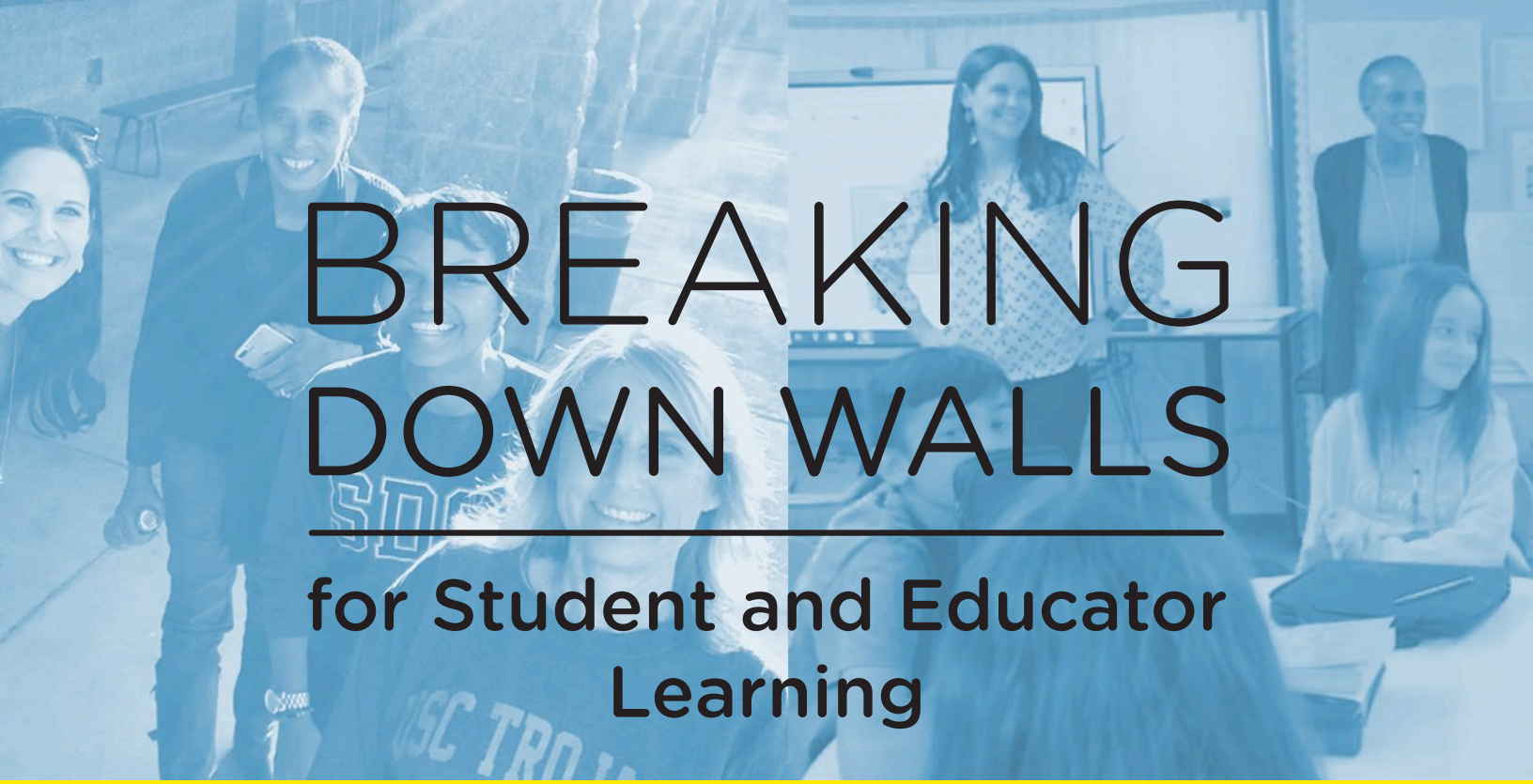

BREAKING DOWN WALLS

for Student and Educator Learning

A POLICY REPORT

on Educators' Professional Learning and Leadership and Pomona Unified School District's Response to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in California

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Introduction

There is growing demand for schools that can prepare students for an increasingly complex and dynamic global economy (Schleicher, 2012). All students are now expected not only to master important concepts and facts but also to think critically, tackle sophisticated problems, and effectively communicate what they know and can do—and ensuring this means that their teachers lead their own learning (Berry, 2016). Instructional shifts are required of teachers who can adapt to the demands of state standards while at the same time preparing a new generation of students to develop social and emotional skills, habits, and mind-sets required for academic and life success.

However, the majority of professional development opportunities experienced by teachers are largely ineffective, rarely meeting their needs or based on their classroom context (Jacob & McGovern, 2015). U.S. public schools spend about $18 billion annually on teacher learning, with about $3 billion delivered by external providers (Jacob & McGovern, 2015). Researchers claim that school district leaders want to spend more time on "personalized formats" (coaching, professional learning communities [PLCs]), but teachers are not satisfied with how they are implemented. The authors aptly describe these findings as a "problem of execution" (Gates, 2014).

Our report is published at an auspicious time for professional learning in California: a new study reveals that despite recent improvements, California's low-income students and students of color perform lower than their white and Asian peers, and the gaps are substantially larger than in other states (Loeb, Edley, Imazeki, & Stipek, 2018). On the other hand, another new study has identified school districts in California where students of color, as well as their white peers, have "demonstrated extraordinary levels" of academic achievement, measured by the state's new assessments. This research found that in these districts labeled as "positive outliers" the major in-school predictor of student learning was the preparation and training of the teaching force (Podolsky, Darling-Hammond, Doss, & Reardon, 2019).

In California, there is no lack of good ideas and effective practices around professional learning (Bishop et al., 2015). For example, the state's Instructional Leadership Corps (ILC) has served growing numbers of teachers in implementing the state standards and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and promoting their professionalism and efficacy. Since the ILC's inception in 2014, its leaders have provided multi-session professional learning to more than 32,000 educators statewide in more than 2,000 schools and at least 495 districts (Lotan, Burns, & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Research is mounting on how teachers learn best—and growing evidence points to the importance of *how educators collaborate with their peers* in making instructional shifts in their practice (Berry, 2019). Teacher leadership that matters most is a "socially distributed phenomen[on]" that develops over time as classroom practitioners collectively gain efficacy based on "repeated opportunities" to reflect on what they master in the context of structured collaboration (Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2015). The importance of building positive professional relationships in developing educators' skills is paramount. A recent study of California's school improvement efforts concluded:

> Continuous improvement requires a shift in mindset and in culture, a substantial investment of time and resources, and persistent effort over time to build organizations where everyone in the system can see how their work impacts student outcomes and can engage in investigations of their daily work to continually improve their practices, processes, and ultimately student outcomes (Hough et al., 2017).

Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) and LCFF

PUSD's 41 schools serve more than 23,000 students, of which 87 percent are from socioeconomically disadvantaged homes, and 30 percent are English Learners (California Department of Education, 2018). Three out of four of the district's schools are designated as Title I. Beginning in 2013, the district drew upon the state's LCFF framework to address both the academic and social and emotional learning (SEL) needs of its students by both reinstating programs that were shut down during the recession as well as beginning a process of engaging educators and parents in order to rethink school leadership models for serving students in a more comprehensive fashion like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). A shift to more whole child, preventive child learning models was accelerated by the district's designation to receive state assistance because of their overidentification of Black students as emotionally disturbed (ED).

California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), adopted six years ago, offers school districts more autonomy to decide how to invest resources related to professional learning in serving high-needs students (i.e., English learners, students from low-income families, homeless youth, and foster youth). By 2020, LCFF is likely to reach $18 billion in additional funding (Johnson & Tanner, 2018), creating new opportunities to accelerate student and teacher learning. (See Appendix A for more background on LCFF.)

Our policy report explores how PUSD, representing one of over a thousand districts in the state, has begun to systematically develop and spread the expertise of teachers through professional learning strategies to target the priority student groups specified under LCFF. Drawing on interviews, document review, and school site visits, our report points to how the district is helping teachers break down the walls between their classrooms to accelerate learning for them and the students they teach. (See Appendix B for research methods.)

Over the last several years the district, with declining enrollment and revenues, has engaged in a great deal of school reforms—from launching comprehensive turnaround efforts for several low-performing schools to using new technologies and student data to both personalize learning and track progress as well as developing classroom instructional strategies tied to NGSS. Along with establishing an emerging co-teaching model so that more organic forms of classroom leadership can be tried, tested, and refined, the district—under LCFF—has shifted its professional development practices so teachers have more voice and choice in what workshops they attend. The district has invested, so far, most of its teacher leadership efforts in addressing the social and emotional development needs of students through PBIS. This work, drawing on the expertise of teachers as PBIS coaches, has spread to 27 schools. These coaches train colleagues on evidence-based methods that include strategies around the classroom environment, predictable class routines, and student expectations. The strength of the PBIS model is the idea that personalized support and learning for every student is based on the power of teachers working together to lead their own learning and how teachers can find their own solutions to the pedagogical problems they face.

PUSD's emerging approach aligns well with the scholarship on effective professional learning that "places teachers in a more active learning role, tak[ing] into account the contexts in which they work, and provid[ing] sustained follow-up support as they attempt to make changes in their practices" (Youngs, 2000). Our investigation builds upon previous research in California revealing that "teachers' knowledge and practice and their opportunities to learn would be key policy instruments" in implementing more ambitious standards-based curriculum reforms (Cohen & Hill, 1998). Our paper seeks to strengthen previous ideas of how expert teachers distribute their knowledge within school settings, often not designed to be led by the teachers themselves. It also takes into account *how districts* are rethinking professional learning in light of current efforts for more demanding student learning outcomes, with implications for local and state education policy.

Pomona's Professional Learning Strategy

Over the last several years, the district has identified a growing group of teacher leaders. Supported by the Office of Equity and Professional Learning, a variety of teachers are engaged in a range of hybrid and coaching roles: supporting the use of PBIS, new teacher induction, math modeling, and developing and using new curriculum aligned to NGSS. Approximately 40 positions have been created where teachers are beginning to serve in a variety of roles:

- integrating social and emotional learning (SEL) teaching strategies into the academic core;
- developing more sophisticated pedagogical approaches to teaching math and science through lesson study and teacher-led curriculum development; and
- creating a more collaborative approach to teacher induction and evaluation.

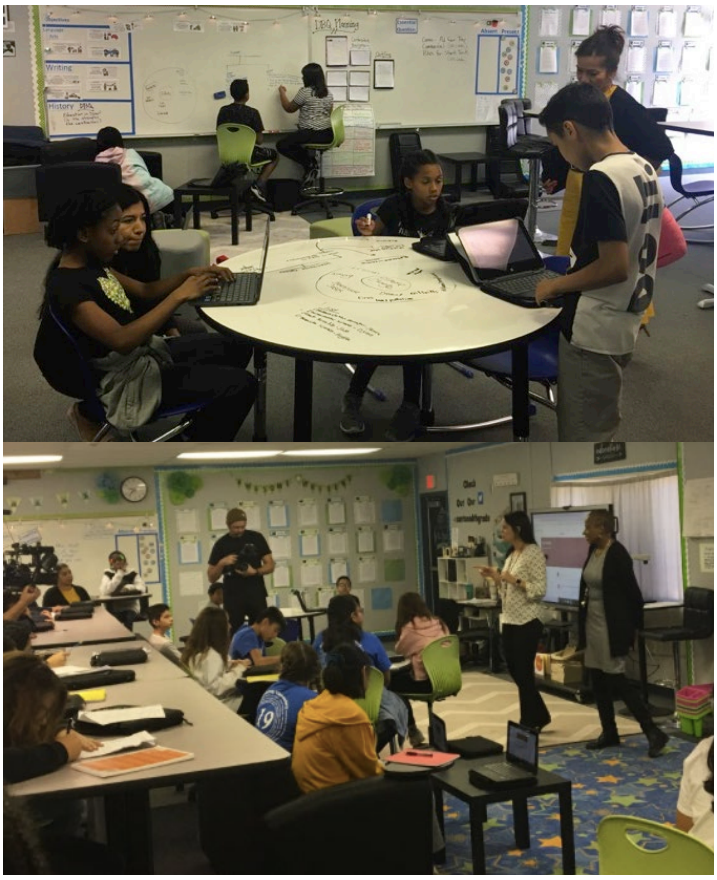
Over the past academic year, the district supported 20 teachers to pilot micro-credentials related to NGSS, technology, and PBIS strategies as a way to test how "mini" assessments of professional learning might be used to personalize more competency-based approaches for teachers to show what they know and can do.

Much like many other districts, PUSD also offers a range of workshops on the six professional development days (four school-directed and two district-directed) included in the collective bargaining agreement for teachers' professional learning. During these days, a wide range of topics are covered related to instruction, equity and social and emotional learning, assessment, and technology integration.

The district also has developed a framework for more teacher-led workshops as well as teacher-directed inquiry as part of their formal professional learning communities, and its late-start Fridays can offer up to two hours or more a week for most teachers to collaborate with one another. Over the years, the district has created opportunities for teachers to lead professional development sessions in summer workshops and has now begun to do so inside the confines of their PLCs.

Interviews with central office administrators revealed considerable variation across the district's 41 school sites in professional learning implementation linked to teacher voice, choice, and time in their professional learning. Notably, an example was found in an elementary school (Armstrong Elementary School) that has been recognized as a California Distinguished School, a Gold Ribbon School, and most recently a PBIS Gold Award recipient. The sixth-grade classroom of Paula Richards and Jamie Santana at Armstrong Elementary is based on a co-teaching model of two seasoned educators. In visiting their classroom, one sees the seamless work of students leading their own learning with one another while one teacher tutors a small group of children and the other works with visiting educators. Their classroom is a model for flexible learning space, and new professional learning structure allows for experimenting with research-based and cross-curricular instruction.

Richards and Santana's leadership story is anchored in service of the whole child and how schools can improve dramatically by building the social and professional capital of teachers. The origins of their co-teaching model stem from their decision to *take down the wall* between their two classrooms in order to learn together. They recognized that despite their own growth as effective teachers over the years they could not help all students meet new academic expectations, particularly the NGSS, unless they collaborated in powerful and very different ways



than afforded by most school districts. Their co-teaching is in its third year. In year one they served a combined class of almost 60 students. The effectiveness of their collaboration was clearly evident to them as well as to school and district administrators. In year two, the district, using LCFF funds, reduced their class load by about 50 percent, creating more space and time for the two teachers to teach and lead for both their school and district.

As part of larger case study research, we also uncovered varied ways administrators have identified and utilized teacher leaders—harnessing the flexibility of LCFF funds—to support the instructional shifts needed to both help students meet the new standards and their SEL needs. And, in particular, the co-teaching model appears to be paying off for the NGSS roll-out as well as in several subject areas where the teacher teams co-develop lessons, incorporate SEL strategies into their pedagogical practices, support job-embedded professional learning, and coach colleagues. We turn next to the emerging evidence on the links between teacher learning and student achievement in the district.

Emerging Evidence for Teachers' Professional Learning and Student Achievement

We cannot make causal claims that teacher-led learning and co-teaching models, compared to more traditional professional development in PUSD, represent a stronger model for improving student achievement. However, multiple points of evidence do support the promise of teacher leadership for the district as it seeks to improve learning for all students. Drawing on a variety of data, a summary of key findings is revealed next.

Administrators are beginning to see that their investments in teacher specialists and the co-teaching model are making a difference. Both central office administrators and principals who work directly with teacher leaders are quite optimistic about what they have personally seen and experienced with more grassroots professional learning. A district administrator said:

> *What we're finding is that by these teacher leaders modeling in the classroom and then coming back and debriefing, we're finding that our PLC time is beginning to be used differently in some schools. It is more about what went right, what didn't, and we believe this is beginning to making huge gains for us.*

Administrators were quick to point out considerable student achievement improvements in the co-teaching classrooms. For example, in 2017–2018 in Richards and Santana's co-teaching classroom at Armstrong Elementary, 64 percent of their students scored a 3 or 4 in Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA), although the entire class they taught entered as 1s or 2s on the CA Dashboard from the previous year. And Figures 1 and 2 highlight the type of progress that they and co-teachers in two other schools have been able to show compared to their grade level peers across the district who teach in more isolated classrooms.

Figure 1: Sixth-Grade Math Growth

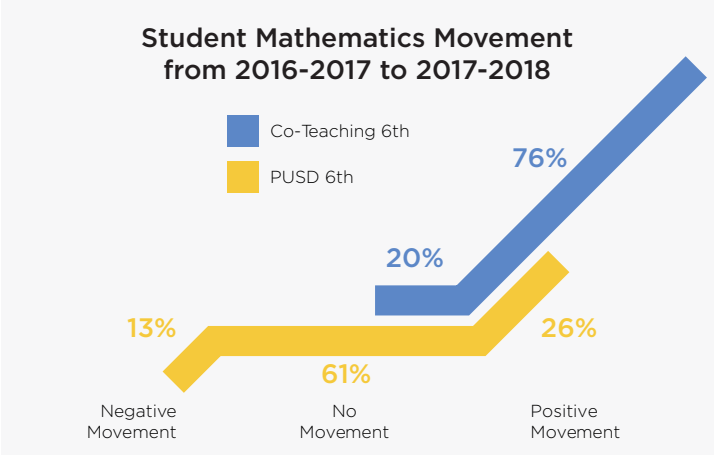
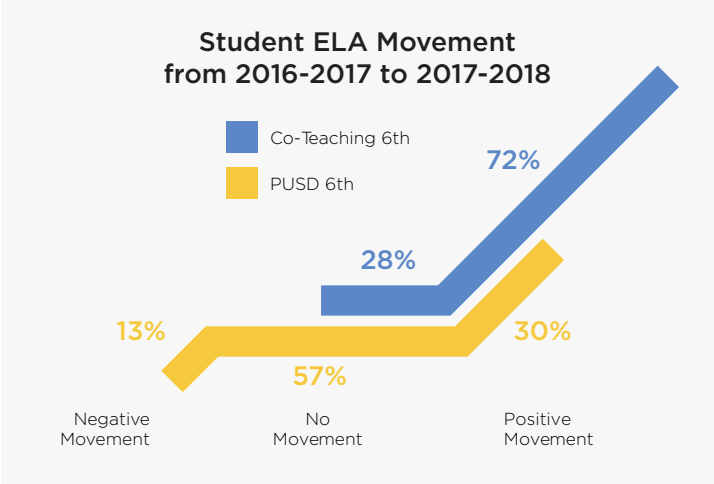
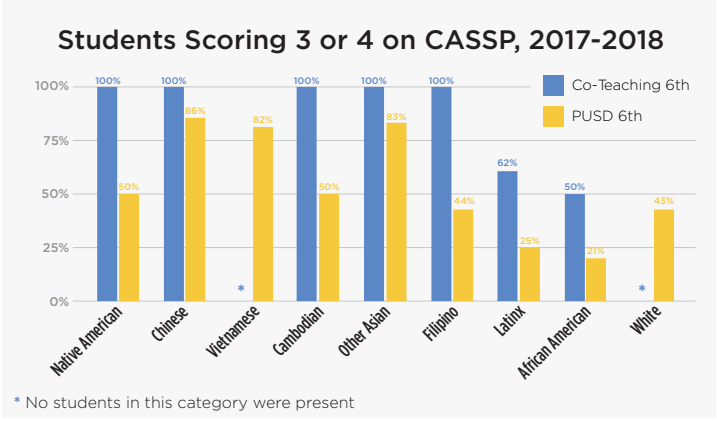


Figure 2: Sixth-Grade ELA Growth



Further analysis of Mathematics growth in the co-teaching model (N=25) disaggregated by race and ethnicity reveals comparatively positive results as well. African American, Latinx, Cambodian, Native American, and Filipino students were two times more likely to score a 3 or 4 on the CA Dashboard based on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASSP) than their peers across the district.

Figure 3: Sixth-Grade Mathematics Achievement for Co-Teaching and Non-Co-Teaching PUSD Classes



Our school site visits revealed more. In each of our observations in the co-teaching classrooms, we saw teachers' extensive knowledge of and *care for* students. We observed teachers using a wide array of work samples and portfolios, and they shared with us their own student data show-

ing growth on both cognitive and noncognitive measures. Interviews revealed the growth and effectiveness of teachers helping each other take on new instructional methods. A fourth-grade educator colleague of theirs told us:

> *We have seen what the co-teachers have done in the sixth grade—for example with DBQs (or Document Based Questions—a method for students to describe evidence in writing)…. Since they've been doing it, their test scores have gone up, especially when it comes to writing and informational texts. So we wanted it for our students. No one (i.e., no administrator) asked us to work on this with them. It was something that we wanted to do mainly because they were getting results, and they showed us how.*

As students are expected to master the more complex curriculum, they are also supported in assessing their own learning and explicitly helping each other as peers. And the positive effects were uniformly seen and experienced by parents and family members of the students in these classrooms. A grandparent who has a student in Richards and Santana's classroom, and who has seen two generations of teachers at the school, told us:

> *The environment and the teacher element have changed completely here. You would never think of nothing like this in our day. You are not studying the same thing at the same time. The child is pretty much independent, studying as they need and motivated by their questions, working together…. It is not a forced type learning atmosphere.*

Teacher-led PBIS training is yielding positive results in terms of school climate and student academic achievement. In classrooms we saw teachers as caring adults promoting both academic development and trusting, stable relationships. At one school, teachers talked about how much they enjoyed teaching at the school—and their positive, stable relationships transferred to how the students view the school. PBIS has established the framework for teaching in ways to buffer the potentially negative effects of serious adversity that many of the school's students face and that manifest in student behavior.

In addition, the PBIS coaches that were most effective were the ones teachers viewed as their peers, not supervisors. As one teacher noted, "[PBIS coaches] really helped us learn from each other; we visited classrooms; we watched each other teach."

When first implemented in the district, PBIS was seen as a system for managing student behavior. Now it is increasingly spreading into academics, culture, instructional practices, relationships with families and the community, teacher leadership, and, in some cases, the operation of schools themselves. As one principal noted:

> *PBIS has really changed [how we viewed] teacher collaboration. We all know we've been protective of our practice, both instructional and behavioral, and now it is more like saying, "Hey I'm having issues here; the data is showing up here; let's have that conversation of how we can support each other."*

Another PBIS coach noted:

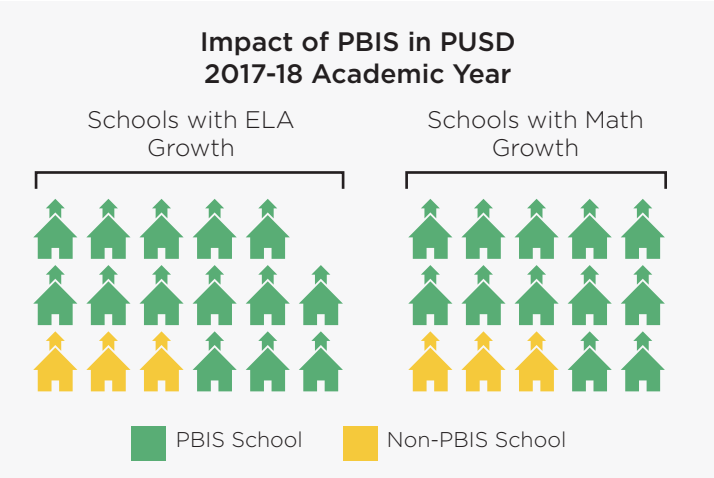
> *The more that we understand as adults what their needs are we provide them with those tools that they need. We've noticed that it's helped them stay in class. They're not having outbursts because they know that they can take a break. They can just ask. They're happy; it changes the whole culture. Then they're allowing other students to learn as well, and we're seeing that too in their scores.*

Integrating PBIS practices and procedures focused on equity, mind-sets, and pedagogical practices appears to be paying off for academic achievement. For example, in 2017–2018, of the 20 schools that substantially increased student achievement in ELA, 17 were PBIS sites. And of the 15 schools that improved their Mathematics performance, 12 were PBIS sites as well. (See Figure 4.)

Cristine Goens, principal at Simons Middle School, shared a brief story that illustrates some early indicators of change at her site based on the district's teacher-led PBIS model:

> *The fact that we were at 1,136 referrals in a year (2012–2013) and now we are at 223 now (2016–2017). That's a lot less of instructional time missed. We're also seeing our honor roll at over 56 percent of our students, which is bigger than ever. There is clear evidence of academic growth since we've become a PBIS school. Another one of our successes is our school climate report card. We*

Figure 4: Student Achievement and PBIS



> *finished 99th percentile for similar schools and 99th percentile for the state. I would say that's kids' perspective about the success that's happening at the site. And I think when you look at those data points and you see how kids are viewing the school, and you hear them say things like "best middle school!" you really — you see it.*

Four years after pilot schools began PBIS implementation, the number of Office Discipline Referrals across PBIS schools has decreased by 48 percent and suspensions have decreased by 61 percent. Office Discipline Referrals decreased from 1,278 in 2014–2015 to 607 in 2017–2018. If we translate this number into its instructional impact, equating every referral to 45 minutes of missed class time, in 2014–2015, students missed 460,000 minutes of learning time (1,278 days). In 2017–2018, referrals were reduced to 5,369, equalling 240,000 minutes (671 instructional days), resulting in an overall increase of 607 days of instructional engagement time. (See Figure 5.)

Accelerating Teacher-led Learning and Leadership

Emerging evidence suggests that the district's recent efforts to utilize teacher leadership to improve student outcomes are paying off. As we sought to understand the role of policy in accelerating more equitable outcomes for students in PUSD, three themes related to professional learning opportunities and challenges surfaced: (1) understanding school readiness for teacher-led learning and leadership, (2) spreading teaching expertise systematically across the district, and (3) building the capacity of the central office in cultivating system-wide teacher-led learning. We unpack these themes next, followed by implications for next generation professional learning policies in California.

1. ***Understanding school readiness for teacher-led learning and leadership***

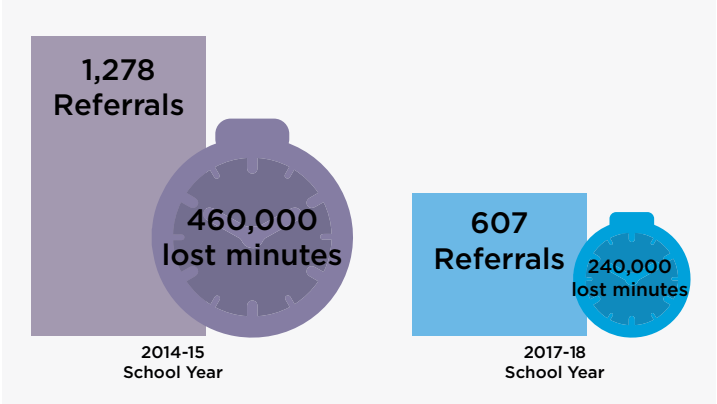
Both teachers and administrators spoke about the growing expertise among some of their teaching colleagues, witnessed through PLCs, learning walks, and occasional peer observations, and the highly collaborative professional development they are beginning to experience. Their descriptions were quite consistent with the related scholarship on teacher learning and policy.

For example, teachers pointed to the effectiveness of more collaborative professional development of specifically grant-funded initiatives, like the RESPeCT Program (Reinvigorating Elementary Science through a Partnership with California Teachers), a large-scale research study funded by the National Science Foundation in collaboration with Cal Poly-Pomona. Teachers pointed to a number of features of RESPeCT that helped them implement NGSS—including the opportunities to watch, analyze, and discuss video cases of each other, examine student work, and critically analyze instructional activities and decisions.

Additionally, in our interviews teachers also consistently noted how collaboration with a peer(s) fuels the incubation of their own ideas. A third-grade teacher told us:

> *Because of the teacher specialist, I learned a lot about how to teach the standards. But she also helped me*

Figure 5: Total District Referrals and Instructional Days Lost to Referrals for 2014–2015 and 2017–2018



learn what other teachers are doing in other grades and schools (to teach to the new standards).

A central office administrator was asked how many of the district's schools are ready for the kind of teacher leadership and professional learning observed at the co-teaching pilot schools. He responded, "Maybe 30 percent"; however, he also noted the vast majority of teachers were "hungry to learn." He continued:

It takes time; it takes a lot of time. And I have to say that one of the biggest things is your leadership at the school. It's what the belief system is, what they're trying to achieve, and how they message it. The messaging becomes very important.

For teachers, getting ready for the new standards was pretty straightforward. As one shared, "It is about working with another teacher and co-creating our own curriculum that we know would fit the needs of our students."

One principal noted that job one in getting teachers and schools ready was the deprivatization of teaching. She said, "The first big change for us was opening your classroom door and just allowing people in and planning with each other." The second seems to be the power of informal learning, spurred primarily by just a few teachers who are in these co-teaching roles.

Teachers are more likely to help one another when principals do the same. Principals in the schools in the co-teaching pilots have been critically important in support of teachers as instructional leaders. As one Armstrong teacher noted:

Our principal is very supportive. When I first came to Armstrong, she said, "Sure you can open the wall if you can find a key to the wall." I had never been in a school where the principal is so comfortable with teachers coming up with their own ideas….

The PUSD teachers and administrators were clear about how schools become ready for the instructional shifts demanded by the new academic standards and student needs. Teachers helping each other was at the core of school readiness for those shifts. However, we learned that there did not seem to be a formal way to identify which teachers are good at what so that they may be strategically supported as leaders and deployed to share their expertise with their colleagues. Granted, principals often document which classroom teachers are better at helping students meet certain standards. And most administrators pointed to student performance data as a key source to identify which teachers are good at getting what results. But these data do not point to what teachers do to yield those results. Even when principals have become quite adroit in knowing the strengths of their teaching colleagues, most of this knowledge is informal and not readily known by teachers themselves.

As one administrator noted:

I don't think anybody sits there and creates a spreadsheet…with everyone's names. Okay, these are their strengths, these are their needs. We don't have that. I had Post-Its, and at the end of the day, I'd put them in a file. I had these notes that I could refer to, but it was not a formalized, centralized, and "this is the way everyone does it" type of thing.

In addition, interviews with administrators (as well as teachers) revealed that there was a small percentage of weak teachers in the district who were definitely not ready for the instructional shifts demanded by the new standards. Principals were quick to point out how to address

Related Scholarship on Teacher Learning and Policy

Researchers have documented the characteristics of effective professional learning for teachers: focusing on content; incorporating active learning; supporting structured collaboration; using models of effective practice (e.g., analyzing student work, peer observations, etc.); providing coaching and expert support; offering feedback and reflection; and bolstering sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Professional development, *driven by the right kind of feedback*, does improve teaching effectiveness. Teachers learn best from colleagues who help them take risks and embrace their weaknesses, support them in regulating their own teaching strategies, and serve as resources for them while activating ownership of their own learning (Wiliam, 2014). And other scholars, using new analytical tools, have found that teachers are most likely to make instructional shifts and improve student learning when they have *indirect exposure* to new ideas through collegial interactions forged by social networking (Daly et al., 2014; Penuel et al., 2012; Bridwell-Mitchell & Cooc, 2016).

the knotty issues associated with assessing and developing ineffective teachers. One administrator, whose school had rapidly improved of late, noted:

> *You have to give it to them (the weaker teachers) in increments because, I think, it goes back to relationships. You can give them whatever they want, but if they feel that you're not doing it for the right reason or because you're trying to catch them doing something bad, then it's not going to work. They have to believe that you're trying to help them. They have to believe that we want them to be the best, and our best teachers are most suited to help them.*

These matters raised an important question related to our second theme: How can the district cultivate and utilize more teacher leaders, and how can districts spread teacher leaders' expertise more equitably within current budgetary constraints?

2. ***Spreading teaching expertise systematically across the district***

We found numerous examples of teachers improving their teaching when they had access to "more authentic collaboration" in school- or cluster-level efforts. A teacher of 18 years teaching in a high-collaboration school told us:

> *When you learn from other teachers, and you hear their ideas, and you get to share with one another, I think that's the best way that I learn because I'm not just taking in information from one person. I'm getting ideas that teachers are actually using in their classrooms. So, it's not just a "try this strategy," but actually, we have a teacher who's using this strategy…and we are working together, or they're trying this and we're seeing results from it.*

As one Armstrong teacher noted on the influence of Richards and Santana in their school: "As a teacher, it excites the rest of us because now we have to keep up with them." And when teachers talk about how they are influenced by their colleagues, they readily turn to evidence of impact from student portfolios that show growth on a range of cognitive and social and emotional outcomes. Teaching expertise continues to spread organically as teachers begin to use social media to both inform and inspire their colleagues.

As one principal from a high achieving, Title I elementary school noted:

> *When it starts to become peer pressure…that's when movement happens. It's when people begin to learn from each other…. But I can say that today I see my staff at that cusp where we've begun to just take off, and part of it has been those opportunities to be pulled out of the classroom and be working with the other teachers, which again, without being a Title I school, we would've never had the resources and opportunity to do.*

And a teacher in her school who serves in an LCFF-funded co-teaching role told us, "So this job opportunity really attracted me because I'm really interested in building that system of how to give teachers the confidence and telling them it's okay, you don't have to have a curriculum in front of you." However, the challenges of spreading teaching expertise more equitably emerged quickly for us with four issues in mind.

First, four teachers, from the co-teaching classrooms, influenced 487 teachers (311 via professional development, 63 through job embedded support, and 113 by the way of social media). However, there is no way to formally measure their leadership impact so others can learn from how they get the results that they achieve.

PUSD educators meet to discuss potential future projects together. ***via Twitter @ joe24150***

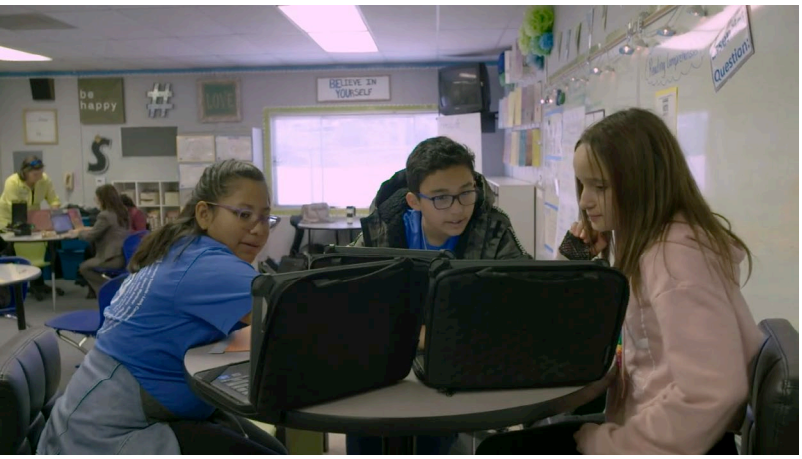
Second, teachers in small schools who teach single subjects struggle to find an authentic professional learning community that meets their subject matter and grade-level needs as well as the developmental needs of their students.

Third, building trust and sound relationships among teachers and administrators is key in developing a system of teacher leadership (rather than individual teachers as leaders). However, we found little evidence of the intentional cultivation of school and principal readiness for teacher-led learning and retention of effective educators.

Finally, some principals have acquired knowledge and skill in developing individual teachers as leaders, but their know-how seems very informal. Some schools are more ready for teacher leadership than others, and some are further along in implementation. There seems to be a need for the development of a system or process to leverage the skills and capacities of schools that are good at teacher leadership to help other schools do the same and to assess how schools are progressing with implementation. These findings led to another question: How can the district develop and implement a system of teacher leadership where many more classroom practitioners have opportunities to lead formally and informally?

3. ***Building the capacity of the district central office in cultivating system-wide teacher-led learning***

Over the last several years, the Office of Equity and Professional Learning has supported an array of efforts to spur teacher-led learning and leadership, both formally and informally. Those efforts appear to be paying off. Teacher interviews surfaced at least five ways the central office can cultivate system-wide, teacher-led learning.



First, teachers, even those who teach in schools with collaborative cultures, lament the limited *time* they have to learn and lead. And we discovered that teachers can be overwhelmed by all the curriculum resources available that have varying degrees of alignment with their students' needs. They told us that they often resort to creating resources that may already exist. One teacher said, "We're constantly recreating because we're all in our self-contained classrooms." Teachers need to adapt curriculum to the needs of their students, but they do not have time to do so if those resources are not curated. Teachers engaged in the micro-credentialing pilot struggled to find the time in their PLCs for the kind of action research evidence required of them. A teacher leader noted:

> *Is it not time to look at the master schedule? The way it is set up, when you're teaching, most of the time I am too. And so how can I come see you teach? So, when we are talking about the flexibility within LCFF, why can we not do something different?*

We asked: How can the district master schedule and calendars be designed for the teacher-led learning and leadership that is beginning to emerge?

Second, there are limitations to what 40 teacher leaders can do in a district with 1,400 certified educators—given the current organizational structure, the traditional use of time and face-to-face workshops, one-on-one peer observations, and occasional learning walks. The district office has tried to accommodate the need for teachers to see one another teach by finding and using substitute teachers. During the first quarter of the 2018–19 academic year, district officials recorded 4,700 teacher absences due primarily to professional development and release time (e.g., PBIS training). This did not seem sustainable. As one central office administrator noted:

> *When it comes to coaches, we have them coming in. We do not have enough. One thing we don't do well enough with this whole one-to-one and technology and future-ready district is we're not using technology. We're scratching the surface of what we can do with it. Where you can actually put a teacher in front of their ViewSonic. They have their big screens in their classroom. They literally could connect with their colleagues in other school sites down the street and be together virtually.*

How can the district capitalize on the potential of online communities of practice to leverage the few teacher leaders they have and the need to identify, cultivate, and utilize others?

Third, a number of teachers and administrators alike pointed to the need to abandon some programs that are not needed along with a strategy to do so. Interviews with teachers revealed that they are often overwhelmed with too many programs they must implement. One teacher said, "I've often said, why don't we pick three or four programs that as a school we're going to be great at, instead of 20 that we're just good at." A central office administrator agreed. "We put too many things on teachers' plates." How can the district help schools eliminate programs that they do not need?

Fourth, teaching expertise is likely to spread faster by utilizing teacher leaders who teach in a similar context to the colleagues they are assisting. The new teacher observation and feedback tools and processes seem to hold the promise of helping identify teachers who are good at spreading their expertise. And the micro-credentialing pilot participants interviewed indicated a high degree of interest in working on micro-credentials as a community of practice—and less so as individuals. They saw a lot of value in teams identifying a need and working on a micro-credential together to address that need, but without turning it into a compliance activity. The district and the union are beginning to reshape teacher evaluation to focus on both individual growth and teamwork that lead to more equitable student outcomes. Teachers and administrators raised questions about what the current collective bargaining agreement values in terms of teachers and the development and spread of their expertise. How can union and district officials rethink incentives and compensation to meet the new demands on teachers to learn and lead?

Finally, district officials point to the positive effects of National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) training in beginning to shift the culture in the ways that principals need to lead their schools. Principals who have been through the training spoke of its benefits to them and the development of more collaborative forms of leadership. Others recognized they are not as well prepared to lead with teachers as leaders. One central office administrator noted:

> *Too often we might have a principal that might fit the characteristics of not being collaborative or trying to micromanage maybe too much…. They're not building capacity and letting their people run with stuff and learn and fail and grow.*

In many ways we saw evidence of teachers and administrators leading together in schools like Armstrong—only informally with no means for the model to spread systematically across the district. How can the district begin to train administrators and teachers together around their priorities?

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our policy report highlights how central office administrators took advantage of a new state law to create opportunities for more teachers to lead their own learning. The story of PUSD and its focus on cultivating leadership from the classroom for the benefit of its students comes at a time when research on strong links between teacher collaboration and student achievement is growing; new technologies and tools make it more possible for those who teach to also spread their expertise, and there is growing knowledge to create the enabling conditions for teacher-led learning and leadership to flourish.

Co-teaching is an example of teacher-led learning that is emerging in the district that allows for everyday opportunities for teachers to mentor one another, offer just-in-time feedback, collaborate on common strategies for instruction or engagement, and support strategies for struggling students. PBIS teacher coaches have emerged as brokers of knowledge and translators for demystifying many of the big ideas around more whole-learning classroom strategies grounded in the efforts of schools themselves, which have their own unique attributes.

PUSD's recent shift to building expertise from within a system illustrates what Fullan (2007) argues is required for sustainable change in schools. As he describes, external approaches to instructional improvement are rarely "powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school." The district continues to rely on a great number of different programs from outside vendors; however, the Office of Equity and Professional Learning has orchestrated a variety of strategies aligned to the superintendent's vision in the strategic plan.

The success of LCFF and the statewide system of support for schools struggling to improve learning for key student groups will continue to hinge upon the ability of educators to spread their expertise with the support of school site administrators, district central offices, and a policy landscape that enables and sustains teacher-led learning and leadership. Unfortunately, it is difficult to identify which schools have the enabling conditions for teacher-led learning and leadership—including shared vision and strategy; supportive administrators and working relationships; adequate resources (including time); and the collective embrace of shared influence, joint inquiry, and risk-taking (Eckert & Daughtrey, 2019; Berry, 2019).

District Policy and Practice Recommendations

1. **Gather more detailed data on what teachers want and need to be successful.** Districts often jump into designing professional learning strategies without taking inventory of current strategies by surveying teachers. Design a process and tools to assemble evidence on teachers' professional learning profiles and needs and establish an array of tools and processes (e.g., virtual learning communities, professional learning modules, and micro-credentials) that accelerate outcomes.

2. **Identify exemplar professional learning schools and turn them into learning labs**. Models of quality professional learning are sometimes isolated within a department or school site. Invest more deeply in these exemplars, like Armstrong Elementary and Cortez Magnet, so they can have *more time and resources* to serve as laboratories of inspiration and learning with other district educators.

3. **Carefully identify the root problems that get in the way of teachers spreading their expertise.** Each school operates in a different context (student and community needs, teacher experiences, culture, etc.) and should engage in a learning process to become ready for teacher leadership and to help every educator learn in ways that suit their needs and those of their school.

4. **Cultivate administrators who have the know-how to foster stronger teacher collaboration.** A key ingredient in the emerging PUSD professional learning model is a cohort of site principals who enable expert teachers to share best practices and coach their peers in real time. These principals not only allow teacher leaders to be instructional leaders but they also proactively look for ways to tap these teachers to help drive learning experiences for all students across school sites. They know how to utilize the talents of their teams, and they learn alongside their teaching colleagues. Revisit and redesign administrator training for teacher leadership.

State Policy Recommendations

1. **Support statewide, annual surveys about professional learning experiences to guide improvement.** The ambitious goals of LCFF and a statewide system of support require exceptional coordination among educators, school sites, districts, and counties. However, there are very few formal channels for state policy to be informed by the perspectives of LCFF implementers: teachers. Funding under Title II and Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) can be used to develop feedback mechanisms to improve teaching and learning conditions, including school readiness for teacher leadership informed by recent research and innovative tools that can be used to measure progress.

2. **Elevate promising models of teacher-led learning across the state under the statewide system of support.** California has developed a robust statewide model of continuous improvement and efforts geared toward improving student learning in schools where students have historically struggled academically.[1] However, nowhere in the levels of support is teacher-led learning identified as a promising model for improving student learning. It is implied that technical assistance for schools is necessary from outside the school system or from the district central office, but not from within the school system itself. Highlighting more examples of implementation strategies of teacher-led learning models like those emerging in PUSD could help improve the efficacy of the system of support and also ensure its sustainability for professional learning is not dependent on the expertise of outside entities.

3. **Strengthen ideas of shared leadership and teacher-led learning in the California Administrator Performance Expectations (CAPE)[2] and California Teaching Performance Expectations (CTPE)[3] that identify a variety of roles for expert educators who can serve in more hybrid roles of leadership.** Ideas around leadership are often narrowly tied to school site administrators and features of instructional leadership, management and learning environments, family and community engagement, ethics and integrity, and policy. Many teacher leaders already have strong influence around these areas of work, but they are not often recognized for both teaching and leading. The California Commission in Teacher Credentialing should explore innovative ways to recognize teachers who lead without leaving the classroom.

4. **Expand California's Instructional Leadership Corps (ILC) with a virtual learning community component.** The ILC is a partnership between the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), National Board Resource Center, and the California Teachers Association (CTA). This "teachers teaching teachers" model trains teacher leaders to lead ongoing professional learning around the state's new math, science, and ELA standards within their own districts. A virtual learning component could assist districts like PUSD to spread teaching expertise and serve the unique professional learning needs of teachers.

1 More information about California's system of support can be found here: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/csss.asp
2 More information about the California Administrator Performance Expectations can be found at https://www.ctcexams.nesinc.com/content/docs/CAPE_Placemat.pdf
3 More information about the California Teaching Performance Expectations can be found at https://www.ctc.ca.gov/docs/default-source/educator-prep/standards/adopted-tpes-2013.pdf

In closing, California serves more than six million students in more than 1,000 districts and over 11,000 schools. The state has some of the most significant challenges in educating highly diverse students, who come to school profoundly impacted by the effects of poverty and inequality.

Under LCFF, school districts in California have many options and more flexibility in finding and using professional development resources to fuel school improvement compared to the past. There are many vendors, with a myriad of programs, vying for the attention of districts and administrators eager for immediate change in student performance. The idea of teacher-led learning presents a necessary but labor-intensive approach, yet as our policy report reveals, districts have the potential to ignite change from inside their systems. This approach will build the internal capacity of the district and the educators who serve children every day. Over 20 years ago, Elmore (1996) concluded that scaling up ambitious curriculum reforms required teachers "increasingly to think of themselves as operating in a web of professional relations that influence their daily decisions, rather than as solo practitioners." And more recently, Hough, et al. (2017) pointed out that continuous improvement ideas in California are "unlikely to lead to success in schools where the context presents substantial challenges to regular and substantial teacher collaboration unless there is a deep district commitment to supporting those schools and overcoming the contextual barriers" (Gallagher, et al., 2019). PUSD has demonstrated how to begin to create opportunities for teachers to do so. Now is the time to take bolder action in policy and practice to turn their innovative pilot efforts into a system of professional learning that students deserve in PUSD and across the Golden State.

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Appendix A: More on the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)

Under LCFF, the state now directs dollars to districts based on the proportion of the high-needs students served. It also requires districts to determine funding priorities based on the input of a broad base of education stakeholders.

Since 2013, California has made the pursuit of equity an explicit goal of education policy. LCFF directs targeted state funds to districts that serve a disproportionate share of the most disadvantaged students (Affeldt, 2015). In keeping with the aim of the policy, local actors (i.e., school districts) are charged with the responsibility of determining how best to utilize resources.

LCFF replaces the previous K–12 finance system, which relied upon an array of categorical funding streams to provide districts with targeted revenue designated for high-needs students. Under the new law, districts are required to prioritize resources for disadvantaged students: those eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FRPM), foster youth, homeless youth, and English Learners (EL) (Hill & Ugo, 2015).

They also have greater flexibility in determining how supplemental funds are spent. LCFF charges county offices of education (COEs) with oversight responsibility for reviewing and approving district spending plans, referred to as Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs). Districts are required to explain how their LCAPs will utilize LCFF resources to generate progress on a number of academic and whole-school performance indicators (e.g., student attendance and student suspensions).

A recent study shows that LCFF has resulted in a six percent increase in graduation rates for low-income students (Johnson & Tanner, 2018). Such a development is a promising result for an ambitious new statewide policy initiative still in its infancy. However, there is also evidence that some districts are struggling to set clear priorities (Fuller & Tobben, 2014) and to demonstrate that with additional funding for high-needs students clear, measurable progress can be achieved.

Appendix B: Methods

PUSD was identified by several professional organizations and agencies as a district we should consider for this study as it was seen in the forefront of teacher-led learning. District size and geography were taken into account in selecting PUSD, along with a set of additional districts throughout the state.

The study was organized around a specific set of questions developed in tandem with program officers at the Stuart and Silver Giving Foundations:

(1) How do teachers learn about instructional strategies that meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and NGSS?

(2) How do schools and district professional development offices organize to support the diffusion of these instructional strategies?

(3) How are teachers, schools, and districts evaluating instructional programs and assessments relative to the standards and needs of students?

(4) What strategies are most effective for reaching vulnerable student communities such as low-income students, English Learners, and foster youth?

The research team reviewed a variety of district-produced documents including the district's LCAP, strategic plan, budget, student outcome data, and a pre-visit survey completed by district officials. The research team then conducted a two-day site visit to the district and school sites within PUSD, followed by a series of follow-up visits that spanned a 19-month period (May 2017 to January 2019). We interviewed more than 50 stakeholders, including students, teachers, principals, district officials, union representatives, school board trustees, and community members.

Summary of Interviewees:

Education Stakeholders	Totals (N=53)
Students	10
Principals/Site Administrators	8
Labor Partners	2
Central Office Staff	12
Parents	10
Teachers	11

The research team transcribed and analyzed all interview notes and produced an in-depth case study, focused on a particular set of themes related to positive student outcomes for PUSD. Based upon an initial review of the interviews, codes were developed: evidence of impact, time, teacher ownership of learning, measuring progress, student engagement, parent engagement, learning for instructional shifts, equity, dissemination of best practices, formal evaluation, and culture of "how things are done in my school." These codes allowed the research team to organize the 53 interviews to map out patterns of responses and evidence of impact.

With each interview the research team developed a summary memo with attention to patterns, themes, relationships, or concepts that emerged and how they would relate to student learning evidence. These summaries as well as the coded interview data, document reviews, and school/classroom observations then informed the narrative we presented in this policy research report.

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