

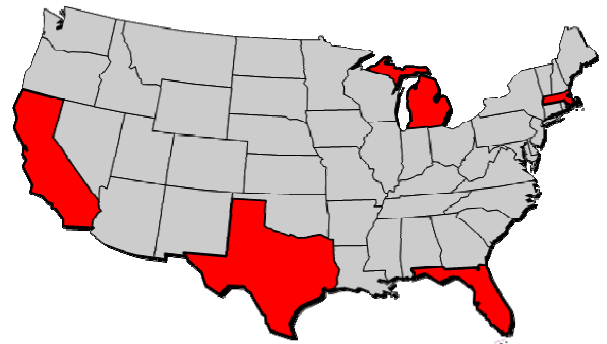


CASE STUDY

Core Practices in Math & Science: An Investigation of Consistently Higher Performing Schools in Five States

Los Amigos High School

Garden Grove Unified
School District
(California)



Introduction

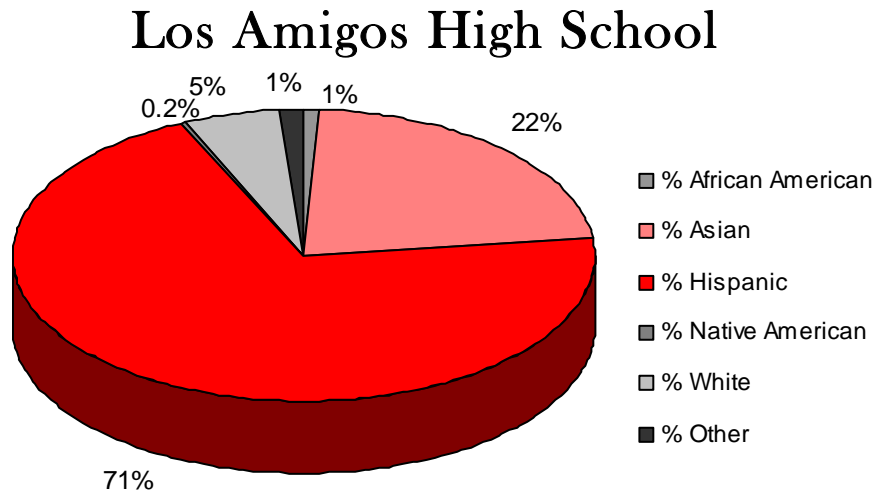
Since 1999, the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA) and its affiliated research teams have studied over 500 public schools across the country in an effort to identify and disseminate effective practices embraced by higher performing schools that distinguish their campuses from their average-performing peers. Building on the foundation established by this previous research, NCEA sought in the current study to focus specifically on educational practices in the areas of mathematics and science in five states: California, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Texas.

Criteria used in school selection in the current study included three years of state assessment data in mathematics and science (2004, 2005, and 2006), campus demographic make-up, percentage of economically disadvantaged students, school size, and geographic location. In addition, all of the schools selected for participation met the state and federal requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2006. Schools categorized as higher performing based on the selection criteria were those “beating the odds” with consistently better student achievement over three years, when compared to peer campuses with a similar student population. Therefore, a list of the state’s highest performing schools may contain schools different from those selected for this study.¹

In order to illuminate the roles of different members in a school community, for each selected school, NCEA researchers interviewed district-level administrators, school administrators, and classroom teachers. To supplement the interview data, researchers collected pertinent documents, observed secondary level algebra classes, and invited participants to take part in the NCEA *Self-Assessment* online.

¹ For more detailed information about the school identification process and the list of higher performing schools included in the study, please see the full cross-case report at <http://www.nc4ea.org>.

Figure 1: Student Demographics



District and School Profile

Established in 1965, the Garden Grove Unified School District (USD) is the seventh largest school district in California and serves students from seven cities: Anaheim, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, Santa Ana, Stanton, and Westminster. With a total enrollment of 48,450 students, the Garden Grove USD operates a total of 70 schools, including 47 elementary schools, ten intermediate schools, seven high schools, and two alternative continuation schools. Approximately 60% of the students in the district qualify for the free and reduced-price lunch program.

Garden Grove educators have seen many changes in student demographics over the years. While in the past 80% of the students were Caucasian, the district now serves a highly diverse student population, including a large number of English language learners. Students of Hispanic descent account for 55% of the district's student population, followed by Asian students, at 28%. Among the Asian students, Vietnamese students comprise the largest subgroup. The Garden Grove Unified School District was the finalist for the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2002 and 2003 and won the Prize in 2004.

With a total enrollment of 2,182 students, Los Amigos High School is a Title I school, where more than 70% of the student population is eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program. Approximately 70% of the students at the school are English language learners. The majority (71%) of students on campus are Hispanic (Figure 1). Los Amigos High School offers a variety of Advanced Placement courses and *Newsweek* has recognized the school as one of the top 450 schools in the country for its number of students passing the AP tests. In 2008, based on its analysis of academic and enrollment data, *U.S. News and World Report* chose Los Amigos as a silver-medal school.

As a strong proponent of higher standards, NCEA recognizes school efforts to move more students to the state’s higher standard of achievement by accounting for those students in the analysis of consistent higher performance. Tables 1 and 2 summarize performance at both the state’s proficient and advanced standards attained by the students at Los Amigos High School for the years of 2004, 2005, and 2006. The state averages included in the tables represent student performance among schools with a student population similar to Los Amigos, particularly based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

Table 1: Performance Trends based on Proficiency Standard

	2004	2005	2006
Grade	10	10	10
Mathematics	78%	82%	80%
Science	Not Tested	Not Tested	31%
State Average for Similar Schools (Math)	63%	64%	68%
State Average for Similar Schools (Science)	Not Tested	Not Tested	23%

Table 2: Performance Trends based on Advanced Standard

	2004	2005	2006
Grade	10	10	10
Mathematics	N/A	N/A	N/A
Science	Not Tested	Not Tested	5%
State Average for Similar Schools (Math)	N/A	N/A	N/A
State Average for Similar Schools (Science)	Not Tested	Not Tested	7%

*Math performance data at the advanced standard level were not available because the state assessment is an exit exam that students either pass or fail.

Theme 1

Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

Prioritizing academic achievement as well as college and career readiness, educators in the Garden Grove Unified School District establish focused goals that encompass opportunities and support for students.

- Educators in Garden Grove embrace the ultimate objective of every student completing high school, meeting college entrance requirements, and having the key to a four-year college education or technical training for skilled careers. To attain their ambitious objective, district leaders establish a small number of long-term academic goals that are clearly defined in terms of

student proficiency and progress. Regarding the importance of having sustained goals, one leader commented, “Districts tend to look for quick fixes, which result in immediate feel-good but do not get you there. Don’t be afraid to step out there and say, this is what we want, even when you are going to look bad because you are so far from it.”

- District goals include clear expectations and essential support for members of the entire school system. In addition, the expectations are measurable, primarily anchored in student performance on state and district standardized tests. One district leader stated, “We need to hold ourselves accountable at each grade level, to make sure that we help the students meet the state standards and become proficient because a high school teacher cannot place a far-below-basic student in math in algebra or geometry and expect the student to be successful.” To enable the staff to meet expectations and vertical accountability, the district office creates opportunities and resources for improvement. For instance, through a backward-mapping process, district administrators clarify sound student placement criteria for educators. The district office also provides focused training on strategies for teachers to sustain students who may not be accustomed to enrolling in rigorous courses.
- Because the district goals are constant and small in number, school sites can easily embed them in various subject areas. One math teacher at Los Amigos High School expressed, “It’s great that the district office has ambitious goals for the students to go to college because if you don’t raise expectation, students will never try to live up to it.” Prioritizing academic achievement and readiness for four-year universities, educators at Los Amigos establish school-wide, departmental, and course-specific goals. Similar to those at the district level, school-wide academic goals are long-range and remain constant over the years. With aligned school goals as their guide, teachers collaboratively specify what they would like to achieve in their subject areas and course groups.
- Across the district, educators create expanded opportunities for all students. Concerning the district’s large student population in poverty, one district leader expressed, “Our students are every bit as bright and capable as any other students and students in affluent areas. What they haven’t had are the same opportunities. People will talk about an achievement gap, but that’s really a result of an opportunity gap. So filling those opportunity gaps is what is going to erase the achievement gap.” Recognizing the necessity for the school district to supply families with needed opportunities, for instance, Garden Grove educators create pre-school programs to ensure academic readiness for incoming kindergarteners. District-wide efforts to instill college readiness include equal access to rigorous coursework, availability of the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program in every intermediate and high school, administration of the PSAT for all 10th-grade students to inspire a college outlook, and financial sponsorship of SAT

preparation classes for all high school juniors. Recognizing the necessity to supply families with essential opportunities, educators at Los Amigos High School place every freshman on a college path, extend after-school access to academic support in a learning-conducive environment, and expose students to career coursework.

To effectively address district-wide academic goals, educators in Garden Grove engage in standards-based and vertically aligned curriculum development, revision, and implementation.

- As educators are accountable for teaching the state standards, district administrators lead the development of curriculum materials to encompass standards and guide instruction in order to help students reach proficiency at each grade level and, ultimately, successfully graduate from high school. Describing the district leadership as curriculum-minded and achievement-focused, one leader at Los Amigos High School expressed, “Our district stepped up to the state’s calling, and developed curriculum in a timely manner as requested by the state. We excel in student achievement as a district because of that.” Standards-based materials provided to teachers in every core subject include information about scope and sequence of courses, quarterly pacing charts, textbook correspondence, and suggested instructional strategies and resources. The curriculum guide also contains sample assessment questions based on those on state tests such as the California Standards Test (CST) and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE).
- With a large number of state standards for each subject and grade level, curriculum developers prioritize the standards to narrow the scope. Using blueprints for the CST as a preliminary guide to determine heavily tested areas, educators identify focus standards to emphasize in instruction. Teachers in the district also identify additional focus standards that may not appear on the CST Blueprints. The identification does not eliminate non-focus standards; instead, teachers address them in conjunction with the focus standards.
- Revision of the district curriculum is needs-based and often occurs concurrently with changes at the state level. For example, with new textbook adoptions and updated CST Blueprints, educators revise curriculum materials to ensure continuous alignment with standards. To maintain consistency, mid-year revision is uncommon and primarily needs-driven. For instance, when district administrators discerned that teachers did not fully utilize the language arts program, curriculum leaders created articulated and text-aligned pacing to more effectively address program expectations. One leader commented, “If we changed the curriculum every year, with so many content areas, both core and elective, it would be a moving target due to the constant revision.”
- Via involvement of teachers from multiple grade levels, teacher input and vertical alignment become an integral part of the curriculum development

process. In addition to identifying focus standards, teachers have the opportunity to represent their schools in the curriculum “consult” process, in which they draft curriculum materials, collect input from colleagues, and conduct curricular revision. Participation from teachers facilitates curricular alignment across grade levels. For instance, for the writing rubric in secondary education, teachers from each grade level study various writing strands to ensure accumulation of skills and differentiated levels of challenging language.

- Implementation of the standards-based curriculum is consistent throughout the district, with school-site enhancements within the district framework. A leader at Los Amigos High School stated, “Curriculum implementation is rather self-regulated. It’s so ingrained in the core subjects district-wide that there is no other way in the teacher’s mind.” At Los Amigos, teachers collaboratively strengthen curriculum alignment and implementation. For instance, the math department develops detailed pacing calendars as well as common assessments and learning units in each delineated course group.

Theme 2

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

To serve the diverse student population, district and school administrators practice student-centered staff selection.

- With a focus on increasing diversity to provide role models for students, leaders in Garden Grove engage in active staff recruitment. As the student population becomes increasingly diverse, one district leader stated, “We really try to bring in more diversity in our teaching staff and in our principals, because we want our students to see themselves in the face of the school staff and say ‘I can be successful like them.’” In addition to visiting local universities and recruitment fairs, district leaders work with a large number of interns, especially for high-need areas such as special education and secondary math. Principals are also on the lookout for competent candidates. At Los Amigos High School, the principal shared, “We always keep our eyes and ears open. If I hear a teacher recommend a college student, I will encourage that person to apply with the district.”
- To maintain a staff dedicated to the student population, educators at Los Amigos engage in focused and candid teacher selection after the initial district-level screening. With a large low socio-economic population and many English language learners on campus, the principal shared, “We are very forward and open in our interview. We talk about our student demographics because the bottom line is the candidate needs to want to work with the student population here.” The interview process also concentrates on strategies to support students and curricular alignment through departmental collaboration.

Continuous instructional support and professional development strengthen staff capacity, validate decisions regarding teacher release, and facilitate effective retention.

- Following staff selection, educators consider professional development essential to move the entire school system forward, particularly in terms of instructional strategies that inspire active participation and accommodate student needs in rigorous courses. A district leader expressed, “The work we are doing is not rocket science, but it is extremely difficult. Our teachers and principals are working extremely hard, wanting to learn new strategies. They care about the students and consider themselves as having a chance to make a difference.” The district office introduces a main focus every year and provides ongoing workshops after school. Examples of strategies teacher learn include checking for understanding and helping students gain independence via scaffolding before they become self-regulatory learners.
- In addition to providing staff development, administrators in Garden Grove support instruction with specialized personnel and actively cultivate teacher leadership on campus. One district leader expressed, “We are developing people in our curriculum office who can then go out to the school site with a lot of expertise in curriculum.” After instructional training, district-level staff provides follow-through assistance in effective implementation. Support personnel also serve as particular important components in the district’s investment in new teachers to aid prompt adaptation to instructional responsibilities. Curricular and instructional experts such as Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) work closely with new teachers at school sites to provide ongoing support, including co-planning, co-teaching, model lessons, conferences, and reflective conversations. One leader at Los Amigos shared, “The district office makes sure that the support is connected to the classroom where the students are. That’s why Garden Grove is successful.”
- Effective staff retention results from administrators’ active stance in cultivating campus teacher leadership and offering readily accessible assistance at school sites. At Los Amigos High School, leaders encourage well-performing teachers to seek training to become TOSAs or administrators. The school administration also constantly seeks teacher input, particularly from teacher-elected department chairs, concerning student intervention, teacher selection, and teacher course assignments. In addition providing support personnel, the district office trains teacher coaches on each campus to provide job-embedded instructional support. Teachers at Los Amigos further observed, “The school administrators are supportive. If you ask them to come to your class for whatever reason, they always show up...When you ask for support, they are more than willing to help and very approachable.” New teachers at Los Amigos receive additional assistance from colleagues and an assigned

volunteer mentor in their department. Monthly meetings organized specifically for new teachers allow them to ask questions about the school structure and procedures.

- Through the provision of support, leaders at Los Amigos validate new teachers' release and retention. Based on the tremendous amount of assistance available to new teachers, one school administrator commented, "The first year is the critical year because Garden Grove has very high expectations. We give all new teachers the same courtesy and support, and help them as much as possible. That's why if a new teacher doesn't make it through the first year, we feel confident that it's just not a right fit and the teacher is not going to succeed as a teacher in Garden Grove."

Collegial collaboration across and within schools enhances instructional consistency and support.

- Collaboration is prevalent throughout the district and strengthens vertical articulation. As district educators work towards preparing students for college and careers, collaboration among feeder schools increases. To ensure a good academic foundation for incoming students, one administrator at Los Amigos High School shared, "There is good communication both ways [within our feeder pattern]. Intermediate school teachers have come to our school, and we have visited theirs, so we can see what the students are doing and what the transition has to be." Staff in each department meets with intermediate school instructors in the same subject area and collaborates on instructional implementation and strategies. For instance, to equip incoming students enrolling in AVID or honors English classes with the right expectations, Los Amigos educators explain reading logs and provide summer reading books. Administrators also maintain communication with their intermediate-level counterparts and meet with 8th-grade students and parents to explain college entrance requirements and plan a high school schedule.
- At Los Amigos, administrators and teachers both value collegial collaboration. One school leader expressed, "Teacher collaboration is the key to high student performance, with teachers working towards the common goal." Teachers at Los Amigos most frequently collaborate within their course groups to enhance curricular and instructional consistency and discuss topics such as alignment, common syllabus development, common assessment and grading, student data analysis, lesson plans, and effective strategies and materials from their own repertoire or workshops. Teachers also have occasional opportunities to engage in vertical conversations within departments.
- School schedules include formalized teacher collaboration time. Based on the agreement between the teachers' union and the district office, educators develop site-specific plans for the master schedule. At Los Amigos, teachers

agree to four 90-minute blocks on late start days after district benchmark assessments to discuss student needs. In math education, the school's participation in a five-year research project conducted by California State University-Fullerton, Teachers Assisting Students to Excel in Learning Mathematics (TASEL-M), strengthens existing collaborative practices by increasing meeting frequency and guided conversations. The grant from the research project provides math teachers release days once every 4 to 6 weeks to meet with a coach within their course groups. In addition to scheduled collaboration periods, teachers on the campus of Los Amigos take the initiative to communicate via email and meet regularly and informally on their own time after school, at lunch, and during planning periods.

Theme 3

Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

To ensure college and career readiness, educators in Garden Grove augment the high school curriculum and course offerings with rigor, relevance, and consistency.

- To prepare students for college and careers, the standards-based high school curriculum is rigorous and relevant. A district leader expressed, "A rigorous high school education is absolutely necessary for what students want to go on to do, whether it's college or work." To this end, the district office focuses on aligning its graduation requirements with college admission criteria, particularly the "A-G" criteria for the University of California system. In addition, vocational courses such as the Regional Occupational Program (ROP) are available. At Los Amigos High School, educators offer ROP in areas such as computer-aided drafting, professional dance, culinary arts, automotive performance, business applications, construction technology, and legal occupations.
- To increase rigor and relevance in the high school curriculum and ensure college preparation, the district administration eliminates courses that do not meet college entrance requirements. For instance, because courses in life and general sciences do not meet the A-G criteria for the University of California system, one district leader characterized those courses as "a slippery slope and a side door students can take," whether knowingly or unwittingly, that does not confer college entrance eligibility. "By taking out some of the loop holes, students won't get caught in traps of classes that do not help them become college eligible." At Los Amigos, course elimination entails that all core classes are college preparatory. A school leader expressed, "If students leave us at least with A-G college readiness, they have the option to choose whatever they want. That's why we make all freshmen take at least Algebra I and biology, both A-G required courses. We don't bring it down."

- Course creation, offerings, and scheduling at Los Amigos focus on accommodating student needs. Graduation requirements and college and career preparation are the most pertinent factors in high school course availability. At Los Amigos, educators offer courses and a master schedule that allow course combinations to be as diverse as possible. In addition to required coursework, one leader expressed, “We try to help students create an elective pattern that works towards whatever goal they want to meet after they graduate from high school.” Meeting student needs often requires the creation of additional courses, such as technical training options, college preparatory coursework, and intervention classes. In the area of college preparation, “if it’s in the A-G category, it exists.” Administrators also expand AVID classes, which the district office uses to promote college readiness. With the majority of AP students passing the AP exams with high scores, educators at Los Amigos strive to ensure continuous availability of a large number of AP courses.
- To maintain rigor, educators at Los Amigos High School stress curricular and instructional consistency. One school leader shared, “We are so strong in course planning that no matter what class students take, they all get the same information.” Such consistency for each course across classrooms, a result of teacher collaboration, ensures equally rigorous instruction and prevents students from choosing easy classes. Another school leader observed, “The students understand that it doesn’t matter who their teacher is; they are going to have a high level of expectation.”

Educators base student placement on data, emphasizing equal access, flexibility, and availability of support.

- Equal access to challenging courses for all students underlies the district’s student placement policy. A district leader expressed, “Any students who demonstrate that they are able, even though it may take some extra help and support to meet the standards of the rigorous class, are put in that rigorous class.” The district policy determines student readiness based on data and supplementary teacher recommendations, without dictating fixed course placement. Students can move from one level to another, but the district office requires justification when students move from challenging courses into easier ones.
- At Los Amigos, to ensure student readiness and sound decision-making in instructional arrangements, educators provide students with ample assistance as well as data-based and equal access to challenging coursework. The principal defined “success” as “making sure that every student has equal opportunity to be in education, at the highest ability. We want to make sure that all doors are open for the students, and that they have the opportunities.” Without withholding opportunities, educators at Los Amigos meet with students individually to review performance and provide advice about

recommended prerequisites that build an appropriate knowledge base for courses such as AP or advanced science courses. Educators also make sure that course placement helps students accumulate essential knowledge and continue to progress.

- To lead educators in the transition to higher state expectations, district administrators provide clearly defined and flexible course sequences. In math education, since the new state framework requires algebra readiness by the eighth grade, the district curriculum office delineates multiple pathways, working backwards from the completion of at least Algebra II in high school. District leaders also establish student performance profiles for the different pathways and specify methods for educators to support student needs. One district leader shared, “We have the same target. There are several different ways students can take to still end up where we want them to be.” Students can enroll in Algebra I in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade based on their performance data and requirements for additional support, for instance, in the form of elective companion courses and opportunities to repeat classes.
- As educators increase the level of rigor in courses and as students have equal access to such courses that challenge and stretch, teachers use a variety of strategies to ensure learning and understanding. At Los Amigos, as one science teacher expressed, “trying to help students to be successful in higher level classes is the trend on campus.” By sharing best practices within course groups during collaborative data analysis, teachers adopt effective instructional strategies in scaffolding and student engagement. Throughout the day, teachers across the campus reinforce school-wide practices such as use of interactive notebooks and Cornell notes that strengthen organizational skills and participation.

Theme 4

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

Using student performance data, educators throughout the district monitor their progress against established measurable targets.

- The district office monitors its established goals and initiatives, remains honest about progress made, and aims for continuous improvement. In describing the district’s goal setting, the superintendent shared, “Be very thoughtful and specific about what your goal is. Then break that down into pieces that are measurable, that you can truly hold yourself accountable to. It has to be something that you can know if you’ve achieved it, and you can say each year, ‘are we on course?’ ‘how are we doing?’” School sites adopt similar strategies in establishing goals and specify the evidence educators will gather to measure progress. At Los Amigos, not only do administrators conduct school goal evaluation, teachers also monitor their progress toward departmental and course-specific goals.

- To hold themselves accountable, educators in Garden Grove rely extensively on the district-wide quarterly benchmark assessments for all core subjects, created and revised based on pacing and focus state standards. At the secondary level, benchmarks are available for the core subject areas. Students' performance on the benchmark assessments correlates strongly with their achievement on the state tests. A leader at Los Amigos High School observed, "Because we have the benchmarks, and because the district keeps track of those benchmark exams, there is an accountability to stay on track." Benchmark assessments at the secondary level also ensure rigor in challenging courses that prepare students for high school, college, and beyond.
- District-level examination of progress entails effective monitoring of school administration based on the overarching district goals. Frequent communication between district and school administrative teams often includes data review to ensure, for instance, rigorous instructional delivery, student placement-policy compliance, and student progress. Furthermore, the district office produces annual reports of student growth with disaggregated data. As school leadership has access to a multitude of data reports, one district leader observed, "Typically, the principals are the first ones to notice what worked and what they need to keep working on, when they get their data. They are very analytical of what's happening."
- Another layer of data-based district progress monitoring, conducted by both district and school leaders, is instructional monitoring. Holding teachers accountable for student performance on benchmark assessments, district curriculum leaders and support staff regularly visit classrooms to ensure faithful replication and implementation of instructional strategies. Through administrative walkthroughs, formal evaluative observations, and assistance from department chairs, school administrators monitor instruction daily.

With the ultimate goal of enhancing student achievement, educators in Garden Grove engage in ongoing parent communication and education.

- Serving families facing many socio-economical challenges, district and school administrators provide opportunities for parents to become better advocates for their children. One district leader expressed, "We are trying to empower our parents the way parents who have more advantages and are more used to dealing with our system have, so that we put them on an equal playing field...to request their children to be placed in rigorous classes." Garden Grove educators, therefore, explain the education and accountability system, particularly in terms of requirements for graduation and college admissions. By cluing the parents in to the type of support their children require at home, educators increase parental involvement steadily.
- At Los Amigos High School, educators undertake parent education early and sustain their efforts throughout high school. To align parent expectations to

college readiness, educators host meetings for intermediate school parents to provide information about high school academics, graduation, and college requirements. School administrators disseminate information about available student intervention programs, generate lists of credit-deficient students, and hold meetings with the students and their parents. In addition, the principal takes the initiative to attend functions, such as athletic or band boosters, to provide parents with updates. Teachers prepare grade checks twice a month for students to take home with information about attendance, homework completion, and current grades. Regarding the benefit of parental involvement, the principal shared, "Parents are feeling more comfortable about coming to school to meet with the counselors or teachers, exercising their parental right to know what their children are doing and what they need to do to graduate."

- To ensure understanding, communication with parents involves linguistic support. Serving many non-English-speaking parents, educators at Los Amigos conduct meetings in multiple languages and address different needs arising from disparate cultural backgrounds. The principal expressed, "Parents are more comfortable in separate meetings [by language groups], and we can get to the nitty gritty of the relations students and parents need to have with the school." For instance, in addition to academic information, the bilingual monthly Parent Advisory meetings at Los Amigos address cultural issues such as discipline. Recognizing potential linguistic, cultural, and educational barriers, educators at Los Amigos further modify event titles to reflect intended function. For example, to better communication purposes and increase attendance, school administrators replace "Back to School Night" and "Open House" with the more user-friendly terms, "Come to School Night" and "Family Night."

With district- and school-provided resources, educators engage in consistent performance monitoring and increase student involvement in the process.

- In the Garden Grove Unified School District, administrators facilitate site-based student monitoring through easy and prompt data access. Trained in data analysis and collaborative data discussions, teachers and school leaders access the district's online data system that provides disaggregated data reports, broken down by significant subgroups or organized by school, class, and standard. In addition, to strengthen teacher buy-in and data use, the district office demonstrates a strong commitment to making state and district assessment data available instantaneously.
- At Los Amigos High School, teachers engage in regular and continuous student performance monitoring. In addition to frequent assessment of student mastery during instruction, teachers discern student improvement and weaknesses by reviewing grades and results of common assessments from

the district office or from their course groups. The principal at Los Amigos shared, “Data is readily available for teachers to discuss. So there is no reason for them not to know where students are performing.” In addition to academic performance, teachers pay attention to tardiness, truancies, or physical needs that may hinder effective academic achievement.

- Students at Los Amigos High School participate in monitoring their own progress. One school administrator observed, “We spend time letting students know they are now in high school and they need to chart their own progress.” Teachers work with students on using the school-provided planner that explains criteria for graduation and college entrance. As part of registration, students meet with their counselor to review the four-year Personal Learning Plan established in the eighth grade based on their post-high school goals. Biweekly grade checks also help students monitor their performance on a regular basis.

Educators in the Garden Grove Unified School District dedicate all available resources and support to meeting student intervention needs.

Theme 5

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

- To support school-level efforts in student intervention, the district administration provides curricular and instructional resources. For instance, pacing guides are available for summer school programs. The district office also provides instructional training for teachers working with struggling students, such as those enrolled in math companion classes, special education students in inclusion, and mainstreamed English language learners. For high school educators, the district office purchases consumable workbooks for CASHEE interventions.
- Classroom teachers devote tremendous efforts to addressing student needs. In addition to helping students during office hours as well as before and after school, teachers at Los Amigos High School constantly and collaboratively make data-driven instructional adjustments to improve student achievement. One science teacher shared, “At this school, teachers modify their teaching all the time because the students are different from year to year.” In both math and science education, for example, recognizing students’ frequent struggles with familial responsibilities after school, teachers work to accomplish as much as possible in class to help students succeed and assign a minimum of homework every day.

With minimal disruption to the core instruction, educators at Los Amigos High School focus on early and preventive intervention to support

struggling students.

- At Los Amigos, educators strongly emphasize early intervention for 9th-grade students. One school administrator expressed, “The majority of the students are getting some kind of intervention, especially in the ninth grade. We recognized that if we can get them early and help them finish with a good number of credit hours, students will be on track down the road.” Struggling 9th-grade students enroll in Freshman Academy to strengthen their study skills with AVID strategies. In math, 9th-grade students can take companion classes that provide preview or reinforcement and double the amount of instruction.
- To prevent dropouts, student intervention at Los Amigos concentrates on credit recovery and the state exit exam without removing students from regular coursework. An administrator shared, “There are multiple ways for students to get back on track credit wise. Also for students who don’t pass CAHSEE in the tenth grade, we offer many intervention opportunities, so that it doesn’t become an excuse to drop out.” For example, after school courses in the second semester not only facilitate credit retrieval for failed first-semester classes but also allow students to simultaneously enroll in the next level. With minimal disruption to students’ core schedule, opportunities such as the ROP classes, summer school program, and off-campus adult education classes also help make credit-deficient students proficient. To assist students with CAHSEE, the exit exam, educators offer tutoring during and after school as well as in the summer.

Summary of Findings

Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

Focusing on student success after high school, educators in the Garden Grove Unified School District hold themselves accountable for reaching ambitious educational goals that are focused, sustainable, and consistent throughout the entire school system. To ensure the attainment of their goals, educators provide students with expanded opportunities and engage in the development of a standards-based and vertically aligned curriculum.

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

To serve the district’s diverse student population and to address student needs effectively, educators in the Garden Grove Unified School District conduct focused staff recruitment, selection, development, and retention. Measures adopted in Garden Grove to increase staff capacity and, therefore, student achievement, include instructional support, training, leadership opportunities, and collegial collaboration.

Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

Guided by their ambitious goal anchored in post-secondary readiness, educators in the Garden Grove Unified School District enhance instructional practices and arrangements with rigor, relevance, and consistency as well as with accommodation of student needs through flexibility and supportive strategies. In addition, educators emphasize providing equal access to challenging coursework for all students.

Monitoring, Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

In the Garden Grove Unified School District, monitoring of instructional effectiveness and progress towards established educational objectives involves much data collection and analysis as well as administrative communication in the district. To ensure student achievement, educators in Garden Grove conduct frequent data-based performance monitoring and engage the students and their parents in the effort through awareness-raising and parent education.

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

With a strong commitment, educators in the Garden Grove Unified School District strive to meet students' needs with curricular and instructional resources and adjustments. In addition, student interventional measures at the high school level are timely and preventive to ensure credit proficiency among students and, as a result, successful graduation.



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