


CHANGING SCHOOLS IN LONG BEACH

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Middle School Reform: Raising the Stakes

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AND

A Special Section on Parent Involvement

A Special Section on Parent Involvement



Parents want to know what standards-based teaching means for their kids. Middle school principals, teachers, and support staff are using a variety of strategies to help them find out.

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LBUSD Raises the Stakes on Middle School Reform

You can take this to the bank: Within the next two years, pilgrims from school districts across the country will journey to Long Beach Unified, eager to learn about the district's comprehensive assessment program. It will become a national model — the kind of much-talked-about but seldom-realized accountability mechanism that actually *helps* teachers and kids, actually *drives* reform throughout the school system, actually *produces* continuous improvement — not only in test scores, but in what kids are really learning.

If we seem impressed, we are. On page 11, we describe the progress of the assessment program in some detail, touching on the nuts and bolts of performance assessments, portfolios, end-of-course tests, a new academic profile for students, the upcoming standards-based report card, and the encouraging high correlation between the SAT-9 and the district's homegrown, standards-based testing.

The emerging assessment system is critically important to the future of school reform in Long Beach. It's also rather complicated. If you'd like something simpler, you might try Deputy Superintendent Chris Steinhauser's test of a good school: *Would I want my kid to go here?*

Some years ago, when Steinhauser was principal of Signal Hill Elementary, he began a crusade to turn the failing school around. One of his first tasks was to convince neighborhood parents to make Signal Hill their school of choice. "I kept telling them the school was good enough for my kids, but my kids weren't there. And finally the parents said to me, we want to see you put your kids in this school." He did, and his faith in his staff and his plan was rewarded. The school's test scores quadrupled in just a few years' time.

Last fall, Superintendent Carl Cohn made Steinhauser the district's deputy superintendent and charged him with a single mission: raise student achievement. Cohn, of course, had one sharp eye on the State of California's Academic Performance Index and the state's "promise" that schools failing to meet the Index's performance targets would be taken over by the state.

Steinhauser was given control of the district's

worst-performing elementary, middle and high schools — 18 in all. His task was to make sure they never received the state's academic "death penalty."

A few months later, Steinhauser went to the superintendent and school board with a radical proposal. He asked permission to reconstitute inner-city Washington Middle School. Let's change the principal, he said, revamp the faculty and pour on as many district resources as possible.

"The angle that I took in talking to the board was that we have to be proactive under the state API system," Steinhauser recalls. "I said I would rather we do it ourselves and learn from our mistakes than wait for the state to do it." And Steinhauser said something else. "I told them we just had to be open and honest with ourselves. I said to our top leadership, 'Right now I could not send my child to Washington. And that's unacceptable.'"

Despite some misgivings about damaging its long-standing good relationship with the district teacher's union, the school board agreed to support Steinhauser's proposal. A brief but intense storm of protest followed. Washington teachers and other supporters sharply criticized the district for failing to involve them in the decision, and several hundred protesters showed up at a board meeting to vent their anger. But the board stuck with Steinhauser, and the rebirth of Washington Middle is now well underway.

"Somebody told me not to do this," Steinhauser said recently. "They told me it was too hard. And it is the most difficult thing I've ever tried to do. But it's the right thing for kids."

The "Cohn Context"

Chris Steinhauser's "test" of a good school calls to mind a similar test advocated by Carl Cohn five years ago. He urged principals to visit teacher classrooms with a basic question in mind: "Would I put my child or grandchild into this classroom?" Some observers (and we were among them), thought the superintendent's question was

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ON THE COVER: LBUSD Deputy Superintendent Chris Steinhauser is charged with raising achievement in the district's lowest-performing schools. Here he looks on as Toni Issa-Lehara, principal of the reorganized Washington Middle School, talks to a student.

LEADERSHIP

“Developing Talent From Top to Bottom”

With a strong central office staff in place, LBUSD has turned its attention to sharpening the leadership skills of talented principals and teachers who can support continuous school improvement.



Educational leadership. School board member Karin Polacheck attributes much of the progress in Long Beach Unified to the leadership of Superintendent Carl Cohn. “I think we’re basically on target. We just need to be moving faster. We’re still losing kids.”

Leadership, so the cliché goes, begins at the top. And there may be no better proof in Long Beach Unified than the story principal Sandy Blazer tells about a *60 Minutes* segment she watched one Sunday evening last year.

Blazer had been puzzling over what to do for her “pockets” of low-performing kids at high-scoring Stanford Middle School. “Our average scores are very good, but when you look at the kids from outside our neighborhood, it’s a different story.”

60 Minutes told of the KIPP Academy in Houston where inner-city kids were excelling. “I watched it and I said, ‘that’s what we need,’” Blazer says. “So I called the superintendent the next day and said ‘I need to go to Houston and see this for myself.’ And he said, ‘take who you want to take and send me the bill.’” Blazer and her staff made the trip to Houston “and we were one big goose bump for three days. We sat with these inner city kids in an algebra class and it was like being in a GATE class.”

When the Stanford staff returned, they immediately began making plans to create the Stanford Academy for Intensive Learning (SAIL), based on the KIPP model. Then, Blazer recalls, “the superintendent sends me a handwritten letter — remember, he’s got 100,000 kids to think about — and he writes, ‘Let me know if anybody gets in your way while you’re trying to start this program.’”

Blazer is one of several principals who recount another Carl Cohn story. The superintendent went to Sacramento to visit a program that was producing big gains for the district’s weakest readers. When Cohn returned, he began asking his staff why LBUSD wasn’t using the same program. It was “highly prescriptive,” he was told,

and teachers would resist the lock-step teaching method required. “Is what we’re doing working?” Cohn asked. Long Beach Unified’s reading scores indicated otherwise. “Then let’s do it,” he said. The program was mandated last fall, over teacher and principal protests, and the results, admit even those who opposed the program, have been impressive.

“That’s what’s so great about the Long Beach Unified leadership,” Blazer says. “They are very clear about expectations and they ask hard questions about how we spend our money. They’re not dictatorial, but they want proof that what we decide to do is working for kids. We do have a lot of top-down here, but we also have a lot of bottom-up, as our SAIL experience shows.”

A talented crew

“Leadership” may be as good an explanation as any for why LBUSD is beginning to beat the odds and create a successful urban school system. At a recent meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, CCSSO staff member Cindy Brown expressed the opinion of many when she told the audience that “I’ve never seen a more impressive district staff than we’ve seen here in Long Beach.”

School board member Karin Polacheck gives most of the credit for the district’s deep talent pool to Cohn. “He believes you go out and get the best and brightest. And you also develop the best local talent.” Polacheck attributes the district’s drawing and holding power “to the stability of our superintendent and board and the fact that we understand that school reform means being in for the long haul.” Talented staff, she says, “want to

work in place where they know the leadership isn’t going to change every couple of years, as it does in many urban systems.”

Cohn’s support for leadership development doesn’t stop at the central office, district insiders say. They describe a gradual shift in the district’s “leadership outlook” over the past five years that — while still evolving — is helping the district move past the mostly district-owned “school reform” agenda toward a commitment to continuous improvement in every school.

Growing your own

Principal leaders — “Our core of middle school principals is absolutely stronger than it was five years ago,” says Polacheck. “We have more instructional leaders in our schools, and fewer ‘managers.’” Polacheck believes a central office decision to hire more middle grades principals from the elementary ranks is part of the explanation. “That’s where your strongest instructional people are.”

Dorothy Harper, assistant superintendent for middle schools, also points to the district’s somewhat belated effort to develop professional development programs for principals “that are focused on instructional leadership and creating standards-based schools.” Harper is now developing a program that will send principals to other reforming districts (and bring outside principals to Long Beach) to trade ideas and mull over common problems.

In the past several years, principals’ meetings have been transformed from routine administrative sessions to intense marathons focused on the

“Developing Talent”

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district’s reform agenda. “Principal meetings my first year were just dumb stuff,” says Blazer. “But each year that goes by, the principals’ meetings make me more tired, in a good way.” Harper says she’s trying “to provide more opportunities for principals to help shape different initiatives, so it’s not so much us telling them what to.”

While principal leadership in the middle schools is much improved, says one district administrator, “we still have some people who are not well suited for the job. And we still haven’t put together a truly comprehensive training program for principals that matches the quality of what we’re doing for teachers.”

Teacher leadership — The best-led school districts, experts say, start “at the bottom” by developing a deep pool of teacher leaders who rise up in the organization over time. Opportunities to become teacher leaders have expanded exponentially in LBUSD during the past five years. More teachers are working on district committees and meeting with administrators to talk about what works in the classroom. The most striking development has been the decision to pull expert teachers out of the classroom to coach colleagues. The district has gone from a single math coach in 1996 to more than thirty middle grades coaches today. They provide leadership on standards, content, literacy and technology.

Convinced that standards-based reforms would never take hold without more leadership at the school level, district leaders began working several years ago on a plan to transform department chairs from “paper shufflers” into teacher developers. A new job description and better pay began to attract teachers interested in leadership. But even the middle schools’ most enthusiastic chairs say they can not fill the shoes of a coach who spends half- to all of their time partnering with colleagues to improve practice.”

Chairs in each subject have already begun meeting in the summer with district curriculum leaders and are becoming a force for instructional improvement, says Linda Bueno-Alawhal, Harper’s assistant. “Even if the chairs spend most of their time in their own classrooms making it really standards-based, they become the role models in how things can happen and how to implement.”

Hamilton English department chair Linda Moore is optimistic about the future of department chairs as curriculum leaders. “One of the wonderful things about Long Beach is that they trust us to be leaders in our content areas. And I think we’re ready to do that.”

Q+A with Carl Cohn

Long Beach Superintendent Carl Cohn became the longest serving head of an urban district early in April. With more than nine years at the helm, he overcame odds that send most urban superintendents packing after an average of less than three years in the job. Middle-school reform has taken place on his watch as part of a general effort to build a standards-based school system. Yet, as the following interview shows, Cohn credits others with the vision. He sees his primary role as choosing the right people and sensing the right political decisions.

Did you have a vision of standards-based reform in your plans when you became superintendent?

No. I don’t see myself as the architect. I chose people who brought me, kicking and screaming, to the standards effort. Coming from a parochial education background myself, I was more of a strictly basics person, but I realized that foundations were interested in this kind of reform and that we could use them as outside critical friends.

What really convinced you this was the way to go?

When I saw teachers who were most excited about the changes become better able to serve their students. What we had before, as in our standardized assessments, could measure progress but not get the best and brightest teachers excited about teaching.

You say you choose the right people. What do you look for when selecting people for major leadership positions?

I look first for intelligence. Would they be knocking people’s socks off? At some point, you must have people who can make things happen. Also, I take it as a challenge to woo highly qualified people away from jobs they like. Some turn me down initially, but I have this residual good feeling about a commitment to urban schools — comes partly from studying to be a priest — and I am able to convince others to join us.

Why have you been able to stay around long enough to lead the district through many changes?

Some superintendents want to be the smartest person in the room. I don’t. I want to bring all political persuasions together and get them to agree on basic issues, such as school uniforms. My job is to create initiatives that everyone can take credit for. I also help people see issues in larger contexts. For example, I had to convince our reading leaders that going to a more structured reading program was a matter of pride. If Inglewood and Sacramento can make such great reading gains with the program—without the talent we have—then they’re embarrassing us. On the SAT-9, I brought in

all our experts and said: “If we are really doing a good job on standards, then that little test should not throw us for a loop.” Also, it is important that the school board and the superintendent be seen as change agents. Because we have an image of being demanding, we have blunted the kinds of criticism that often arise when major changes are made.

What do you believe have been the best accomplishments so far?

Everything to do with the development of standards, especially the engagement of teachers around building standards-based classrooms. Why do good teachers stay? It has to be because of good support—we are building a healthy environment in terms of support for teaching.

Would you consider the Eighth-Grade Initiative an accomplishment?

The initiative came from a strong school board. Among other things, it was highly symbolic. It told the high schools that the district was serious about student achievement, and it had a powerful message for middle school students and parents. It is based on very traditional grading. The standard of two Fs resonated well with the public. Yet, we know that in the hands of a talented school administrator, the grading issue can lead to larger efforts to make grading more fair and equitable. That has become one of our promises for the future.

What remains to be done?

We need to do better on the SAT-9. At the same time, we are suggesting to state officials that this large urban system can get better and that we are good at defining our own interventions. This is why we are reconstituting Washington Middle School and not waiting for the state to take action and give us a ticking clock. We need standards-based report cards, which will require massive communication efforts with parents. We need to clarify and clearly define the role of academic coaches. We need to spend a lot of time describing the standards-based classroom and communicating that to parents, teachers, and the public. Finally, we need performance-based measurements that we hold up as genuine and celebrate and that say to the community: “Standards make a difference.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A Results-Driven Approach to Teacher Development

As Long Beach Unified puts the finishing touches on its standards-based curriculum, professional development built on rigorous teacher standards is becoming the top priority. "It's really coming down to what is happening in a classroom with 35 kids and one teacher."



A five-year plan. Lisa Isbell of the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development helps lead an effort to develop a five-year plan to prepare new and veteran teachers to deliver high-quality standards-based instruction.

Five years ago, by the district's own admission, professional development for teachers in Long Beach Unified was disjointed, uneven in quality, and largely unconnected to the district's emerging standards-based reform agenda.

The approach was "individualistic," says Stanford Middle School principal Sandy Blazer. Teachers "did their own thing," and while many of the programs they participated in were useful, most of the training took place outside of the classroom and school and failed to address the fundamental question every school should ask: *Why aren't our students achieving more?*

"It's a lot easier to just talk to yourself and do your own thing," says Blazer. But, as the district has shifted its professional development focus to training that supports high achievement, she says, "that has completely changed. You have to talk to each other now; you have to read each other's papers; you have to talk about each other's work. You have to decide what is most important to teach and how to teach it to every kid."

Most principals and other district leaders attribute LBUSD's increasingly finely-honed professional development programs to a decision several years ago by Superintendent Carl Cohn to consolidate curriculum and professional development under a single leader — assistant superintendent Chris Dominguez. Dominguez was already leading the push to transform the district's curriculum around a set of rigorous academic standards. With the expansion of her responsibilities, Dominguez began an effort to

develop a comprehensive professional development plan that supported the standards agenda.

Several committees began an in-depth study of the district's professional development offerings, says Lisa Isbell, who heads the office of professional development. "When we started having these conversations, we realized there was a disconnect between what was happening in curriculum, what was happening in instruction, and what was happening in professional development."

"A lot of good things were happening — the standards were all there and people were really starting to use them in the classroom. But the kinds of opportunities we were giving teachers to increase their knowledge and their pedagogical skills to actually teach to those standards were a little bit out of alignment in some cases."

The district accelerated its move away from "the one-shot workshop approach," Isbell says, "and really focused on what teachers need to know and be able to do. We got more into the aspect of coaching and that's where we started picking up on our middle school coaches and looking at that as a more job-embedded kind of staff development model."

The district is now completing a long-range strategic plan for professional development that represents "a much more focused, results-driven approach," she says. "We're really trying to be very specific about what the gaps are between what teachers need and what teachers have."

The "spine" of the new approach, Isbell says, will be a detailed set of professional teaching

standards, developed in collaboration with district staff, principals, teachers and representatives of the Long Beach teachers union. "We are saying that this is what we think an exemplary teacher should be, so what are the things that teachers need? It's a complex question, and not everyone fits themselves in the same place on that map, but it's what we need to do.

"We feel like our curriculum is pretty solid and we're continuing to improve that, but it's really coming down to what is happening in a classroom with 35 kids and one teacher. And it's the teacher's knowledge and skills that's going to make or break the whole thing."

Ultimately, the teacher standards will be used to revamp the district's teacher evaluation system. "That aspect has actually come from the teaching staff themselves," Isbell says. "They believe it needs to be embedded in our evaluation, because it is so much clearer and gives them so much more direction about what they need to be doing."

The rise of teacher coaches

Two years ago, the district began to experiment with a professional development model that pulls expert teachers out of classrooms and makes them full- or part-time teacher coaches. "I think it's been the coaches that have really made a difference in the way teachers are teaching and thinking about instruction," says Linda Mehlbrech, the district's curriculum leader for

“A Results-Driven Approach”

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social studies. Math leader Dixie Dawson agrees. “Most principals can’t walk into a math classroom and say whether the teaching is at grade level, for example. But coaches can walk into a middle school math class and immediately see if the teacher has them doing fifth grade work.”

In the middle schools, many coaches were funded with grant monies. For the coming year, schools are being asked to pick up those costs in their own budgets. Middle school superintendent Dorothy Harper “has urged us to be creative and collaborative in preserving the coaching idea, because she really endorses it,” says Cynthia Terry, principal of Hamilton Middle School, where four full-time standards coaches have worked for the past two years. “They have made a huge difference for us, and we’re doing what’s necessary to keep that support in our school.”

Many middle principals are choosing not to spend funds on full-time coaches, Terry says, “but not too many principals are sitting in their offices with as many new teachers as I have.” Some principals will use school funds to free up time for subject-area department chairs to serve as part-time coaches, a model that Terry says works better in some schools than others. “If you have a young department head group like I have, they are barely keeping their own heads above water. They can’t help the teacher next door.”

“If the department chair is strong and is getting the time to be a coach,” Dawson believes, the part-time model can work. But Mehlbrech is less sure. “If you’re teaching and trying to coach, you never seem to have enough time for both.” The curriculum leaders agree that having mentors and coaches in classrooms is the key to raising student achievement in the district. “For years the teacher’s door was closed,” says Dawson. “To change instruction in a classroom, someone has to be in the classroom, supporting the change, monitoring, dropping by to make sure it’s happening. We have to have people in there who know what needs to happen and who have the leadership skills to help teachers make it happen.”

Isbell says that during the first years of the coaching program, “coaches have spent far too much of their time working on basic classroom management and fundamental teaching skills.” As the district improves its new-teacher mentoring program (supported by state funds) and develops new training to help all teachers with fundamentals, coaches and department heads will have more time, she says, to help take good teachers to higher levels of skill and knowledge.

A Strategic Plan for Professional Development

Working with the Teachers Association of Long Beach and other teacher representatives in the district, Long Beach Unified is developing a strategic plan to accomplish these objectives:

- ✍ Establish professional teaching standards that define the content knowledge and teaching skills that teachers need to ensure that all students have an opportunity to meet standards.
- ✍ Establish administrator standards that define the knowledge and skills all principals must have to support teachers in implementing a standards-based curriculum.
- ✍ Design a collaborative structure for implementing professional development programs that is primarily driven by teachers’ needs.
- ✍ Establish professional development standards to guide the implementation of all staff development.
- ✍ Develop a long-range professional development plan.
- ✍ Define the role of school-based and district-level professional development programs and the relationship between the two.
- ✍ Design a comprehensive plan to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of professional development programs.
- ✍ Strengthen the connection between college programs that prepare teachers and administrators, district programs that support professionals in new jobs, and programs that promote the professional growth of teachers and administrators throughout their careers.

Essential elements of instruction

“The feedback we got last year from the middle school standards coaches was that they were going into classrooms and seeing tremendous gaps in teachers’ basic teaching practices,” says Isbell. The problem was most apparent among emergency-credentialed people with little or no formal teacher training, but many recent teacher education graduates and even some experienced teachers were also missing “the fundamentals.” The district’s solution is to bring back a program discontinued in the early 1990s that trains teachers in basic lesson design and fundamental teaching strategies. The Essential Elements of Instruction, as the program is called, “is going to form the foundation from now on of all the staff development we do,” Isbell says.

Even the most sophisticated professional training offered by the district “hinges on the fact that when you actually go to deliver it in the classroom, you need to be very clear about what it is you’re trying to do,” she says. “The fundamental problem teachers have been struggling with is taking a standard and actually breaking it down and doing a task analysis and determining what are the essential knowledge and skills that kids need to have to actually attain the standard.”

Outside consultants have done the EEI training this year, but the district is now revising the program to create a stronger linkage with its

standards-based approach to teaching. “We’re not trying to swing the pendulum back to the days with our instruction was devoid of real content,” says Isbell. “We’re trying to create this balance of pedagogy and content and have them blended with each other.”

Professional development that’s “job-embedded”

What’s changed in Long Beach Unified, more than anything else, is the understanding of what professional development is. And it’s just about anything that prompts teachers to examine their teaching and try to make it better. “Job-embedded” staff development is the jargon district leaders use. Here are some examples:

Curriculum mapping — Although some middle schools are ahead of others, most teachers are now deeply involved in developing or adapting “curriculum maps” that break down district standards and tie them to the specific content students must learn to meet them. As teachers grapple with this process — trying to translate standards into specific lesson plans — they are participating in the best kind of professional development, says Dixie Dawson.

Breaking the Code — After years of skirting the issue of beginning readers at the middle school level, the district now requires all schools to offer the “Breaking the Code” reading

curriculum to any student below the 25th percentile on a reading assessment. The program requires teachers to follow scripted lesson plans that are highly structured and paced. Deputy superintendent Chris Steinhauer says that while the main purpose of the program is to reduce dramatically the numbers of non-readers in the middle grades, “as teachers see the success” of the method, they are beginning to understand the value of a tightly structured, sharply focused approach to instruction.

Data Analysis — Information about student performance, broken down by subject and by specific skills, can be a powerful tool in designing and evaluating staff development. “Disaggregating” data to look at the performance of different kinds of students (by race, gender, socioeconomic condition) is particularly revealing, and sometimes unsettling. Schools now look at data from many sources — SAT-9 test scores, district performance assessments, the new end-of-course tests, and student portfolios. Even the district’s new “academic profiles,” which describe student progress toward key standards, can become a professional development experience as teachers are required for the first time to document every student’s progress against a common set of goals.

Examining student work — “We hire a lot of new teachers,” says Steinhauer, “and most often new teachers don’t have the skills and experience to regularly assess how their students are doing and make the necessary adjustments in their teaching. They may set the bar for students at a certain level but they may not know if the bar is high enough.”

One way to address the issue, he says, is to bring teachers together to collectively evaluate the work of their students. “At one school where I’ve been working,” he relates, “I asked them to give me their samples of student work. I said, you’re scoring them at a certain level. I’m going to take them and send them to one of our highest-performing schools, and I’m going to have those teachers score them, because you guys should all come up with the same scores. You shouldn’t be giving a paper a 4 when they give it a 2.” The teachers, he says, “were very willing to take the risk because they wanted to improve.”

Professional development for principals

Professional development for middle school principals has lagged behind training for teachers since the beginning of the standards movement in Long Beach. More and more, principals are involved

in training for new programs like Breaking the Code and the Essential Elements of Instruction, says Dorothy Harper, because “if you don’t have a basic understanding, you can’t make judgments about the implementation in your school.”

But principal professional development remains in the hands of assistant superintendents and is not directly connected to the district office responsible for all other professional development. That lack of coordination, and the absence of a planning process that uses the same principles now used for teacher training (establishing performance standards, identifying gaps, and developing strategies to address them), puts principal professional development at risk of falling even further behind.

“I don’t think we’re anywhere near where we need to be yet,” says Cynthia Terry, principal of Hamilton Middle School and a member of a committee that’s begun talking about principal development. “We’re looking at some standards for principals, and I know the district is going to be moving toward some sort of training that will include existing, new and emerging principals, but we’ve really just started.”

Terry says she’s encouraged by improvements in the training of “co-administrators” — assistant principals and others on her administrative team. Her own list of professional development priorities includes more training in data analysis and a program that will give principals the skills they need “to help our teachers with the rigorous instruction issue, so we can really move to a point in the district where an ‘A’ at Hamilton and an ‘A’ across town mean the same thing.”

More in-depth principal training in data analysis may be on the immediate horizon. Superintendent Carl Cohn has begun studying the success of schools in the Brazosport, Texas school system where students of every race and income level are scoring at or above the 90th percentile on the Texas state assessment tests. Brazosport attributes its success, according to its superintendent, to an “unrelenting” focus on student performance data, following the “Total Quality” model popular in industry.

It could be the next big thing.

Progress Toward LBUSD’s Student Achievement Goals: 1999 Middle School Assessment Data

LBUSD has set a high standard for its students’ achievement. The district holds all students, including LEP and special education students, to the same high standard.

Based on the assessments conducted in 1999, student achievement data in Long Beach indicate that most middle schools face significant challenges. A large majority of the district’s middle-school students fall short of ambitious, locally set proficiency targets. The SAT-9 recorded below-average scores in core content areas. Score averages on the district’s writing assessments were low in all but one school.

While district and school averages are low on the tests administered, there are schools in which large proportions of students achieve the district targets and where overall scores are relatively high. Scores at six schools were consistently high, regardless of the test or the content area: Newcomb, Bancroft, Hughes, Stanford, Cubberly, and Rogers. Four of these schools (Bancroft, Hughes, Rogers, and Stanford) serve 45 percent concentrations of high-poverty students; Cubberly, Hughes, and Stanford serve groups with more than 30 percent LEP students.

SAT-9 — In 1999, the average achievement of LBUSD students was in the lower 40th percentile ranges in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade mathematics and language. School-level scores across the district are slightly higher in mathematics and language than in reading. Importantly, the scores of groups as they move between grades six and seven, and seven and eight, increased in all subjects and grades between 1998 and 1999.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) — Policy Studies Associates, Inc. administered tests based on the NAEP to a sample of eighth-graders from Long Beach middle schools in 1998 and 1999. Long Beach middle schools are successfully helping approximately half of their students meet NAEP’s Basic level of proficiency in both reading in mathematics, despite the large number of poor and limited English proficient students in the district. The challenge for the district remains in helping even more students meet Basic levels of proficiency and in helping larger numbers of students reach the Proficient level and above.

SOURCE: Excerpted from an independent analysis by Policy Studies Associates, Inc. of Washington, D.C. for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

A Five-Year Look at the Progress of Standards-Based Reform

	Before:	What's Been Achieved:	Still on the Agenda:
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spotty support among middle school principals for reform agenda. • Emerging curriculum leadership at the district level; not well-coordinated with professional development and new-teacher programs. • Traditional training for principals with little focus on instructional leadership and standards-based reform. • Little attention to developing teacher leaders or recruiting expert teachers to become coaches. • Limited teacher input into development of standards and instructional policies. • Three area superintendents make it difficult to coordinate middle grades reform districtwide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum, instruction, professional development merged under single strong leader. • Majority of principals understand and support reforms. • Principal training more focused on standards and instructional leadership. • Curriculum leaders in core subjects help lead and support standards-based teaching. • Top teachers recruited as teacher-coaches, deepening the leadership pool. • Transition of school department chairs from "paperwork managers" to instructional leaders. • More teachers helping design new components of standards-based reform (e.g., end-of-course tests). • District reorganized; one assistant supt. for middle schools; deputy supt. with single mission to raise achievement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating principal training with district's comprehensive plan for teacher professional development. • Creating a deliberate process for principal selection that puts a strong, standards-focused instructional leader in every middle school. • Evaluating the impact of district's teacher-coach experiment and, if effective, deciding how to sustain it. • Evaluating the effectiveness of school department chairs as leaders of teacher development. • Making smooth transition to new superintendent; preserving environment that fosters initiative, creativity, risk-taking and reflection.
Teacher Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Cafeteria-style" staff development; too much "one-shot" training, often unconnected to district's reform agenda. • Little coordination between district staff development goals and university-based training. • Some inkling that in-depth discussions of student work can be powerful professional development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most professional development occurs outside of classroom with little hands-on coaching. • Few opportunities for teachers to work together in schools to improve teaching and learning. • Limited attention to strengthening the content knowledge of teachers. • No systematic training for inexperienced teachers in classroom management and core teaching strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive district training designed around standards-based classroom. • District-university partnerships aligning training goals; college and school faculty collaborating regularly. • Emphasis on teachers examining student work together, redesigning curriculum, mentoring one another. • Job-embedded professional development with coaches and mentors offering hands-on help in classrooms. • Teacher institutes in all core subjects to strengthen content knowledge and subject-specific teaching strategies. • Reemergence of training in fundamental classroom management and teaching techniques, tied to standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating effectiveness of all professional development programs in raising student achievement. • Completing collaborative, long-range, standards-based professional development plan tied to new standards for teachers. • Limiting use of scarce staff development time to strategies that raise achievement. • Using school department meetings to drive improvement in every school. • Making sure new emphasis on "essential elements of instruction" does not become a substitute for higher-level training in standards-based teaching.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of strong leadership in the district's testing and research office. • Temporary use of off-the-shelf standardized tests to replace the CLAS exams discontinued by state. • First stages of locally developed districtwide performance tests. • Early discussions about need to strengthen teacher skills in classroom-level assessment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of comprehensive assessment plan to measure each student's progress toward standards. • District performance assessments in writing, science and history; now graded by teachers at school level. • Development of math portfolios that provide wealth of information about student progress toward standards. • Decision to use end-of-course tests in every subject and at every grade as foundation of district standards-based assessment system; math end-of-course tests implemented K-12. • On-going development of classroom performance assessments teachers can use throughout year to track individual student progress. • Matching Long Beach standards to state SAT-9 test; demonstrating strong relationship between SAT-9 and end-of-course tests in math. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating end-of-course tests in all subjects at all grades. • Completing development of standards-based report card that includes both coursework grades and information about student progress toward specific academic standards. • Linking teacher grades with students' mastery of standards; assuring an "A" has same value in every course and school. • Development of student portfolios in subjects other than math. • Convincing teachers, principals and parents that district's standards-based approach will produce gains on SAT-9. • Building local assessment system of such quality it will withstand politics of testing and accountability at state level.
Student Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent expectations for students, depending on teacher attitudes, grading and school's curriculum. • Students "kept in the dark" about what they're expected to learn and whether they're learning it. • Poor-quality programs for students "pushed out" of regular schools into "storefront" schools and other alternative settings. • Limited school-based, after-school programs with little connection to students' specific academic needs. • Weak coordination among student support personnel within schools and with outside service agencies. • Almost no communication between schools and community agencies providing after-school care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra resources focused on schools with most inexperienced teachers and lowest-performing students. • Students better informed about learning goals and expectations, due to widespread use of standards and rubrics. • Long Beach Prep established for multiple-F 8th graders; increased pressure on schools to identify and help students early in middle grades. • "Scandal" of storefront schools now on district leaders' action agenda. • Expanded after-school programs tied to students' specific learning problems; stronger links between schools and service agencies. • Major literacy focus throughout middle schools; smaller classes, effective strategies to increase basic skills; reduces behavior problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity in teacher quality across all middle schools. • Student-led parent-teacher conferences where students can discuss progress and set goals for future achievement. • Revamping storefront schools to guarantee high-quality education. • Developing closer ties with outside agencies that offer after-school programs. • Reaching a level of excellence in middle and elementary schools that eliminates need for Long Beach Prep and for basic literacy instruction in middle grades. • Complete the development of student "academic profiles" that will follow students through school, document their progress toward key standards, and describe each intervention and special program in which they've participated.
Parent & Community Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on traditional parent organizations like PTA to communicate with parents. • Few lines of communication with various minority communities. • Early efforts to form partnerships with business and community groups around school reform issues. • Low priority given to explaining standards-based reform to parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools created to help schools explain and involve parents in standards-based reforms. • More teachers able and willing to talk to parents about 'why' and 'how' of standards-based teaching. • Parent liaisons working in some middle schools to help support students who are struggling academically. • Parent Institutes to provide information and training to parents of adolescents. • Emergence of nationally recognized Education Partnership linking schools, colleges and key community organizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening relationships with language-minority parents and communities. • Exporting the strong parent outreach programs modeled by some middle schools and making them a districtwide standard. • Evaluating parent liaison program and determining whether it deserves expansion and long-term district support. • Educating parents and involving them in development of standards-based report cards. • Helping parents understand the power of end-of-course testing to improve teaching and learning and reduce achievement disparities among schools.

STUDENT SUPPORT

A “Laserlike” Focus on the Neediest Kids

In the last two years, Long Beach Unified has redoubled its effort to support its many low-income and low-performing middle grades students.

Next on the agenda: better counseling support and an effort to correct the “scandal” of “storefront schools.”

Two years ago, English teacher Adrianne Matte spoke poignantly about conditions at Hamilton Middle School in an interview with *Changing Schools*. Students at Hamilton, she said, were “tougher kids to teach. They’re not mean kids — but they are so very, very needy.”

Matte described a school with a small core of veteran teachers who found themselves not only “thinking about these kids 24 hours a day,” but trying to support the large numbers of new and inexperienced teachers who came and went every year, creating an atmosphere of permanent instability. Despite the heroic efforts of principal Cynthia Terry and her administrative staff, it was impossible to serve the school’s 1300-plus student population at the level Terry and Matte and others knew they needed.

Today, Hamilton Middle School is a different kind of place. The school is still overcrowded and many of the teachers are still inexperienced. But a “can do” spirit now permeates the school. What changed? District leaders heard the cry for help. In the fall of 1998, the district placed a team of four full-time teacher-coaches at Hamilton, one for each core subject area. The highly accomplished teachers, drawn from other middle schools across the district, mentored rookies in the fundamentals of good teaching and classroom management. They worked with more experienced teachers to redesign instruction for the many kids with limited basic skills and special learning needs. They even pitched in for cafeteria duty.

And the district took other steps to strengthen support for students in the school. New literacy programs, more guidance support, earlier intervention. The decision to make the school year-round created new opportunities to help struggling kids during the “inter-sessions” that substitute for summer vacation in the year-round

model. “It’s still a challenge,” says Terry, “but it’s a whole different school today — a better school because we’re in a better position to serve these kids.”

Hamilton is one example of a larger phenomenon taking place across Long Beach Unified. In the last two years, the district has redoubled its effort to serve its many low-income and low-performing middle grades students. That has happened, in part, because of the school board’s Eighth Grade Initiative, which requires students with two or more “F’s” at the end of eighth grade to spend an extra year at Long Beach Prep Academy.

The Initiative sparked action on the part of principals and faculty across the district, both because they cared about the kids and because they didn’t want to suffer the embarrassment (or potential consequences) of sending students “to Prep.” Schools started or expanded after-school programs, reorganized the school day to create more intensive instruction in basic literacy skills for kids who don’t read and write well, added more support personnel, and improved their outreach to community service agencies that share their interest in creating a healthy environment for young adolescents.

Lessons from a tough year at Lindbergh

“The superintendent has made it very clear that he wants what he calls a ‘laserlike focus’ on those schools that are the neediest,” says Dorothy Harper, who became assistant superintendent for middle schools last fall, after serving as “Area A” superintendent under the old administrative structure. Harper’s area included both Hamilton and Lindbergh Middle, another school with



School lunch California-style. Principal Mike Troyer brims with enthusiasm as he hands out lunch tickets to students at Stephens Middle School.

similar challenges. Both schools remain under her supervision today.

Last year, Harper says, “we had a very tough year at Lindbergh. The teachers were complaining about the kids’ behavior, the kids were complaining about the teachers because they felt misunderstood. So our school social worker, Noel Alpin, said he’d like to start some groups. He worked with the counselors, the psychologist, and himself, and he recruited off-track counselors and social work interns. He also went to the outside and got additional resources. So we ended up with an extended counseling service center. I have to tell you that I don’t know how we would have made it through the year if that intervention had not been brought to the campus.”

Harper says when she assumed responsibility for the entire middle school program, one of her top priorities was to build on the experience at Lindbergh and “see if we could replicate those services at other schools and have really coordinated interventions for kids. We have a lot of support people in place now, but it’s just not as focused and efficient as it could be.”

The press of her new responsibilities — and the transfer of a key staff person — has forced Harper to “put my dream on hold” this year. But she vows to pursue it in 2000-01. “One of the things we’re expecting to happen is that through this counseling support we’ll have mentors for the youngsters who are most at risk. We want to

ASSESSMENT

LBUSD's Assessment System Begins to Drive School Reform

One hears a strong message from central office staff in Long Beach Unified. Ultimately, all students should be assessed on the same standards, and reach the same level of skills and knowledge.



Curriculum gurus. Long Beach Unified curriculum leader Dixie Dawson (r.) has spearheaded the effort to develop mathematics end-of-course tests at every grade level. Social studies leader Linda Mehlbrech (l.), who faces the same task in history, economics and geography, gets a few tips from the trailblazer.

SAT-9. Performance assessments. Portfolios. Common scoring guides. End-of-course exams. Standards-based report cards.

The different ways Long Beach Unified measures what and how well students learn can seem overwhelming to those who have not been part of the flow of things for the past few years. Even many inside the system see the waves without seeing the pattern of the tide.

Lynn Winters, LBUSD's chief of testing and research, makes few apologies for the district's experimental approach to assessment over the last five years — although she would agree with critics that the district hasn't always kept teachers well-informed about the purpose behind all the experimentation.

"We've learned a lot," she says. "And I think right now we're at the point that we know where we need to start. We have figured out the approach that will really move us toward the goal of having teachers make fairly consistent assessments about what kids across classrooms know and can do."

Long Beach is one of the very few large urban districts with an assessment plan that goes beyond standardized tests and state-mandated accountability measures. The plan supports the district's standards-based reforms. The goal, says Superintendent Carl Cohn, is not to demoralize teachers but "to get the best and brightest teachers excited about teaching." Cohn, Winters and other district leaders believe the district's emerging assessment system, built on a foundation of end-of-course testing in every course and at every grade, will be sturdy enough to weather the unpredictable winds kicked up by on-going battles over school accountability in Sacramento.

THE SEARCH FOR STABILITY

Cohn lured Winters, a national expert on assessments, away from research at UCLA's Center for Research on Assessment, Standards, and Student Testing. With other central office staff, she has worked for five years to put together an assessment system that is "bare-boned at the district level and that shifts assessment to the classroom level." Its development has not always been smooth. For example, the district was forced to slow down the pace of change two years ago when teachers complained about the extra work required to compile student assessment portfolios. The decision was made to complete math portfolios first, fine-tune the process, and then move forward.

Nor have state policies helped. To be fair and rational, state accountability measures ought to align with state academic standards, but California adopted an "off-the-shelf" test for accountability — the SAT-9 — before adopting its standards. As a result, many of the assessment efforts in Long Beach have proceeded in spite of, rather than aided by, state efforts.

Nonetheless, the assessments in Long Beach, while seemingly complex, follow well-established principles for a good assessment system:

- One test cannot do it all. The SAT-9 reports progress to the public based on a national sample of student performance. But it provides very little detail about the academic strengths and weaknesses of individual students. To find out how well students are doing on standards adopted by the district, other measures must be used.

- Assessments must be aligned with standards and the curriculum.
- Assessment results must be clear, consistent, provided in a timely manner, and used to help improve student and teacher performance.
- A good assessment program must help teachers become skilled at using challenging assessments, linked to standards, as a regular part of their teaching.
- Important decisions about students, such as promotion, must depend on multiple factors, never a single test.

Ultimately, when the system is working right, says Assistant Superintendent Dorothy Harper, "a kid at Rogers Middle School and a kid at Lindbergh who are both judged 'proficient' truly will be at the same level of skills and knowledge."

GETTING TO EQUITY

In pursuing this goal of equity, the district uses many strategies, often beginning with math because its step-by-step curriculum is easier to build an assessment system around. Math portfolios are now two years old. They were developed from conversations among math department chairs at summer seminars three years ago.

Middle grades students collect tests, sample papers, and other work in their portfolio items in four areas — numbers, algebra, geometry, and measurement. Students also analyze their own portfolios and determine their level of proficiency using a scoring guide. This process gives them ownership for their learning, says math

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“LBUSD’s Assessment System”

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curriculum leader Dixie Dawson. “They have to look at all their work, and if they’re only at 50 percent, they mark ‘I’m not proficient.’ Doing that gets them away from the attitude that no matter what I do, they’ll pass me on.” Over the next several years, LBUSD will implement the portfolio process in other subjects.

End-of-course exams developed in much the same way as portfolios. High school math teachers, attending a meeting of the LBUSD-college partnership, began talking about the need for a common assessment for each math course, and Dawson says they “eagerly pulled other teachers together” to create end-of-course tests. LBUSD has now created these tests for every math course in grades K-12, and work has begun on creating similar tests for all subjects and grades.

Dawson and Winters say that the end-of-course tests will become the bedrock of the district’s assessment system. Dawson says data from the math end-of-course tests has already been “incredibly helpful” in making decisions

about curriculum and instruction. When teachers sit down with the end-of-course results and analyze them together, she says, “some powerful questions and issues come up” about why large groups of students miss certain problems, leading to discussions about different ways to present material.

Dawson also linked the test scores to students’ report card grades, pointing out to math department chairs that some students getting A’s performed poorly on the end-of-course exam. “Are teachers in those classrooms grading too easy or teaching the wrong things?” she asked them. Dawson also pointed out that parents of students who sail through middle-grades math and then fail the high school exit exam (half of which is middle-grades math) will be looking for someone to blame.

The end-of-course exams are expected to stimulate teachers’ use of on-going assessments in their instruction, drawn from a bank of assessment items that are tied to standards and the end-of-course test itself. Ultimately, teachers will be grading work similarly. This goal is being further enforced by regular meetings of teachers

to examine student work and discuss common standards for scoring.

In truth, Long Beach is building a data-driven instructional system. Dawson’s analyses in math, for example, “allow math departments to see exactly where the weaknesses are. Often they will look at questions on the test and say, ‘Students need to be able to do that. We need to teach that concept better.’”

STANDARDS-BASED REPORT CARDS

Long Beach Unified is now developing a way to explain all of these assessment results to parents: the “standards-based report card.” The new report has been discussed for several years, but “it needed to wait until we had a solid system for determining if a student is proficient in a certain standard,” says Linda Bueno-Alahwal, middle school reform coordinator. That system is emerging rapidly, and committees of teachers are working to create a “weighted” report card with different values assigned to tests, projects, and homework. Dawson says the new report “will show that, if I’m an A student, this is what I can do.” It will also include traditional letter grades. “Parents need that,” says social studies curriculum leader Linda Mehlbrech. The district expects to have a “talking document” illustrating standards-based report cards in circulation during the coming school year.

Just about everyone in the district agrees that explaining the new report card to parents will be a challenge, requiring many messages and mediums. Because of the current preoccupation with SAT-9, says Lynn Winters, another priority message for both educators and parents will be that if Long Beach students can do well on the standards-based end-of-course tests, they will do well on the state’s accountability tests. “We’ve already seen that in math,” she says.

Winters hopes that more experience will show teachers how useful the emerging district assessment system can be in raising student achievement and improving their own instruction. “That’s the process piece,” she says. “How to get teachers to use these tools. How to reach the point where these are things they want and find useful and, in fact, can’t live without.”

1999 STATE RANKINGS Long Beach Unified Middle Schools				
SCHOOL	1999 API Score ⁽¹⁾	1999 API Statewide Rank ⁽²⁾	1999 Similar Schools Rank ⁽²⁾	2000 API Target ⁽³⁾
Franklin Middle	412	1	3	431
Hill Middle	514	3	4	528
Marshall Middle	548	3	5	561
Washington Middle	433	1	5	451
Jefferson Academies	486	2	6	502
Demille Middle	512	2	7	526
Hamilton Middle	466	2	7	483
Hoover Middle	580	4	7	591
Lindbergh Middle	453	1	7	470
Constellation Charter	490	2	8	506
Rogers Middle	719	8	9	745
Stephens Middle	554	3	9	566
Bancroft Middle	742	8	10	745
Hughes Middle	734	8	10	737
Stanford Middle	694	7	10	699
K-8 Schools				
Butler School*	500	3	4	515
Cubberly School*	728	8	7	732
Avalon School**	596	5	9	606
Hudson School*	622	5	9	631
Tincher School*	609	5	9	619
Newcomb School*	793	9	10	794
Robinson School*	562	4	10	574

HOW SCHOOLS ARE RANKED IN THIS TABLE: Schools are ranked from lowest to highest using the “Similar Schools” column. Schools with both a low statewide ranking and a low Similar Schools ranking are likely to receive extra scrutiny from the district.

* K-8 school: includes elementary scores ** K-12 school: includes scores of all grades.

¹ The Academic Performance Index (API) scale is 200-1000. Only scores for students in the district the prior year are included in the calculation.

² Rankings are in deciles with 10 being the highest and 1 the lowest. For statewide ranks, each decile contains 10% of all schools. For Similar School ranks, each decile contains 10% of the 100 most similar schools. The state’s Similar Schools rank compares the school with 100 other schools with similar demographic characteristics.

³ The growth target for each school is 5% of the difference between the 1999 API and the interim Statewide Performance Target of 800.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

“Seamless Education” Pact Builds On Mutual Dependency

“I have developed a real appreciation for the idea that the education of students in our community is not a partitioned responsibility,” says Glenn Nagel, Long Beach State’s dean of natural sciences.

Like many university professors, Glenn Nagel began his association with the public schools by taking a “one-way street” point of view. “Usually university people see themselves as givers when they start working with schools,” says Long Beach State’s dean of natural sciences. “They don’t see themselves getting anything. But it turns out that the public schools have a lot of stuff that can help us, too.”

That powerful insight might be fashioned into a motto for the Long Beach Education Partnership — something along the lines of “We’re all in this together.” And the truth of that statement is not in doubt. Long Beach State has over 1,500 teacher education students at any given time, and of those who graduate, a large percentage find employment in the Long Beach public schools.

CSULB president Robert Maxson is fond of saying that “we need them more than they need us.” But as Long Beach Unified vigorously pursues standards-based reform in an environment where well-trained teachers are in very short supply, it’s apparent that the dependency is mutual. And the willingness of Nagel and other university and school leaders to accept and even relish their mutual dependency helps explain why the Long Beach college-school partnership has been hailed by U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley as one of the strongest in the nation.

When Nagel came to Long Beach State four years ago as dean, he brought with him a background as a lab scientist who had had little contact with the world of K-12 classrooms beyond his marriage to an elementary school teacher. When he was approached by a group of teacher education faculty and representatives of LBUSD anxious to build a “seamless partnership” among educators in the city, “I was skeptical at first, because I’ve seen partnerships come and go.”

“Most of these kinds of partnerships are

forged out of convenience when one is seeking resources from some external agency,” Nagel says. “We get together for the good of group, form a partnership, and then split the spoils, and hopefully we’ll do something good for our institutions in the process.”

But he soon realized that the Long Beach effort was different. “The Seamless Education partnership actually came together with no other goal than to improve education with our own internal resources.” The impetus came in part, he says, “from the fact that everything was going wrong in Long Beach in the early 90s. Things were crumbling around them.” The infrastructure of the university was shaky, and the community was suffering from the withdrawal of the shipyard, the aerospace downturn, and the problems with McDonnell Douglas. “People said education was going wrong, too, and maybe if we got together we could improve the situation.”

Working under the leadership of the presidents of Long Beach State and Long Beach Community College and LBUSD superintendent Carl Cohn, Nagel and his fellow deans have spent the last four years collaborating with key school district staff, plowing their common ground in an effort to improve the crop yield. “I have developed a real appreciation for the idea that the education of students in our community is not a partitioned responsibility,” he says.

University standards

At a recent national conference presentation, CSULB education dean Jean Houck ticked off the Education Partnership’s accomplishments since 1994. The list was extensive: regular exchanges between college and school faculty; summer courses designed specifically to deepen the content knowledge of math, science and social



Tailoring a partnership. The “seamless partnership” among Long Beach Unified and area colleges has been hailed as a national model. Kathy Cohn, associate dean of education; and David Dowell, associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts, agree with Long Beach State president Robert Maxson’s oft-quoted remark: “We need them more than they need us.”

studies teachers; an extensive “service learning” program that places hundreds of college interns in LBUSD classrooms each year; and a new \$2.5 million grant from the National Science Foundation to modify K-8 teacher education in math and science.

But the most profound development, college and school leaders agree, has been the impact of Long Beach Unified’s standards-based school reform on the relationship between the district and Long Beach State. “Our seamless partnership work is awesome now,” says Dixie Dawson, who heads the district’s mathematics programs. For example, she says, college professors now meet regularly after school with math teachers to explore algebra together, and meeting agendas are aligned with the content teachers will be teaching in their classrooms the following month.

“We are all getting on the same page with standards,” Dawson says. “The university is paying attention to the kind of content knowledge our teachers need to help kids meet our standards, and we are showing college professors what it means to teach to standards.”

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“LB’s Seamless Education Pact”

Continued from page 13

CSULB associate education dean Kathy Cohn agrees that the impact of LBUSD’s standards initiative among college faculty “is significant and growing.” Traditionally, Cohn says, university students who planned to become teachers have completed a four-year degree before taking teacher preparation courses in a fifth year. While that remains the dominant model, the university — in collaboration with the school district — has developed a new teacher training program, ITEP, that teams education, liberal arts, and science faculty members to offer a “blended” curriculum of education and content-area courses offered over a student’s entire college career.

A key feature of the program is its commitment to modeling standards-based teaching — not only in College of Education courses, but in classes taught by science, English, mathematics and social studies professors. “They have examined the California academic standards and they have everything in their courses that our ITEP students need to teach those standards,” Cohn says. “Our faculty has known in general what the standards are, but they are thinking about them in a much deeper way.”

And that’s a huge shift in thinking for professors, Cohn and other CSULB leaders say, requiring close cooperation between the College of Education and other colleges on campus.

David Dowell, associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts, says the new ITEP program, which has involved about 60 faculty members on campus so far, is already having “a significant impact on the way faculty operate here. It’s not just that you have to change your content, you have to change your delivery.”

Dowell says faculty discussions about standards-based teaching are generating “some very interesting conversations.” At one meeting, professors examined a core principle of the standards-based classroom — grading and assessment. “The gist of that discussion was, ‘how good is good enough? What does it mean to meet a standard? Does that mean that you’re satisfactory if you master most but not all of the standards? And if not, what do we do to make sure students do have mastery? Those kinds of questions are really getting to the heart of the issue of faculty responsibility for student learning, in a way that’s very new on university campuses.”

These same kinds of conversations about the meaning of “grades” and the attainment of standards are going on in every middle school in



Future teachers. Students in Long Beach State’s ITEP program are piloting a new streamlined teacher preparation program that organizes their training around standards-based teaching and learning. Here they discuss effective communications with CSULB faculty member Nancy Briggs.

Long Beach Unified. And Nagel says the district’s “spadework” on standards issues has been invaluable in helping university leaders begin to rethink their own approach to educating students. “The level of pedagogy in most university classrooms is, ‘I lecture, you listen.’ We’ve put all the responsibility for learning on the student,” he explains.

Nagel notes that universities in the Cal State system are under increasing pressure from Chancellor Charles Reed to create “student-based outcomes for our instructional programs. And it’s all the same thing.”

One goal of the NSF grant, Nagel says, is to draw more prospective teachers into the subjects of science and mathematics. The key is to shift the emphasis in college courses from the threat of failure to the promise of success. “A typical science instructor will say that 30 percent of students will fail the class,” he explains. “We have to not think that way anymore. We can’t afford to do it, and it doesn’t work very well with these students. You end up scaring most of them.”

A fundamental “disconnect”

As the ITEP program expands from its current enrollment of 50 students to an eventual target of 500, Cohn and her colleagues believe its impact on teaching across the university campus will grow as well. The launching of the ITEP — and other initiatives, including a long-awaited new program in middle grades education — represent a culmination of the Long Beach Education Partnership’s

original goals. This summer the Partnership will showcase its success at a statewide conference aimed at promoting similar partnerships across California.

Cohn says Partnership leaders have agreed it’s time for reflection. “The goals that were established six years ago have all been accomplished, so we are taking some time now to stop and take stock.”

One sticky issue the Partnership must face is an apparent “disconnect” between the College of Education and the school district over the basic preparation of new teachers. While Long Beach Unified educators generally agree that the Partnership’s internships, teacher-faculty interchanges, and collaboration on programs like ITEP have increased teacher graduates’ understanding of standards-based instruction, they still complain that too many graduates arrive in classrooms without fundamental teaching skills.

The district’s recent decision to implement a training program in the “Essential Elements of Teaching” is attributed, in part, to the university’s lack of attention to the basics. “I think our partnership with the university has done some really good things,” says Lisa Isbell, who heads the district’s professional development office, “but I don’t see our teachers as being exactly where they need to be coming out of teacher preparation.”

But, Isbell says, the Education Partnership is strong, and she’s confident that “our university will get there.”

"Raising the Stakes"

Continued from page 2

hopelessly naive. For starters, it assumed that every principal knew a good teacher when he or she saw one, and it was pretty clear that some of them didn't. Now, as we reflect back, it strikes us that Cohn's "naive" question is a perfect illustration of his successful leadership style. Cohn is not a micro-manager, but a provocateur; not an ideologue but a pragmatist. As he says in the interview on page 4, "I help people see issues in larger contexts." And his favorite context is: "Does it work for kids? And if it doesn't, why are we continuing to do it?"

The "Cohn Context" runs throughout the stories in this final issue of *Changing Schools in Long Beach*, as we offer a summary of the district's progress on school reform — with a particular focus on the middle grades — from roughly 1995 to the present. As the stories and the chart on pages 8-9 make clear, the district's goals for school improvement have not been reached — in part because, as the district's understanding of successful schools deepens, the goals become more ambitious and more challenging to achieve.

But Long Beach Unified has come a long, long way, and its teachers, principals and staff have reason to be excited about what is "working for kids" and what is going to work even better in a few years if the district can stay the course. One only has to look at the plans for Washington Middle School to appreciate the strides the district has made in knowledge, skills and attitude. The Washington experiment underscores the commitment of district leaders to support educators who believe they have it in their power to help kids reach high standards. And it also highlights another message, aimed at those who are willing to accept the same tired excuses for student failure. "You can run, but you cannot hide."

What's happening at Washington

Chris Steinhauser makes few apologies for the district's unilateral decision to "reinvent" Washington Middle School. "The biggest criticism I have taken for the changes at Washington is that I didn't ask the teachers if this is what they wanted to do," he says. "But if I had gone to the table and described what needed to happen, they would have said no."

Although Franklin had slightly lower state scores, Steinhauser says that when he went to Washington for a visit, "I saw a greater need there. I heard over and over, 'these kids are doing

the best they can; this is all they can do.'" And I said, 'No, this is *not* acceptable.' They have some of the best kids I have ever met. They're polite, and they're eager to learn. The teachers believed they were doing the best they could to help them. But the standard needed to be elevated drastically."

Steinhauser says what the district has done "is set the parameters. What they do within the parameters is totally up to the principal and faculty." Among the "parameters" are a longer school day and a longer school year. Teachers must meet on a regular basis once a week and they cannot earn extra money by teaching during their conference period "because if you do, you can't meet together."

In return, the district has already begun heaping resources on the school. The building is being renovated; new technology is being added, and district experts visit the school regularly to coach and mentor teachers. "We're also going to bring music, art and accelerated programs back to the campus," he says. "Those kids are leaving that area and going to other schools. I said this needs to be a school where parents want to be."

Washington's current teaching staff was invited to re-interview for teaching jobs in the new school. Applicants went through a rigorous selection process designed by new principal Toni Issa-Lahera (whose instructional leadership skills are uniformly praised throughout the district).

"A 'Laserlike' Focus"

Continued from page 10

maybe have a mentor on the campus for each kid. We want to provide some parent education services to parents of the youngsters. Not just the kids who are in deep, deep trouble, but borderline kids. And the kids that need more challenge — we want to help the parents with that. We want enrichment, field trips, those kinds of things."

One knotty issue, says Harper, is deciding who will coordinate a program of this scale at every school where it's needed. While Alpin stepped into the breach at Lindbergh, "he couldn't keep doing it forever." She hopes that school-based counselors will take some of the responsibility, with district support. And she's counting on help from outside youth agencies. "Our community resource folks are very interested in helping in any way they can," she says. "We haven't always done the best job in the past in using those resources, but we've gotten a lot better at that. So the goal is for school sites to take it on themselves, working with agencies."

Meanwhile, Adrienne Matte has moved to

The actual selection of staff was left to a committee that included both union and district representatives. Candidates were required, among other things, to view a classroom videotape and suggest strategies to meet the diverse needs of the students portrayed. In the end, 19 of the 25 resident teachers who reapplied were asked to return.

This summer Washington's reconstituted staff will spend 10 days in intensive professional development, Steinhauser says, "doing curriculum mapping, setting expectations, and all those other things that make a difference." The teachers will have an unprecedented 20 days for professional development during the year, and three days for parent meetings. Issa-Lahera will get extra administrative help so she can concentrate on instructional improvement. "We're going to change the entire culture there," Steinhauser says.

Because of the massive intervention required, the district has decided to reconstitute only one middle school at a time. But other low-performing schools are not being ignored. They are receiving extra help — and extra scrutiny — and if they fail to improve, it's clear that reconstitution is also in their future.

"I can't be in this job accepting my check if I don't help make each of these schools a place I would send my child to," Steinhauser says. "And I have total faith that that's going to happen."

Long Beach Prep, where she says she's learned what it really takes to support the district's most needy kids. And Harper is quick to say that it was her own experience in starting the Prep Academy that hardened her determination to strengthen student support programs for middle graders. Another target in her sights is the district's longstanding "storefront school" program, where students with behavior problems have often been placed. "They're a scandal, really," she says. "They're a holdover from the Seventies, and most often the curriculum is whatever keeps them quiet."

By revamping the alternative schools and holding them to the same high academic standards being pushed in other schools, Harper believes the district can create a "safe haven" for some students "that are not ever going to make it on a traditional campus that's huge and crowded." She imagines schools with small enrollments and low student-teacher ratios, designed specifically for middle graders. "We want to create a new alternative program that takes advantage of what we're learning about how to better meet the needs of all kids."

Chris Steinhauser on Low Performing Schools

Chris Steinhauser's job description may be unique for a school district deputy superintendent. His sole responsibility is to raise student achievement in the district's 18 lowest-performing schools — including four middle schools (Washington, Franklin, Butler and Avalon).

Several months ago, Steinhauser received school board approval to "reconstitute" Washington Middle School, replacing the principal and requiring teachers who wished to remain at the school to reapply and go through an in-depth interview process. (For more details about the Washington changes, see the story on page 2.)

Here are some comments from Steinhauser about his new responsibilities and the district's determination to be "proactive" and avoid potential school takeovers by the state under its new accountability system.

The Mission

"My mission is to make sure that our lowest performing schools meet their (state) target goal and move from there — that they have an instructional plan that will continue to build achievement. But we won't meet our targets and stop there. That's not what we're about. It's about that making sure that the bar keeps getting raised higher and higher."

The Strategy

"My grand strategy is that I want to be able to say to parents that no matter where your child goes to school, he or she is being provided a rigorous academic program. I want to be able to say that the child at Washington Middle School is getting the same kind of program as the child at Stanford Middle School in every course. Yes, some of the kids at Washington may need more time, may need support after school and during school breaks, but I want the standard to be consistent so that all schools are going up."

The Approach

"There are two prongs to the agenda. The core of the program is to insure that no matter where you are as a student in this district, you have a rigorous instructional program. That's our standards agenda. But we also know that we are under the gun on the SAT-9 for these low-performing schools. So how do you marry these two things? We are focusing on our own standards-based assessments, and if they do well on those, they will do well on SAT-9. Our end-of-course tests for math are the proof. We've done the analysis, and if you score at 80 percent or higher on those, you will have a similar score on SAT-9. That tells me that if you focus on the skills and knowledge represented by the standards, and assess, reteach, and make the necessary adjustments, you don't need to worry about anything else. You're going to do a great job."

State Intervention

"If we hadn't acted at Washington, the state would probably have been in here in two years and done it for us. And let's be honest. When the state comes to do it, they are not going to have the manpower to support these schools. It's not going to happen. What they are going to say is, 'you no longer can have this program. You have to use this other program instead.' And it will probably be a canned program from someplace. That's not what we want. We know what to do, and we need to do it now."

Unprepared Students

"To be frank, part of my problem (with low-performing schools) is that because teachers say the kids can't read the textbooks, they supplement with lower, watered-down material. And I am saying very clearly we can't do that. But I have to help them bridge that gap. We are taking extra-

ordinary steps to see to it that their kids get the literacy skills they need. And it's already happening.

"When I was a principal at Signal Hill Elementary, we went from the 8th percentile to the 45th percentile. We didn't change the student population. What we changed was the focus. And that's what we're doing now. That's part of our battle. . . . We want to be in a place where people are willing to take risks — to say, I may be at this school in the inner city, but our standards should be just as high and our expectations are just as high as the teachers who teach the kids across the way."

Collaboration

"The bottom line for anything we do has to be whether it's paying off. And that's why the teacher feedback is so critical. We have to meet with teachers and create opportunities for them to be very open and honest about what they like and what they don't like and how we can make it better. And we're doing that regularly now."

The Future

"Let's say that three years from now Washington has moved up to being fifth from the bottom. That will be great progress. Another school will find itself on the bottom and my job may be to work with that school, looking at what worked for Washington and deciding how we can have the same success at that school. But we expect and believe that the 'bottom' will be closer to the top than it is now.

"My focus next year will be to turn the fire up even more. Franklin is going to be my number one priority next, but I've also got Butler and Avalon. I'm open to all kinds of suggestions, and I think the schools have been very responsive in trying to improve (without reconstitution). But everything's on the table."

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