innovative curriculum ideas. However, there were also many inexperienced, uncredentialed teachers, and the teams were extremely uneven in their experience (with experienced teachers teamed together) and in their practice. The range of student achievement was wide, but the average was low. The third school (Laurel Ridge) was a middle-ground structurally, with a number of teaching teams and an advisory period to promote personalization, shared teacher time for teams, and a professionally active, generally well-qualified teaching force. Laurel Ridge maintained a substantial professional development agenda and had many relationships with universities, including a large number of student teachers on campus. Achievement was high relative to other schools with similar student populations. (See Appendix B for a summary of schools and outcomes.)

The 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 sixth grade cluster and block literacy classes, although it remained the most highly tracked of the three schools. Robinson lost its team structure and long-term relationships with students. While it maintained advisories and introduced literacy blocks, there are no longer teams with common preparation periods. Some of the opportunities for best practice may have been jarred along with some of the conditions that 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 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%. (Some emergency permits are held by teachers working out of their credential fields.) By 2000, all three schools had 100% fully credentialed teachers and the percentage holding emergency permits had declined to 0-3%. (See Appendix B.) Some teachers had been evaluated out of teaching at Steward, and all of the schools had literacy coaches and stronger professional development programs functioning.

Survey data indicate that more than 90% of the teachers in all three schools were involved in some form of professional development in 2000, 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. 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."

As a lens on the effects of state and district policies, we examined the implementation of the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program in these schools. As noted earlier, through BTSA the state aims to ensure that all new teachers experience strong mentoring, and San Diego City Schools (SDCS) has leveraged BTSA funding to support beginning teachers

in ways that complement its teacher professional development goals. The connections have been most tightly drawn at the elementary level, where literacy coaches are involved in providing mentoring for beginning teachers. By all accounts, the integrated BTSA model works best at that level. Data from three middle schools suggest that new teachers in SDCS have mixed experiences with BTSA both within and across schools, and suggest that equal supports in different contexts may not be sufficient to reach desired policy ends.

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 was not the universal experience. A majority of beginning teachers rated specific work with their mentors on a survey as only "somewhat useful". One implementation concern was the match with mentors who shared the beginning teacher's content background, school context, or both. These concerns varied with the capacity of the school, since BTSA is not the only form of beginning teacher support in San Diego, as new teachers at each school rely on other formal and informal support from teachers, administrators, coaches, and personal contacts.

This supportive infrastructure varies from school to school, as does access to mentoring, with a range of 21% of beginning teachers having mentors in one school to 67% in another.

In addition to cross-schools differences in mentoring opportunities and experiences, there were also 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 the potential . . . but it’s basically a pain.” Many beginning teachers commented on this “busy work”, which they felt takes too much time from their harried schedules and does not address their immediate needs and concerns. As one teacher noted,

[W]e did these [monthly] meetings . . . And they were, like, two and three hours long. And it took us about ten minutes to do actually what we were supposed to be doing! . . . [I]t’s pretty frustrating since we mainly do paper work. I assume that it is the same for every group. It seems kind of that that is what they do. We just chit-chat.

Another left the program because of the requirements, stating:

I had [originally signed up for BTSA], but when I had all of these things that I had to do, 5 different classes a day and portfolios, I couldn’t take up my Wednesdays to go to meetings and to do research papers and things, so I had to drop out of it. That’s the only thing it seemed like the district was offering me. . . I dropped BTSA ‘cause I couldn’t do it. I didn’t have the time to do it. It’s voluntary for me and [they give you] \$200 or something. I got through my first year with a little stress, a little more gray hair. BTSA wasn’t... from what I saw of it, it wasn’t offering me anything that was useful. Other than ‘here are all these reports’ I have to write. [And] ‘go have three more observations’... That’s not helping me.

Steward, a junior high school with 25% beginning teachers,⁷ provides little formal support to beginning teachers beyond BTSA, but more than one beginning teacher referred to BTSA as “beginning teacher whatever”, indicating her disdain for the support it provided. Poor communication about the program and a lack of subject-specific mentoring support weakened the potential impact of BTSA to Steward teachers, and some teachers simply dropped out.

⁷ This refers to teachers with less than three years of teaching experience.

Survey data indicate that, beyond BTSA, peer coaching and common planning time with other teachers is rare for beginning teachers (about 20%) at Steward, though regular supportive communication with an administrator or department chair is common (nearly 80%), and 65% of the new teachers take advantage of opportunities to observe other teachers.

In contrast, Laurel Ridge, a middle school with less than 20% beginning teachers, resembles a teaching hospital as it hosts significant numbers of student teachers, respective cooperating teachers, and university supervisors. BTSA does not define beginning teachers' support experiences, and school level supports eclipse many teachers BTSA experiences. First-year teachers are informally looked after by most staff members, have an assigned mentor, experience peer coaching (>70%), attend monthly meetings organized by a vice-principal, and report the highest level of supportive communication with administrators and/or department chairs (>85%). Thus, district-led monthly BTSA meetings feel like an additional "assignment" to many beginning teachers, especially since they already feel so supported at the school.

Robinson, fighting an uphill battle with teacher turnover, is further taxed by the needs of beginning teachers who comprise one-third of its teaching staff. And while the school looks to BTSA for beginning teacher support, many new teachers do not take advantage of it, citing its demands as too burdensome. Supplementing BTSA with school-based support, the principal called together new teachers a few times during the year to talk about their experiences, the peer coach supported individual new teachers, and some experienced teachers occasionally pitched in to help beginning teachers. But these efforts were piecemeal, and most Robinson beginning teachers describe their first year experience as "sink or swim", without considering BTSA as an adequate lifesaver.

Communication about BTSA varies greatly more across, than within, sites. While beginning teachers across all sites are not clear about whether BTSA is required or voluntary, teachers at Steward struggled more than teachers at the other schools to figure out what was available to them, costing them a semester of support in one particular year. And, even though BTSA is not the only source of support for new teachers at any one of the three schools, the share BTSA has of each school's beginning teacher support varies considerably. Steward and Robinson beginning teachers seem to have only modest amounts of school-level support, while Laurel Ridge offers considerably more.

Disparity in the demand for and the capacity to support new teachers can explain some of the differences across schools. Steward has a veteran staff, with 40% of its teachers with more than 10 years of experience; but many of these individuals eschew formal mentoring opportunities. Laurel Ridge's teaching staff is more active in taking classes for career advancement (50% compared with 25% of the other two schools), and traditionally has had a large number of mentor teachers on staff. At Robinson, while there are a significant number of veteran teachers comprising more than half of the teaching staff, many of these individuals have not taught many years at the school. Whereas earlier, experienced teachers tended to be prearranged together in teams, minimizing opportunities for new teachers to have common preparation time with more experienced teachers in their fields, now the common preparation time for teams has been eliminated, so there are fewer places for this kind of learning.

BTSA illustrates the tension between the need for system-wide approaches and local differences between and within schools, as well as the difficulties integrating a state mandate (for the CFASST portfolio) into an already intense professional landscape. It seems likely that beginning teachers in the schools with less capacity to support novices will need

disproportionate investments to ensure their success. Furthermore, our study reveals that the overlap in shared responsibility for supporting beginning teachers (in this case state, district, and school level) presents a challenge for communicating and establishing an authority and a workable process for supporting beginning teachers.

The Literacy Push

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 (from 501 to 586 with 100% of students tested), steady but somewhat more modest gains for Laurel Ridge (from 621 to 667, with 99% of students tested), and overall but uneven gains for Steward (from 533 to 573 and then a drop to 549 with 97% of students tested and the addition of more than 200 students as the school added a 6th grade).⁸

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 more teacher professional development. Students are spending more time reading books at their reading level in rooms, which are increasingly designed to support their learning, though they are doing so in increasingly homogeneous classrooms across the board (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.

⁸ From 1998-2001, Laurel Ridge gained >10% students scoring above the 50th percentile in reading, and >5% in language; Robinson gained nearly 8% in reading, and just under 5% in Language; and Steward gained <5% in both reading and language.

Notwithstanding these changes, teachers do not uniformly embrace these efforts: some are enthusiastic and engaged with the reform, others resent the top-down nature of the reform, complaining they are “workshop-ed to death”, and still others remain unclear about expectations for their teaching. Some teachers describe the Literacy Framework as “disjointed”, and compare it to getting directions that specify landmarks (e.g. particular teaching techniques such as shared or guided reading) but do not identify the complete route or destination. Nevertheless, the Literacy Framework has considerably impacted the culture of teaching at all three schools over the past three years. Where most teachers previously taught behind closed doors, more Language Arts teachers are accustomed to peer coach and administrative observations, observing one another, 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 to 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 them, what is it that you would like for me to observe?

These changes represent a significant departure in the definition of teacher professionalism in terms of how teachers relate to students, to one another, to peer coaches, and to principled knowledge. At each school, some teachers embrace or accept that definition, while others retain more private and autonomous notions of teaching.

While there is much in common across schools, the implementation of the Literacy Framework throughout the three schools differs in two important ways. First is the extent to which schools have enacted the Literacy Framework; and second is the manner in which the reform has (both intentionally and unintentionally) redefined school structures and school

culture. School-level attention to the Framework has been mediated by both the instability of site principals and peer coaches, and the way each school has organized opportunities for teacher learning. All three schools have undergone significant changes in leadership over the past four years⁹, and each school's implementation of the Framework reflects changes in leadership, the literacy background of site leaders, and site teachers' experiences. The leadership changes are associated with the reforms, since principals were replaced by the Instructional Leaders in the two lower-achieving schools (one former principal was fired; another moved), and in the third school, a successful principal was recruited to become a mentor principal in the district. There are noticeable differences over time and 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 (see Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1998).

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 (especially now with a vacancy), 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, albeit not comprehensively. Robinson and Steward face greater inconsistency in implementing the Framework both across literacy classes, and throughout the school.

Steward teachers meet as departments, and have less regularly scheduled time set aside to meet with one another than the other schools. Relying mainly on consultants and the peer coach

⁹ All schools have had at least one change in principals, and at least two different peer coaches. Laurel Ridge has had two different principals, and two different peer coaches, but their peer coach position is currently vacant. Steward has brought on three principals, two brand-new vice-principals, three peer coaches and a math administrator. Robinson also has had three principals, one new vice-principal, two peer coaches (though currently vacant), a math administrator, and more changes to come with outside funding.

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 Spillane, et al. 2001) and increase dialogue about instruction among teachers. Furthermore, Steward has 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, department-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. It is worth noting that, even with the changes, a larger share of teachers at Robinson report that they plan and collaborate together than at either of the other two schools.¹⁰ Robinson also acquired a math administrator, and will be awarded resources to fund a 6:1 teacher-to-coach ratio¹¹ through an outside grant. These changes are likely to expand coaching opportunities and further impact the school culture. Many teachers felt SDCS imposed a “one size fits all” structure to achieve its goals for greater equity, taking individual school needs or organizational values little into account. They bemoaned the loss of their house and team structure. 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 in low SES students do in either of the other two schools. (See Appendix C.) Recently, after considerable dismantling and restructuring had already occurred, the district has not only tolerated, but also supported, creative school efforts to achieve re-establish some of

¹⁰ Our teacher survey data reveals that 40% of Robinson teachers report having common planning time with teachers in their subject, while <30% of Laurel Ridge and <25% of Steward teachers do.

¹¹ This compares with Laurel Ridge at 50:1 and Steward at roughly 30:1.

the elements of personalization for students and collaboration for teachers lost in the adaptations to literacy blocks and other requirements, and 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). State accountability is more narrowly construed than district and school-level accountability. Closer to the classroom, educators tend to define accountability more broadly (e.g. beyond student achievement scores), and measure accountability through multiple measures (including student participation, behavior, attendance, a myriad of formal and informal assessments). In addition, San Diego goes beyond the "accounting" function of test scores to 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 differ in important ways, 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 rank 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 some teachers believe that norm-referenced tests are neither adequate nor accurate means of testing students, most of them agree that having an assessment that measures students' reading and math proficiency is important. However, there is no question that the test used to assess school accountability is having a substantial effect in our case study schools. Many teachers argue that the test is not aligned with the state curriculum standards, and needs to be. 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 and 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 eliminated. This 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 which has experienced substantially gains and has more than 50% of its students scoring above the 50th percentile in both reading and math in a school with large numbers of language minority and low-income students – 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 (add cite). (Kentucky’s similar accountability index, which produced schools that boomeranged from “rewards” status one year to “sanctions” the next was repealed they year before California’s was enacted.)

One of the API anomalies is that, as schools test more of their LEP and special education students, as San Diego has done, even if their scores continue to increase their average performance will generally look relatively poorer than similar schools who hold out more of these students from testing. Another anomaly is that the designation of similar schools not only includes student demographics, 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. What this means in practice 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 are inflated by holding low-performing students out of testing and by hiring uncredentialed teachers – two things that San Diego no longer does.

Until the API system is redesigned, however, the city and the schools are doing the best they can to work within the curious dynamics it creates to support productive changes. While the “underperforming” label negatively affected teacher morale overall at each school, each school reacted 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. One teacher said, “It is devastating. It is devastating [to be put down as a “poor performing” school] for a 20-year period. Every year they tell us how terrible we are: Title I, Q1/Q2. [They tell us], ‘Now do the impossible and make everyone brilliant!’” Laurel Ridge teachers, by contrast, voice concerns mainly with public relations issues they faced once identified as “low performing” since their reputation in the community has been positive.

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 indicate (on an anonymous survey) that 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 Steward and Laurel Ridge.¹²

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, schools struggled to maintain

¹² Except that teachers at Robinson rated themselves lower than Steward teachers for having consistent standards across classrooms.

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 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 and coaching opportunities). Robinson, on the other hand, purchased things which were less directly tied to literacy instruction (e.g. school nurse time, refreshments for students, and technology). Taken together, these schools illustrate the tension of maintaining a commitment to locally defined goals in the face of state and district policy.

Part V

Meeting the Needs of High Schools: Reforming the Reform

In the initial years of San Diego's district-wide reform, leaders pursued – with great intention – 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 minimizing “the K-12 thinking that has to go on” (quoted in Hightower, 2001, p. 137) by creating such groups. Also, 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” (quoted in Hightower, 2001, p. 42).

Increasingly, high school principals bristled at the apparent “one size fits all” approach to reform. They felt that district reformers lacked knowledge related to the particular needs of high schools and that the K-12 instructional conferences failed to meet their learning needs. Data from a survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP) of all San Diego City Schools principals (which had an 83.5% response rate) revealed the differential reactions to district initiatives by school grade level:

Selected CTP Principal Survey Results

SURVEY ITEM	HS Principals	MS Principals	Elementary Principals
The district does not understand my school’s reform agenda (<i>q. 11o, percent rating “agree” or “strongly agree”</i>)	39%	5%	6%
Please rate how valuable monthly Principals’ Conferences have been to you and your work (<i>q. 7a, percent rating item “highly valuable”</i>)	46%	70%	89%

Source: CTP Principal Survey, May 2000.

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] (Bersin, Principals’ Conference, 10/3/00, qtd in 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 a different treatment. The districts’ high school

efforts have been framed by the state policy context and the lack of district-led models elsewhere for high school reform. In San Diego, the vision for high school reform is squarely focused on improving the quality of instruction. The district's reform leaders hope to transform the system of high schools into academic institutions that prepare students to pursue the post-secondary education or employment of their choosing. In order to accomplish this lofty goal, they have followed a three-pronged strategy: work with principals to improve their abilities to serve as leaders of instruction at their sites; work directly with teachers to improve curriculum and pedagogy; and create opportunities for students who need additional support to achieve at high levels. Initially, this effort has been focused on literacy and math, which the district views as the "gatekeeping" subjects. While the district implemented a new Physics curriculum rather abruptly in fall 2001, they appear to be moving more slowly in other high school subject areas.

Unlike other attempts at high school reform, such as Philadelphia's across-the-board move to create smaller learning communities (originally called "Charters," Fine, 1991), San Diego's reformers have emphasized improving instruction, not changing school structures. This is a deliberate move 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 cautions, however, 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 reculture a school and then you can actually get some reform. But, 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.... (Alvarado, Principal's Conference, 11/15/01)

Impetus for High School Reform in San Diego

Based on SAT-9 achievement data, San Diego's high school students are the lowest performing group in the district. While about 46% of the district's students in grades 2-8 score at or above the 50th percentile in reading, only 36% of students in grades 9-11 do so. (See Appendix A.) These scores are particularly low for African American and Hispanic students in the district, among whom about one-fifth of students score at or above the 50th percentile in reading, compared to over 60% of white students¹³. There is also a disconnect between students' grades and their college readiness. Significant proportions of graduates from San Diego High Schools who receive 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 9th grade and continues throughout high school (Schools for a New Society proposal application, SDCS, 4/00).

To address the problem of low performance at the high school level, district leaders have conducted research, created new positions and administrative structures, and pursued planning and implementation grants to support focused work on high school reform. 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. With these grants, the district sought to improve in three key areas, aligned with the district's overall strategy: increased academic press, achieved by reshaping instruction and

¹³ Data from spring 1999 SAT-9 administration.

course-taking patterns to challenge and motivate students; improved instructional leadership among high school principals; and provision of more personalized educational settings for students. As the district moved further into the work of high school reform, however, they discovered a need to adapt the system-wide approach to meet the particular needs of this subset of schools.

Using State Policy as a Warrant for High School Reform

Across the nation, heightened graduation requirements and proficiency exams are becoming increasingly commonplace as states attempt to ratchet up the performance of their graduates. California is in the process of implementing a high school exit exam, which students must pass in order to receive a diploma. State content standards and related course-taking requirements are approaching those of the university system. Instead of being thrown off-course by these state demands, San Diego's leaders are attempting to harness these initiatives and use them in the service of their overall reform goals.

Leaders of San Diego's high school reform have tethered their benchmarks for improvement to the University of California/California State University Subject Area Requirements. These coursetaking requirements, often referred to as the "A-G's" as they specify seven content areas,¹⁴ are the baseline requirements for admission to the state's universities. Starting with the first high school-specific reform retreat in February 2001, the district has provided principals with disaggregated data on the UC/CSU eligibility of their graduates. The district also tied a set of its performance expectations in the \$8 million Carnegie implementation grant application to the A-G course requirements, with the goal that during the course of the

¹⁴ The seven areas are social science, English, mathematics, laboratory science, languages other than English, visual and performing arts, and college preparatory electives.

grant, the percent of UC/CSU-eligible students will nearly double (from 38% in 2000 to 66% in 2004) (SHARP, SDCS, 8/01). Finally, the district is instituting support programs for students not on target to pass the California High School Exit Exam, although reform leaders expect the number of under-prepared students to decline sharply as the work of reform deepens at the K-8 level. Also in the Carnegie implementation grant, the district is holding itself to the expectation that all students will pass the Exit Exam by their senior year (SHARP, SDCS, 8/01).

Another example of this “active use” (Firestone, 1989) of state policy is the districts’ change in its course of study in science. Citing the state’s content standards, which require more than 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 a challenge 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 ninth 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. As might be expected with such a mandate, there has been resistance to this change and, as with any new program, there have been implementation problems. Initially, the main criticism was not the content of the reform but the apparent top-down nature of the change. Although the district did engage some teachers in pre-

implementation discussion, principals did not necessarily perceive 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." (High School Principal, 5/01)

As Hightower (2001) observes, San Diego's reformers have created a tension between the "what" and the "how" of reform, and implementation of the physics curriculum may represent yet another example of this. Teachers and principals may see value in the new curriculum, but many found the nature of its introduction unsettling.

Changing the Tone of Reform: Doing "With" Instead of Doing "To"

As we've noted, a frequent criticism of school reform in San Diego under Bersin and Alvarado has been its top-down nature. Principals and teachers have often felt as though this reform is being done "to" them instead of "with" them (Hightower, 2001; 2002a). High school teachers and principals share in this critique of district leadership, particularly in response to mandates such as the Genre Studies blocks and the Active Physics curriculum mentioned above. Yet in year four of the district's reform, and in the context of high school reform in particular, the district seems 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.

No Model to Follow. High schools have presented a perennial challenge to school reform efforts. In a study of system-wide reform efforts in Chicago, Sebring, Bryk & 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, even in the midst of a K-12 reform initiative. And while Alvarado’s work in District #2 has been described as the “existence proof” that district-wide instructional improvement can happen (Elmore & Burney, 1997a), it is important to note that District #2 serves a predominantly K-8 population with no comprehensive high schools under its jurisdiction, although Alvarado sponsored a number of small high schools of choice in this district as in District #4¹⁵.

Widespread reform of high schools has been 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, Aneess, & Ort, in press). 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.

This lack of a model may be leading district administrators to look to the schools for more 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 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,

¹⁵ In New York City, each borough’s comprehensive high schools constitute their own separate district.

but also skeptical that their input would be heeded by district leaders¹⁶. 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...(HS Principal's Conference, 11/15/01)

District administrators identified and then invited six high school principals to work intensively on whole school reform at their sites. Citing a lack of preconceived "model" or "solution," Alvarado and his staff have encouraged these principals to develop site-specific strategies for reform within the framework of instructional improvement outlined in the district's reform plan, the Blueprint for Student Success. These six principals, five representing "underperforming" schools based on state guidelines, have begun meeting with district staff to define the reform approach for their sites. These six schools comprise the prospective grantees in the district's Federal Smaller Learning Communities Implementation Grant, submitted in February 2002 for \$2,500,000 over three years. The district also has an \$8 million award from the Carnegie Corporation and the Gates Foundation to create small learning communities in high schools. This "co-creation" of high school reform presents yet another example of how the

¹⁶ A few years earlier in the reform, a group of high school principals were asked for input on a secondary literacy initiative. The study group did not feel that their recommendations were heeded and high school principals have questioned how genuine district calls for input have been ever since (Hightower, 2001).

district seems to be changing its approach to reform to make it more collaborative and recursive and less top-down. However, there is no doubt that it will be purposefully guided with an intense focus on instructional improvement.

Part VI: Conclusion

When looked at from top-down, bottom-up and inside-out perspectives, the San Diego reform provides a fascinating case of district leadership that has prioritized high-quality instruction and professional learning through an 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 enforcing standards of practice from the “top.” It seeks to grab the comet of outside influences by the tail and wrestle them to the advantage of “inside” purposes without being carried off by the force of the comet’s momentum.

Negotiating District and School Relationships

Whereas early advocates of site-based management saw bottom up decision making 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 enables teachers to make more nuanced,

personalized, and *well-grounded* decisions about how to help individual children, and can proactively organize resources (dollars, 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* must 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. (Alvarado, Pew Forum, 1/25/01)

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 in a very short period of time. The district's human capital has improved; 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 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 among 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.

There have been some costs in terms of local participation and sense of inclusion, especially at the secondary level, and there have been costs 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, 19xx). 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 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 Alan Bersin at a recent principals meeting:

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 – 6 of 18 – on whole school reform, 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 vs. 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 newly announced state policies 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 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 districts' 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 beginning teacher support, at least at the secondary level, and the state's accountability policies. These last are quite new, with many kinks to be

worked out. The accountability policies are quite intrusive. 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 for motivation on the punishment and rewards embodied in the state policies, 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 see that by holding fast to its own theory of instruction in literacy, the district was able to improve 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 provides 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. The bet in San Diego is that if the district is strong enough to enforce this coherence through professional learning in the first instance, the knowledge base and skills of the profession will strengthen the ability of local schools to forge their own meaningful learning and teaching agendas that strengthen them from the inside out.

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