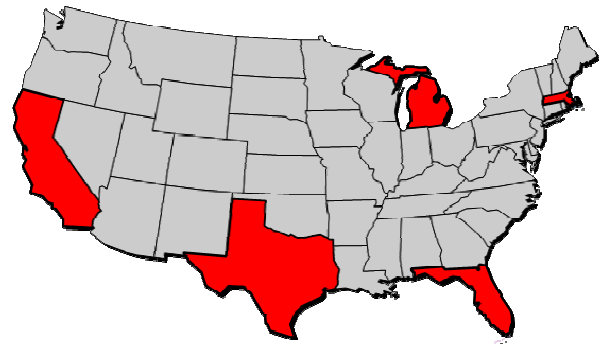## CASE STUDY

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

Hill Classical Middle School
Long Beach Unified School District
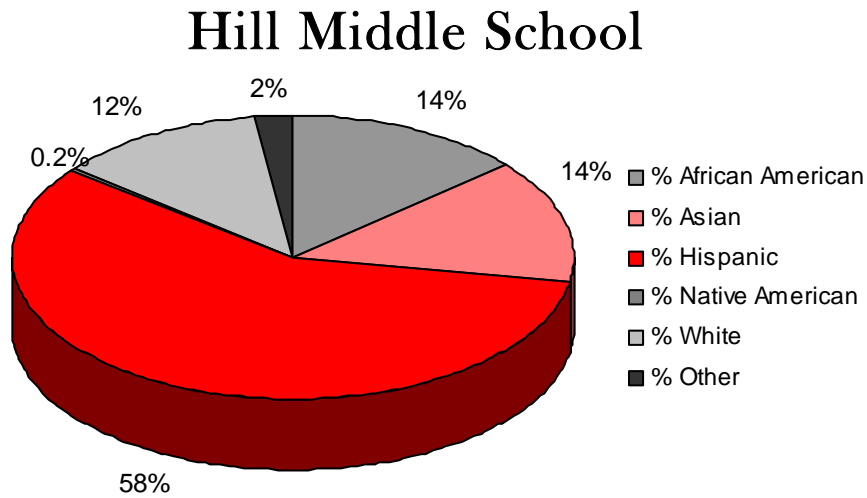(California)

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.

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[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

Hill Middle School

- % African American
- % Asian
- % Hispanic
- % Native American
- % White
- % Other

District and School Profile

The third largest school district in California, the Long Beach Unified School District was the winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2003 and a finalist for the honor in 2002, 2007, and 2008. Operating 93 schools, the district serves almost 90,000 students. Approximately 25% of the students are English language learners. About half of the students are Hispanic, and African American and White students each account for approximately 17% of the student population. With a School of Choice enrollment policy, schools in the district admit students on a first-come, first-served basis and give the first priority to students in the schools' neighborhoods.

Located in east Long Beach, Hill Classical Middle School serves 1,117 students, 82% of whom qualify for free and reduced-price meals. The majority of students commute daily to the school from the north and west areas of the city. About 8% of the students are English language learners. Hispanic students make up the largest subgroup of the entire student population, at 58%, followed by African-American and White students. Among the recognition Hill Classical Middle School has received are the California Distinguished School award and the National Blue Ribbon School award.

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 Hill Classical Middle 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 Hill, particularly based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

Table 1: Performance Trends based on Proficiency Standard

	2004			**2005**			**2006**		
Grade	**6**	**7**	**8**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Mathematics	39%	33%	N/A*	54%	46%	N/A*	49%	57%	N/A*
Science	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	34%
State Average for Similar Schools (Math)	17%	17%	N/A*	21%	21%	N/A*	23%	24%	N/A*
State Average for Similar Schools (Science)	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	20%

Table 2: Performance Trends based on Advanced Standard

	2004			**2005**			**2006**		
Grade	**6**	**7**	**8**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Mathematics	9%	4%	N/A*	15%	14%	N/A*	16%	16%	N/A*
Science	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	9%
State Average for Similar Schools (Math)	3%	3%	N/A*	5%	5%	N/A*	4%	5%	N/A*
State Average for Similar Schools (Science)	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	Not Tested	6%

* Results for the 8th-grade math test were not included as students were allowed to choose between two versions of the test.

Theme 1
Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

Long-range district academic goals focus on preparing students for college and skilled careers and involve the entire school system.

■ The key priority embraced by educators in the Long Beach Unified School District, according to a district leader, is ensuring that upon the completion of their education, all students are "successful in whatever they choose to do, whether it's go to college or technical school, or go directly into service or the world of work." With that priority in mind and input from various stakeholders, district leaders establish five-year goals anchored in proficiency and readiness for post-secondary career options for all students. Holding fast to their long-term academic goals, district leaders do not adopt any program that derails

them; instead "what will change will be the work underneath those goals as students make progress or don't make progress."

- To reach their ambitious goals, educators in Long Beach provide ample academic opportunities for students. For instance, the majority of course offerings at high schools are "UC approved" based on the standards established by the University of California system. One district leader commented, "We bend over backwards to ensure students have access to college preparatory classes…All ninth graders are scheduled into a college preparatory course sequence." If student enrollment exceeds available spaces, the district office approves offerings of additional sessions or pays for students to take online courses.

- District leaders recognize the need to work backwards and examine the entire K-12 system to meet milestones along the way. For example, the district-wide initiative to increase student enrollment in AP courses, according to one district leader "is not just a high school initiative. It's a K-12 initiative." In addition, students learn about college entrance requirements and high school paths early on. One leader at Hill Classical Middle School commented, "As a district, we are trying to make sure we get the kids early enough so that they don't miss out."

Vertically articulated and standards-based curriculum materials facilitate the attainment of district academic goals. Curriculum development is collaborative and needs-driven, and implementation is non-negotiable.

- With curriculum leaders and classroom teachers taking on specific subjects and grade levels, curriculum development begins with the state standards. While the standards provide a common framework for instruction, to make them user friendly, one district leader described the process of "unpacking the standards: looking at them and doing task analysis of what's needed." The development process includes identification of prioritized "power standards" that frequently appear on the California Standards Test (CST). In addition, curriculum leaders ask teachers to name critical standards not necessarily assessed on the state tests.

- Curriculum documents help teachers understand the requirements of the standards, particularly in terms of instructional content, cognition levels, and evidence of student learning. At the secondary level, course outlines are the center piece and specify information about learning goals, the standards addressed, scope and sequence, pacing charts, academic vocabulary, instructional resources and activities, common assessments and performance standards, and instructional strategies such as lesson differentiation. Also included is information that helps students make connections between the course content and real-life careers. Textbook correlations are part of the course outlines; however, as one district leader commented, "It's not letting

the textbook drive what's being taught," especially because the developed curriculum often has a sequence that is different from the book and includes resources to fill any gaps in the book's presentation of the material.

- Various district departments collaborate to ensure effective curriculum development. For example, the special education staff works with the district's curriculum office to ensure the inclusion of accommodation strategies based on student needs, such as enabling students in the inclusion classroom to obtain the same state standards at a different pace. Likewise, curriculum materials providing standards-based pacing charts and supplemental materials to support language and content acquisition are available for English language learners. Another cross-departmental collaboration fosters the development of common assessments, with curriculum leaders creating standards-based assessment items and leaders in research and evaluation conducting field tests, item analysis, and regular follow-ups to suggest revision.

- Curriculum development is data-driven and needs-based. The district curriculum office is in constant collaboration with teachers to develop materials based on their needs. In addition, the office undertakes annual curriculum review and revision based on data and areas of need. Regarding the refining process, one leader stated, "It never ends, and it has to be this way because it's part of the continuous improvement process. We are constantly looking at how to fill in gaps, to better meet student needs." For example, to better address state standards, district curriculum leaders integrated academic vocabulary into the curriculum in core subject areas after a lengthy review of research findings and effective teaching strategies within the district, particularly in language arts.

- K-12 vertical articulation is part of the curriculum development process. One leader expressed, "The accountability system has forced us to really look at what the outcome is going to be, then to back up and do the steps along the way to get there." Curriculum leaders study state standards and tests to determine what students need to master in adjacent grades to ensure student readiness for the next level. Educators in Long Beach also make use of the vertical articulation to enhance curricular consistency and address high student mobility in the district.

- Implementation of the core curriculum is non-negotiable, and school-level educators enhance achievement within the curriculum framework. For instance, teachers may compact instruction if they are able to attain good student performance data. At Hill Classical Middle School, educators conduct site-based delineation of the science curriculum. While most schools in the district offer a semester-long 7th-grade science course, educators at Hill allow students a full year via the addition of an extra period. Also at Hill, based on results from existing research and the goal to reach higher student

achievement in all subject areas, educators adopt a campus-wide literacy focus and create curriculum materials such as assessments and "Opportunities to Write" maps.

Theme 2
Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

Internal leadership development helps retain staff and builds a pipeline with strong instructional leaders.

- As a result of the district's proactive investment in building up its "leadership pipeline," a vast majority of educators demonstrate career longevity and instructional leadership. One district administrator shared that the district's success lies in "having your experts within house and offering support, with a lot of coaching, collaboration, and mentoring." For instance, the district office has programs in place for aspiring administrators, and district leaders encourage current assistant principals to work towards principalship by performing administrative duties at a school site while concurrently job shadowing or working with mentors.

- Strong instructional leadership is a necessary component in the administrative leadership pipeline. One of the prerequisites of becoming an assistant principal in the district is classroom experience, which establishes instructional leadership in site administrators. Because of their classroom experience, one district leader observed that current administrators "know what it's like to work in the field." For candidates from outside of the district, the interview process ensures the presence of strong instructional leadership by requiring candidates to complete tasks such as analysis of classroom lessons and post-observation conferences.

- The district office's proactive stance in maintaining a leadership pipeline includes requesting current campus leaders to identify strong teachers. One district leader shared that "we want to develop multiple leaders and need powerful leaders at the school sites who are teacher leaders." Teacher leadership development is a way of "building your capacity at the school site and helping teachers to grow professionally and personally." District leaders acknowledge teacher leadership by encouraging others to observe model classroom instruction, by inviting exemplary teachers to contribute to staff development efforts, and by asking those teachers to serve on district committees (e.g., curriculum development and textbook reviews) or to take on special assignments to bridge communication between the district office and school sites. At Hill Classical Middle School, teacher leadership development opportunities include, for instance, department chairs' serving on the steering committee and coordinating faculty meetings and implementation of the campus-wide literacy focus.

- Internal development and support in the district leads to staff retention. One district leader characterized staff retention as "the Long Beach Way; we don't have monetary rewards, but recognition and celebrations. That's all about the culture of the district, such as the support available." At Hill Classical Middle School, where the district office frequently recruits teacher leaders, teacher retention is high. Teachers receive good support from administrators and take part in making site-based decisions, and as one school leader commented, "We have been growing from a Program Improvement school to a National Blue Ribbon school. When you are succeeding, you want to stay at where you are succeeding."

District administration concentrates on continuously developing instructional leaders and staff competence with needs-based, relevant support and training.

- In addition to making available embedded training and assistance in internal leadership development, the district administration provides excellent support not only to newly hired teachers but also all district employees. New administrative and teaching staff members receive structured professional development and mentoring for the first two years, and ample support is accessible to all on a regular basis. For instance, site administrators meet regularly with district staff and fellow administrators. Curriculum leaders in each subject area are available to assist teachers with instruction and assessment, as well as to conduct model lessons upon request.

- Staff training is needs-based and instructionally focused. District administrators perform needs assessments by looking at student data and conducting focus groups and surveys with school staff. Staff development topics are available electronically for easy access and include content training, preparation for state tests, curriculum updates, data analysis, and instructional strategies such as SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English). One district leader stated that areas such as reading, math, and English language development "are what we are trying to improve and we really need to invest in professional development to help the teachers develop the skills they need." In addition, as instructional leaders on campus, school administrators have access to ongoing training to help them discern what needs to happen in the classroom. For instance, with changes in the elementary level science curriculum, the district office trains principals on what materials teachers should have, how to support teachers, what a lesson should look like, and what sequence to follow.

- To better address areas of need and ensure high relevance to the staff, the district's preferred mode of training is in-house implementation. Examples include the district-designed programs for aspiring administrators and new teachers, with the latter following a series of specific workshops that target beginning teachers' most relevant area of need: application. When out-of-

district training is available, for instance, for newly adopted textbooks, the district office sends representatives to attend workshops and later collaborates with the attendees to customize the training to include district pacing and benchmark assessments.

At Hill Classical Middle School, collegial collaboration is prevalent and provides teachers with further opportunities to develop professionally.

- To encourage teacher collaboration, leaders at Hill facilitate opportunities on their campus. For instance, by embedding regular collaboration time in the school schedule, school leaders create faculty, department, grade-level, and "looking at student work" meetings. The principal observed, "The teachers here talk together and do things together a lot. Teacher collaboration is part of the reason we are as successful as we are. If they didn't do it, I don't think we would have our success."

- Teachers at Hill take the initiative to create more collaboration. School-wide budgetary constraints do not reduce staff collaboration but push teachers to be creative. Using their own time, teachers collaborate after school outside of scheduled meetings. In lieu of requesting substitute teachers in order to walk through fellow teachers' classrooms, educators in the math department create portfolios through which they share what their colleagues would see in their classrooms.

- Driven by student achievement and enrichment, during collaboration time, teachers conduct staff development among themselves. One math teacher expressed, "Professional development often implies a master teacher giving information to the others, but at Hill if anybody has a need for professional development, they can always ask a fellow teacher on campus." During meetings, teachers share instructional practices that lead to success in their classrooms, including how to motivate students to turn in work and differentiate lessons. Discussion about instruction often emanates from analysis of grades, test results, and state standards, and entails action plans to address areas of need and move students forward.

Theme 3
Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

Common instructional practices in the district emphasize addressing state standards and engaging all students.

- Educators in the Long Beach Unified School District engage in consistent and effective practices. District-wide, a research-based and locally developed instructional practice program, Essential Elements of Effective Instruction (EEEI), helps teachers design and conduct standards-focused lessons and improve active student participation. The EEEI model of lesson design

requires teachers to plan backwards to reach the terminal objective and includes elements such as standard references, modeling, checking for understanding, teacher-guided activities, and independent practice. In addition, to increase students' familiarity with the state standards, as a district leader commented, "It's typical in Long Beach to see student work posted with the subject standards."

- Instructional resources are readily available that enable teachers to engage students and focus on state standards. One teacher at Hill Classical Middle School expressed, "We have quite an extensive support program from the district. It's just unbelievable the support that we have." For instance, the commonly administered quarterly benchmarks help teachers stay on the pacing and address focus standards. An array of curriculum documents is easily accessible on an internal district webpage, where teachers find pacing guides, PowerPoint lesson presentations, and instructional activities. The district Teacher Resource Center houses different subject area offices that provide resources such as videos and equipment to enhance student engagement.

- At Hill Classical Middle School, campus-wide instructional strategies strengthen student engagement. Commonly adopted practices include lesson differentiation and tiered assignments. One school leader characterizes such instructional strategies as allowing "students [to] have some choice in, not necessarily what, but how they are going to learn, how much effort they are putting into, and how deep they are going." Instruction addresses the same curriculum and state standards, and teachers engage in different strategies based on different student needs and learning styles. For example, some teachers offer students a menu of assignments, specifying grading criteria and levels of participation that can range from a basic five-paragraph expository essay to increasing numbers of bibliography entries. Students choose assignments from the menu and set goals for their final grades. While allowing student choice regarding amounts of independence and support, teachers provide guidance to ensure everyone is on the right path.

Class scheduling and placement focus on higher student performance by accommodating needs and fostering potential.

- With strong teacher involvement, educators in the Long Beach Unified School District develop course schedules based on student data. At Hill Classical Middle School, teachers vote to add an eighth period every day in exchange for a longer conference period. The eight-period day schedule allows longer exposure to science. Instead of having 7th-grade science for just one semester, students at Hill receive a full year of science instruction. The full-year schedule in turn allows more in-depth instruction at other grade levels because students pick up more concepts in the seventh grade.

- Student placement focuses on potential and needs. The district office provides placement criteria based on student performance in class and on the district and state assessments. For instance, considering mastery of math facts the prerequisite for success in pre-algebra classes, the district office bases student placement on performance on the district-wide Basic Math Facts test. Besides grades and test scores, leaders at Hill take into consideration teacher recommendations as well as factors that may impede student performance, such as test anxiety. The principal commented, "You have to go with the test scores, but also with what the teachers are seeing in each child." Furthermore, using math as an example, one teacher stated, "The expectation at Hill is if you are good at math, you will be in algebra; it doesn't matter if a student is a second language learner. We place students where their needs will be met."

- For students with better abilities, opportunities are available for them to pursue more advanced academics. For instance, in addition to programs at particular school sites for identified gifted and talented students, Excel programs are available for other high-achieving students. One district leader characterized Excel as "a local norm. We want to challenge students and allow them to stay in the school." In addition, students who demonstrate mastery of concepts on pre-tests can "compact out" and take higher level courses. About half of the students at Hill are taking advanced courses.

Educators at Hill Classical Middle School strive to provide students with a strong academic foundation in a structured environment.

- Administrators and teachers at Hill embrace the goal of preparing students for the next level - high school academics and beyond. One school leader shared, "At the middle school level, students are not really on a path yet. What we want to do is make sure they are ready to get on a path by giving them the foundation here." For instance, students at Hill can take foreign language and technology courses to fulfill high school requirements. School counselors also meet with 7th-grade students regarding high school paths and college entrance requirements.

- At Hill, students receive academic preparation in a calm and structured environment. Campus-wide, teachers share common goals and expectations for student achievement and behaviors. For example, the entire staff concentrates on Tardy Sweeps to reduce distraction by getting students to class on time. Calmness and structure also come from signs in the hallway that direct students to walk on the right. One teacher observed that programs to structure the campus "all help the students calm down, allow them to see a structure and know how to work within the structure, which makes the classroom time less intense because they are calm as they walk into the room."

- Common instructional expectations and strategies also lead to structure and consistency in the classroom. All teachers at Hill utilize the district-wide EEEI, which, as expressed by one teacher, "provides consistency for all of us. The students are used to following a certain sequence as they come into the classroom." In addition, every teacher at Hill agrees to practice the 5:2 rule; after five minutes of instruction, teachers have students participate in a two-minute activity to process the information. All teachers also use Cornell notes to develop students' note-taking skills. The campus-wide literacy initiative provides consistency by exposing students to writing, through which "teachers can test students' content knowledge."

Theme 4
Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

District administrators practice data-driven program monitoring. Data utilized are wide-ranging, disaggregated, and longitudinal.

- Long Beach educators base decisions regarding academic programs and initiatives upon student data. One district leader stated, "We constantly review our data, and we disaggregate the data in every way we can. We look at where we are making progress, where we are staying flat, where we may have had some slippage and why." Data for program monitoring come from pre- and post-tests as well as research studies. Before new programs and initiatives become standardized, district administrators review preliminary data from pilot studies conducted by the research office as, according to a leader, "we are very strategic in the way we do things, so we don't jump in with both feet."

- District administrators rely on longitudinal data to determine program effectiveness. For example, for key programs such as Reading Recovery, which targets the weakest 1st-grade readers, the district office conducts longitudinal research studies to ascertain continuous positive student results. On a more general level, to track student success more effectively, the district office partners with higher education institutions and business leaders to gather data on college graduation rates and training-to-work success.

- Data reviewed by district administrators include, as one leader characterized, "both soft and hard data as teacher input is critical." The district office provides numerous avenues for teacher input. One example is the regular forums the superintendent holds that all employees can attend to share opinions about district initiatives. Teacher input also often serves as one data component in district-conducted research studies.

- Based on the review of data, educators make modifications, discontinue a program, or try to replicate their success. For instance, based on positive

student achievement results in second through fifth grades, district leaders decided to "capitalize on where there has already been success" and expand MAP2D (Math Achievement Program Professional Development), a math instructional program developed in-house, to different grade levels. Regarding program discontinuation, a leader expressed that "as educators we have to come to the realization that it's ok to say that we started something that was wrong and go from there. It's about continuous improvement and becoming a learning organization."

District administrators provide resources and hold educators at school sites accountable for monitoring student progress and instruction.

- The district office considers consistent student progress monitoring necessary to inform the entire school system. In addition to providing training via the Data Analysis Program Certification, the district office maintains constant communication with school-level educators. Such communication keeps district-level administrators informed and guides their provision of resources and support. For instance, assistant superintendents not only meet with school principals monthly to monitor student results and needs but they also visit campuses regularly.

- To facilitate effective student progress monitoring on campus, the district administration creates district-wide assessments as resources for teachers and administrators. One district leader observed that the district-developed instruments, such as benchmark assessments and end-of-course exams, are easier for teachers to focus on because "the CST is a moving target. Instead of focusing on the state assessment, we focus on quality standards-based instruction with common assessments" that correlate highly to the state test and accurately predict student performance on the CST. In addition to monitoring student performance in the classroom, "the common assessments allow teachers and administrators to look at students' intervention needs from a common perspective."

- After common assessments, district leaders strive to provide educators with student results. Performance reports are available on the district's online data system soon after the students complete tests. The data reports include detailed and disaggregated information, such as item analysis of each question for each class, "so teachers will know what specific content knowledge or items were missed by many students and [can] use the data for instructional purposes." Also available to teachers is information concerning each individual student's proficiency level, strengths, and weaknesses. In addition, access to longitudinal data for each student enables teachers to determine whether a weak area is temporary or long-standing.

- District administrators expect principals to be strong instructional leaders who monitor instruction and assist teachers. One district leader shared, "The most effective person to coach and supervise classrooms is the principal, not somebody from the central office." At Hill Classical Middle School, the principal and other campus leaders are constantly in the classrooms, using both district evaluation tools and school-created instruments for regular observations. Classroom monitoring focuses on student performance and instructional practices in line with EEEI, including integration of state standards in lessons, active student participation, assessment of understanding, and "proving behaviors" at the end of a lesson. Toward the end of the school year, school leaders consult multiple data sources to determine which teachers need assistance to achieve improvement.

At Hill Classical Middle School, data use is prevalent in decision-making and progress monitoring.

- Educators at Hill organize the campus to use student data in decision-making. A campus-institutionalized framework involves the entire staff in coming to data-based decisions. Besides district provided data, teachers collect additional student data to guide their improvement efforts and to determine whether they are meeting their goals. For example, several departments at Hill keep track of student performance using data portfolios that begin with school data made available by state and federal agencies, and expand to include subject specific assessment results. Based on student data, teachers collaboratively decide on the next steps and plan strategically for the school. Regarding teacher involvement in data-driven decisions, one teacher expressed, "The teachers feel they are heard. It's more of a site-based decision-making that everybody is behind."

- In the classroom, teachers constantly monitor student performance and base instructional decisions on data from exams and observation. One school leader shared that at Hill, "we do a lot of assessing and pre-testing." For instance, math teachers develop their own monthly assessments to determine student intervention needs. Regarding teacher-conducted observations of student performance, one math teacher shared that such data should be included "in what you use to assess children's understanding. If I can see a concept that I need to stress more, I will reteach immediately."

- Students at Hill participate in data-based progress monitoring and decision-making. In setting their own academic goals, students decide how they will measure their achievement along the way. Students set individual goals for their final score, and every time they take a test, they shade in the score on a graph to monitor their own progress. A school-wide survey administered to students further allows them to reflect on their learning and academic preparation.

Parents in the district have many opportunities to get involved in monitoring their children's performance.

- Encouraging parental involvement in student monitoring is a goal for both the district and the school levels. The district office publishes newsletters every two months to inform parents of district endeavors and academic achievement. Several district leaders also hold parent forums to facilitate two-way communication. At Hill Classical Middle School, teachers design course syllabi that stress to the parents the importance of home-school communication, in ways that include requesting parents to "please check your student's planner each night…[and] communicate with the teacher using telephone, email, or notes in the planner."

- Communication with parents centers on performance monitoring and academic readiness. Parents at middle and high schools in the district attend conferences with school counselors, in order to help them understand how to help their children get ready for high school and college. School educators also contact parents when student attendance impedes learning. At Hill Classical Middle School, educators survey parents on workshops that will be helpful for effective progress monitoring. Parents also complete questionnaires regarding, for instance, school communication and adequacy of their children's academic preparation.

- Providing parents with easy access to performance information is a district priority. At many school sites, parents have online access to their children's academic performance, including grades and homework. At Hill, teachers diligently post student information on the school online system because, as one teacher shared, "it gets parent buy-in." Teachers also mail regular progress reports to the parents. In addition, with the majority of the student population as Hispanic, Hill educators communicate with parents in both English and Spanish.

Theme 5
Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

Intervention for lower performing schools and struggling teachers centers on mobilizing district resources and support.

- Constantly holding staff members to high standards, the district administration provides strong support to school-level educators. Although there are few Program Improvement (PI) schools in the Long Beach Unified School District, because the district office keeps pushing schools to higher expectations and standards, every year district administrators work with schools with relatively low student performance to offer directions, restructuring, and assistance. Schools in need of additional support are not necessarily PI schools, but

"Focus Schools" that may be at risk of becoming PI schools. District administrators help Focus Schools identify the weakest grade levels and subject areas as well as to set targets for acceleration and achievement gap reduction. To effectively address the identified weaknesses, district administrators determine appropriate support, mobilize centralized coaching and available resources, and exert a system of internal control by making budgetary decisions on behalf of the school. In addition to intensive staff development, assistance from district coaches, and targeted student intervention, school leaders receive support from cohorts of peer leaders who have attained high achievement with similar student populations. One district leader expressed, "Compared to other urban districts, Long Beach has very few Program Improvement schools because of the way we rally support around to help the schools."

- The district office provides mentoring for struggling teachers, both new and experienced, to ensure the continuation of quality instruction. Regarding new teachers, one district leader shared, "We don't want students to suffer just because they happen to have a new teacher in their classroom." During new teachers' first two years, mentors meet with them for at least one hour weekly, following district guidelines and individualizing meetings as needed. For experienced but struggling teachers, the district office provides coaches through the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program.

Early and focused intervention is available to help struggling students stay on track. School sites are in charge of intervention implementation.

- Student intervention starts in early grade levels in the district, with school sites in charge of implementation based on district guidelines and resources. One district administrator observed, "The school site creates interventions focusing on what they see as the need because schools have different needs according to their populations." For instance, district policies require preschool children with low basic literacy and math skills to attend pre-kindergarten readiness classes. In first through fifth grades, struggling students attend mandatory summer tutorials. The district office also provides training and develops intervention curriculum materials for programs such as after-school tutoring and math development courses. At the elementary level, training further focuses on assisting school leaders to conceptualize site-based intervention systems to support struggling students.

- Characterizing the school as "an intervention school," educators at Hill Classical Middle School ensure student access to needed assistance. A school leader shared, "We have interventions everywhere and there is going to be an intervention somewhere to help students who aren't making it." Intervention plans for struggling students begin with classroom teachers. Each teacher at Hill submits an intervention flow chart to school leaders to show how the teacher will work with each student who requires intervention. In

addition to support from classroom teachers, students have access to an after-school study center where they receive focused reinforcement of what they have learned in class and assistance to finish homework or retake assessments. Peer tutoring at Hill offers opportunities for more advanced students to assist their fellow students and earn service-learning credits.

- Intervention plans grant students extra support without holding them back. At Hill Classical Middle School, flexible scheduling and placement allow students to stay on track in regular classes, even if they need intervention. For example, students struggling in math receive additional support and daily math instruction as a result of double blocking in regular and development math courses. Instead of electives, students with low GPA take tutorial classes targeting study skills. At the district level, in order to promote at-risk or far-below-basic 8th-grade students to the next grade, district administrators require those students to attend a summer school program and, if needed, to take an additional ninth period for literacy or math support. One district leader shared, "Retention is no longer defined as retention, but as intervention support. Part of the reason is you can only retain students so many times to the point where then you set them up for dropping out of school."

Summary of Findings

Student Learning: Expectations & Goals

Aiming to equip students with college and career readiness, educators in the Long Beach Unified School District establish long-range academic goals, involve the entire K-12 system, create ample opportunities for students to enhance their post-secondary preparation, and collaboratively develop vertically aligned and standards-based curriculum materials. The district's curriculum framework helps educators understand the state standards, constantly meets teacher needs, and allows school-level augmentation to enhance student achievement.

Staff Selection, Leadership, & Capacity Building

Instituting opportunities to build a strong leadership pipeline and to continuously develop staff capacity, educators in the Long Beach Unified School District enjoy career longevity and excellent instructional leadership among the staff. Available staff development is needs-based, instructionally focused, and highly relevant. In addition, Long Beach educators enhance staff capacity building through collegial collaboration on campus.

Instructional Tools: Programs & Strategies

With a strong focus on the state standards, educators engage in consistent and research-based instructional practices that stress student engagement, have

access to abundant resources, develop data-informed course schedules, and deliver education in a structured environment. In addition, to effectively meet students' needs and help them realize their potential, Long Beach educators establish class placement criteria and appropriately challenge the students.

Monitoring, Compilation, Analysis, & Use of Data

Engaged in data-driven practices and decision-making, educators in the Long Beach Unified School District constantly monitor academic programs, student progress, and classroom instruction. Data consulted include student test scores, results from longitudinal research studies, teacher input, and classroom observations. In addition to educators, students and their parents also participate in data-based progress monitoring.

Recognition, Intervention, & Adjustment

To ensure a high level of performance across the district, administrators direct resources and support to campuses and teachers in the most need for improvement. Likewise, struggling students in the district have access to timely and focused intervention programs. Educators in the Long Beach Unified School District focuses particularly on ensuring that student intervention helps students to catch up without derailing them from their educational paths.

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