Governance Matters
The School Board Guide to Reinvigorating High Schools
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California School Boards Association

In 2005, the California School Boards Association convened a High School Reform Task Force to look at the state of high school in California and develop strategies around reform that would be useful for school governance teams. This task force, comprised of board members and superintendents from throughout the state, also sought to identify the key role the governance team can and must play if high schools will prepare all students for the challenges and opportunities ahead of them. Students in California must be challenged to meet high expectations and be given the support they need to meet rigorous standards if they are to compete in the global economy. CSBA believes that a high school diploma must be meaningful and valued by colleges and employers. It must symbolize a student’s preparation to participate in college, career, society and the nation’s democracy.

Over the past several years student achievement has been on the rise in California. According to the Academic Performance Index (API), which is the cornerstone of California’s Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999, California students have been reaching new heights in meeting the state’s rigorous academic content standards. However, much work still needs to be done. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has shined an important light on the pervasive achievement gap that exists in schools across the nation. Further, many of California’s high school students have not had the same success at mastering the academic content standards as their elementary counterparts. This is especially true of students in low socioeconomic households, African American, Southeast Asian and Latino students, English learners and special education students.

The good news is that many districts have taken these challenges head on and are making important strides in raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap. This guide will focus on an array of strategies districts may choose to reinvent their high schools. Many of these strategies are highlighted with case studies of districts and the role the board played in carrying out reforms. These case studies share consistent themes that may assist other boards in determining the processes that need to be in place before meaningful reform can happen. The common themes within these districts are:

- A shared vision that focuses on student achievement with specific goals outlined.
- Support of the vision and goals is evident in every board decision and deliberation.
- Implementation of a comprehensive data system to support all decisions from the school board to the classroom and to maintain oversight of reform practices.
- Continuous accountability by the governing board to sustain reform efforts.

These themes will be explored in more depth throughout this resource guide. What is evident throughout the best practices highlighted is the important role school boards play in the success of school reform. It is through their leadership that reform goals and strategies are implemented, sustained and evaluated. Of all the themes listed above the most prominent is the board and superintendent collaboration and the role of the board. The role of the board was evident as it set a vision and direction regarding student learning and high school expectations. The governance teams in the highlighted districts also followed up their vision-setting with support to help staff carry out the vision. Finally, these boards maintained oversight and accountability, using accurate and timely data, to ensure progress towards the board’s vision. This governance theme runs throughout the guide and is discussed more specifically in the conclusion.

In 1997, the California School Boards Association published a handbook on reform and restructuring titled, “Making Changes That Improve Student Achievement: A School Board’s Guide to Reform and Restructuring.” It listed the nine components of successful reform. Almost a decade later, these components are still relevant and were found to be in place in the districts highlighted in this guide.

Reform must be:

1. Based on agreed-upon needs in the system. (The agreed-upon needs are established in the vision- and goal-setting process. The board will want to take the lead in providing an overview of where students are currently achieving and where the district wants them to be).

2. Developed through a process that includes all stakeholders who share a long-term commitment to the reform.
3. Tailored to the unique needs and goals of the school, district and community.

4. Supported through training and staff development so that staff can successfully implement reform.

5. Sustainable with the available resources and over time. (The board will want to review district priorities as related to the vision to determine how to allocate resources. “Out-of-the-box” approaches related to funding and allocation of resources should be considered).

6. Supported by the board, which establishes the policy, curriculum and financial direction of the district.

7. Aligned with and connected to other district or schoolwide efforts.

8. Supported through communication with the public about the reform and reasonable expectations.

9. Evaluated to demonstrate improved student outcomes and specific indicators of success.

This guide covers several issues, including: effective use of data, student engagement and social capital, curricular pathways, students with special needs, alternative education and governance. It is intended to help school boards begin a meaningful discussion on raising student achievement for all high school students in their districts.
In order to see a clear picture of the state of high schools in California, it is important to gauge how well students are faring in public high schools. There have been many reports and studies in the past several years that have attempted to determine the graduation and dropout rates of California’s high school population. Unfortunately, California does not yet have a statewide data system that tracks individual students, making it difficult to determine if a student has simply moved to another district or dropped out altogether. As a result, these measures of dropout and graduation rates are all estimates. What is clear from all the studies and measures of dropout and graduation rates is that there is an alarming disparity in rates among African American, Latino and Southeast Asian students. There is much work to be done to keep students succeeding through high school.

Beyond dropout and graduation rates, it is important to examine the progress of high school students’ achievement on the California Standards Tests (CSTs) and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The CSTs measure student progress on the state’s academic content standards. Statewide, students are making progress in mastering the content standards, but that progress is not even across-the-board. While California continues to see increases in the number of students scoring at or above the proficient level in the elementary grades, high school scores have remained stagnant. The CAHSEE measures math skills, including Algebra I, as well as 9th and 10th grade standards in English/Language Arts. It was used for the first time in 2006 to deny high school diplomas and will be a critical piece of data to examine as it continues.

Other indicators also reveal that there is much work to be done in California’s high schools. The remediation rates reported by the University of California and California State University are too high. UC reports that 33 percent of students need remedial instruction in reading and writing upon entering the UC system. Fifty-five percent of CSU freshmen need remedial coursework in English or mathematics.

Additionally, the percentage of California students taking the SAT exam, the test which measures college readiness and which nearly every college in the country accepts as a part of its admissions process, is relatively low. More females than males take the test (females 55.6 percent, males 44.4 percent). The ethnic breakdown of test-takers is also of concern. It is clear that there exists a wide achievement gap in this area also.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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There are many factors that could be causing the stagnation in achievement levels. The quality of coursework taught to students needs to be examined closely, as well as the types of programs that keep students engaged in their learning. Motivating students to be excited about learning is hard work. The more districts understand what students expect from their high school curriculum, and extra- and co-curricular activities, the better they can create a high school program that is relevant to their post-high school aspirations.

**Adolescent Motivators**

What keeps students interested in attending school? CSBA’s High School Reform Task Force had the opportunity to meet with several high school students from varying backgrounds and with different academic interests to try to get the answer to that question. The Task Force was interested in hearing from the students on various issues, including what motivates students and how districts could improve the engagement of high school students on campus. Overwhelmingly, the students interviewed stated that a strong connection between teachers and students was important in keeping students...

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1 The College Board also collects ethnic information for an “Other” category that is not reflected in their report listed on the College Board website. Therefore, the percentage total across ethnic categories will likely be less than the totals reported. [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)
engaged and motivated in school. On the topic of curriculum, the students expressed a strong preference for "hands-on," real-world learning along with academies or "specialty areas" that met their interests and needs. Smaller class size and interesting course offerings outside of core classes were other strategies the students believed would lead to more engagement from students. Even those students enrolled primarily in advanced placement courses wished that career and technical education courses were an option for them. They cited the inability to receive the Advanced Placement credit in career and technical education courses as a deterrent for them to enroll.

MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization recently evaluated several comprehensive initiatives in high school reform and came to similar conclusions. It found that the two primary components of successful reform are structural changes in schools to improve personalization and instruction. Examples of structural change might be small learning communities and faculty advisory systems that can increase students’ feelings of connectedness to their teachers. Especially in combination with one another, extended class periods, special catch-up courses, high-quality curricula, training on these curricula, and efforts to create professional learning communities can improve student achievement. School-employer partnerships that involve career awareness activities and work internships can help students attain higher earnings after high school. Furthermore, students who enter ninth grade facing substantial academic deficits can make good progress if initiatives single them out for special support. These supports include caring teachers and special courses designed to help entering ninth-graders acquire the content knowledge and learning skills that they missed in earlier grades. These findings are very similar to what students themselves are saying is needed in reforming high school.

Several recent surveys of high school students and high school dropouts have found similarities in what keeps high school students engaged and what pushes them out. In a recent study conducted for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation by Civic Enterprises, a Washington-based public policy development group, focus groups were conducted with high school dropouts to explore the reasons young people leave school before graduating. While 35 percent stated academic failure as the reason to dropout, higher percentages cited lack of motivation and of interesting classes as reasons they left school. Sixty-nine percent said they were not motivated or inspired to work harder. Nearly half said their classes were not interesting or did not include “real world” learning experiences. Two-thirds said they would have worked harder had they been challenged to do so. Most dropouts agreed on the changes necessary to keep students in school. Some of these changes include opportunities for applied learning to make classes more relevant, better teachers who keep classes interesting, smaller classes with more individual attention, and better communication between parents and schools.3

In another recent poll, more than 1,000 high school students were surveyed and only 31 percent felt that expectations at their schools were high and that they were significantly challenged. Ninety-two percent said they wanted a curriculum that provided opportunities to apply their knowledge to actual employment-related scenarios.4 The National Governor’s Association also conducted an Internet survey of more than 10,000 high school students ages 16-18. The survey found that 62 percent of students felt schools had done a bad to fair job of holding their attention. It also found that 50 percent of respondents believed their senior year was a “waste of time” or could be much more meaningful. More than a third said their classes were not adequately preparing them for college. While this particular survey finds that many students feel their senior year is not useful, boards should keep in mind that for many students the senior year can be stressful and filled with a rush to complete courses required for graduation and pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE).

The key themes in most research and surveys around engagement and motivation are the need for a curriculum that has real-world experience and is set at a challenging high school standard, along with teachers who care and have high expectations. Students also want the standards they feel their senior year is not useful, boards should keep in mind that for many students the senior year can be stressful and filled with a rush to complete courses required for graduation and pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE).

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Board members, working within their role and responsibilities, are able to significantly improve the quality of education in their district and to move the district toward successfully raising learning and achievement for all students. The board’s governance responsibilities can be aligned to focus squarely on any one issue. In this case, the goal is improving achievement for all students in high school, and by assuming its responsibilities, the board can be influential in reaching it. These responsibilities are:

• Setting direction for the district
• Establishing the district structure
• Providing support to the district and staff
• Ensuring accountability for both resources and outcomes
• Educating and leading the community

The responsibility of setting a long-term vision for the district is the central role of the board and the centerpiece of any reform movement. In researching best practices around California, each district highlighted in this guide had a widely held vision related to high school achievement and concrete goals for its staff and high school students. Staff, students, parents and the community embraced the vision because they participated in its formation. In the area of high school reform, the community will have definite ideas about the skills and knowledge they want their students to have by graduation.

If the district has not yet defined the goals and expectations for their high school students, this must be the first step. The governance team will want to begin this process by soliciting community input. The first step in soliciting input is to create a framework for discussion around the topic of reinvigorating high schools. As community leaders, the board can help start a discussion with the community about the education process and provide an initial structure from which to begin the discussion. Once this initial framework is established, the community can be brought in to discuss high school reform and provide input. This can be accomplished by involving students, teachers, staff, parents and others in a community engagement process that also allows for board input and reflection.

In order for high school reform strategies and practices to be successful, community support is crucial. Communities support schools where all efforts are focused on improved student achievement. The community should be involved in developing the district’s vision for high school achievement and how district programs and policies are used to achieve that vision. Most boards find that, as they work with their community to develop districtwide goals, people value much more than test scores. Board members and citizens alike expect schools to produce knowledgeable citizens who contribute to the community, individuals who are ready for college and/or individuals with marketable, 21st century skills.
Accountability

The Importance of Data: Data Drives Expectations and Accountability

The accountability responsibility of the board is crucial, and following the vision-setting process, it is where the governance team will want to begin the process of looking at high school improvement. To make decisions on school reform and improving student learning, school boards must first know what the existing environment looks like. To accomplish this, they must understand how students are currently achieving on several levels by analyzing data. Reliable data should be used at all levels of the district continuum - from the board to the classroom teacher. Some of the decisions that should be made with data include:

- Creating school improvement plans and assessing progress
- Allocating district resources
- Tracking student achievement for diagnosis and placement
- Changing beliefs and attitudes that all students can learn
- Guiding teacher professional development
- Linking interventions to results

Reliable data are an essential component in making any decision in the district. Analysis of data can take many forms and should be easily understood by the board, staff and the public. The district staff might consider formatting data in a variety of ways in order to better understand and analyze the results. Data-driven decision-making is a powerful tool. It changes student outcomes, classroom practices, professional development, administrative spending, community support, student enrollment, teacher retention and budget adjustments.

In order to obtain an accurate picture of where high school students are currently achieving in the district and where learning gaps exist, all data should be disaggregated by socioeconomic status, race, gender, disability and ethnicity. With this disaggregated data, the board and staff can identify issues and problems that may otherwise remain hidden, ensure that no students fall through the cracks and recognize grade-level and school wide strengths and weaknesses. Once the issues are exposed, the board and staff can begin to understand the root causes of problems and comprehend why some students are not performing well. Then staff can target specific areas for improvement by enhancing instruction and assessment and guiding curriculum development, revision and alignment, and then assess whether specific interventions have been successful. Boards can then guide the allocation of resources towards the specific needs of students, measure program effectiveness, convince stakeholders of the need for change, highlight successes, monitor and document progress toward achieving goals, inform internal and external stakeholders of progress, and ensure that all personnel are focused on student learning. All of the board’s goals are easier to achieve once the data is analyzed in a meaningful way.

As stated earlier, a statewide data system is not currently in place. However, it is clear that significant gaps exist between the achievement of groups of students in California. African American, Latino, Southeast Asian and American Indian students, English learners, students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and special education students are all less likely to score at the proficient level on state tests. The same gap exists in dropout and graduation rates. CSBA believes that the achievement gap is the most pressing and difficult problem California faces concerning student performance. Because of the limitations in its current data system, California is unable to answer many questions about student performance statewide, such as the performance of a group of students over time, which would help shed light on the extent to which a school is helping those students improve. However, there is still enough data locally and statewide to identify areas of concern and act now. The state is working on a new data system that is based on a student identifier, but it will be at least a year and probably longer before it is used for any of these purposes.

Because of the lack of a uniform statewide data system, it is imperative that districts create their own data system in order to take a critical look at the existing data in their high schools. Any data system a district selects—and there are many from which to choose—should be compatible with the required elements of the California School Information Services (CSIS) Program. A common component of all the districts highlighted in this guide is the implementation of a data system that the governance team and staff use to make decisions about student learning and instruction.

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The impetus for the task of collecting and analyzing district-, school- and student-level data must come from the governance team as part of an overall strategy and commitment to improve student achievement at the high school level. It must be noted that these systems come with significant costs. Not only does the board need to be prepared to incur the costs of the hardware and software for the data system, the board should also be prepared to find resources to support the system’s ongoing personnel costs. The board will also need to ensure that resources are available to provide critical professional development needed for personnel at every level in the district—from the board to the classroom—to enable staff to utilize effectively the data to inform policy and instructional practice. Such an investment must be supported through professional development to ensure that the greatest value is received. In these times of fiscal stress for districts, the board should be prepared to make cuts elsewhere to support such an endeavor.

The board might want to consider scheduling several study sessions to review and discuss data with staff. Along with data, the board should be presented with the latest research on high school reform. This will help inform the board as it examines the data. There are a multitude of data sources the board will want to review. All of the data listed below should, when possible, be disaggregated by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education and English learners:

- Demographics of students in the district and by school site.

- Both district- and school-site-specific Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program results and Academic Performance Index (API) scores. It is important to look at results over time. Data should include at least three years of information. This is especially important for board members who are new to the board.

- Participation rates in school activities. Governance teams should annually review and evaluate all programs in the district to determine the success of these programs and their effectiveness in reaching the district’s student achievement goals.

- Course offerings at each high school should be analyzed by enrollment demographics and the success rates of students enrolled. Board members will want to pay special attention to advanced placement and honors courses, as well as remedial courses to determine if there are disparities in enrollment patterns.

- Teacher assignments and credentials should be reviewed to determine that there is equity in placement of new and experienced teachers at each high school site. There have been several studies recently that show new, inexperienced teachers, as well as non-credentialed teachers are disproportionately assigned to the lowest-achieving schools.

- Feeder patterns and course taking patterns within a unified district and from elementary districts should be reviewed to determine what courses and services will be needed for incoming freshmen.

- Master schedule and course offerings.

- If possible, data should be provided on who is not moving into district high schools and why. This can also be accomplished by conducting surveys of parents of elementary and middle school students.

- Graduation rates.

- Mobility rates within the district and to other districts.

- Community resources available to students and families in the district and what types of services are offered. This is necessary to determine whether outside agencies are meeting the needs of the students and moving toward the same goals as the district.

- Counselor ratios and assignments must be looked at to determine whether students have the access needed to accomplish their goals and meet district expectations.

- Local employer satisfaction. Considering this area when reviewing and analyzing data may give the board insight into the types of skills and knowledge students are expected to possess when entering the workforce.

- University of California and California State University remediation reports.

- Results from high-quality, local assessments that guide instruction.

**Case Studies:**

**Accountability and Effective Use of Data**

Despite the limitations the state has regarding data collection, many school districts in California have moved ahead with implementing data systems that inform the board and staff and drive their decision making and accountability on reform initiatives. All of the schools highlighted in this guide have put in place a districtwide data collection system and are using it to improve learning at the high school level.
Los Altos High School

Los Altos High School, in the Hacienda-LaPuente Unified School District, has implemented changes that are resulting in improved learning and a more engaged student culture. Los Altos High is a large high school with approximately 2,000 students, of which 63 percent are Latino, 13 percent white, and 19 percent Asian. Three years ago, the governing board adopted six goals that focused on students achieving at high standards. After the district created a vision and the six specific goals for their high schools and students, the board purchased a data collection system. This purchase was a priority for the board and it redirected categorical and general funds money to do this. In every district, in order to accomplish the goals the board has established, district resources will need to be allocated accordingly. While the decision to prioritize spending can be challenging, it helps to continuously tie all fiscal decisions back to the vision and priorities of the district.

The district created a position, Director of Learning Standards and Accountability, to be responsible for collecting the data and disseminating it to administrators and teachers as soon as possible.

Because it could not do everything at once, the district began to focus on two groups of students: special education students and students most affected by large achievement gaps. With the data system in place, and armed with information about which students were struggling in the district, staff was able to analyze course enrollment patterns at Los Altos. This analysis revealed that a student’s ethnicity predicted whether a student was enrolled in college preparation courses or vocational education programs. Rather than maintain those two separate pathways for students, the district allowed the school to adopt the University of California “a-g” as a default curriculum. Los Altos had also previously established two academies where students could further develop career technical interests. The board established a formal School Business Partnership Program to build a bridge between the education and business community that expands opportunities, resources and creates career pathways for district students and staff. The district then implemented interim assessments to track student progress on the content standards. Because of the district’s data system, these interim assessments provide prompt and meaningful information to guide changes in classroom instruction as well as district policy, if needed.

To further support academic achievement for all students, the school initiated team teaching for special education students and enhanced collaboration time for teachers. These were not easy changes. The school and district worked together to figure out a way to make the instructional minutes fit the contractual minutes dictated by the collective bargaining contract. Eventually, teachers agreed to teach additional minutes and now use that time to examine data and to try to shore up teaching strategies to reach the students who are falling behind. All teachers receive staff development in learning to examine data and are retrained annually on how to use the data to improve instruction. Additionally, the honors and advanced placement courses were opened to all students who wanted to challenge themselves; the gate keeping prerequisites were removed.

The biggest barrier to change in Los Altos High School and other schools in the district were the human challenges. The district had to take a close look at the adult behaviors and practices of those on high school campuses and try to develop strategies to move staff towards the goals and vision set out by the board. There were many who did not believe that all students could achieve in rigorous courses and who refused to team-teach in a collaborative setting. Through all of the changes occurring at Los Altos High School the board remained focused on its vision and six goals. It continues to make decisions, including budgetary decisions, based on that vision.

Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District

Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District is another example of the governing board using data to inform decisions and strategies to improve student learning. PVPUSD is located in Los Angeles County, southwest of the city of Los Angeles. It is a suburban district with an average daily attendance of a little more than 11,000 and has two high schools. The district is 65 percent white, 26 percent Asian, 4 percent Latino and almost 2 percent African American.

In 1998, when California developed academic content standards, PVPUSD sought best practices to inform implementation of a standards-based curriculum. The goal was to align the curriculum and assessments with what was being taught in the classroom. School board members and district staff looked for themes as they attended workshops and visited previously low-performing districts to see how they improved. The most powerful theme uncovered was the use of data to inform instruction. Thus, during the board’s annual goal-setting exercises the board unanimously agreed to adopt a process of districtwide data-based decision-making. The board believes it is crucial to set direction for the district and maintain focus on the goal. The superintendent’s role is clearly defined and it is his job to delegate tasks to make the board’s goals a reality.

Although the specific board goal to make data-driven decisions has been modified since 1998, district staff
continues to use data to inform their daily work. A computerized program was purchased that sorts and stores standards-based assessment data and provides customized reports to administrators throughout the year. Before the start of each new school year, the system prepares reports for all teachers that include longitudinal assessment results for every student in their classes. Principals meet with teachers when the reports are first distributed and again informally several times throughout the year. Both teachers and principals use the data to target teaching to the areas most needed and to create professional development opportunities that address the areas where students are lacking. An online version of this information will be available to parents in fall 2006. This is a clear example of how board policy can drive instructional practice in an appropriate and powerful way.

Parent and community involvement is crucial to the success of the students in PVPUSD. When the school board set its goals and outlined what resources were needed for implementation, it went to the community and over several years passed three bonds and a parcel tax. The superintendent credits the parcel tax (with revenues of approximately $3.5 million a year) for financing the district’s data-gathering process. Per year, the student data program costs $4-7 per student.

Palos Verdes Peninsula uses multiple measures to determine the success of this program. The district uses the state’s measures as one factor but sees them as, “more of a floor than a ceiling.” It also uses college entrance information, SAT results and staff feedback as measures of success. The district credits data-driven decision making with remarkable API scores for special education students, which are higher than the California average for all students. The scores of African American, Latino and English learners are improving, though the district acknowledges there is still room to grow.

**Key questions for Board Members:**

**Accountability and Effective Use of Data**

The following questions are intended to focus the governance team’s discussion on current practice regarding the state of learning and achievement in district high schools.

- What are the values, priorities and beliefs of the district?
- What do you want students to learn prior to graduation from your district?
- What are the minimum competencies and skills that need to be met?
- How do we improve student achievement in our high schools?
- What are the higher-performing schools doing that others are not?
- What resources or support are needed to change and improve the current high school situation?
- How do we monitor progress?
- Is there a policy in place that supports the use of data in decision-making?
- Does the district have a data system in place that can track individual student data longitudinally?
- Have staff, teachers and the board received training on how to analyze and use data to improve teaching and learning?
- How do we acquire and allocate the necessary resources?
- Are budgets prioritized to meet the vision set out for student achievement in high school?
• How strong is the articulation between middle school and high school? For example:

  » What courses are middle school students taking?

  » What is the failure rate of middle school students in math and science?

  » What remediation is provided to help failing students?

  » Is there social promotion?

  » For high school districts, does the district need to meet with feeder districts to articulate expectations and provide support to feeder districts to ensure students in feeder districts have the knowledge as skills necessary to be successful in high school?

  » What programs exist for incoming freshmen in the summer? If these types of programs exist, data from the feeder schools needs to be gathered before summer.

• Are there aspects of the collective bargaining agreement that limit the ability of the district to be successful, such as:

  » Instructional time

  » Seniority and transfer issues

  » Prep time

  » Professional development

  » Evaluation based on student achievement

  » Schedule/master schedule

• Does the district include academic indicators and professional standards in teacher evaluations?

Much of the data listed above can be extracted from local and statewide databases. However, the district will want to conduct surveys of students and parents, as well as staff and local business, to elicit some of the data needed above. To keep governance teams informed in a thoughtful manner, surveys can be given on a regular basis so that district staff can begin to compile longitudinal data.

Exploring relationships across multiple categories of data can provide new insight into student learning and ways to improve it. The process of collecting and interpreting data can help replace hunches and hypotheses with facts; identify root causes of problems, not just the symptoms; assess needs and target resources to address them; set goals and keep track of whether they are being accomplished; and focus professional development efforts and track their impact. This requires training and practice in using data as well as the time and setting to have purposeful discussions about the data and what it means.

Professional development is fundamental to using data to drive decision-making. All the good data in the world will mean nothing if district staff cannot analyze and use it. Board members play an important role in this area. Policies can be instituted that establish the importance of using effective data to support decision-making at all levels in the district. The effective data piece of any policy is important in balancing the effort to collect data with the amount and type of data required to inform decision-making. Too much information can be as much of a hindrance as too little, if it is not used well.
Student Engagement and Social Capital

While the connection between student engagement and achievement may seem obvious, this issue often slips through the cracks in discussions around school reform and improvement. Engagement and motivation are the first step in the learning process. A growing body of research shows that a student’s feelings of connection to school are an important influence on academic and behavioral outcomes.

In discussions about engagement, an understanding of social capital and why it is important is crucial. The concept of social capital has existed for decades being first defined by sociologist James Coleman. More recently, researchers have applied the concept of social capital in the context of education and the role it plays in the academic achievement, or lack of, in various groups of students. Social capital refers to the quality and depth of relationships between people in a family or in a community that help them achieve their goals. A family’s mental, emotional, financial and social resources contribute to its social capital. In a community, the ability of its members to work together towards the common good is a measure of its social capital.

Social capital creates value for the people who are connected to it. Critical information needed to be successful in schools, such as learning about colleges, entrance exams and relevant classes, depend on social capital. For example, having a parent or sibling who has attended college and can provide assistance in helping a student research colleges, coursework, etc., provides one segment of social capital for a student.

However, social capital is not solely the property of the middle and upper class. It comes in many different forms. There is considerable social capital in low socioeconomic areas, but many of the assets available through it seldom allow participants to rise above their economic class. It is social capital that is needed for economic survival. If students do not have parents or family members who have gone to college or trade schools, or do not have opportunities to meet members of the community who are well connected, they come to school with little or none of the type of social capital that can be used to advance themselves in school or career. They must rely on school personnel and peer groups to provide them with the information they need to make choices that will lead them to success. These students need schools and districts to provide them with the social capital they cannot attain themselves.

The students who arrive at school with the types of social capital conducive to college readiness and success in school usually have parents who are college graduates, possess higher incomes, have opportunities to travel, and have broad and diverse connections. Because their parents have gone to college, they are aware of the process of college preparation, including which courses to take, how to fill out college applications, which exams must be taken, etc. They also tend to have peer groups that share the same goals and values. These students do not need to rely on school personnel to inform them of their choices. Therefore, as boards, due to diminished resources, have been forced to reduce the numbers of counselors and advisors, this group of students does not suffer as much as those students who have social capital less aligned with the school environment.

Another way of looking at engagement is through the characteristic of what is referred to as connectedness. Study after study, in addition to CSBA’s discussion with students, indicates that when students are connected to learning and to relationships with peers and adults, they are less disruptive and more successful in academics. Phrases such as student support, asset development, interventions, developmental responsiveness, or school climate are “code” for talking about the importance of creating school communities that connect students to caring adults and to motivational teachers. Robert Blum makes “A Case for School Connectedness” in the April 2005 issue of Educational Leadership: The Adolescent Learner. Blum states: “In this era of accountability and standards, school connectedness can seem like a soft approach to school improvement. It can, however, have a substantial impact on the measures of student achievement for which schools are currently being held accountable.”

To study the relationship between academic success and school connectedness, Blum convened a conference of researchers. From their findings, he synthesized three school characteristics that connect students and encourage their academic achievement:

- High academic standards that are delivered by supportive teachers;
- A school environment that reflects adult and student relationships that are positive and respectful; and,

• A school environment that is both physically and emotionally safe

Research also shows that students who feel connected to school are “less likely to use substances, exhibit emotional distress, demonstrate violent or deviant behavior, experience suicide ... and become pregnant.” Blum goes on to say that connected students are less likely to skip school or be involved in fighting, bullying, and vandalism—all behaviors that cost schools financially as well as academically.7

A critical component of reforming high schools is changing the way adults and students relate to one another. Every student should have a meaningful human connection with at least one adult on campus who can monitor progress and communicate to specialists and parent when difficulties emerge, who can listen, encourage and advocate for the student.


There are many programs that districts can use to increase the levels of engagement on school campuses. Some of these include AVID, LinkCrew and Anti-bullying programs.

- **AVID—Advancement Via Individual Determination**
  is a college preparatory program for students in the “academic middle” who are often economically disadvantaged and underachieving. It enables disadvantaged secondary students to succeed in rigorous curricula, enter mainstream activities in school, and increase their opportunities to enroll in four-year colleges. AVID is designed to increase schoolwide learning and performance. Visit http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/ps/avidgen.asp

- **Link Crew**—Link Crew is a high school transition program that welcomes freshmen and makes them feel comfortable throughout the first year of their high school experience. Built on the belief that students can help students succeed, Link Crew trains members of the junior and senior class to be Link Leaders. As positive role models, Link Leaders are motivators, leaders and teachers who guide the freshmen to discover what it takes to be successful during the transition to high school. Link Crew increases freshmen success; more and more studies are showing that if students have a positive experience their first year in high school, their chances for success are exponential. Visit http://www.boomerangproject.com/content/view/2/101/

- **Anti Bullying**—The act of bullying and the harm it causes have typically been given little consideration; bullying is believed to be a natural and unfortunate part of growing up. The prevalence of bullying has come under scrutiny more recently because of the major role of bullying as a precursor to the notorious and avoidable incidents of school violence across the nation. Today, the link between bullying and later delinquent and criminal behavior can no longer be ignored. Bullying among youths may take place in a variety of hostile acts that are carried out repeatedly over time. The acts involve a real or perceived imbalance of power, with the more powerful child or group attacking those who are less powerful. Bullying may be physical (hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing), verbal (taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, threatening), or psychological (spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, or promoting social exclusion, extortion, or intimidation). The California Department of Education’s website has many resources available for school districts that want to begin working on stemming the tide of bullying and create a safe school where students can learn comfortably. Visit www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/
assisted, including those students who are struggling in school and those in alternative settings. The outcome of these focus groups can be shared with the board. Students can attend a workshop or study session of the board to answer questions board members might have.

Once the district has collected data and evidence on how engagement and social capital can be strengthened, the staff can look to successful models and strategies in place in other school districts. This can help inform their discussions and decisions on how to proceed and make reforms in their high schools.

Engaging students in the curriculum and in school activities is intertwined with the quality of instruction and materials in the classroom. Many proven strategies can be used to increase the motivation of students in high school while also increasing the level of teaching and rigor in the classroom. These strategies and models come in a variety of forms. They range from service learning to small schools structure to integrated curriculum to student mapping.

Case Study:

Effective Student Engagement Strategies

School districts of all sizes and geographic location have found creative strategies to improve the engagement and social capital aspect of their high schools. One small, rural district that has found success is the Black Oak Mine Unified School District. The student demographics of one comprehensive high in BOMUSD are: 92.5 percent white, 3.6 percent Latino, 1.9 percent American Indian, .5 percent Asian, .2 percent African American, .5 percent Filipino, .9 percent other. BOMUSD serves students in a geographic area of over 400 square miles in the Sierra Foothills of El Dorado County and has an ADA of just fewer than two thousand. Throughout the last decade, community members unified around the issue of youth development to overcome the challenges of living in a rural area, including high rates of poverty and drug and alcohol abuse. An awareness of the need for more sophisticated youth development and student engagement began within the school community (parents, teachers, and district staff) and quickly spread throughout the geographic area.

The five-member school board has included the community in establishing the district vision, mission and goals. In 2000, the board developed a strategic planning document which included a vision, mission and goals. The development of the document began with a 62-member taskforce led by the assistant superintendent. The taskforce included students, parents, teachers, administrators, agency members, community and business leaders. In 2006, the board added an annual action plan to the document. Concurrently the board re-examined the vision, mission and goals and found them to be still appropriate for their district. With the board’s support, the district applied for and was awarded $3 million through the federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative over a three-year period in an effort to carry out the district vision relative to student engagement. The board understands that the ability of the district to meet its vision requires they seek continual funding through grants, endowments, etc. They also recognize that reaching goals may require additional resources and are willing to consider using other district resources to do so.

The funds provided by the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative have enabled the district to hire additional support staff to continue the youth development efforts. Three years ago, the district created a youth advocate position at Golden Sierra High School, the district’s comprehensive high school. The youth advocate’s responsibility is to promote youth engagement by ensuring every student is involved in school. As a result, over seventy percent of students at the high school are involved in at least one extra- or co-curricular activity. The youth advocate also builds relationships with students and parents and often serves as a liaison between parents and the school. District staff recognized the tremendous impact of the youth advocate at the high school level and, as funds became available through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, added the position at every school in the district. The grant has also provided additional counseling services on all campuses including alternative high school programs. The district measures the success of its student engagement efforts through several indicators: drug, alcohol, violence and assets data from the California Healthy Kids Survey, disciplinary data and academic achievement. One hundred percent of students have passed the high school exit exam, average daily attendance is 95 percent and dropout rates are less than 1 percent.

School and district staff have also focused their attention and budgeting primarily on entering ninth-graders in hopes that the time devoted to these students will carry them more successfully through the four years of high school. Black Oak Mine USD believes in using community and environmental assets to create programs to enhance student engagement. For example, several years ago the district instituted a white water rafting trip for entering freshmen – a trip funded by the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative. Freshmen participate in the rafting trip with students and teachers from their integrated core group. The key to the success of the trip has been the out-of-school relationships formed peer to peer and teacher to student.
Beyond the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, BOMUSD has created a special program at Golden Sierra High School. In the integrated Freshman Core Program, ninth grade classes at the high school are scheduled so that cohorts of students move together through their physical education, science and English classes. The district uses ninth-grade class size reduction for science and English to keep class sizes low in the Freshman Core Program.

The school district also used funds from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative to lead the community to find new ways of incorporating youth development into the community. Community engagement efforts qualified them as a participant in the Forum for Youth Investment’s program Ready by 21™. Ninety community members gathered for a two-day “Making it Happen Conference” to kick-off the Black Oak Mine Ready by 21™ Coalition. The group was led through exercises to identify the current needs for youth in their community and outline the desired outcomes of a fully implemented, community-wide youth development program. Student involvement is at the core of the Ready by 21™ process. The most pressing request from the community, including students, was to create after school programs and activities for high school students. Part of the challenge in rural communities is being able to provide opportunities for students to have safe, healthy social networks after school hours.

A challenge with any school district or county office of education that receives grant funds or one-time monies is the ability to sustain that investment over time. The biggest challenge the Black Oak Mine governance team faces is how to retain the youth advocates after the grant money runs out. They can see the improvements that have been made and will need to thoughtfully consider how to prioritize the district budget if they and the community want to sustain the effort.

The master schedule has also undergone several transformations over the last 10 years. The high school staff recognized that many curriculum areas are not suited for daily short periods in a regular, standard schedule. For the last four years a modified block schedule has been used at the high school.

BOMUSD has also addressed student engagement and social capital through its long-standing career and technical education program. A 15-unit vocational education graduation requirement was established 10 years ago. The requirement can be met through a myriad of courses offered both on and off campus. All courses meet the state’s new Career and Technical Education Content Standards.

In 2005, Golden Sierra High School was honored with the California Distinguished School Award.

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Key Questions for Board Members:

Effective Student Engagement Strategies

- Has the district conducted surveys of parents and students to gauge success of district programs in engaging students?
- Is every student connected to at least one adult on the school site?
- Has participation in extracurricular activities (music, choir, AP, debate, athletics, MESA) increased?
- Has the district evaluated data that shows how resources are distributed to each school site, to ensure that schools with the greatest need are receiving the greatest amount of resources?
- How are counselors utilized at each school site? If counselor-student ratios are high, has the district put in place other strategies to reach students?
- What are the expulsion and suspension rates in the district?
- What is the attendance rate of students and how many referrals to the Student Attendance Review Board are made each year?
- Is there a correlation between a student’s engagement in school and graduation rates?

Small Schools and Small Learning Communities

Much has been written about small schools and small learning communities as a means to reform high school. In many circles, these reforms are the silver bullet to improving student achievement. The tenet behind the small schools movement is a good one: creating a more personalized environment in which students can learn will lead to improved student performance. The federal government has made a strong push for large, comprehensive high schools to convert to the small learning community format. They continue to award Small Learning Communities Initiative grants to districts all around the country. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has also embraced the small learning communities concept and has contributed more than $200 million dollars to the cause.

There is no one structure for creating a personalized learning environment in schools. Many exist and school districts across California are using them. Configurations such as
career academies, magnet programs, house plans, and schools-within-a-school are all a form of small learning environments. Many schools have used a more staff and student-centered approach to creating a more personalized environment such as by assigning each staff member on a school site to a group of students in the school. This ensures that each student has one adult looking out for his or her academic and social well-being.

For districts that want to take a more formal approach to small schools such as creating physically small schools or restructuring large high schools to include small learning communities, it is imperative that they look at the research on how effective small schools have been and the resources necessary to make that transition. Although smaller learning communities may lead to benefits for students, implementing and sustaining smaller schools is not always easy. For example, recruiting more teachers at a time when teacher shortages loom is a difficult undertaking. Another challenge is how to provide a rich curricular and extra curricular program for students on such a small economy of scale. Furthermore, research points to the need for professional development for teachers accustomed to teaching larger classes so that they may take full advantage of smaller classes. Faithfulness to the small schools concept is imperative during implementation and over the long-term. If the school’s culture fails to change along with its structural change, the school may not see the desired result. The school board of any district contemplating this move will need to take a critical look at the district’s resources to determine if there are sufficient monies to sustain the small schools after any grants or federal or state funding ceases.

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Curricular Pathways

The future success of the comprehensive high school may be in its creation of an alternative organizational structure that offers a new definition of curricular pathways leading to a standards-based diploma. These pathways will offer students greater opportunity to acquire the skills that will be necessary in a competitive and global economy, but with less of the tracking that can put limitations on many students. Creating an environment that offers students a rigorous curriculum intertwined with various pathways to college and career can help ensure that ethnicity and low socioeconomic status are not predictors of a student’s pathway. This would require that all students have access to the school’s curricular paths, assistance with the development and ongoing adjustment of a personal learning plan and knowledge of post-secondary opportunities. Learning plans can be viewed as a road map to help counselors and staff to apprise students and parents of a variety of post-secondary options, so that upon graduation all students will be prepared to continue the pursuit of their academic and occupational goals.

There are different routes a district can take to make certain that students will have the greatest flexibility possible in deciding if and when to enter college, the workforce or both. Possible options include incorporating “a-g” coursework into career technical education; providing career specific magnet schools at every high school; creating small learning communities, etc. Below are three districts that chose different paths but are each producing young adults that have viable options after graduation.

Case Studies:
Effective Curricular Pathways

A-G: San Jose Unified School District

San Jose Unified School District is an urban district with almost 31,000 students. The district student population is composed of 51 percent Latino, 29 percent White, 13 percent Asian, 3 percent African American and 4 percent other. Thirty-nine percent of SJUSD students are low socioeconomic status and 28 percent are English learners. The district has six comprehensive high schools, which include PLUS programs at each campus and one continuation high school.

The district staff and board had been contemplating a move toward more rigor in its high schools and increasing expectations of its students when in 1996 they received a Danforth grant to build a public engagement model. The district began by holding facilitated focus groups. These focus groups included parents, staff, students, business partners, clergy, local politicians and other community members. These initial discussions focused on student achievement, academic standards, diversity, and community involvement. Specific questions addressed in the initial focus groups included:

• How are San Jose Unified schools doing: is the district on the right track, or is it headed in the wrong direction?
• What is the single biggest problem about the local schools?
• What do you like best about the local public school and what is the school doing that is really working?

9 The “a-g” requirements are the coursework necessary to fulfill the minimum eligibility requirements for admission to the University of California. It also illustrates, according to the UC system, the minimum level of academic preparation students ought to achieve in high school to undertake university-level work. In order for a high school course to qualify for “a-g” status the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) must first approve them. BOARS establishes the subject areas and pattern of courses required for minimum eligibility for freshman admission to the University of California. It is a committee of the University’s Academic Senate and includes faculty representatives from each campus of the University. Most comprehensive high schools offer some “a-g” approved coursework. The California State University system has agreed to accept courses certified by the University of California to meet its subject area requirements, also. While school districts are required to offer access to “a-g” approved programs, there are only a few districts that require completion of an approved “a-g” curriculum to earn a diploma.
In response to the focus groups, the board increased student graduation requirements to the highest in California. These more stringent requirements mandated an additional year of math, science, and foreign language and included 40 hours of community service. The focus group work has been ongoing and now includes District-wide Community Conversations with each school community to address issues and develop action plans as well as annual Climate Surveys administered annually to all grade 4-12 students, teachers and parents. This information is used to drive the District Strategic Planning process.

It was a requirement by the board that the district not make significant changes without the support from the parents and community. Once they received that support, in the fall of 1997, the board adopted these core principles and made the decision to adopt an “a-g” curriculum for all students.

While the 240-credit requirement is still in place for these graduation and/or may be there for truancy referrals. Students who are deficient in credits toward high school graduation requirements, many vocational education classes were replaced with foreign language, science, and math courses. Another challenge has been to find qualified math and science teachers. The district established a teaching fellows program that hired people from business as they were earning their credential. There were approximately 200 people in the program, which had limited success. What the district came to realize was being qualified in a subject area did not make someone a successful teacher. There was an approximate thirty percent rate of return—some teachers left by choice others were not reassigned.

SJUSD acknowledged that for many students the UC-approved “a-g” curriculum in the traditional comprehensive high school setting would not work. As a result, the district placed a small continuation campus at each of its six comprehensive high schools. The PLUS program is for students who are deficient in credits toward high school graduation and/or may be there for truancy referrals. While the 240-credit requirement is still in place for these students, not all courses are approved by the University of California. However, the curriculum is still rigorous. The students spend half of each day at the continuation school, catching up on academics, and the other half taking classes at the traditional high school, a community college or an occupational center. Each student receives an individualized learning plan, grade reports every three weeks and counseling and career planning. Many of these students are still eligible for college admission, just not University of California. All PLUS programs are integrated into the comprehensive high schools and students can participate in all sports and drama activities as well as be a part of school activities, including lunch periods.

While the dropout rate has not varied much since implementation of “a-g,” the results in student achievement have been impressive. API scores for all students have improved since 1999. Latino students have raised their API scores by 150 points and closed the achievement gap 24 percent. More students, including the historically disenfranchised students, are now eligible for the UC and CSU college systems. Sixty-five percent of the graduating class last year was eligible for UC or CSU compared to the statewide average of 35 percent. Forty-seven percent of SJUSD’s Latino graduates were eligible for UCs compared to 24 percent statewide.

Career-Technical Education: Clovis and Fresno Unified School Districts

Two large, urban school districts in central California have created a collaborative career and technical education program by creating a unique hybrid of a charter school and a joint powers agreement. The primary reason for using the charter process was to alleviate the burdens that come along with interdistrict transfers. The Center for Advanced Research and Technology (CART) was born out the desire for a technology high school to be created in the Clovis Unified School District. CART student demographics are: 45 percent White, 27 percent Latino, 18 percent Asian, 6 percent African American and just under 2 percent Filipino. Ten percent of students are English learners and 46 percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Enrollment is about 1,300 students.

The board and superintendent of Clovis Unified wanted to create a program with less of a vocational education focus and more of a technology, business-based focus with real-world experiences. In 1997, as the idea grew, Clovis Unified and the Fresno Unified School District created a Joint Powers Agreement to serve students from both districts. CART is a charter school created by the districts and governed by its own seven-member board. Representatives from both districts, including superintendents, school board members and members of the business community sit on the board. The vision both districts had for CART was to collaborate with businesses and community agencies to educate students in a cross curricular, project-based environment that is academically rigorous, and facilitated through a
business-based instructional model. The governing board of CART developed several goals which include: establishing a curriculum that infuses core academic standards into business and industry projects creating a seamless transition between school and the world of work and higher education; providing educational experiences in emerging technology areas which offer outstanding employment and business opportunities for graduates; facilitate long-term learning by actively engaging students in their education; and increase student achievement through application of academics, personal attention, real world projects experiences, and choice of career path exposure. All of the goals correlate with what students continually say they want in a high school experience.

Although the two districts are neighbors, they serve different populations of students. It was an early and continuing goal of the program to positively influence the future of all students in the San Joaquin Valley. The school describes itself as having a business atmosphere and is organized around four career clusters: professional sciences, engineering, advanced communications and global economics. Within each cluster are several career-specific laboratories in which students complete industry-based projects and receive academic credit for advanced English, science, math and technology.

Eleventh- and 12th-grade students from both districts are bused from their regular high schools to the CART facility. Half-day classes are taught by teams of instructors from business and education. Students design and complete projects in collaboration with partners from the business community. Students from different backgrounds and cultures are required to work collaboratively to complete projects.

CART gives many underserved students access to a quality career and technical education and has enhanced the social capital of these students. Peer groups are an important influence in shaping a teenager’s goals and aspirations. When districts purposefully provide opportunities for students of varying academic and socioeconomic levels to collaborate, the benefits are immense. When surveyed, 93 percent of CART students reported that project-based learning was a good way for them to learn. They also said CART created a positive learning environment with a relevant and challenging curriculum that prepared them for college and/or work.

Demand for the program is high and continues to grow each year. Enrollment is voluntary for 11th- and 12th-grade students in Clovis and Fresno Unified School Districts. An effort is made by the admissions team to provide equity in the number of students enrolled from the 14 feeder high schools.

At the school’s inception, district responsibilities were established in the areas of financial and administrative services, budgeting, accounting, payroll, accounts payable, human resources, maintenance, grounds and risk management. As needs change for each district, the designation of responsibilities shift accordingly. CART won a 2004 CSBA Golden Bell for being an exemplary instructional model for improving student achievement. The school has a 98 percent attendance rate. Sixty-two percent of the Class of 2003 applied to the local California State University campus and all were accepted. Ninety percent of students surveyed at CART felt they were prepared for college-level work.

Regional Occupational Centers and Programs

Regional Occupational Centers and Programs originated in 1967 to provide opportunities for specialized job training on a regional basis through a well-established series of programs at school and community sites. The purpose of the ROCP is to provide high school students 16 years of age and older, and adult students, with valuable career and technical education so students can 1) enter the workforce with skills and competencies to be successful; 2) pursue advanced training in higher educational institutions; or 3) upgrade existing skills and knowledge. Counseling, community-based training, and basic skills reinforcement are additional benefits of the program. Currently, seventy-three ROCPs in California serve over 375,000 high school students annually. Students receive training at a variety of venues from regular classrooms to actual business and industry facilities, such as automotive dealerships and hospitals. In most ROCPs, courses are offered during the regular school day throughout the school year, in the late afternoon and evening, and sometimes during the summer months. More than 300 different ROCP career technical education courses are offered in areas such as information technology, agriculture, business, culinary arts, healthcare, construction, and auto technology. ROCPs operate under three different organizational structures: 1) joint power agreements comprised of two or more school districts (25 ROCPs); 2) county board of education (43 ROCPs); and 3) single districts (6 ROCPs).

Unified School District, San Bernardino City Unified School District, Silver Valley Unified School District, Snowline Joint Unified School District, Trona Joint Unified School District, and Victor Valley Union High School District, as well as the county court schools and two correctional facilities. During the 2005-06 school year, 210 teachers taught 74 different courses to an annual enrollment expected to reach 17,000.

Responsibility for the SBCSS ROP lies with the San Bernardino County superintendent. However, in an effort to ensure the responsiveness of the ROP to member districts, the superintendent opted to share his program oversight responsibilities by creating an ROP Consortium Board of Directors made up of member district superintendents. The 16-member district’s boards of education must give annual approval for membership in the ROP. In addition, the SBCSS ROP has an advisory committee made up of members of the business community who are responsible for validating labor market data, assisting in the development of course work and reviewing classroom instructional materials and equipment. All ROP coursework must be approved by the California Department of Education. Presently the CDE has approved 100 courses for the SBCSS ROP which are available to the districts to add to their CTE offerings.

The SBCSS ROP sees itself as an integral part of the economic development of the county and continually reaches out to county and city economic development staff and local chambers. Using federal Tech Prep funds the ROP contracts with the Inland Empire Economic Partnership (a private, non-profit regional economic development organization) to identify critical employment data, which is used for course development. The San Bernardino County Board of Trustees is supportive of the SBCSS ROP and facilitates good community outreach with member districts.

The San Bernardino County Office of Education runs the ROP program and provides support to the 16 district members through funding, professional development for ROP instructors, design of courses and facilitates connections between business and industry. In 1999, with the advent of the state’s accountability system and the imminent arrival of NCLB and CAHSEE, the ROP staff had concerns that electives would be forced out of the high school curriculum due to the new emphasis placed on mathematics and English language arts. Because most ROP courses are elective courses, this narrowing of the curriculum could have a detrimental effect on ROP enrollment. At the same time, the ROP was getting pressure from business to include more math, reading and communication skills in the curriculum.

The SBCSS ROP began the process of integrating the state academic content standards particularly in math and language arts, into the ROP courses. Attention was given to the state content standards that were reasonable for ROP courses to reinforce. Curriculum specialists were hired to work with ROP instructors on how to address the standards in their instruction. There is a delicate balance of preserving the integrity of the ROP coursework with the integration of the content standards in math and language arts. Also, the SBCSS ROP has begun the work of integrating the new career and technical standards into their curriculum. They began with newly developed curriculum and will eventually include the standards into all ROP courses.

The SBCSS ROP has 49 different articulation agreements with five of the county’s community colleges covering 29 different college courses. This means that students in the articulated ROP classes will receive college credit for successfully completing the ROP class. The ROP has used Tech Prep grant funds to foster these agreements and has also given some of the grant money to the San Bernardino Community College District to hire a community college liaison to facilitate more agreements.

The SBCSS ROP has moved toward a focus on identifying state and national industry certifications that will allow them to attract more students and make them more competitive for employment. For example, they now offer certification in sectors of the medical field i.e., nursing certification, dental assistant certification, medical transcription certification and pharmacy technician certification. The SBCSS ROP measures its success by the completion and placement rates of its students. The competencies the students achieve through ROP coursework are the basis for the completion rates. Placement rates are based on whether the students continue with their education after high school and or are employed after high school. Based on 2004-05 data, SBCSS ROP’s completion rate was 87 percent and its placement rate was 87 percent. Interestingly, more students than ever are opting to continue their education rather than enter immediate employment. This is based on follow-up surveys of program completers. The staff at the SBCSS ROP attributes this to their increased emphasis on the importance of continuing education.

The county office ROP programs often differ in their governance structure from joint power agreement ROPs. The governing board of a JPA ROP often consists of school board members from each of the participating school districts. If school districts are interested in implementing some of the strategies highlighted above, the Joint Powers Agreement ROP governance structure is an option.
Key Questions for Board Members:
Effective Curricular Pathways

• How does the district decide which courses will be offered?

• How do students choose classes?

• Are race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or EL status correlated to course enrollment?

• Have connections to middle school and community colleges been established?

• Has the district made any effort to reach out to local businesses in creating partnerships that can provide more access for students to internships, service-learning opportunities, etc.?

• Is there equity in access to rigorous “a-g” courses, Honors courses and International Baccalaureate programs?

• Who is currently enrolled in the district’s “a-g” courses?

• Are there effective professional development strategies in place to train teachers in effective instructional strategies to teach “a-g”?

• Are ROP and vocational courses modern and aligned with California’s new Career and Technical Education Content Standards?

• Are the career-technical education and/or vocational education courses current in their offerings to fit today’s work environment?

• Does the district offer access to career and technology education (i.e. ROP, Early College programs, computer technology courses, etc.)? If yes, are career and technology courses aligned with the core content courses so that students do not have to choose one over the other?
Students with Special Needs

**English Learners**

Governance teams must pay careful attention to English learners (ELs) in their districts. Because of the diversity in California, most schools have students who are learning English. In 2003-04, approximately 25 percent of California’s students were ELs. California has by far the most ELs of any state, with roughly 32 percent of the nation’s 5 million English Learners. While many English learners are reclassified by the time they come to high school, many are entering the California public school system as high school students and need extra support to master the language and the academic content standards. This extra assistance has never been more necessary, as English learners are now required to pass the high school exit exam in English in order to graduate.

ELs must accomplish more in school than their English-speaking classmates: ELs must become proficient in English and at the same time learn the required academic curriculum. Two questions often drive EL public policies: 1) What is the best method for teaching ELs? – often reduced to a debate about bilingual education vs. English immersion, and 2) How long it should take students to become academically proficient in English?

The method in which to instruct ELs has been controversial for many years. Adding to the debate, in June 1998, Proposition 227 was passed by 61 percent of the California voters. The initiative was intended to significantly alter the ways in which the state’s English learners are taught. Proposition 227 requires that ELs be taught “overwhelmingly in English” through sheltered or structured English immersion programs during “a temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed one year,” and then transferred to mainstream English-language classrooms. In addition to the primary intent that ELs be taught primarily in English, the initiative included parental waiver exceptions allowing parents to request alternative programs for their children.

Demographic changes over the last 20 years have focused the discussion on best practices and educational research. A recent report by the American Institutes for Research in conjunction with WestEd stated there is no conclusive evidence that one instructional model for educating English learners, such as full English immersion or a bilingual approach, is more effective for California’s English learners than another. The study concludes that a variety of factors in varying school contexts influence English learner achievement, including: staff capacity to address EL needs; a school-wide focus on English Language Development and standards-based instruction; shared priorities and expectations in regard to educating ELs; and systematic assessments providing ongoing data to guide EL policy and instruction.

The majority of California public schools currently offer three types of instruction for English learners (as described by the California Department of Education):

- **Academic Subjects Through the Primary Language (L1 Instruction)**—English learner students receive a program of English-language development (ELD) and, at a minimum, two academic subjects taught through the primary language. The curriculum is equivalent to that provided to fluent-English-proficient (FEP) and English-only students. Students being taught academic subjects through the primary language may also be receiving specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE).

- **Structured English Immersion**—These are classes where EL students who have not yet met local district criteria for having achieved a “good working knowledge” (also defined as “reasonable fluency”) of English are enrolled in an English language acquisition process for young children in which nearly all classroom instruction consists of a curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language.

- **English Language Mainstream Classroom**—English learners who have met local district criteria for having achieved a “good working knowledge” (also defined as “reasonable fluency”) of English are enrolled in classes where they are provided with additional and appropriate services.

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While many reports come to different conclusions about how to educate English learners (i.e., bilingual education vs. English immersion), there are consistent characteristics that emerge when examining a successful program. They include a positive and academically focused school climate, shared goals among all levels of district staff and board, conveying high expectations for student performance while attending to the skills needed to meet those expectations through ongoing assessment to inform instruction, monitoring academic progress with longitudinal data, parent involvement and strong instructional leadership. Whichever direction districts determine is appropriate, staff must ensure their instructional plan for ELs is articulated clearly across classrooms, grade levels and school sites.

The research has shown that successful EL programs are flexibly constructed to accommodate students with varying levels of fluency and, where appropriate, students from different language backgrounds. Rather than using a single model for all students with limited English proficiency, teachers in successful programs adjust curriculum, instruction and use of the student’s primary language to meet the varying needs of students. To foster academic and cognitive development at the classroom level, research has found that providing opportunities for students to interact and problem-solve allows for natural language acquisition.\(^\text{12}\)

Data from research indicates that proficiency in English reading and writing varies from six to 10 years. Proficiency in English as used here refers to proficiency in the use and understanding of academic English, not conversational English. It is also crucial to acknowledge that “students of different ages and with different levels of native language literacy also learn a second language differently and at varying rates of speed.”\(^\text{13}\) Typically, English learners who arrive with an academic background in their native language are able to reach the grade level norms more quickly than their peers who have had little to no formal schooling. Research has found that most students learning English in U.S. schools reach grade level proficiency in mathematics and language arts several years before they become proficient in reading, science and social studies in English.\(^\text{14}\) Despite California’s schools best efforts, the chance of an English learner being redesignated as English proficient after 10 years is less than 40 percent.\(^\text{15}\)

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**Case Studies:**

**Effective Strategies for English Learners**

Two districts in California provide examples of districts in varying stages of implementing reform strategies directly addressing the needs of EL students. While using different methods, both are seeing vast improvements in academic outcomes.

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Napa High School

For many years, the 17,000-student Napa Valley Unified School District has been assessing the achievement levels of its EL students. However, four years ago the district began to take a careful look at its population of English learners. The district focused its attention largely on Napa High School, a suburban, Title 1, 2,422-student high school with 44 percent Latino, 47 percent white and 7 percent other students. Over one-quarter of the students at Napa High are ELs. The school board noticed that the English Language Development scores of these students were stagnant. The board concluded that English learner students were not receiving an adequate amount of focused instruction on the skills they needed to master the ELD levels expected of them.

The governance team made it a district goal to improve instruction for its English Learners and charged the superintendent, district EL coordinator, the Napa High School principal and other school staff with reaching that goal. Their first step in this process was to take a critical look at the high school master schedule. District and site administrators rearranged classes so that the same group of ELs could share the same teacher for two class periods a day – English language arts and ELD. There have been many positive outcomes from this new schedule. Teachers are able to work with a smaller number of students, which allows more individual attention per student. Students of the same age and ELD level can be in the same class and teachers have more flexibility with the time spent in each subject area. The second step in the process of strengthening the achievement levels for ELs was adopting a new curriculum for EL students, written and aligned with appropriate ELD lessons for grades 6-12. The district spent approximately $30,000-$40,000 for new textbooks using district instructional materials monies and Title III, ELA and LEP funds. Subsequently, $3,000 is spent each year for consumable workbooks.

To support the work at Napa High, the district also opened a newcomer center for students who had missed at least one year of school (most students enrolled have missed an average of three years). A teacher was hired by the school district to begin the newcomer program and to help oversee the proposed programmatic changes for EL students. The teacher works full time at Napa High but is paid by the district from Title III federal funding. Her time is split 80 percent as the newcomer teacher and 20 percent as the school’s Title I Coordinator.

Now that the new program has been in place for four years, the total number of EL students has declined. Teachers and administrators attribute this reduction to two factors. The first is the flexibility in the new system for students to move up to a higher level at anytime, midyear if necessary. Second, teachers now rely on multiple measures to determine ELD level, not just CELDT scores, and have reclassified close to 100 students. EL students are watched closely by administrators, the literacy coach, the newcomer teacher and ELD teachers so there are no opportunities for student progress to go unnoticed. As students are redesignated as English speakers, they are immediately enrolled in college preparatory and/or honors classes.

The board carried their vision for EL students to other areas of responsibility. Several years ago the board approved changes to the collective bargaining agreement to require Crosscultural, Language and Academic Development (CLAD) certification for all credentialed staff. The school board has been supportive of the changes at Napa High and has updated and adopted board policies for ELs to lead the work of the district.

Valley High School

Valley High School is located in South Sacramento and is part of the large, suburban and growing Elk Grove Unified School District, which has an ADA of 58,670. The school serves a diverse student population of 2,120 students: 33 percent African American, 26 percent Hispanic, 23 percent Asian, 4 percent Filipino, 4 percent Pacific Islander and 8 percent white. Students who qualify for the federal free- and reduced-lunch program compose just under two-thirds of the school population and one-quarter are English learners.

In the fall of 2003, the EGUSD, through leadership from its board, convened an English Learners Task Force to develop a coherent, districtwide approach for supporting ELs, with specific actions that would enable ELs to meet what the district calls Bold Goals and Annual Performance Targets. The EGUSD mission is to support all ELs to achieve or exceed district standards and the student achievement goals established by the board. The task force focused on five major areas: curriculum, professional learning and instructional strategies, structures and systems, assessment and community and parent involvement.

To begin the work, the district used its comprehensive data system to create profiles of its English learners. Every high school in the district now receives a one-page profile of each EL student which includes CELDT scores, CST scores, CAHSEE results and grades. Based on this data, in the 2004-05 school year, Valley High School administrators noticed a disturbing trend. EL students designated with a CELDT score of a three, four or five who were placed into mainstream academic courses were earning Ds or Fs at an alarming rate. All students scoring a 1 or 2 on CELDT were placed in non-college preparatory English Language Development classes.
In response to their initial findings, Valley High School staff took action in several areas. Overlying all reform efforts was the creation of the EL partnership. The goal of the Partnership was to pull together a collegial environment of students, administrators, teachers and staff to increase the achievement of ELs. In addition to current course offerings of college prep and ELD classes, the school created a set of health, science and social studies courses that employed SDAIE strategies and were also an approved a-g curriculum. Teachers of these new courses are instructors for both SDAIE and mainstream classes. All teachers who teach SDAIE or EL classes were grouped together by the creation of a new program – The English Learner Partnership. The goal of the administration and partnership teachers was to construct a learning community that was included in the rest of the high school and provided a collegial atmosphere for staff. Part of the professional development plan for staff included monthly, paid common planning time and a summer retreat. The common planning time is especially important because it is when teachers can analyze the data and find collaborative strategies to direct resources where they are needed. Current school funds were reallocated to fund the Partnership.

The high school master schedule was completely reworked. Teacher and administrator input was sought, both formally through surveys and informally during the redesign process. Some staff changed their class schedules but no additional staff needed to be hired. Most new costs, including textbooks, were paid out of Title III funds.

Teachers report that student engagement in SDAIE classes has improved, in-class assessment results have improved and there have been fewer behavior problems reported. An unexpected outcome has been that EL teachers have shared SDAIE strategies with teachers outside of EL and they are using SDAIE strategies in the mainstream classes with beneficial results.

**Key Questions for Board Members:**

**Effective Strategies for English Learners**

- What programs are currently in place to work with EL students?
- How successful have these programs been? How is success measured?
- Is there a policy in place that provides direction for staff in working with EL students?
- Has the governance team recently reviewed the reclassification policy in the district?

**Special Education**

Approximately 681,969 individuals, newborn through 22 years of age, received special education in California in 2004-05. Special education is defined as specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. California provides such instruction through a continuum of placement options in the least restrictive environment. Infants and their families, preschoolers, students, and young adults may receive special education services in a variety of settings that might include daycare settings, preschool, a regular classroom, a classroom that emphasizes specially designed instruction, the community, and the work environment. School districts and county offices of education bear the cost of almost all special education services. This has led districts to consider thoughtful approaches when examining the special education services offered and meaningful changes in how students are classified as needing those services.

California school districts, like all districts in the nation, also provide specialized services for students with disabilities who are not eligible for the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, but still have a disability. Those students are provided protections under Section 504 of the act, which requires districts to provide the students with access to education. While no Individualized Education Program is required for students who qualify for services under Section 504, districts still must make meaningful efforts to ensure students have access to public education programs.

**Case Study:**

**Effective Strategies in Special Education**

There are many strategies in place in California school districts to support special education students achieve academic success. The Lodi Unified School District is in the northern part of the Central Valley. It has 30,000 students with 35 percent Latino, 32 percent white, 8 percent African-American, 17 percent Asian, 4 percent Filipino and 4 percent other. The district has 8,000 thousand high school students and 10 percent of those are identified as special education students. In 2001-02, the district examined the data on its special education students and what they found was alarming. There were three parallel universes in LUSD among English learners, special education and general education students. The numbers of special education students who had access to highly qualified teachers, standards and instruction in the general education setting was minimal. Because so many of LUSD’s special education students with mild and moderate disabilities were also students of color, the issue became one of equity and access.
Alongside the realization of the inequities in instructional access came the external push to prepare more students for graduation. The state graduation requirement of Algebra I and CAHSEE also prompted the district to move toward finding a path that would lead to higher achievement among the special education population.

Particularly troubling to staff were the low numbers of special education students enrolled in Algebra I courses. The board studied the data and supported a change in course access for all students, while staff began to phase out the separate curriculum for special education students on a diploma track. There were challenges to making such a change. The district had to redo master schedules at the high schools to be able to incorporate the special education students into general education Algebra I courses. Both general education and special education teachers had to be given staff development to learn how to modify instruction for these students. In the case of the special education teachers and instructional assistants, their Algebra I knowledge had to be strengthened. An ongoing challenge is how to create modification and accommodations for students in Algebra I courses and instruction.

Parents and teachers were skeptical at first. However, once the data began to show marked improvements for special education students, particularly in algebra, more and more staff and parents accepted the changes as did the students. The district started out slowly. In 2002-03, all ninth-grade special education students whose IEP stated that they were on the path to graduation were enrolled in general education core classes. LUSD is phasing in one grade level at a time so that by 2006-07 all special education students on a diploma track will be enrolled in the general core curriculum with the appropriate supports. Those supports include special education teachers and assistants collaborating in the general education classes, study skills classes taught by the resource specialists, and accommodations and modifications of coursework.

The results have been remarkable. In 2001-02, LUSD had 42 special education students enrolled in a general education Algebra I course. Thirty-one of those students passed the class. In 2004-05, 494 special education students were enrolled in general education Algebra I classes with 313 passing. While it has many challenges yet to face, the LUSD board has taken the steps necessary to ensure that all of its students are demonstrating potential that previously had gone unidentified and unrecognized.

Key Questions for Board Members: Effective Strategies in Special Education

- What are the course-taking patterns for the special education students in the high schools?
- What strategies are used to teach special education students in the core curriculum?
- Do special education students on the path to graduation have access to qualified Algebra I instructors?
- Are there support structures in place for special education students whose IEP states they are on the path to graduation?
Alternative Settings

Many high school students are not successful in traditional, comprehensive high schools for a variety of reasons. Districts and county offices of education can and do offer program alternatives that provide students with the environment, curriculum and support systems needed to ensure that they achieve their full academic potential. There is a variety of alternative school settings:

• **Continuation Schools**—Continuation education is a high school diploma program designed to meet the needs of students 16 to 18 years of age who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not completing their education. Students enrolled in continuation education programs are often credit deficient or in need of a flexible schedule due to employment, family obligations and/or other critical needs. For apportionment purposes, a minimum day of attendance in continuation education is 180 minutes. However, many continuation high schools offer academic programs that exceed the minimum daily attendance requirement. In addition to providing state mandated academic courses for high school graduation, continuation education emphasizes guidance, career orientation and/or a work-study schedule. Supplemental programs and services may include independent study, Regional Occupational Centers and Programs, career counseling, job placement and apprenticeships. In October 2004 there were 522 continuation high schools reporting an enrollment of 64,466.

• **Community Day Schools**—Community day schools are operated by school districts and county offices of education. Community day schools serve mandatorily and other expelled students, students referred by a School Attendance Review Board, and other high-risk youths. The 360-minute minimum instructional day includes academic programs that provide challenging curriculum and individual attention to student learning modalities and abilities. Community day school programs also focus on the development of pro-social skills and student self-esteem and resiliency. Community day schools are intended to have low student-teacher ratios. Students benefit from learning support services that include school counselors and psychologists, academic and vocational counselors, and pupil discipline personnel. Students also receive collaborative services from county offices of education, law enforcement, probation, and human services agency personnel who work with at-risk youth. Community day schools are supported by supplemental apportionment for community day school attendance, in addition to base revenue funding. There were approximately 28,000 students served in 327 community day schools during the 2004-05 school year.

• **Juvenile Court Schools**—These programs meet the educational needs of students who have been incarcerated or placed in group homes, camps or ranches, as well as students who have been expelled from their home district schools because of a status offense or other infraction or behavior governed by the Welfare and Institution Code or Education Code. County boards of education administer and operate the juvenile court schools. These schools provide an alternative educational program for students who are under the protection or authority of the juvenile court system and are incarcerated in juvenile halls, juvenile homes, day centers, juvenile ranches, juvenile camps, or regional youth educational facilities. Students are also placed in juvenile court schools when they are referred by the juvenile court. A minimum day program for Juvenile Court Schools is 240 minutes. Funding is provided by the state general fund and is included in the annual apportionment to county offices of education.

• **Independent Study**—Independent study is an alternative instructional strategy, not an alternative curriculum. Students work independently, according to a written agreement and under the general supervision of a credentialed teacher. While independent study students follow the district-adopted curriculum and meet the district graduation requirements, independent study offers flexibility to meet individual student needs, interests and styles of learning. Independent study is only available as a voluntary option chosen by students and parents. Students cannot be assigned to independent study. Independent study is also offered at the district’s discretion and it is not available in all districts. Independent study can be used on a short-term or long-term basis, and on a full-time basis or in conjunction with courses taken in a classroom setting. Classroom-based students may take some classes using independent study, often to solve scheduling problems. Districts can operate independent study as a program within a school, or as stand-alone charter school or alternative school of choice. In 2004-05, nearly 21,170 independent study students graduated from high school or passed a high school equivalency exam.
• **Middle College**—Some students do not flourish in a traditional high school environment, so through this unique program students have the opportunity to explore and be challenged by new options at the 11th- and 12th-grade levels. Students complete their requirements for high school graduation while also exploring individual interests through a diverse college curriculum. The middle college program is a formal collaboration between a school district and a college. In the middle college setting, students are treated as college students and see themselves as college completers which motivates students to higher achievement and encourages them to model adult behavior. Types of middle college students include those who may be in jeopardy of not completing high school, those that have the potential maturity needed to succeed in the independent environment of college, students who may show a discrepancy between standardized test scores and actual grades and students who may be gifted in one area, such as music, art, or computers, but may not be socially connected to their traditional high school.

• **Online Learning**—In 2002, the Online Classroom Pilot Program was established through Assembly Bill 294. Districts have implemented a variety of program delivery options to meet learner needs. The benefits of online learning include providing schedule flexibility and equity of access, preparing students for success in the college environment, providing motivating technology-enriched curriculum that engages students in active and responsible learning, and embedding technology literacy with academic content. Districts have indicated that running an online class was either about the same or more expensive than running a traditional class. An initial investment must be made for the necessary equipment, infrastructure, online content and training. Although the development cost will go down after initial implementation, there are recurring costs associated with online content delivery (as there are recurring costs with traditional content delivery). Since its inception, the California Department of Education has accepted 40 school sites from 11 districts for the Online Classroom Pilot Program. Sixty-three teachers and over 1,700 hundred students have participated in the program.

• **California Partnership Academy**—The Partnership Academy Model is a three-year program, grades 10-12, structured as a school within a school. There are currently 290 funded programs throughout California. Academies incorporate many features of the high school reform movement, which includes creating a close, family-like atmosphere, integrating academic and career technical education, and establishing viable business partnerships. Emphasis is also placed on student achievement and positive postsecondary outcomes. Key components of the academy model are:

Visit the following websites to learn more about these alternative programs:

- Independent Study
  [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/oe/is/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/oe/is/)

- Community Day Schools
  [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/oe/cd/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/oe/cd/)

- Juvenile Court Schools
  [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/oe/jc/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/oe/jc/)

- Continuation Schools
  [www.cde.ca.gov/sp/oe/ce/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/oe/ce/)

- Middle College
  [www.lagcc.cuny.edu/mcnc/design.htm](http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/mcnc/design.htm)

- California Partnership Academy

- Curriculum focused on a career theme and coordinated with related academic classes.

- A voluntary student selection process that identifies interested ninth graders.

- A team of teachers who work together to plan and implement the program. Teachers are required to have a common planning period to meet regularly to: plan the program activities and curriculum, coordinate with business representatives, meet with parents, and discuss student progress.

- A variety of motivational activities with private sector involvement to encourage academic and occupational preparation, such as a mentor and internship program, enhanced curriculum, classroom speakers, field trips, and postsecondary options.
Governance Matters: The School Board Guide to Reinvigorating High Schools

Case Study:
Effective Strategies in Alternative Education

Jereann Bowman High School

Jereann Bowman High School is a continuation high school in the William S. Hart School District. It has approximately 300 students and most are predominantly Latino and African American. The California Department of Education has recognized Bowman High School several years in a row as a Model Continuation High School. Teamwork, collaboration and dedication to student achievement provide the scaffolding for Bowman High School’s amazing success with students. The WSHUSD school board and superintendent strongly support Bowman High as an alternative educational option for students. The school has the same core academic program as the regular high schools and allows concurrent enrollment at the local community college for many of its students. Current textbooks and supplemental materials are found in every classroom. As in other districts highlighted in this guide, William S. Hart has implemented a data system that is used throughout the district. Teachers have immediate access to student data and all decisions made at the school, and throughout the district, are data-driven. Teachers have been trained to analyze and use the data to target assistance to students. They also use the data to target assistance for passing the exit exam. In 2006, Bowman had the highest passage rate on CAHSEE of all the schools in the district. The district supports research-based, high quality staff development and Bowman is student-centered in its approach. Currently, there is a waiting list of teachers who want to work at the school.

The school board has consistently supported Bowman High School by allocating funds to the school for various programs, hiring a literacy coach and providing for technology in every classroom and a computer lab on campus. The board encourages the principal and superintendent to think “out of the box” about educating a challenging population.

In 2005, Bowman’s API score increased a dramatic 103 points, the graduation rate increased from 96 percent to just over 97 percent and attendance rose from 83 percent to 86 percent.

Key Questions for Board Members

- Are referrals to alternative education programs appropriate?
- Are there disparity trends in the demographics of the alternative schools?
- Is the coursework consistent with district expectations for all students?
- Is the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) criteria used for these schools appropriate?
- In which areas of ASAM is the school showing progress?
Role of the Board

The role of the trustees who sit on locally elected school boards is to ensure that school districts are responsive to the values, beliefs and priorities of their communities. Boards fulfill this role by performing five major responsibilities which represent core functions that are so fundamental to a school system’s accountability to the public that they can only be performed by an elected governing body. Authority is granted to the board as a whole, not each member individually. Therefore, board members fulfill these responsibilities by working together as a governance team with the superintendent to make decisions that will best serve all the students in the community. The five major responsibilities boards assume in governing their schools are:

• **Setting the direction for the community’s schools.** Of the role and responsibilities of governing boards, none is more central to the purpose of local public school governance than ensuring that a long-term vision is established for the school system. The vision reflects the shared values of the community and the board and keeps the district focused on student learning. The vision should set a direction for the school district, driving every aspect of the district’s educational and administrative programs.

• **Establishing an effective and efficient structure for the school district.** Employing the superintendent; overseeing the development of and adopting policies; setting a direction for and adopting curriculum; providing for consistent and relevant professional development; providing direction for and approving bargaining agreements; and establishing priorities for the budget that reflect the vision and goals of the district.

• **Providing support.** Ensuring a positive climate exists for staff; acknowledging staff and students as they are successful in achieving the vision and goals of the district; upholding district policies and creating a professional demeanor that models the district’s beliefs and vision.

• **Ensuring accountability to the public.** Monitoring student achievement and program effectiveness through the use of data and requiring program changes as needed; evaluating the superintendent; monitoring, reviewing and revising policies.

The California School Boards Association recognizes there are certain fundamental principles involved in governing responsibly and effectively. These principles—or Professional Governance Standards—reflect consensus among hundreds of board members, superintendents and other educational leaders throughout the state.

These Professional Governance Standards describe the three components vital to effective school governance:

1) the attributes of an effective individual trustee,
2) the attributes of an effective governing board, and
3) the specific jobs the board performs in its governance role.

The intent of these standards is to enhance the public’s understanding about the critical responsibilities of local boards and to support boards in their efforts to govern effectively. (See Appendix A on page 41)

• **Demonstrating community leadership.** Communicate clearly the district’s policies, fiscal condition and progress on goals adopted to achieve the vision; building support for the district’s educational programs and public education in general.

In all of the case studies presented in this guide, several common themes run through each district. One of the most prominent is the board and superintendent collaboration as the board works through its 5 key responsibilities. The role of the board was evident through the vision and direction the board set relative to student learning and high school expectations. The governance teams in the highlighted districts also followed up their vision-setting with support for staff to carry out the vision in the form of prioritizing budgets to support the vision and the purchasing of data systems so that boards can maintain oversight and accountability-with accurate and timely data- to ensure progress towards the board’s vision.
Vision: Beginning the Process

Of the role and responsibilities of governing boards, none is more central to the purpose of local public school governance than ensuring that a long-term vision is established for the school system. The vision reflects the shared values of the community and the board and keeps the district focused on student learning. The vision should set a direction for the school district, driving every aspect of the district’s educational and administrative programs. In order to begin the process of creating or revising a vision, it is imperative that the board include input from staff, parents, students and the community so they have ownership of the adopted vision. Creating and supporting the vision is especially crucial to the work of improving high schools.

The board will want to work with the superintendent to determine the appropriate model or process for soliciting meaningful input and for leading the discussion on developing and/or reviewing the vision. The board’s knowledge of the community’s needs and interests will help determine what type of process is most appropriate. There are a variety of ways that a board can solicit feedback:

• Conduct surveys of parents, students and staff on their expectations of what a meaningful high school experience includes. The surveys should also ask participants to honestly express the current barriers to raising graduation rates, increasing student engagement and providing meaningful classroom experiences.

• Reviewing current policy and/or creating new policy specific to high school as a part of the agenda of several regular board meetings so that public input can be made.

• Create a committee of broad groups of stakeholders, including students, in a community-wide effort over several months.

• Set up focus groups at district high schools, with participation by one or two board members, to solicit input. (Always keep in mind Brown Act requirements when holding meetings in the district. If less than a quorum, the meetings do not have to be agendized. If focus groups include a quorum, an agenda must be posted. Also, any standing committees or meetings that are created by board action must follow the Brown Act requirements).

The final adopted vision must provide clear direction for the staff and a clear framework for the actions of the board. Once the vision and any related goals are adopted, it is important that the vision be implemented throughout the district. Every stakeholder should know where the district is going and how it intends to get there. The vision needs to become part of the organizational culture and every action the board makes should support it. Continuously reviewing the vision and monitoring the progress of our high schools in implementing the vision and goals is crucial in sustaining the goals of the district. Some of the data listed on pgs. 8-9 can be used in providing regular progress reports to the governance team on the achievements being made at the site level and to discuss challenges that are roadblocks to positive change.

A shared vision is important for carrying out the work of the district staff and to achieve the goals laid out by the board. The success of the vision depends on or, is influenced by the extent to which every stakeholder in the district embraces it. However, there will be instances when consensus may not exist.

Key Questions for Board Members

• Does our vision address the specific needs of high school students and our local community?

• What resources will be needed if we adopt this vision?

• Have we included the appropriate people in the development of the vision?

• Are we all able to articulate the vision to staff and the community?

• Do the decisions and actions of the board reflect the vision established for our high schools?

Establishing a Structure and Support for the Vision

Once the vision is established, the board has tremendous responsibility to translate the broad intent of the vision into everyday reality. Boards do this by providing the support necessary for implementation of the vision. All board actions should flow from the vision of the district. Decisions made regarding policy, student achievement expectations, curriculum, budget and collective bargaining agreements should all be focused on the vision and goals of the district. If the board is truly committed to successfully implementing the vision, the board must allocate resources, including funds, to support the work towards the vision. This includes providing the appropriate professional development for staff, allocating resources (people, space, time, materials, and dollars) to implement strategies and programs supporting the vision.

While decisions surrounding budget allocations can be complex, especially at a time when state funding for education is low, boards must develop priorities around the vision and make the decisions to do what it takes to fund those priorities. If the community and district staff were involved in setting the vision for the district, the board will have an easier time justifying its allocation of resources. Several of the examples used in the case studies above demonstrate how boards can continue to support the work of the district toward set goals through prioritizing and planning strategically with the community and staff. Revenues are seldom adequate to cover all expenditures the board would like to make. Leadership requires being able to say no to some things in order to say yes to others.

Another important area of board support comes in the collective bargaining process. Providing direction to staff during collective bargaining negotiations is imperative. Staff must go into negotiations with a clear purpose and with strategies and recommendations that tie to the vision and goals of the district. Once again, if teachers, administrative staff and classified staff are partners in creating a vision and core values of the district, and if those core values put students and learning first, the board can take its bargaining priorities to the community and demonstrate how the district’s priorities in the bargaining process meet the vision the community supports.

Finally, the board must hold the superintendent accountable for ensuring the vision permeates throughout the system and that the administration has developed action plans to implement the vision. The evaluation process for the superintendent makes it possible to monitor his or her process mobilizing staff in the district toward achieving the district’s expectations for student learning.

Key Questions for Board Members

- Is the board directing financial resources to support the direction of the district?
- Has the superintendent helped move the district forward toward the vision of the district?
- Do the priorities established for budget expenditures and allocation of resources reflect the district vision and goals?
- Has the board done everything it can to support and facilitate progress towards the vision?
- Has the board evaluated the collective bargaining agreement to find items that might be barriers to implementing the vision?

Ensuring Accountability

The board is ultimately accountable to the public for student achievement and the performance of district schools. Accountability is the buzzword of the last several years in education. It permeates all new state and federal legislation. Governing boards might define accountability as defining the problems in schools and deciding what to do about them. Because of this, school boards must establish systems and processes to monitor and measure the effectiveness of programs and strategies used to reach the goals of the vision and communicate progress to the community. The board is responsible for evaluating the superintendent, monitoring, reviewing and revising policies, monitoring student achievement and program effectiveness and requiring program changes as needed, monitoring and adjusting district finances, and monitoring the collective bargaining process.

Regular reports to the board are essential for keeping abreast of efforts in the district. Boards will want to request specific data that can help them to monitor achievement. Much of the data that can and should be requested is listed on pgs. 8-9. Establishing a strategic planning process to outline short- and long-range goals can serve as benchmarks of progress toward achieving the vision.

It is also important that the governance team recognize staff and programs that are helping the district achieve its vision. A supportive attitude towards staff members and students will help ensure that the goals the board has set out for its high schools are supported and implemented.

Raising student achievement, graduating students who have many possibilities and closing the achievement gap are
Governance Matters: The School Board Guide to Reinvigorating High Schools

possible, and locally elected school boards play a vital role in leading the charge.

Key Questions for Board Members

- What process does the board have in place for receiving reports on a regular basis about the programs and strategies implemented to target high school reform?

- Is the board vigilant about making sure every decision the board makes reflects the vision?

- Is the board communicating progress toward achieving the vision to the public?

- Does the board effectively recognize staff for their efforts toward implementing the vision?

Demonstrating Community Leadership

The community can be the district’s biggest ally and supporter. This is especially important as boards begin or continue the discussion around raising student achievement in high school. Communities tend to have strong beliefs and values about what knowledge and skills students should possess when they graduate from high school. Therefore, it is critical that the community be included in the development and ongoing refinement of the vision and goals laid out by the board. This is necessary so that the community is committed to the schools and willing to provide the support necessary for the district to succeed in implementing the vision. Boards accept the ultimate accountability to the public for the performance of district schools. As mentioned in the accountability section, boards are responsible for evaluating the district’s progress toward the goals and communicating the progress to the public.

The board demonstrates community leadership in a number of ways, which include:

- Building and maintaining support for the district policies and programs that are used to achieve the shared expectations described in the district’s vision and goals.

- Listening and being responsive to the concerns and interests of the community.

- Providing a quality education program and creating a positive climate in the schools.

- Encouraging and facilitating the active involvement of parents, business and other community members in schools.

- Knowing the district’s schools, programs, reform efforts and students well enough to be able to discuss them and be knowledgeable about education issues and trends that impact schools.

- Ensuring the district has a proactive, cohesive communications plan, which includes a clear, concise written statement of key messages on which everyone can agree.

The community leadership the board provides is instrumental in ensuring success of the reforms and strategies established for improving academic achievement in the district’s high schools.

Key Questions for Board Members

- Do we encourage meaningful community engagement in our schools through our vision, policies, evaluation of the superintendent and all of our actions?

- What issues are of most concern to parents, students, the community and staff?

- Whose participation do we need to achieve the district vision?

- Do we clearly understand the key messages we are trying to convey? Does the board have enough background information to present the vision and goals clearly to community?

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The Lighthouse Study

Is a cohesive and focused board important in improving student achievement? The answer is yes. While the impact a school board has on student learning can be hard to measure, one study has done just that. The Iowa Association of School Boards conducted a study in 2001 that researched the relationship between student achievement and governance team behavior. Called Lighthouse Inquiry: School Board/ Superintendent Team Behaviors in School Districts with Extreme Differences in Student Achievement, the researchers attempted to identify links between the actions of school boards and the achievement of students in schools. The research team studied school board/superintendent teams in a variety of districts in the state of Georgia that had both long-term high levels of student achievement and long-term low levels of student achievement. What they discovered was that there were many differences between the understanding and beliefs of school boards in high-achieving districts and those in districts with low levels of achievement.

One key difference between the high-achieving and the low-achieving districts is primarily in beliefs and values of board members towards students and how they learn. The study found that the two groups had different fundamental beliefs in how they viewed the students in their districts. According to the study, board members from the low-achieving districts held an “accepting” view of students. In other words, they tended to view students as limited by their characteristics, including economic and social conditions. Their focus was generally on managing the school environment rather than changing or improving it. They made frequent excuses to explain why the district was helpless to affect student learning. They accept the limitations of the educational environment and consider it the normal way of educating students.

The widely held beliefs and values of board members in the high-achieving districts were quite different. In these districts, the board members held an “elevating” view of students. Board members believed it was a district responsibility to enhance their students’ potential. The ability to improve learning for all students is expected and social and economic limitations of the home are seen as challenges to conquer. These board members view the educational system critically and seek opportunities to improve and change it. (See Appendix B on page 43)

Board members in the high-achieving districts were knowledgeable about topics such as improvement goals, curriculum, instruction, assessment and staff development. They were able to clearly describe district goals and school improvement initiatives and identify the board’s role in supporting those initiatives. They could give specific examples of how district goals were being carried out by administrators and teachers. In low-achieving districts, most board members were only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives, and while they were sometimes aware of goals, were seldom able to describe actions being taken by staff. It was also clear that there was little evidence of a pervasive focus on school renewal at any level in the district when it was not present at the board level. District staff in high-achieving districts, both in the district office and at school sites, could link board/district goals to the goals of the classroom.

The researchers of the Lighthouse project revealed seven universal conditions for school renewal. The report’s seven conditions for school renewal are:

1. Emphasis on building a human organizational system
2. Ability to create and sustain initiatives
3. Supportive workplace for staff
4. Staff development
5. Support for school sites through data and information
6. Community involvement
7. Integrated leadership

These seven conditions confirm the work of CSBA’s governance model and the role and five responsibilities of the board outlined above.

Governance Matters

The governance role and responsibilities of the board are a good foundation for initiating the high school reform process. The board’s first step is to be receptive to change. As stated in the Lighthouse study, the key difference between high- and low-achieving districts was the mind-set of the governing board. Within the scope of setting the vision for the district, the board must continually focus on students, promote a shared vision of reform and develop high expectations for staff and students.

The responsibilities of the board include establishing and supporting structures and resources toward the vision, providing community leadership for the reform effort and ensuring accountability. A high level of trust, respect and teamwork between the board and superintendent is necessary to provide the kind of district support that will be needed to succeed in any reform effort.
As described throughout this policy guide, the school board’s role is essential in improving and sustaining reforms in high schools. The themes seen consistently in the effective case studies fit well within that role:

- A shared vision that focuses on student achievement with specific goals outlined.

- Support of the vision and goals is evident in every board decision and deliberation.

- Implementation of a comprehensive data system to support all decisions from the school board to the classroom and to maintain oversight of reform practices.

- Continuous accountability by the governing board to sustain reform efforts.

School boards play an important role in improving student achievement at the high school level. Governance matters.
Appendix A

CSBA Professional Governance Standards for School Boards

Public oversight of local government is the foundation of American democracy. Nowhere is this more evident than in our public schools, where local boards of education are entrusted by their diverse communities to uphold the Constitution, protect the public interest in schools and ensure that a high quality education is provided to each student. To maximize the public’s confidence in local government, our local boards must govern responsibly and effectively.

The California School Boards Association (CSBA), representing nearly 1,000 local school districts and county boards of education, recognizes there are certain fundamental principles involved in governing responsibly and effectively. These principles — or Professional Governance Standards — reflect consensus among hundreds of board members, superintendents and other educational leaders throughout the state.

These Professional Governance Standards describe the three components vital to effective school governance:

1) the attributes of an effective individual trustee,
2) the attributes of an effective governing board, and
3) the specific jobs the board performs in its governance role.

The intent of these standards is to enhance the public’s understanding about the critical responsibilities of local boards and to support boards in their efforts to govern effectively.

The Individual Trustee

In California’s public education system, a trustee is a person elected or appointed to serve on a school district or county board of education. Individual trustees bring unique skills, values and beliefs to their board. In order to govern effectively, individual trustees must work with each other and the superintendent to ensure that a high quality education is provided to each student.

To be effective, an individual trustee:

• Keeps learning and achievement for all students as the primary focus.
• Values, supports and advocates for public education.
• Recognizes and respects differences of perspective and style on the board and among staff, students, parents and the community.
• Acts with dignity, and understands the implications of demeanor and behavior.
• Keeps confidential matters confidential.
• Participates in professional development and commits the time and energy necessary to be an informed and effective leader.
• Understands the distinctions between board and staff roles, and refrains from performing management functions that are the responsibility of the superintendent and staff.
• Understands that authority rests with the board as a whole and not with individuals.

The Board

School districts and county offices of education are governed by boards, not by individual trustees. While understanding their separate roles, the board and superintendent work together as a “governance team.” This team assumes collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture in order to govern effectively.

To operate effectively, the board must have a unity of purpose and:

• Keep the district focused on learning and achievement for all students.
• Communicate a common vision.
• Operate openly, with trust and integrity.
• Govern in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with civility and respect.

• Govern within board-adopted policies and procedures.

• Take collective responsibility for the board's performance.

• Periodically evaluate its own effectiveness.

• Ensure opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform board deliberations.

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The Board's Jobs

The primary responsibilities of the board are to set a direction for the district, provide a structure by establishing policies, ensure accountability and provide community leadership on behalf of the district and public education. To fulfill these responsibilities, there are a number of specific jobs that effective boards must carry out.

Effective boards:

• Involve the community, parents, students and staff in developing a common vision for the district focused on learning and achievement and responsive to the needs of all students.

• Adopt, evaluate and update policies consistent with the law and the district’s vision and goals.

• Maintain accountability for student learning by adopting the district curriculum and monitoring student progress.

• Hire and support the superintendent so that the vision, goals and policies of the district can be implemented.

• Conduct regular and timely evaluations of the superintendent based on the vision, goals and performance of the district, and ensure that the superintendent holds district personnel accountable.

• Adopt a fiscally responsible budget based on the district’s vision and goals, and regularly monitor the fiscal health of the district.

• Ensure that a safe and appropriate educational environment is provided to all students.

• Establish a framework for the district’s collective bargaining process and adopt responsible agreements.

• Provide community leadership on educational issues and advocate on behalf of students and public education at the local, state and federal levels.
## Appendix B

### Seven conditions for school renewal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasis on building a human organizational system</th>
<th>Board members in high achieving districts</th>
<th>Board members in low achieving districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal desire to improve for the sake of students; consistent belief that all children could learn; could give specific examples of how initiatives resulted in success.</td>
<td></td>
<td>External pressures are the reason to improve; kept focus on factors that they believed kept students from learning i.e., poverty, lack of parental support, etc.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability to create and sustain initiatives</th>
<th>Board members in high achieving districts</th>
<th>Board members in low achieving districts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could describe structures in place to support connections and communication within district; described evidence of regularly learning together as a board; could describe ways board actions and goals were communicated to staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Could not describe any clear processes for linking board actions and goals with that of staff; believed that superintendent had responsibility to learn and interpret information and recommend solutions; assumed communication was happening with staff but were vague about how that happened.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive workplace for staff</th>
<th>Board members in high achieving districts</th>
<th>Board members in low achieving districts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressed high level of confidence in staff; expressed belief that change could happen with current staff; could give specific examples of how staff showed commitment to goals of district.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tended to make negative comments about staff, such as the need to get rid of poor teachers and principals; seldom recognized staff contributions; expressed belief that new staff, different students, more involved parents would be needed to see positive change.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Staff development</th>
<th>Board members in high achieving districts</th>
<th>Board members in low achieving districts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Could describe the link between teacher training and board/district goals for students, staff development was part of a collective effort to improve in a particular area of focus and was tied to student needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Did not know plan for staff development; made frequent disparaging remarks about staff development; described staff development as chosen by individual teachers and not tied to a collective effort.</td>
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### Seven conditions for school renewal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Board members in high achieving districts</th>
<th>Board members in low achieving districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for school sites through data and information</strong></td>
<td>Spoke of receiving information from many sources, including superintendent, teachers, curriculum directors, outside sources etc.; shared information at the board table; used data to determine student needs as the focus for decision-making; received information on a regular basis.</td>
<td>Referred to superintendent as primary source of information; data used for decision-making based on anecdotes and personal experiences; data received in a report to board but not used in decision-making; referred to decision making as discussing a recommendation from the superintendent and deciding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Sought ways to connect with community; expressed pride in community and their efforts to reach parents.</td>
<td>Identified lack of parental involvement but few actions being taken to improve; expressed belief there wasn't much they could do improve level of parent/community involvement; defined lack of involvement as lack of interest from parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrated Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Had high expectations for all students; could mention specific initiatives that were underway; could describe what was happening in the classrooms with instruction; expressed their focus on finding ways to reach all children.</td>
<td>Could not describe how goals and improvement plans were being implemented; seldom knew district goals; stated it was not their job to know about instruction; had only anecdotal opinions about what was happening in classroom; indicated student needs were too varied to meet them all; had limited expectations for some students.</td>
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