DISTRICT POSITIVE OUTLIERS:

THE SANGER USD CASE

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May 28, 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Our success in the transition to Common Core is the culture we already had established. Our PLCs collaborate based on data. The data changes and broadens, but the foundation stays the same. –Adela Jones, Associate Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction

Sanger Unified School District (SUSD), located a few miles southeast of Fresno, serves approximately 12,100 students in 20 schools. Over 70 percent are Hispanic, 18 percent are English Learners, and nearly 75 percent qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

During the accountability era of New Child Left Behind (NCLB), Sanger earned the reputation of being a "turnaround district" based on its students' steep and steady improvement on California's annual tests of basic skills. Between 2004 and 2012, under the leadership of Superintendent Marc Johnson, Sanger USD moved from being one of the lowest-performing California districts, in need of improvement and under threat of state takeover, to exceeding the district average on the state's Academic Performance Index. By 2012 most of Sanger's 20 schools ranked 10 out of 10 compared to demographically similar schools, and many had received Blue Ribbon awards from the state. Sanger students, including English Learners, out-performed their counterparts across the state on math and ELA tests of basic skills.

With the shift to Common Core State Standards, California suspended annual state testing for three years in order to give school districts and their teachers time to become familiar with the new standards for deeper learning. Across the state, districts were challenged to shift instruction and supports in ways that would prepare their students to succeed on tests that demand more evidence of their knowledge and skills. Since 2014 when California's Smarter Balanced Assessments began, Sanger students have continued to outperform their demographic peers in math and ELA, as well as on other measures of student achievement. (See Appendix A.) Their strong performance suggests that district educators have been successful in moving instruction toward Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

SUSD's success in meeting new state standards for student performance clearly builds upon its capacity for continuous improvement developed over the previous decade –its collaborative culture and systems for developing a strong pipeline of leaders. It also reflects the strategic decisions of district leaders about how to tackle the challenge of Common Core standards: focusing on three primary initiatives and staying true to their principles for leading system change.

Sanger's capacity for continuous improvement

By 2012 when SUSD educators began dipping their toes into the daunting sea of Common Core standards, they were strong in professional capacities for learning – collaboration, broad leadership, and shared accountability within and across system levels. When asked what best accounts for their early success on Common Core assessments, Sanger administrators and teachers invariably say 'it is our culture of collaboration'.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Back in 2005, Sanger administrators invested in developing *PLCs* as their primary strategy for turning around student performance. All administrators and teachers in the district participated in DuFour training sessions at least once over the next few years. This approach to improving student achievement –and the DuFour training—focused on two things: 1) developing teachers' skill in using standards-based assessments and data to evaluate and improve their instruction and 2) engendering teachers' shared accountability for all students' success at their grade level or course.[1] This strategy, supported by investment in professional development and selected instructional frameworks, contrasts with more typical approaches to improving student outcomes that feature the adoption and implementation of textbooks or specific curricula.

In moving to a PLC strategy for continuous improvement, the district invested heavily in developing teacher leadership, creating positions in schools to support teacher learning (Curriculum Support Providers), and focusing principals on leading learning in their school's teacher PLCs.

PLCs became the way of doing business among SUSD teachers and administrators alike. By 2012, the district had developed effective systems and routines for professionals to work together to ensure that all students achieve to high standards:

- Teachers work in PLCs at grade level or subject/course level, each facilitated by a Lead Teacher;
- School principals and PLC Lead Teachers make up a school leadership PLC;
- A district Area administrator and group of 4-5 principals form a PLC that observes and learns from classrooms in each other's schools;
- Several PLCs at the district office level work to support teacher learning in content areas and between Special Education and general education, and
- The district cabinet operates as a PLC to shape and refine district-level decisions and supports.

SUSD's collaborative culture extends beyond district boundaries. SUSD has sought— and been sought by—networks, partnerships, and foundations that offer opportunities for learning and sharing. Their choices are strategic based on the perceived fit with SUSD needs and time commitments involved.

Stable, well-prepared teaching force. Sanger Unified's culture and norms of collaboration, strong site-based and district support for teacher learning, and leadership opportunities make SUSD highly attractive to prospective teachers. By the middle of Marc Johnson's tenure as Superintendent, Sanger no longer had trouble attracting and retaining teachers. This shift was enhanced by SUSD's agreement with Fresno State University's (FSU) teacher preparation program to host intern teachers, as well as FSU's on-site training for administrator credentialing. With teacher retirements and the recruitment of new credentialed teachers, the average tenure of district teachers has shifted from 20-25 years to 10-15 year over the past decade. Superintendent Matt Navo told us that all job openings for the 2017-18 school year had been filled with well-qualified candidates by March 2017.

Notably, the district has been successful in filling Special Education (SPED) positions with provisional and credentialed teachers; the six Resource Specialist Teacher openings for 2018-19 had been filled by May 2018. In the context of a regional and state-wide shortage of credentialed SPED teachers, Sanger's recruitment success is exceptional. Superintendent Navo attributes this to the district's culture of collaboration and its strong SPED department leadership. The district has earned a reputation for supporting the work of special education teachers and for unusually effective collaboration between general education and special education teachers. A decade ago Sanger's SPED and General Education departments ceased to operate as silos, developing open channels of communications and ways of supporting each other's work in schools and classrooms. Further, the district employs proportionally more psychologists than typical – currently 16 psychologists for 20 schools, and they play key roles in mediating between general and special education teachers and student needs. The SPED department and district psychologists are working to integrate academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports for struggling students as part of the district's MTSS initiative. These pieces combine to make Sanger USD an attractive district to SPED teachers.

Broad and deep leadership. Sanger has invested heavily over the past decade in developing principals' knowledge and skills in leading professional learning in their school. The district's School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams (SAALT) have routines for observing and learning from one another's schools, as described later in the context of adapting to CCSS[2]. Sanger principals' primary charge, in addition to making the school a safe and well-organized place for students, is to lead and support teacher learning and the development of teacher leadership. They ensure time and other resources essential to teacher PLCs' success and work with PLC Leads on problems of practice.

By nurturing principal and teacher leadership over the past 10 years, SUSD now has a deep pipeline of educators with strong instructional and team leadership skills ready to step into school, and eventually district, specialist and administrative positions. The leadership pipeline begins with teacher leaders in grade level and course PLCs, some of whom become a Curriculum Support Provider (CSP) who works with all teachers in each elementary school and with subject area teachers in the middles and high school. The pipeline extends from

teacher teams to district office: Teacher PLC Lead → Curriculum Support Provider → Assistant Principal/ Principal → District Specialist and/or Administrator.

Shared accountability for all students' success. Sanger's extraordinary culture of collaboration and leadership is rooted in the moral imperative that district personnel share accountability for all students' success. From teacher PLCs where "all students are our students" to the district office where administrators and staff take responsibility for each school's success, strong norms and systems enforce shared accountability.

Sustainability. Continuity of district leadership has been key to establishing and sustaining Sanger Unified's culture of continuous improvement. Marc Johnson served as superintendent from 2002-2013 and was succeeded by Matt Navo who had previously served as a principal, Director of Special Education, and Area Administrator. In fall 2018 Navo will be succeeded by long-time Sanger educator Adela Jones, who began her career as a teacher and now serves as Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction.

SUSD's Board of Trustees has consistently supported district administrators' strategies for continuous improvement. One of Sanger's themes "Together we can!" captures their shared commitment to bringing all students up to standards to ensure lifelong learning and success. They fully endorse Superintendent Navo's mottos: "Dream Big, Work Hard, Believe" and "Every Child Every Day, Whatever it Takes".

These prior district conditions -- professional collaboration, a stable and well-prepared teacher force, broad and deep leadership, shared accountability, and sustainability -- constitute SUSD's capacity to shift teaching and learning toward Common Core standards. (See David & Talbert, 2013 for further discussion of this historical context.)[3] Also key are district leaders' decisions about how to focus the shift to make it manageable and have the greatest pay-off for student success.

Priorities for change

District leaders reasoned that if Sanger students are to perform well on the more ambitious standards then not only will instruction need to shift but students will need more support. Sanger USD defined three initiatives:

- Professional Learning Communities
- Effective Instruction, and
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS).

The district highlights these three key initiatives in its graphic of mission, vision, goals, initiatives, priorities, values, and beliefs, referred to as its Goals and Coherence Map (see Figure A).

Professional learning communities (PLCs). Although Professional Learning Communities are well-established in the district culture, this initiative reflects the need for teacher PLCs to adapt their practice to address Common Core standards. In particular, the district's DuFour model assumes fairly straight-forward student learning objectives and measures, while CCSS calls for deeper learning and complex, performance-based assessments.

Sanger's PLC initiative provides additional time and resources for teacher teams to work together, as well as PLC training to deepen collaborative practices. District PLCs are working to understand Common core standards for their grade level or course, to design standards-based instruction, to create or use assessment tasks to measure student mastery, and to use assessment data to refine instruction and design interventions for struggling students.

Figure A. Sanger USD Goals and Coherence Map

Sanger Unified School District

MISSION	Increase Student Achievement
VISION	*All students will have the options to demonstrate what they learn and the opportunities to be successful and achieve their dreams.*

GOALS	Raise All Students' Achievement	Close Achievement Gap between Sub-Groups	Ensure a Safe Environment

INITIATIVES	**Professional Learning Communities**
	Effective Instruction
	Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

PRIORITIES	*EARLY LITERACY*	*COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS*

VALUES	Collaborative and Inclusive Culture

BELIEFS	*"Hope Is Not a Strategy"* *"It's All About Student Learning"*	*"Don't Blame the Kids"* *"All Children Can and Must Learn"*

Effective Instruction. The "Effective Instruction" label is strategic in building a bridge between effective practices under the existing Effective Direct Instruction (EDI) approach and Common Core standards. In the expanded meaning of Effective Instruction, teachers would need to move away from their emphasis on direct instruction for basic skills mastery. Teacher PLCs' common formative assessments (CFA's) too would need to shift toward broader and deeper learning objectives. Early Literacy and College & Career Readiness were specified as priorities to meet Common Core's demands on student literacy and range of learning outcomes beyond academic skills.

*Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS).*This initiative anticipated that more students would struggle to meet the new academic standards, especially those transitioning to English as a second language. Building on California's guidance and support for the model, the district MTSS calls for integrating academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports.

District teachers already were experienced in using Response to Intervention (RTI) in their PLCs to address academic needs and Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) to address behavior issues within and beyond the classroom. So the district's challenge is to integrate these established systems and weave in levels of supports for students' social-emotional development and safety. The initiative recognizes that a student's struggle in any one of these areas undermines his or her academic success and transition to an effective adulthood. It also responds to evidence of growing mental health stress and crises among youth in the region and beyond.

Principles for leading change

As important as *what* Sanger USD is doing to address challenges of CCSS is *how* they are leading the change process. Four key principles for leading change grounded district leaders' earlier success in accelerating student achievement during 2004-2012.[4] These principles are clearly evident in their actions today.

Taking a developmental approach. This guidance is based in knowledge of how students and educators learn. It entails starting small and building over time, providing educators with repeated opportunities to learn in multiple ways: from formal professional development, from coaching, from colleagues, from students.

Adapting resources and supports to district context. This acknowledges that the effective supports for change are aligned with the particular history, culture, and needs of a district and its schools. It entails seeking out support providers and partners who are ready to co-design the work with district and school leaders and skilled in adapting their supports to local contexts.

Using evidence to ground decisions. This calls for collecting data to focus improvement efforts, translating the data into action, and using data to refine actions. It includes testing

out new ideas on a small scale, building in feedback loops, and tracking student progress closely at all levels.

Building leadership and trusting relationships to sustain change. This highlights the importance of nurturing and maintaining relationships and trust within the district and with parents and the civic community, as well as building a strong pipeline of school and district leaders steeped in the district improvement culture.

This case study documents how each of the two new initiatives – Effective Instruction and MTSS – has progressed thus far in Sanger USD. Each initiative illustrates how the change leadership principles work in action. Following a description of our research methods, we discuss findings in five sections organized by the district's four core principles for leading change:

- Effective Instruction: taking a developmental approach
- MTSS: taking a developmental approach
- Adapting resources and supports to district context
- Using evidence to guide decisions
- Building leadership and trusting relationships to sustain change

In a concluding section we draw lessons from this period of Sanger's continuous improvement journey for other districts and for state education authorities.

CASE STUDY DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

Sanger Unified was identified as a positive district outlier in an analysis for all California school districts of student performance on the state's Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) math and ELA assessments in 2015, 2016, and 2017. The analysis took into account student demographics and examined how poor, Hispanic, Black, and white students performed relative to state norms. In each year, Sanger's white and Hispanic students out-performed their counterparts in demographically-similar districts across California. Selection of Sanger USD's for a case study additionally took into account student graduation rates (high), suspension rates (low and declining), as well as its region (Central Valley) and urbanicity (Town: Fringe).

To investigate how the district achieved relative success during the early years of implementing Common Core State Standards, we visited the district during Fall, 2017 for three days of interviews in the central office and in four schools. We also reviewed district documents that were being used during 2012-2017. Further, in preparation for the visit, we reviewed district administrator interviews that we had conducted during 2011-2013 when the district was just beginning its movement toward Common Core.

District office interviews

Interviews with district administrator and senior staff focused on strategies, steps, and tools they were using to shift instruction to Common Core, support teacher and administrator learning, use data to monitor and support school progress, meet student needs, engage the community, and allocate resources to support their improvement efforts.

We conducted 30-60 minute interviews with individuals in the following central office positions:

- Superintendent
- Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
- Area Administrator for Elementary Schools
- Area Administrator for Secondary Schools
- Coordinator of Grants & Program Development (including LCAP)
- Coordinator of Inclusive Practices (MTSS)
- Director of Curriculum and Professional Development
- Coordinator of EL Services & Parent Engagement
- Information Systems Manager
- Student Data Specialist
- Coordinator of the LEAP After School Program

School cases and data collection

Schools were selected to represent all three grade levels. We visited Sanger High School (SHS), Washington Academic Middle School (WAMS), and two elementary schools serving primarily low-income students of color.

- SHS is the district's only regular high school and its student population has steadily grown to 3,000 students in 2017-18 of whom 71% are Hispanic and 75% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Its office is staffed by a Principal, Deputy Principal, 4 Assistant Principals, 2 full-time psychologists, and 3 Curriculum Support Providers (CSPs).
- WAMS is the district's single middle school serving1800 students in grades 6-8, 250 of whom are classified as ELs. The school office is staffed by a Principal, 5 Vice Principals, 2 full-time psychologists, 1 Student Assistance Program counselor, and 4 CSPs who oversee the work of PLCs in Math, English, Social Studies, and Science.
- Elementary School #1 is a Title 1 school serving a low-income student population of 240 with 90% Hispanic and half ELs. It has a Family Literacy Center and an after school program serving nearly 100 students.
- Elementary School #2 is a Title 1 school serving just over 400 students, one-fourth of whom are ELs. Its on-site after school program serves over 100 students.

At each secondary school we interviewed the principal and other key administrators or support providers. At each elementary school we interviewed the principal, one instructional support person and two teachers.

Interviews at each of the schools focused on how the school was working to shift instruction toward Common Core standards and to integrate tiers of support for students. Probes asked about resources and supports from the district and external providers that have made a difference for their progress.

Document review

Our document review process included analysis of resources on the district Website: the LCAP for 2017-19, calendars of professional development and testing, communications to parents and the community, announcements of rewards and special pilots underway at individual schools, and a wide range of resources available on the SangerLearns.com open portal. In addition to their scope and sequence by subject by grade, teacher developed units, lessons, and formative assessments among many shared resources, this portal includes a blog for the district's Universal Design for Learning with posts from individual teachers from most district schools describing an effective instructional lesson or practice.

We also obtained documents from district administrators during our Fall 2017 visit. Some of these are included in this report: Sanger Unified School District Goals and Coherence Map, High-Leverage Team Actions Aligned to the Four Critical Questions of a PLC, and the district's MTSS Cycle of Improvement and Self-correcting Feedback Loop. Documents selected for this report met the criteria of: a) on prominent display or in use within the district, or b) a key organizing tool for one or more of the key initiatives.

Data analysis

The interview and document-based data were coded on three dimensions:

- Sanger Initiative: PLCs, Effective Instruction or MTSS (or other);
- Sanger principle for leading change, as identified in prior research:
  Taking a developmental approach, Grounding decisions in evidence, and Building trust and relationships to sustain change;
- Analytic area of interest in the Learning Policy Institute project, based on prior district research: Shifting Curriculum and Instruction, Building Human Capital, Supporting Continuous Improvement, Meeting Student Needs/Student Grouping and Tracking, Supporting the Community and Social & Emotional Learning, and Allocating Resources.

Findings are summarized by the intersection of Effective Instruction and MTSS and Sanger's three change principles with the third initiative, PLCs, woven throughout. In each section, we include evidence relevant to the project's six analytic categories listed above.

EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION: TAKING A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

> *We came from EDI [Explicit Direct Instruction] which was very structured, step by step all the way through. With Common Core you can't do step by step. You need different strategies, and teachers need to let go and help kids to support each other.* –Elementary teacher

With the arrival of Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Sanger leaders faced the challenge of how to leverage and support needed shifts in teaching: from lesson to unit objectives, from teacher talk to student talk, from paper and pencil to online assessments, and from quantitative/ percent measures to rubric-based performance measures. In keeping with Sanger's principal of taking a developmental approach, district leaders honed in on the question of how to build bridges from the district's prior direct instruction (Explicit Direct Instruction, EDI) approach to teaching and learning demands of the new state standards. They had invested years in helping teachers master the teacher-centered direct instruction practices that paid off in annual increasing test scores for all students and English learners (ELs). The new Common Core standards and assessments were a different story. To be successful would require a major shift from instruction focused on mastery of basic skills with simple checks for understanding to more student-centered teaching geared to complex learning and assessment tasks.

District leaders began by crafting language that emphasizes continuity as they carefully sequenced an array of professional development opportunities, starting small and responding to evidence of needs. Over time, Sanger leaders created a range of school-based supports to help strengthen each school's capacity to meet the new standards. Teachers' efforts to develop units and shift instruction are bolstered by district choices of selected instructional frameworks. Frameworks such as Balanced Literacy, Academic Discourse for English Learners, and Universal Design provide both deeper understanding and a structure for shifting instruction from a focus on skills to deeper learning. They provide a mix of underlying concepts and concrete instructional approaches.

Sending clear consistent messages about the new instructional demands

Sanger leaders believed that it was critical to honor what teachers had been doing while introducing a very different way of thinking about instruction and student learning. They honed language that emphasized continuity with past efforts, not a break from the past. They highlighted common elements between direct instruction and student-centered instruction: Both are driven by learning standards, make learning objectives explicit, and entail checks for understanding. And both presume that teachers develop units and lessons rather than implement a published curriculum. But Common Core Standards go farther: deeper learning, student-centered instruction, and more active student engagement, "less teacher talk, more student talk."

The new demands are complex and have implications for all that teachers do. Grade level and subject area PLCs face the challenge of creating lessons and new common formative assessments that embrace broader and deeper learning objectives.[5] So language that relieves pressure and encourages risk-taking is appreciated by teachers and viewed by district staff as part of their job.

As noted earlier, Sanger USD has not adopted a district-wide curricula since 2004 and therefore did not begin a review of Common Core-aligned programs, as many districts did. Rather, as described below, district leaders focused on developing school leaders' deep understanding of CCSS and supporting teacher PLCs' learning to design lessons and assessments to support their students' learning to grade level and course standards.

Starting small, moving gradually

District leaders knew that everyone from district staff to principals to teachers had much to learn to make the shift to Common Core. Through various networks and documents, district leaders understood that the shift for most principals and teachers would be seismic. The challenge was how to sequence different strands so that everyone could move from initially dipping in a toe to slowly incorporating what they were learning into their teaching.

Sanger's history of well-established teacher PLCs worked to their advantage as did its history of preparing principals to be leaders of teacher learning. In addition, Sanger has a tradition of "testing" new ideas with a small number of teachers or in one school.

District leaders hewed to this history in launching Common Core ideas in 2012-13. They started small, beginning with professional development in Common Core math K-8 with a grant from the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation to expand understanding of the new math standards and of the math underlying them. Participants were teams from each school including the principal, Curriculum Support Provider (CSP), and PLC Lead teacher. PLC Leads then shared what they learned with their PLC colleagues as a first step in beginning discussions of the major changes in math teaching expected under Common Core. Sanger became one of ten districts to participate in this "Math in Common" initiative which continues through 2020.

Sanger leaders learned from this early experience in math that PLC Leads did not feel prepared to bring their colleagues up to speed. This led to a new model for professional development: training all teachers, one grade level at a time, so that everyone gets first-hand exposure to the new ideas. With the help of the Bechtel grant and state grants, this model was launched and has persisted.

Through this initiative, Sanger invested in developing math teacher leadership for 21 teachers and selected Curriculum Support Providers (CSPs) in grades 2-8. This group had more intensive exposure to the math content standards, to math fraction progressions through the grades, and to lesson design. These teachers began the process of analyzing math

progressions as a basis for planning and designing lessons to be shared districtwide. This work led to formalizing math Lesson Study[6] across the district with each school determining its own focus and trajectory. Their math learning was also bolstered through their participation Bechtel's Math in Common network of ten districts they initially funded.[7]

During 2012-13 SUSD also introduced teachers to the ELA standards. These professional development sessions included all teachers and aimed to build their understanding the standards and implications for instruction. District leaders noted that these initial learning opportunities did not get into the content of ELA standards at particular grade levels; rather they developed teachers' comprehension of the principles for teaching and learning that ground the new ELA standards for any grade level. This approach was in contrast to teachers' professional development in mathematics through the Bechtel initiative where the focus was on mathematical content.

In parallel, K-1 teachers from four schools worked during the summer and on release days during the year to start revising report cards to reflect the new standards and to pilot standards and instructional shifts and strategies as a source of information for district learning.

Matching supports to instructional shifts

Across subjects and grade levels, both district and school support staff sought various ways to scaffold needed shifts in teaching: from lesson to unit objectives, from teacher talk to student talk, from paper and pencil to online assessments, and from quantitative/percent measures to rubric-based performance measures. Support for these shifts in instruction expanded each year as both district and school leaders saw the need to sustain, differentiate, and decentralize professional learning and supports. The district increased PLC meeting time and professional development, along with site-based support for implementation.

The first step was to increase the time allotted to PLC meetings from two hours every other week to two hours weekly. This was accomplished through a weekly minimum day at the elementary schools and a weekly late start day at the secondary schools. This decision underscored the centrality of teachers working together. As one elementary CSP said: *"We come from a strong PLC district and so depend more on PLCs to help figure it out."*

In summer 2018, teams of teachers and principals will attend a PLC Institute. Although most teachers and administrators went at least once to a PLC Institute sponsored by the Riverside County Office of Education several years ago, some new principals and teachers have not had that experience and others say they would value a refresher. This is consistent with a district mantra 'repainting the Golden Gate Bridge,' pointing to the need for repeated exposure to ideas.

Expanded District Professional Development. Sanger initially followed the strategy of introducing new Common Core instructional expectations to leadership teams of PLC leads, CSPs, and administrators from each school. These sessions introduced the big ideas

and associated language. For example, PLC leaders got training on high leverage practices to carry back to their PLCs. (See Appendix B.)

Subsequently, in response to feedback from Lead teachers, the district moved to provide professional development to all teachers by grade level across elementary schools and by subject area in upper grades. PLC Leads continue to get more specialized training while every teacher gets first hand exposure to new ideas with their grade level/subject area peers. This pattern repeats as the district introduces new ideas and deepens topics already introduced—another instance of "repainting the Golden Gate Bridge," in contrast to a once-and-for-all effort that fades over time. In addition, targeted professional development sessions are provided for all new teachers each year.

SUSD curriculum leaders carefully choose professional development providers. Through formal and informal networks they seek providers and workshops that match their needs and have strong reputations. They observe providers in several Central Valley County Offices before choosing their programs, looking closely at the extent to which offerings can be customized to Sanger's needs.

New instructional frameworks to support shifts. Sanger does not rely on traditional textbook-based curricula with a few exceptions, such as the high school's Integrated Math sequence selected to better match CCSS. Instead, teachers through their PLCs and district support develop and share lessons as they had done under their prior direct instruction focus. They first discovered the need to plan in terms of units rather than individual lessons, given the complexity of the new standards. District professional development in building units supports teachers' ongoing efforts. The units are shared and enhanced within and across schools through PLCs and district-wide grade-level professional development sessions. They are readily available to all on SangerLearns.com where they are linked to locally-developed scope and sequence by subject and grade level.

Teachers' efforts to develop units and shift instruction are bolstered by district choices of selected instructional frameworks. Frameworks such as Balanced Literacy, Academic Discourse for English Learners, and Universal Design provide both deeper understanding and a structure for shifting instruction from a focus on skills to deeper learning. They provide a mix of underlying concepts and concrete instructional approaches.

For example, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, often discussed in the context of special education and a key support for struggling students, was piloted in the middle school by math and ELA teachers. UDL introduces teachers to multiple ways of engaging *all* students and supporting their expressions of learning. The pilot helped district leaders understand how UDL principles can be put into practice and therefore how to hone their supports. As of 2017-18, each school has a site UDL Implementation Leadership Team tasked to model use, support implementation, and understand the potential to support CCSS.

Now every grade level has taken on student engagement and giving kids multiple options to show learning. [We have] a Tournament of Champions where we give students DOK [Depth of Knowledge] level 4 problems that they need to solve as a group. They have roles like a facilitator, a presenter. And then they present. An amazing thing to see. To see the leadership skills come out in the kids and see the teachers become real facilitators and provide formative feedback. It includes a lot of integrated ELD (English Language Development) and speaking with a purpose. –Elementary Principal

From the UDL framework, I created a collaborative culture within my classroom by adding more whiteboards on the wall so students could work together standing up—more engaging for them. –Middle school teacher.

District leaders sought frameworks that would help teachers develop practices to improve academic conversations. This built on several years of professional development in academic discourse and follow-up refreshers, as well as supports and strategies designed specifically for English Learners. Similarly every teacher had prior training and support in Balanced Literacy designed to strengthen unit development in ELA (English Language Arts).

The district has a long history of providing supports for English Learners (ELs) which it continues to expand. In the years immediately prior to Common Core, Sanger paid particular attention to monitoring the progress of long-term ELs (LTELs) and to developing Individualized Language Plans (ILPs) for ELs at risk of becoming LTELs. (See Appendix D for sample ILP.) With the advent of Common Core and its emphasis on academic vocabulary, efforts to support ELs have intensified. Each school has its own Comprehensive ELD (English Language Development) program that shows how they balance Integrated ELD (occurs in the regular classroom) and Designated ELD (specialized instruction at a scheduled time) and their overlap.

In math, Lesson Study --launched by the Bechtel grant described above-- has been the district's vehicle of choice to help K-8 teachers both learn more mathematics and translate their knowledge into powerful lessons for students. Teachers meet several times a year in groups of four schools by grade level to do a full day of Math Lesson Study with the District Math Specialist and a District Instructional Specialist (DIS). They continue to build their capacity to select and implement tasks with higher cognitive demand and to increase academic discourse around the tasks.

Intensified site-based support. Sanger invests heavily in providing support to teachers at each school site. Acknowledging the complexity of translating CCSS into units and lessons, the district has intensified the on-site support provided by content specialists. Schools have traditionally had fulltime Curriculum Support Providers (CSPs), typically exceptional classroom teachers, whose job is to coach and support classroom teachers, one per elementary school and one per subject area in secondary schools. They meet together to

plan and problem solve and are often the pool from which school administrative positions are filled. Now, in addition to CSPs, every elementary school has a Literacy Specialist Teacher (LST) who works with K-3 teachers to advance the district's focus on early literacy. Initially, the LSTs were fulltime in schools with the lowest reading levels and shared by two schools with higher reading levels. Now every elementary school has a fulltime LST. In addition, the district has named five District Instructional Specialists [DIS] who work across schools and subjects.

The district also is using its Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) funds to provide iPads for student in grades 4-12 in all schools to support their learning to take online assessments. The district views this as essential to preparing students, many without technology at home, to succeed on computer-based assessments. At the same time, this becomes one more responsibility. As one elementary support teacher said:

> *There's always tension between learning something new versus refining something you are doing. . . Technology is a struggle too. Learning it takes away from instruction. We give kids a test on paper and pencil and same one on computer and kids do better on paper. How much time should we spend on that?* –Elementary Curriculum Support Provider.

At each level of the district system, educators described their full attention to making sense of and enacting the new state standards. Teachers pointed to how much they have learned and expressed surprise at what they see their students doing.

> *At the beginning it was hard, because I wanted to jump in, but realized that I needed to figure out questions to guide them. What can I ask if they get stuck? It's challenging.* –Elementary teacher.

> *My partner and I have been implementing SLCs [Student Learning Community] where they [students] teach each other. They find their mistakes and need to figure it out. Teachers are seeing that the kids are excited to do it on their own. Even after 19 years I'm learning new ideas.* –Elementary teacher.

The Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction summarized: *"We say the art of teaching has returned: Know, understand, and be able to do."*

MTSS: TAKING A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

> *We're on a journey to make some shifts. Sanger's success comes from maintaining a focus on raising all students' achievement, closing gaps, and creating a safe environment. That's not changed.* –Elementary principal

Sanger's initiative to broaden and strengthen supports for struggling students has deep roots in its culture. *"Every Student, Every Day, Whatever it Takes"* has been a district mantra and moral imperative for over the past decade. At a time when educators and parents worry that

their students will struggle and be stressed out with the high demands of Common Core standards and assessments, SUSD is working on strategies to increase and better integrate student supports.

The Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework "aligns academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning in a fully-integrated system of support for the benefit of all students." [http://www.ocde.us/SUMS/Pages/CA-MTSS.aspx]. This framework is being promoted by the California Department of Education as a way to address equity issues arising from the new standards for academic performance. As with all policies and programs that Sanger administrators review, they considered its merits in terms of their local context and are making it their own.

As noted in the Introduction, Sanger Unified had already developed a strong foundation in academic and behavioral supports for students. District leaders saw the MTSS framework as impetus for integrating and deepening the Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) practices already established in Sanger schools, as well as bringing in social-emotional supports. Both RTI and PBIS specify a pyramid of interventions, ranging in intensity. Tier 1 includes the majority of interventions that take place within the classroom, while Tiers 2 and 3 entail more intensive, out-of-classroom interventions. Figure B shows the academic and behavioral systems of support side by side.

In rolling out its MTSS initiative, district leaders began by making sure that the community and teachers see the initiative as their own, rather than as a state "mandate." They moved forward gradually to establish and refine systems to support the initiative, and they consistently communicated coherence with prior and current improvement efforts. They are supporting principals and teachers to create tiers of support for struggling students in their own school.

Owning the initiative

The district's 2012-13 Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) included MTSS in its action plans to reduce suspension rates and to support progress on ELA and Math, especially among ELs (English Learners), SED (Socio-Economically Disadvantaged) students, and SWD (Students with Disabilities). Parents and community leaders were involved in setting this priority and have confirmed their support in the most recent LCAP.

As with all programs and strategies the district has embraced over the past ten years, Sanger leaders launched the MTSS initiative with the intention of customizing it to fit the district and individual schools and refining it through pilots and feedback from school leaders and teachers. This ensures buy-in from educators and a process of creating demand for effective implementation practices at all system levels.

Establishing and refining systems

A Special Education grant from the state provided initial funding for the district's MTSS initiative. SUSD used the resources to support initial planning and to create a new position of Coordinator of Inclusive Practices and a district MTSS team. Subsequent grants support pilots in specific grade levels and schools, e.g., 1st grade pilot of a program designed for social- emotional support called Second Step (described below).

The district asked each school to create a MTSS team to review data for students with academic and/or behavioral challenges and design appropriate Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions (see Figure B). The teams include the principal, CSP, RSP teacher, teachers, psychologist or counselor, and the Literacy Specialist in elementary schools. Each school team is accountable for developing its own structures and routines for integrating the three MTSS tiers of support within and beyond the classroom.

Sanger USD also undertook the challenge of integrating its data systems to provide information to schools and teachers on students' academic status and behavior status (including attendance, referrals, and suspensions). District leaders knew that it would be crucial for schools to see the coincidence of these measures in order to design effective interventions. SUSD's investment in this enhanced data system, its capacity, and routines for its use in a MTSS cycle of improvement are described in the next section "Using Evidence".

Communicating coherence

Sanger's "Goals and Coherence Map" (Figure A) establishes MTSS as a core district initiative and places it in relation to the Effective Instruction and Professional Learning Community initiatives. In communicating to teachers, school leaders, and parents, district leaders consistently convey a vision of "weaving" this initiative into their ongoing work, rather than "stacking" on something new. They explicitly define bridges to teachers' established routines for RTI and PBIS and to Common Core instruction.

District administrators and staff introduced MTSS to principals and teachers as a marriage of familiar RTI and PBIS routines. Teachers regularly use RTI in their grade-level and course PLCs to meet the needs of struggling students. They discuss for individual students the specific academic or behavioral learning goal and which Tier level (level of intensity) is needed (see Figure B above). Using the DuFour model for PLC practice, they address the four Questions: 1.What do we want students to know and be able to do? 2. How will we know if they know it? 3. How will we respond if they don't know it? 4. How will we respond if they do know it? The third of the four questions calls for a Tier 1 or Tier 2 response, and teacher PLCs are used to determine appropriate interventions (RTIs) through re-teaching the standard in their class or deploying struggling students to another classroom or intervention. For example, several EL students might be pulled out to receive targeted help with vocabulary from an EL specialist. Teachers also regularly use the PBIS system to set
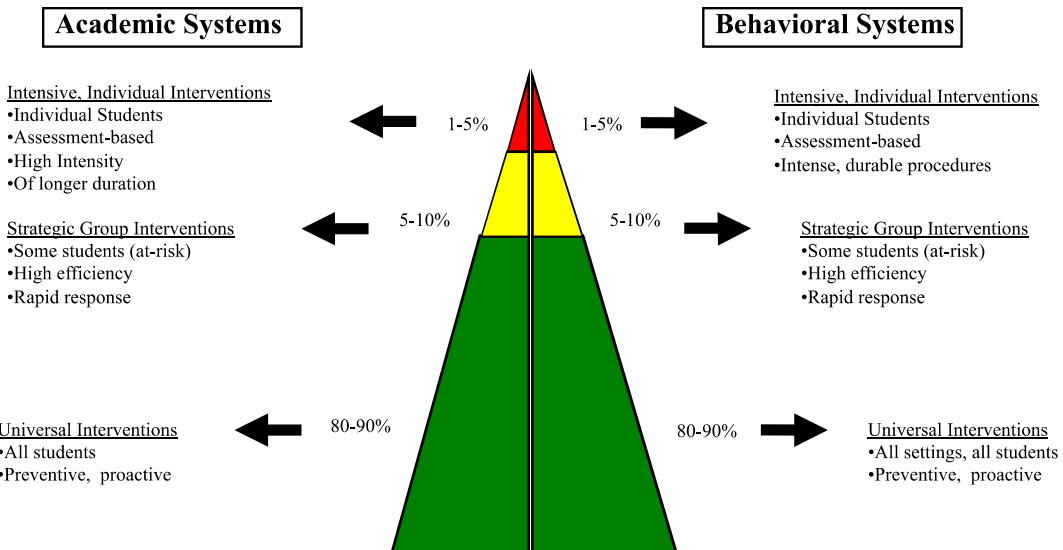
behavior standards and expectations and to respond to particular kinds of student behavior problems within the classroom and in Tier 2 interventions.

Figure B. Pyramid of Interventions

The Pyramid of Interventions represents three levels or tiers of instructional and behavioral intervention with the expectations that at least 80 percent of students' needs will be met in the bottom tier. The broadest tier at the base represents instruction for all students, including classroom instruction and interventions to which students are deployed during the school day. The interventions are targeted to students' particular level of need ranging from work on particular skills to enrichment activities. The second tier represents instruction targeted to small groups of students during classroom time to provide just-in-time instruction to those needing additional help. The third tier at the top represents more intense individual interventions for those whose needs are not met by Tier 1 or Tier 2 interventions. The figure below illustrates the Pyramid and its application both to academics and behavior.

Response to Intervention

School-Wide Systems for Student Success

| Academic Systems | | Behavioral Systems |

Intensive, Individual Interventions
•Individual Students
•Assessment-based
•High Intensity
•Of longer duration

1-5%   1-5%

Intensive, Individual Interventions
•Individual Students
•Assessment-based
•Intense, durable procedures

Strategic Group Interventions
•Some students (at-risk)
•High efficiency
•Rapid response

5-10%   5-10%

Strategic Group Interventions
•Some students (at-risk)
•High efficiency
•Rapid response

Universal Interventions
•All students
•Preventive, proactive

80-90%   80-90%

Universal Interventions
•All settings, all students
•Preventive, proactive

Sanger leaders further define a bridge between the equity goal of UDL to increase access for all students to academic learning and the MTSS goal of addressing needs of struggling students. Messages to teachers frame UDL as a Tier 1 instructional vehicle for implementing MTSS. The goal for UDL is inclusiveness –not just as typically applied to Special Education or 'differentiation' of individual instruction, but to encourage a broader range of student diversity in learning. Teachers are prompted to expand opportunities for students to engage in specific content by organizing multiple pathways and modalities for learning (e.g. auditory, visual, kinesthetic), express their interests, and demonstrate their learning. With this scaffolding of coherent approaches to improving student achievement and MTSS leadership in place, Sanger created learning opportunities for school leaders and teachers to understand and respond to the initiative.

Engaging principals and teachers in creating tiers of support

Professional development for MTSS has evolved from initial orientation sessions for district and school leaders to pilots and explorations to test out and refine specific kinds of support for struggling students. Simultaneously, the District MTSS Team has led the development of rating scales for measuring implementation in classrooms and providing feedback and support (see "*Using Evidence*").

In keeping with established district practice, school teams are expected to develop Tier 2 and 3 responses for RTI and PBIS and integrate them according to student needs. Teachers' work on Tier 1 responses to students who might struggle academically is integral to UDL, and examples are being shared through the SangerLearns.org UDL Blog. Thus far, the UDL Blog, which is open to the public, includes posts from about a dozen district teachers at different schools and grade levels.

During 2016-17 the district initiated a pilot of Second Step, a program for tiered social-emotional supports in the elementary grades. The program includes a curriculum to develop children's social-emotional skills – mindfulness, bullying prevention, empathy, self-regulation, community –to reduce both academic and behavioral problems. Initially it was piloted by 1st grade teachers in all K-8 schools. Gradually it spread to other grade levels, and currently all teachers are including one lesson per week in their classroom. This developmental trajectory is a good example of how the district seeds and learns from a promising instructional resource: the pilot supported 1st grade teachers' learning, created "demand" from other teachers impressed by its results, and informed school and district leaders of ways to adapt and support this strand of MTSS work.

As with the move to Common Core instruction, teachers vary widely in their readiness to integrate social-emotional teaching and learning into their classroom instruction. Sanger leaders are thus supporting teachers' progress on the MTSS initiative by customizing their feedback and supports. For example, a district administrator visiting the classroom of a second-year 3rd grade teacher modeled how social-emotional learning could be integrated

into a narrative writing assignment. She used a poster showing a playground dispute and writing prompts: "what is happening? What would you do in response?" By illustrating how easy it can be to weave social-emotional learning opportunities into regular academic instruction, the administrator reduced this new teacher's anxiety over meeting expectations of the MTSS initiative.

At the secondary level, Sanger High School teachers have been experimenting with various ways of meeting the academic needs of struggling students in the classroom by:

- Designing and evaluating various interventions for students with Ds and Fs during their early years of high school and approaches to credit recovery for students in later grades;
- Using UDL guidelines in PLCs to design unit lessons that increase student engagement in content areas -- and sharing what they learn with their colleagues;
- Mainstreaming LTELs (Long Term English Learners who have not been reclassified due to poor academic performance) by eliminating SDAIE classes[8] (Science department) or by expanding the number of SDAIE classes and including English Only students in them (English department). In both experiments underway in 2017-18 the aim is to engage ELs in more rigorous content instruction.

The high school and middle school also are working on ways to support students beyond the classroom (Tier 2 interventions in the MTSS pyramid):

- Sanger High created eight student-parent advocate positions, classified and staffed by college graduates with some credentials, to work with students (and their families) who have fallen through the cracks in academic performance before entering high school;
- Sanger High is piloting a suicide prevention program to address a disturbing surge in mental health crises during the school day;
- Sanger High and Washington Academic Middle School (WAMS) are using Restorative Justice approaches to reduce suspensions or the time a student spends out of school, devoting personnel time to address the considerable staff demands of this model;
- WAMS created a team of four VPs, two full-time psychologists, and one Student Assistant Program counselor that meets with students in groups on anger management and grief counseling and determine interventions for troubled students based on the nature and pattern of their violations.

The success of Sanger's MTSS initiative hinges on the professional learning that it promotes through such experimentation and on how well effective practices are harvested within and across PLCs in a school, between schools, and between schools and the district leaders who

support the work. This is the developmental trajectory that Sanger's continuous improvement has always followed.

ADAPTING RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS TO DISTRICT CONTEXT

Sanger USD's Effective Instruction and MTSS initiatives were united by a common vision: to improve the options and opportunities for all Sanger students to demonstrate what they learn and to pursue their dreams. District leaders consistently conveyed this purpose for crafting instruction in terms of Common Core standards and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and better integrating student supports through the MTSS framework. Decisions about resource allocation and partnerships for professional development followed these priorities and the vision of extending and enhancing all students' opportunities for success. Sanger USD leaders were discriminating in terms of both the focus and quality of resources they chose to advance district educators' learning.

State funds and resources

California's move to the Local Control Funding formula (LCFF) dovetailed with Sanger USD's established culture of internal vs external accountability as the engine for continuous improvement. The LCFF also increased the district's state funding through additional "concentration funds" that were made available to districts with more than 55 percent students below poverty level.

The process of developing a Local Control accountability Plan (LCAP) both deepen SUSD's relationships with parents and community leaders and forged a shared commitment to the vision for district improvement. Funding priorities to enhance extra-classroom supports for student success include:

- Early Literacy development through expansion of school-based preschool programs
- At-risk student support through expansion of school-based after school programs
- Student readiness for online state assessments through purchase of iPads

In addition, the California Department of Education's online resources to support instruction and assessments aligned with CCSS have become increasingly valuable to district educators. Sanger administrators and teachers have been strategic in gleaning resources useful for informing instruction and report that the state has steadily improved the web-based resources. Notably, the state's current system for Interim Comprehensive Assessments provides fine-grained data on student learning gaps that teacher PLCs are using to focus their instruction.

County offices of education

For over a decade, Sanger USD has been strategic in seeking out and contracting with particular County Offices of Education (COE) that excel in providing a particular kind of professional development that fits their improvement agenda. As noted earlier, Sanger's PLC training with the DuFours was through the Riverside County Office of Education. During

2005-8 Sanger created a calendar of administrators and teachers who traveled to Riverside to participate in PLC training, gradually transforming the district culture to one of collaboration and shared accountability. The district's current PLC initiative is intended to revitalize teacher team collaboration with a focus on Effective Instruction and MTSS.

When faced with the challenge of preparing district administrators and teachers to meet Common core State Standards (CCSS), SUSD leaders sought out the best professional development resources that fit their priorities. Based on evidence of student achievement gaps, the district sought support for secondary math, early literacy, ELs and especially long-term ELs (LTELs). The criteria they use to judge "good fit" with district needs include a) professional developers with top-quality content expertise and successful experience working with practitioners and b) readiness to customize professional development to the district and on-site support to district schools. Over the past five years SUSD has contracted with these COEs for targeted professional development:

- Tulare County for math, PBS, EL, and Early Literacy/ Writers' Workshop
- Ventura County for ELITE training for EL and LTEL instruction and interventions
- Orange County for development of LEAP after school and family night programs

Sanger's local Fresno COE has provided district administrators with support in managing their LCFF and LCAP process.

Foundations and Networks

The S.H. Cowell Foundation has been a long-standing funder of place-based improvement efforts in Sanger, CA. For more than a decade Ken Doane of the Cowell Foundation has partnered with the school district and with the local Boy's and Girl's Clubs to support youth development. The Cowell Foundation's multi-year support for district leadership development – in particular the School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams (SAALT) initiative and protocol for school walkthroughs – established the school improvement routines and pipeline of school leaders that ground the district's capacity to respond successfully to new standards for student achievement.

The Central Valley foundation involved SUSD in a network of eight districts focused on English Learners under the leadership of Stanford University's Kenji Hakuta. The network's ultimate focus on long term ELs (LTELS –students who have been in the system for several years without meeting state standards for reclassification) prompted Sanger to seek new training (through Ventura County) to address the special needs of these students. This network's focus on analyzing data to identify gaps and challenges was in synch with the district commitment to evidence-based decision making.

The Bechtel Foundation has been the key source of support for Sanger's initiative to improve math education. The Bechtel Math Network (involving math leaders from ten California districts) provides a rich learning environment for Sanger math educators. This network's

approach to building professional community across districts resonates with Sanger's PLC culture; in turn, Sanger's PLC culture has been fertile ground for developing new math education practices.

USING EVIDENCE TO GUIDE DECISIONS

Sanger does well at trying new things and reevaluating and not being afraid to make changes if not working well. Always look at what's not working for kids. We 'make it our own and make it fit' – we're not about adopting programs, rather adapt and fit them to our students. This is a big factor in our success for ELs. –High School Curriculum Support Provider.

Using evidence to refine policies and practices is integral to Sanger's culture of continuous improvement. Established routines for evidence use include: teacher PLCs using common assessments to identify student learning gaps and target instruction, principals presenting school data at annual "Summits" with district administrators to identify improvement priorities for their schools, and School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams (SAALT) of principals and a district leader conducting instructional rounds (classroom walkthroughs) to hone their support for teacher learning.

District leaders regularly examine student data to set priorities for improvement and evaluate policy decisions. They rely on both formal and informal feedback from district and school staff to assess the effectiveness of their supports to teachers and schools. And when launching a pilot intervention or particular focus such as long-term English learners (LTELs), they systematically collect data to track what is going well and not so well in order to make mid-course corrections.

It was thus standard practice for Sanger USD to place priority on evidence use as a strategy for progressing on its initiatives to meet Common Core standards and enhance supports for struggling students. The district invested heavily in improving its infrastructure and capacity to provide educators access to a broad range of student data. It refined routines for data use and added new ones – developing schedules and scaffolds for more intensive data use at all levels of the system. And it launched new pilots for Effective Instruction and MTSS to help develop evidence-based best practices for Sanger schools.

Building a comprehensive and accessible data system

Sanger USD grew its data department from one part-time person in 2012 to an Information Systems team headed by a former secondary school VP and staffed by two full-time data analysts and a data base administrator. Each of the analysts oversees the development and use of a specific subsystem and strands of data.

The data team, in collaboration with district leaders, expanded and integrated existing systems. Current data systems include one that merges Illuminate (that tracks academic

performance data) and Powerschool (that tracks behavior and outcome data required by the state). The merged system flags Ds and Fs and Attendance as well as Benchmark academic data. The other subsystem is called ELLevation and tracks performance data for ELs (including LTELs) and RFEPS; it also tracks data for IFEP and migrant students. (See Appendix C for sample Individualized Language Plan use of data.)

The team facilitates administrators' access to this enhanced data system by providing iDashboards reports on trends over time, with links to individual schools and classrooms (but not individual students). Principals use these data for their annual Summits (described below), which are attended by the two data managers who can query the data in real time as needed.

Teachers may submit requests for specific kinds of classroom data broken down by individual students. Teacher PLCs can then use these data to assess their students' progress across multiple assessments and behavior measures. They can also use Illuminate to access a databank of questions tied to the standards. In addition, K-5 teachers can link their gradebook and assignments to create standards-based report cards.

An important part of the story of Sanger's investment in a comprehensive data system is the collaboration that went into its development. The data experts who created the system described the process: "We had lots of back and forth with the District Office folks about what they say they need and what goes into our supporting that need. So it is well-integrated." Because all district leaders were involved in this development process, the data system is well-designed to support and track Sanger's progress on its two initiatives. The integration of students' academic performance and behavior measures provides capacity to follow "the whole child" over time.

Developing and using evidence to improve student learning

Sanger's effective use of evidence to continuously improve professional practice and student success goes well beyond periodic reviews of standardized data. District progress on the two initiatives also is supported by refined and new routines for teachers, schools, and the district office to use evidence from observations and experience to evaluate and improve their practice.

Teachers

Teacher PLCs' data use routines haven't changed with the new instructional and MTSS initiatives, though they have faced challenges in developing grade-level or course data useful for assessing Common Core teaching and learning. Beginning in 2015, the district doubled the allocation of time for PLC meetings through its early release/late start schedules, providing them additional time needed to grapple with new forms of assessments and data.

Since the advent of Common Core State Standards, PLCs at all grade levels have been refining the data they use to assess student learning to standards. District leaders gave teachers the option of administering CA Interim Assessment Blocks to determine how if at all the online data reports were useful. (The answer is not so much initially, since item-level data were not available). Current consensus among Sanger teachers is that the SBAC Interim Comprehensive Assessment (ICA) is worthwhile because the online reports provide item data that are useful for identifying patterns in student performance and addressing gaps. This year all Sanger teachers in grades 3-8 and 11 gave the ICA assessments in January.

In addition, the district is supporting PLCs' efforts to develop Common Formative Assessments (CFAs) that are useful for monitoring their students' progress toward CC standards and developing responses to performance gaps. Unlike the CFAs that teacher PLCs developed in the past to assess students' basic skills and address learning gaps, the new CFAs are using performance tasks and scoring rubrics to assess student learning to higher-order standards. Starting this year all teachers are involved in a professional development process, supported by Solution Tree (the umbrella organization for DuFour PLC training), for assessing the rigor and relevance of their PLC-developed CFAs. Teacher PLCs now have a rubric and protocol to help them better align their assessments to Smarter Balanced performance standards. (See Appendix D).

Students

Even students are involved in evidence use through their own Student Learning Communities (SLCs). As one elementary principal described:

> *In the past we gave kids a test, scored it, and gave it back and that was the end. Sometimes a retake. With the Student Learning Community, they have a unit and test every five weeks. Students look at the results and look at their notes in small collaborative groups and look at the strategies and explain why they missed it. Then they retake and review and discuss.*

The district is bringing students into both understanding and owning the standards for assessing their mastery in content areas and using evidence of their performance to focus their individual improvement efforts.

Principals

Principal Summits have a long history in Sanger and have evolved considerably over the years, from much time devoted to locating data to now having ready access to data. The structure has changed from a principal presenting results publicly as a form of accountability to three principals sitting with district leaders, including top administrators and the data team, in a collaborative problem-solving mode to produce an Action Plan for each school. The Plan focuses district staff supports to the school site and is refined over time. Sanger's readily

available system data has supported this refinement of Summits to better hone in on school improvement needs, as has the shift in emphasis from accountability to coaching and support.

School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams (SAALT) routines for school walkthroughs were well established prior to the advent of Common Core and have been refined to support principals' learning of the new standards and how to support teachers' shifts in instruction. The basic routine involves a district administrator and principals from 4-5 schools visiting one of their schools each month with a specific focus for classroom observations chosen by the principal; then the principals meet together as a PLC to discuss their observations and help focus the host principal's next steps.

Since Common Core, Sanger leaders have honed the SAALT process through training in Instructional Rounds, taking purely descriptive notes on the chosen focus rather than asking questions of students. Building on their knowledge of Common Core standards and instructional strategies, principals tend to focus on specific aspects of classroom instruction, such as academic discourse. Immediately after each walkthrough, observers post their notes by classroom and then the group looks for patterns. For example, they might see 70% teacher talk or ¾ of students working collaboratively.

> *The idea now is not so much what we got from it but that school administrators get more comfortable with the process so they can train teachers to do this and draw conclusions themselves.* –District administrator

To scaffold routines for data use in SAALT teams and PLCs the district developed templates that link data review to actionable next steps. In the case of SAALT/principal PLCs, the focus is on crafting responses to gaps between observed practice and Common Core practice standards for a school. The next step is using evidence to distill and share best practices, first in each SAALT team and then districtwide. In addition, SAALT teams are working to weave English Language Development (ELD) into their school visit observations, based on training in integrated design for ELD from the Ventura County Office of Education.

District Administrators

The district developed new evidence-use routines to support Sanger's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). A MTSS Cycle of Improvement brings together district and site leaders to focus on reducing suspensions and failing grades, especially among students struggling with language and behavioral/emotional disabilities.

> *Now we start with the school [data] then up a level to SAALT team, then administrator PLC, then the whole team comes together as MTSS team so we can think at the system level.* –Associate Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction

Sanger leaders established a cycle for data meetings that is calendared throughout the year. At the school level, every 6 weeks the site's MTSS team looks at students' grades, EL benchmarks, RTI data, and other indicators of student well-being in order to hone in on patterns or individual students for intervention. SAALT teams follow the same calendar, each meeting focused on a particular data strand. The district Administration PLC, including SAALT representatives, follows up with a cross-school analysis of the same data. This process ensures site-specific data use to focus interventions, cross-school sharing of issues and effective interventions, and district support of ongoing school improvement efforts that ideally integrate academic and behavioral interventions for struggling students. (See Appendix E.)

The district coordinator of Sanger's MTSS initiative described how the improvement process worked during 2016-17:

> *We used an improvement cycle over the year: what trends do we see? What changes in action should we make? Our target groups are ELs, foster and homeless students. The district MTSS team shared back to principals who leaned into their PLCs. We followed two week cycles involving SAALT teams, our district team looking at district-level data, and the cabinet. Based on the data, we create an action plan and try to engender best practices.*

In addition to tracking and responding to student academic and behavior data, the school and district MTSS teams are using a district-designed rubric to assess their progress on the initiative. They focus on: leadership; ongoing evaluation and assessment system; curriculum and instruction, culture, capacity and sustainability; and funding. This self-assessment process is helping school teams improve site-based practices and is providing the district office with information to help target its support.

Learning from teacher feedback and pilots

Sanger regularly relies on teacher feedback and builds pilots into its improvement efforts to refine levers and supports for change. In its efforts to better align PLC practices with current initiatives, district curriculum and instruction leaders worked with teachers to develop unit assessments that can serve as common formative assessments – the backbone of PLC evidence use. After teachers judged Illuminate's pre-built unit assessments as too long and ill-suited to students' readiness for online assessments, the district chunked the unit benchmarks to shorter tests and teachers have been developing scoring rubrics in their PLCs. Almost every major initiative starts small allowing time for feedback to hone the best ways to proceed,

District leaders get feedback about teachers' instructional struggles from Curriculum Support Providers and through SAALT team walk-throughs. In response, they are able to better focus and design their supports for teacher learning and change. For example, when

CSPs reported that teachers felt the need for more embedded professional development, such as coaching and lesson study, district professional development shifted in this direction.

Several pilots have supported the Effective Instruction and MTSS initiatives. For example, in launching Universal Design for Learning (UDL), district MTSS leaders identified a small number of teachers in each school who were interested in trying out UDL in their classrooms. These pilot teachers provided information on their own successes and struggles, which helped district leaders determine what kind of professional development would be most useful as all teachers take on UDL.

Likewise, Sanger's 1st grade pilot of Second Step was designed to generate examples of how teachers can weave social-emotional learning into their lessons. Observations in pilot teachers' classrooms made clear to district administrators and support staff that teacher support would need to be differentiated. In particular, beginning teachers struggled with the demands of Common Core and needed active guidance and modeling for ways to seamlessly bring in opportunities for students to develop social-emotional skills.

Informal "pilots" are also being carried out by teachers who are empowered and accountable to improve student success. For example, the Sanger High Science department's experiment to mainstream ELs in regular classes will provide valuable information on how to meet academic learning needs of struggling ELs at the secondary level. The science teachers are testing their hypothesis that the practice of assigning ELs to SDAIE classes with "watered-down" curricula limits their academic success. Evidence thus far suggests that LTELs are benefiting from greater exposure to academic language, while newcomers may require the more intensive ELD support that SDAIE classes provide.

Overall, Sanger has unusually complex data systems and intensive routines for collecting, analyzing, and using evidence. So much so that top leaders ask themselves: "Are we data rich and action poor? How can we look at the data, analyze, synthesize and get to action efficiently?"

BUILDING LEADERSHIP AND TRUST TO SUSTAIN CHANGE

People in the district office know your face and name. We're all in this together. Between our focus on PLCs and PBIS, we all care so much about the kids. [The district message is] 'We're going to get you to where you need to be. Everyone can do it. You're all a part of that'. –Elementary teacher

Over the years Sanger leaders have taken seriously the need to actively build and maintain trust and positive relationships inside the system and with parents and the community. They recognize that bringing about change in professional practice is dramatically different from adopting a program. It depends not only on fostering ownership of the reform vision but also on building trusting relationships within and between levels of the system. This principle for

leading change was pivotal to Sanger's stunning turnaround in student achievement during 2004-2012.

Sanger leaders knew that achieving the shift from direct instruction to Common Core instruction and building a stronger safety net for students would entail nurturing the human and social infrastructure fundamental to real and lasting change. They would need to build new leadership teams in the central office and schools, sustain a culture of relationships in schools and trust between the district administrators and teachers, and engage parents and the community in learning about and supporting district improvement efforts.

Building on prior collaboration and trust

Sanger's strong culture of collaboration developed gradually over several years as district leaders' worked to break down the silos that typically isolate professionals in district offices and in classrooms. SUSD's PLC initiative was pivotal in defining collaboration to ensure all students' success as a moral imperative. The PLCs that grew at all system levels are both rare and cherished by district professionals. Especially unusual is dialogue and coordination between Special Education and Regular Education departments and staff. The resulting collaboration and trust between special education and regular teachers in Sanger schools is important capacity for school progress on the district's MTSS initiative.

Key to the MTSS initiative is further breaking down silos that might inhibit integrating academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support for struggling students. To this end, the district MTSS Team includes professionals with specialized expertise and roles relevant to students who regularly need Tier 2 or Tier 3 behavioral support. It brings the Director of Pupil Services and Director of Child Welfare and Attendance together with the Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Chief Financial Officer, the two Area Administrators, Coordinator of ELD, Coordinator of Grants and Program Development, Information Services Manager, a teacher, and the Coordinator of Inclusive Practices. Relationships among team members are grounded in mutual respect and trust, and the MTSS initiative is forging new channels of communication and generating ideas for collaboration across specialized roles and responsibilities. Referring to Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, the MTSS coordinator explained. "We're aligning what used to be separate systems of support. The pyramids are no longer separate, but more like a grid or matrix to address multiple needs of individual students."

Developing Leadership

The district strategically brought two highly-respected principals into the central office to head up the new initiatives. Each has a strong track record of leading teacher learning and supporting school improvement in high-poverty district schools. These leaders put a trusted, even revered, face on each of the district's key change initiatives. Other coordinators and specialists in the district office are also highly-regarded educators.

Because Sanger has a long and deep pipeline for leadership development – from PLC leads to CSPs to VPs to Principals to district specialists and administrators – pulling great principals from schools and great teachers from school leadership positions and classrooms does not deplete the schools' capacity for continuous improvement. This may well be SUSD's greatest advantage relative to demographically similar districts. With a strong backbone of teacher leadership in schools, the district can bring in trusted superstars to mobilize, lead and support the challenging, collaborative work it takes to qualitatively improve student outcomes.

Remembering to work 'below the green line'

District and school administrators learned during Sanger's turnaround years that formal designs for improvement will never come to life without work "Below the Green Line". This term, introduced by organization consultant Steve Zuieback, refers to a diagram that places informal conditions of relationships, identity, and trust below a green line that separates them from formal structures, policies, and plans. Over the years, when confronted with push-back from teachers on a district policy or practice (such as the short-lived iPad classroom observation tool), district and school leaders recognized the need to work 'below the green line'. They have learned over and over again that taking seriously teachers' and school leaders' perspectives on how to best serve Sanger students is crucial both for refining district decisions and building change leadership.

When challenged to make major shifts in instruction and build new strategies to support struggling students, school leaders and teachers may well feel pressure to move quickly. At risk is the time that it takes to nurture relationships and re-focus educators' identity to include making and leading change, while perhaps sacrificing a sense of efficacy in the short run. Yet this is especially the time when work below the green line matters most.

One principal captured the challenge of maintaining a school culture of relationships among adults and between adults and students:

> *When I came into the school [last year] I saw that everyone was so busy, no 'good mornings', everyone with blinders on. So we're committing to creating a culture of relationships –not only to kids but to each other. [Now] feels like a place of people not a place of business. We have things for people struggling and for honors, but what about those in the middle? And are they making connections with adults? So we are working hard at 'building relationships with your kids'… We know the importance of having one caring adult.*

In this view, schools' continuous improvement under new state standards and expectations depends fundamentally on adhering to Sanger's long-standing call to actively nurture relationships and trust. This principle applies to teachers' work with students, principals' work with teachers, and district administrators' and staffs' work with principals and teachers.

District leaders acknowledge this crucial element of leading change in their mantra: "Going slow and plowing deep."

Building relationships with Parents and the Community

SUSD has a solid track record of partnering with parents and the community to support student development and well-being. Over the years, each school has created an open, welcoming environment for parents. All elementary schools have family literacy nights, when parents or guardians of primary grade students enjoy listening to readings with their child and receive books. Schools at all grade levels welcome parents to visit and help out in classrooms and the school. As noted, Sanger has used LCFF concentration funds to significantly expand both its preschool and afterschool programs, bringing more parents into the schools on a daily basis.

In addition, the district has an educational program for Spanish-speaking parents that has engaged large numbers of parents over recent decades. Parents for Quality Education (PIQE) is a national, certificate-granting program designed to help Spanish-speaking parents support their sons and daughters to achieve college readiness and success. Sanger's program annually graduates approximately 100 parents and is highly valued by parents in the community.

Also notable is the district's long involvement and leadership in a broad-based community partnership to support Sanger youth. Sanger's Community of Caring Task Force has been meeting first monthly and now bi-weekly for over a decade with the mission to serve the needs of Sanger youth by sharing information and collaborating to address problems that surface. Chaired by local Pastor Sam, the meetings are well attended by leaders of local youth organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, civic leaders such as Chamber of Commerce head and City Council members, police officer(s), a district representative, and pastors of all Sanger churches. The Task Force provides a web of youth support beyond the district.

These district-community partnerships helped Sanger to get broad community backing for the new Common Core State Standards. Initially, when word got out about California's new education standards, an element of the Sanger community began a campaign against the standards that included leafleting parking lots with flyers that labeled the new standards as "communist". Superintendent Navo asked his colleagues on the Community of Caring Task Force to help dissipate parent fears; and they trusted his judgment that the standards will bring better outcomes for students. The respect and trust for the district that was established in this community forum meant that civic leaders confidently stepped up to back Sanger's instruction initiative. Also, the fact that the superintendent's children attend district schools made his claim to parents that Common Core standards are "good for our kids" trustworthy.

Sanger's LCAP process further deepened and expanded its partnership with parents and community members. Through a process of recruitment and application, with help from Pastor Sam, the district brought together a diverse committee of 25 members representing low-SED communities, ELs, foster and homeless students, along with leaders of the teachers' union and classified staff. Through an elaborate process of vetting and voting on potential goals, the committee agreed on priorities for enhancing the district's social-emotional and behavioral supports for students. One challenge that Sanger faces is reaching parents or guardians of students most in need, especially foster and homeless youth. This is a frontier for district and school improvement efforts, being led by the new district coordinator of EL practices and parent engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

Our earlier study of Sanger USD's dramatic turnaround in student achievement --under federal No Child Left Behind law and the California State Test of basic skills-- concluded that the district's success was rooted in its culture of continuous improvement and core principles for leading change. That research ended in 2012, when district leaders were turning their attention to challenges posed by the new Common Core State Standards. Our report concluded with a question we and other observers were asking: "Is this simply a story of reaching low-level state standards, and will the district be able to stay the course after the more demanding CCSS assessments are implemented?"

This study – based on data collected during Fall 2017 and focused on Sanger's response to California's CCSS – reaches pretty much the same conclusions as our earlier study. A school district can achieve significant improvement in student achievement to the extent that its culture embeds learning in the daily lives of educators. And this requires leaders at all system levels who know how to nurture and sustain a culture of continuous improvement.

Our recent interviews and observations attest to the robustness of Sanger's culture. We continue to find:

- Collaboration within and between levels of the district system
- Leadership of teacher learning and a deep pipeline of educators ready to step into higher positions
- Shared accountability for all students' success within schools and between each school and district administration and staff.

We also find that Sanger's principles for leading change continue to operate. Remarkably, though not surprising in light of the leadership pipeline, this leadership culture has deepened with superintendent succession and shifts in district administrators and addition of staff over the past 5-6 years. Each and every SUSD leader "gets" and acts on the principles of

- Taking a developmental approach to leading change
- Adapting resources and supports to fit district and school contexts
- Using evidence to guide decisions
- Building leadership and trust to sustain change

These principles positioned Sanger well for a transition to CCSS. They translate directly into key strategies for leading change: a) go slow and communicate pathways to change; b) build on strengths of teacher mindsets and skills, c) monitor how schools and teachers are responding and back off when needed, move in with supports when needed; d) be transparent and maintain trust and working relationships as fundamental to getting the information and feedback needed to calibrate district action.

Sanger was strategic in focusing on two key initiatives as engines for moving the system to achieve student success under the higher state standards for student learning and college and career readiness. Superintendent Navo consistently conveyed the vision that unites them: that all students will have options and opportunities to demonstrate what they learn and pursue their dreams. The mottos "Dream big, Work Hard, and Believe!" and "Every child, every Day, whatever it Takes!" focused Sanger educators on the vision and moral imperative grounding district improvement efforts. SUSD's Effective Instruction initiative defines bridges between the district's earlier direct instruction regime and Common Core's deeper and more demanding instructional goals. Its MTSS initiative supports the integration of existing tiers of academic and behavioral support with new tiers of support for students' social-emotional development.

The body of this report documents how Sanger's leadership principles ground and guide the district's gradual progress on its two initiatives, resulting in students' relative success on SBAC assessments for three years in a row. Here we offer some guidance for districts gleaned from Sanger. Then we consider how state policies and resources might be strengthened to support districts' progress toward meeting Common Core standards.

"Takeaways" from Sanger

Lessons from Sanger's success in moving teaching and learning toward the new, more demanding state standards pertain to both the *what* and *how* of their change efforts. The question of *what* Sanger leaders did to bring about effective change hinged on district leaders' sense of "fit" with the district. As Superintendent Navo put it: "It may be hard for other districts to understand, but our decisions are always about 'what fits Sanger Unified'." The importance of building on district strengths and history can get lost when attention is focused on "what works" in general, rather than on specific strengths of particular contexts.

A key lesson From Sanger regarding *what* districts should invest in to support educators' progress toward CCSS is: *Focus on initiatives and supports that fit the mindset and skills that schools and teachers bring to the challenges for change.*

Capacities that SUSD had developed over the previous decade fundamentally framed district leaders' decisions about initiatives, frameworks, partnerships, professional development models, and in-house innovations to invest in during the early years of the district's transition to CCSS. These conditions and building blocks included:

- Continuity of district and school administrators and missions
- A stable, well-prepared teaching force and broad teacher leadership
- Teacher grade-level and course PLCs experienced in using student learning standards to design curriculum, instruction, and assessments
- Systems and practices for addressing student academic and behavioral needs through tiers or levels of support
- Collaborative district-community and school-parent relationships
- Track record of successful foundation grants and partnerships in support of SUSD initiatives

District leaders' decisions about what to invest in initially to move educators forward on CCSS built on these capacities strategically:

- The two initiatives –Effective Instruction and MTSS- were explicitly aligned with the district's prior instructional and behavioral systems.
- New positions to lead the initiatives were staffed by strong trusted leaders with deep histories in the district.
- Professional development in grade-level and course content standards was geared to developing the deep understandings that teacher PLCs' need in order to align their curriculum, instruction, and formative assessments with the new standards.
- CCSS-aligned resources –including Math in Common, Integrated Math, and Balanced Literacy – supported teacher PLCs' work on instructional change (in lieu of textbook adoption).
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) served as a vehicle for integrating and weaving together the new academic and social-emotional agendas for enriching teaching and learning.
- Early Literacy development was integrated into expanded preschool and afterschool programs that were already established in schools serving low-income students of color.
- CCSS leadership development was supported through a renewed grant from the S. H. Cowell foundation, a long-term partner in developing district leadership.

How Sanger leaders have gone about leading these initiatives is as important as their strategic decisions about what to invest in. Sanger's experience offers a model of how to avoid top-down district mandates and compliance mentalities that sabotage real change.

- *Build on where you are vs. sudden change in direction.* Sanger leaders focused on what was good about their long-term investment in direct instruction as segue to a very different Common Core pedagogy, using familiar language to describe new expected practices. They sought links between past and present demands both to underscore the value of prior work and to smooth transitions, and they honed pressure and supports to match schools' and teachers' readiness.

- *Give educators the chance to "opt in" vs. requiring implementation of specific curricula.* Provide opportunities for individual schools and/or teachers to try out new ideas or resources and share their experiences for district learning and decisions about next steps.

- *Make ongoing adjustments based on feedback vs. pressing for "fidelity".* If an improvement effort isn't working well, make early adjustments based on feedback from teachers. Having systems in place for feedback is key to refining, as well as building ownership of, a specific approach to improving student outcomes.

- *Establish routines at every level for evidence use vs. relying on top-down monitoring of annual test scores.* Sanger benefits from weekly and monthly routines for gathering a range of evidence of student learning at all system levels (e.g., SAALT teams, PLCs), which are both learning opportunities for participants and informative to district leaders.

- *Create data reports targeted to educators' questions vs. collecting and reporting more data than can be digested.* Focus on reporting data that is actionable for educators. Even with Sanger's culture of evidence use, district and school leaders struggle to translate data into action when presented with complex, comprehensive data reports.

- *Weave in new ideas and learning expectations vs. stacking them.* When introducing something new, show how it fits in with current practice rather than adding onto everything else. This works only when there is communication and collaboration across district departments: the more a district office operates in silos, the more likely that schools and teachers will experience disconnected expectations.

- *Invest in growing leaders within the district vs. hiring from outside.* Sanger is blessed with a long history of stable and consistent district administration and Board governance, making its leadership pipeline extremely effective in producing strong leaders immersed in district culture. This ensures continuity of principles and practices to sustain continuous improvement.

- *Vet professional development providers carefully vs. relying on "usual suspects".* Sanger, through networking and observing providers in County Offices around the Central Valley, carefully selects providers, programs, and workshops that are high-quality and match their needs. Key is whether or not a provider will be a good partner in customizing and adapting their practice to district schools and teachers.

- *Focus on the district's vision to expand student opportunities for success vs. on what's "blinking red" on the Dashboard.* The superintendent and other district leaders

actively avoid the "fear game," emphasizing that Sanger Unified aims for more than test scores and green dashboard ratings. They publicly express the belief that if educators keep progressing on the district's coherent initiatives to enhance students' learning opportunities that the scores will gradually improve.

Sanger administrators developed these leadership principles and strategies in the context of evolving state policies and resources to support the transition to Common Core standards. As noted earlier, SUSD educators have found the state's web-based instructional and assessment resources to be increasingly valuable, and the district has taken advantage of particular professional development specialties of several County Offices. We conclude by suggesting how lessons from Sanger's experiences and success might inform the state's efforts to help California districts successfully transition to the CCSS.

Implications for the state

One lesson can be drawn from district responses to the state's approach to rolling out the CCSS. District leaders in Sanger Unified and other high-performing California districts attribute their success in part to the state's 3-year moratorium on standardized testing. By all accounts, this provided the slack that district leaders needed to create a learning environment for educators that was free of risk and conducive to innovation and change.

Going forward, how might Sanger's experiences inform ways in which the state can act to improve California districts' success on the CCSS?

Stay the course. It is critical that the state not move away from its current direction. District leaders and educators generally feel that Common Core "is here to stay"; any signs to the contrary would be a blow to their intense efforts under the current system.

Give districts time to make local accountability work. SUSD had a significant head start, and it will take most districts time and support to develop the kind of internal accountability needed for continuous progress. Even for Sanger, the hiatus in state assessments during 2012-14 was crucial for allowing teachers and schools to take risks entailed in shifting instruction to address the new standards. Organizational and instructional change takes time and protection from external monitoring and threat of sanctions.

Keep expanding and refining SBAC interim assessments and reports. Educators are eager for assessments aligned to standards for their grade level and content area and for assessment data that provide fine-grained feedback to hone instruction to improve student performance. The state can play an important role in expanding and deepening educators' use of formative assessments to improve teaching and learning.

Support the development of County Office of Education (COE) capacity. Districts across the state depend upon high-quality professional development and support to make progress on the CCSS. Some in rural areas depend primarily on their local COE. Yet, Sanger and other

successful districts have been strategic in identifying and partnering with county offices for specific, high-quality professional development support. Since it is unlikely that any one COE can develop the capacity to meet all district support needs, the state might consider developing specialized capacities among COEs in a region. This strategy would ensure that every California district can draw on high-quality support from a COE within a reasonable distance.

Sanger Unified has done a remarkable job of making ongoing adjustments to strengthen its support of educators' success through ongoing cycles of feedback. It is worth serious thought about how California's Department of Education and State Board of Education could get rich and useful feedback from districts and County Offices to improve its supports for their journey to reach Common Core State Standards.

ACRONYMS

CCSS	Common Core State Standards
COE	County Office of Education
CSP	Curriculum Support Provider
DIS	District Instructional Specialist
DOK	Depth of Knowledge
EDI	Explicit Direct Instruction
EL	English Learner
ELA	English Language Arts
ELD	English Language Development
ILPs	Individual Learning Plans
LCAP	Local Control and Accountability Plan
LCFF	Local Control Funding Formula
LST	Literacy Specialist Teacher
LTEL	Long-term EL
MTSS	Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
NCLB	No Child Left Behind SPELL OUT
PBIS	Positive behavioral Interventions & Supports
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
RFEP	Reclassified Fluent English Proficient
RSP	Resource Specialist Program
RTI	Response to Intervention
SAALT	School Academic Achievement Leadership Teams
SAP	Student Assistance Program
SBAC	Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium
SDAEI	Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English
SED	Seriously Emotionally Disturbed
SHS	Sanger High School
SUSD	Sanger Unified School District
SWD	Students with Disabilities
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
WAMS	Washington Academic Middle School

ENDNOTES

[1] DuFour training sessions, currently conducted through Solution Tree, LLC, are attended by teacher teams and typically last one or two full days. They frame a moral imperative for teachers to collaborate on the challenge of bringing all students to grade-level and subject standards. The PLC model focuses a teacher team on four questions that should precede and follow instruction: 1) what do we want students to learn (standards), 2) how will we know if they learned (assessment), 3) what do we do if they haven't (intervention) and 4) what do we do if they have (enrichment). See Richard DuFour's article on district PLCs: http://www.advanc-ed.org/source/professional-learning-communities-key-improved-teaching-and-learning

[2] Sanger's SAALT initiative was launched with support from the S.H. Cowell Foundation in 2006(?) and its model for leadership development persists.

[3] David, J.L. & Talbert, J.E. *Turning Around a High Poverty District: Lessons from Sanger*. (San Francisco, CA; S.H. Cowell Foundation, 2013). http://shcowell.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Learning-From-Sanger.pdf

[4] David, J.L. & Talbert, J.E. *Ibid.*

[5] Common formative assessments are fundamental to PLC practice. Teachers together design an assessment to measure student learning following instruction focused on particular grade-level or course standard(s), each administers it with students in her/his class, they bring back results to the next PLC meeting and determine a) facets of their instruction that need improvement and b) individual students who are struggling and need intervention. "Formative" refers to the ongoing use of assessments to inform instructional decisions, in contrast to "summative" assessments that are designed to measure students' ultimate learning outcomes.

[6] Lesson Study is a form of professional learning through lesson development in which teachers reflect on their teaching practice through cycles of collaborative **lesson** planning, **lesson** observation, and examination of student learning. The "polished" lessons are then shared with others.

[7] Math in Common is a seven-year initiative (2013-2020) that brings multiple districts together in a community of practice, providing the district math leaders with opportunities to learn from each other and from experts as they implement CCSS. Currently there are ten participating districts.

[8] Specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE) is a teaching approach used in content areas, e.g., social studies, science, literature, with students who are learning English as a second language. Unlike English Language Development (ELD) which focuses on language development, SDAIE aims to develop content-specific vocabulary and knowledge. Typically, in secondary schools serving high portions of English Learners, each subject department has one or more SDAEI classes. The range of English language development among students in such classes can be quite wide, and the depth of content instruction can be sacrificed if many students struggle with basic language comprehension. The Sanger teachers were concerned that the rigor of content instruction in SDAEI classes often falls short of what ELs need to reach CCSS.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A1. Sanger USD CAASPP test results, 2015-2017

CAASPP Test Results			
	2017		
	Residual*	% Met and Above in District**	% Met & Above in CA
Math All Students	0.220	40	38
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	34	25
Math Black	N/A	34	19
Math Hispanic	0.227	33	25
Math White	0.220	58	53
ELA All Students	0.166	48	49
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	42	36
ELA Black	N/A	44	31
ELA Hispanic	0.176	43	37
ELA White	0.155	65	64

CAASPP Test Results			
	2016		
	Residual*	% Met and Above in District**	% Met & Above in CA
Math All Students	0.237	37	37
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	31	24
Math Black	N/A	24	18
Math Hispanic	0.249	30	24
Math White	0.307	58	53
ELA All Students	0.208	47	48
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	41	35
ELA Black	N/A	39	31
ELA Hispanic	0.222	41	37
ELA White	0.222	66	64

CAASPP Test Results			
	2015		
	Residual*	% Met and Above in District**	% Met & Above in CA
Math All Students	0.195	35	34
Math Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	29	21
Math Black	N/A	26	16
Math Hispanic	0.205	28	21
Math White	0.236	54	49
ELA All Students	0.149	44	44
ELA Economically Disadvantaged	N/A	39	31
ELA Black	N/A	36	28
ELA Hispanic	0.158	38	32
ELA White	0.170	63	61

*"Residual" represents the difference, measured in standard deviations, between the actual average performance of a district's students in a given racial subgroup and what one would predict the performance to be based on the district's SES characteristics. Note: we did not calculate the residual for Economically Disadvantaged students.

**"% Met and Above in District" represents the percent of students of a given subgroup who met or exceeded the grade and subject standards on CAASPP, averaged across grades.

Source: California Department of Education. (2018). *California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Results*. Retrieved from https://caaspp.cde.ca.gov/

Appendix A2. Sanger USD dropout rates, 2015-2017

Dropout Rates						
	2015		**2014**		**2013**	
	Rate in District	Rate in CA	Rate in District	Rate in CA	Rate in District	Rate in CA
Hispanic	3%	13%	6%	14%	8%	14%
Black	0%	19%	8%	20%	7%	20%
White	6%	7%	2%	8%	2%	7%

Source: Education Data Partnership. (2018). *Ed Data*. Retrieved from https://www.ed-data.org/

Appendix A3. Sanger USD Suspensions and Expulsions, 2015-2017

Discipline Rates				
	2017 Suspensions		**2017 Expulsions**	
	Rate in District	Rate in CA	Rate in District	Rate in CA
Hispanic	3.80%	3.70%	0.14%	0.10%
Black	5.00%	9.80%	0.21%	0.21%
White	3.10%	3.20%	0.06%	0.07%
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	3.10%	4.70%	0.14%	0.11%
	2016 Suspensions		**2016 Expulsions**	
	Rate in District	Rate in CA	Rate in District	Rate in CA
Hispanic	4.40%	3.70%	0.24%	0.09%
Black	8.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.23%
White	2.78%	3.10%	0.06%	0.07%
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	4.40%	4.70%	0.19%	0.11%
	2015 Suspensions		**2015 Expulsions**	
	Rate in District	Rate in CA	Rate in District	Rate in CA
Hispanic	4.80%	3.80%	0.20%	0.10%
Black	7.50%	10.10%	0.00%	0.21%
White	2.40%	3.20%	0.17%	0.07%
Socioeconomically Disadvantaged	4.60%	4.90%	0.19%	0.12%

Note that the suspension / expulsion rates represent the unduplicated count of students suspended / expelled divided by the total number of students enrolled in the district in the given subgroup. Sources: California Department of Education. (2017). *Suspension Data*. Retrieved from https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessd.asp; California Department of Education. (2017). *Expulsion Data*. Retrieved from https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesed.asp

Figure I.1
High-Leverage Team Actions Aligned to the Four Critical Questions of a PLC

High-Leverage Team Actions	1. What do we want all students to know and be able to do?	2. How will we know if they know it?	3. How will we respond if they don't know it?	4. How will we respond if they do know it?
Before-the-Unit Team Actions				
HLTA 1. Making sense of the agreed-on essential learning standards (content and practices) and pacing	◧			
HLTA 2. Identifying higher-level-cognitive-demand mathematical tasks	◧	◧		
HLTA 3. Developing common assessment instruments	◧	◧		
HLTA 4. Developing scoring rubrics and proficiency expectations for the common assessment instruments		◧		
HLTA 5. Planning and using common homework assignments	◧	◧	◧	◧
During-the-Unit Team Actions				
HLTA 6. Using higher-level-cognitive-demand mathematical tasks effectively	◧	■		
HLTA 7. Using in-class formative assessment processes effectively	◧		■	■
HLTA 8. Using a lesson-design process for lesson planning and collective team inquiry	■	■	■	■
After-the-Unit Team Actions				
HLTA 9. Ensuring evidence-based student goal setting and action for the next unit of study			■	■
HLTA 10. Ensuring evidence-based adult goal setting and action for the next unit of study			■	■

■ = Fully addressed with high-leverage team action

◧ = Partially addressed with high-leverage team action

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APPENDIX C: SUSD Individual Language Plan

Student #: ▮▮▮	**Student Meeting Report**	**Student:** ▮▮▮
Date: 2/27/2018	**Sanger Unified School District**	**Report:** SDC02Standard
Time: 1:22 PM		**Page:** 1

Purpose: Individualized Language Plan (ILP)   **Meeting Date:** 9/22/2017

▮▮▮ # ▮▮▮

School: Del Rey Elem	**Enrolled US:** 8/16/2012	**Years in US Schools:** 5
Grade Level: 5	**ELL Entry US:** 8/16/2012	**IEP:** No
LEP Status: EL	**HLS Date:**	**SIFE:** No
Gender: M	**Parent Refused ESL:** No	**ELL Teacher:**
DOB: 2/23/2007	**Asylee/Refugee:** No	

ELP Assessment Results

Test	Date	Listening 1 2 3 4 5	Speaking 1 2 3 4 5	Reading 1 2 3 4 5	Writing 1 2 3 4 5	Overall 1 2 3 4 5
CELDT (Intermediate/4 ... 3-5 /Annual Assessment)	9/29/2016	541	556	499	506	525
CELDT (Early Advanced/5 /Gr... 3-5 /Annual Assessment)	10/27/2017	640	556	527	549	568

Standardized Test Scores

Date	Grade	Test Name	Scores
9/29/2017	5	BAS	Instructional Level: S
6/5/2017	4	BAS	Instructional Level: R
5/12/2017	04	SBAC Math	Scale Score: 2372 Achievement Level: 1 - Standard Not Met Claim 1 - Concepts and Procedures: 1 - Below Standard Claim 2 - Problem Solving and Modeling: 1 - Below Standard Claim 3 - Communicating Reasoning: 1 - Below Standard
5/1/2017	04	SBAC ELA	Scale Score: 2399 Achievement Level: 1 - Standard Not Met Claim 1 - Reading: 1 - Below Standard Claim 2 - Writing: 2 - At or Near Standard Claim 3 - Listening: 2 - At or Near Standard Claim 4 - Research Inquiry: 1 - Below Standard
2/3/2017	4	BAS	Instructional Level: P
9/30/2016	4	BAS	Instructional Level: N

Student Course Grades

Grade Level	Grading Period	Course Subject	Course Name	Grade Received
5	2017/2018 - Trimester 1	Math	Operations & Algebraic Thinking	3
5	2017/2018 - Trimester 1	ELA	Foundational Skills	3
5	2017/2018 - Trimester 1	ELA	Speaking and Listening	3
5	2017/2018 - Trimester 1	ELA	Literature	2
5	2017/2018 - Trimester 1	ELA	Informational Text	3
5	2017/2018 - Trimester 1	ELA	Language	3
5	2017/2018 - Trimester 1	ELA	Writing	3

Meeting Notes

First ILP goal setting meeting
Author: Ana Cuaron   **Date:** 9/22/2017

ILP Goal: ▮▮▮ will build his writing stamina (provide lots of details) at least for 10-15 minutes. Teacher Guarantees: - Provide ▮▮▮ with a timer - Allow ▮▮▮ to move to a comfortable place to write (desk or standing table) - Provide a graphic organizer to generate a list of topics or writing starter sentences - Collect data/evidence (date writing samples) Student Guarantees: - Log the date and time (Mrs. ▮▮▮ to create a tool) - Write without stopping (don't worry about spelling at first, don't erase – just cross out) - Stay focused and select a place to write Follow-up: 5 weeks

Attendee Signatures:

Figure 1.10

Assessment Instrument Quality-Evaluation Tool

Assessment Indicators	Description of Level 1	Requirements of the Indicator Are Not Present	Limited Requirements of This Indicator Are Present	Substantially Meets the Requirements of the Indicator	Fully Achieves the Requirements of the Indicator	Description of Level 4
Identification and emphasis on essential learning standards (specific feedback to students)	Learning standards are unclear and absent from the assessment instrument. Too much attention is given to one target.	1	2	3	4	Learning standards are clear, included on the assessment, and connected to the assessment questions.
Visual presentation	Assessment instrument is sloppy, disorganized, difficult to read, and offers no room for work.	1	2	3	4	Assessment is neat, organized, easy to read, and well-spaced, with room for teacher feedback.
Balance of higher- and lower-level-cognitive-demand tasks	Emphasis is on procedural knowledge with minimal higher-level-cognitive-demand tasks for demonstration of understanding.	1	2	3	4	Test is rigor balanced with higher-level and lower-level-cognitive-demand tasks present.
Clarity of directions	Directions are missing and unclear. Directions are confusing for students.	1	2	3	4	Directions are appropriate and clear.
Variety of assessment task formats	Assessment contains only one type of questioning strategy, and no multiple choice or evidence of the Mathematical Practices. Calculator usage not clear.	1	2	3	4	Assessment includes a blend of assessment types and assesses Mathematical Practices modeling or use of tools. Calculator expectations are clear.
Tasks and vocabulary (attending to precision)	Wording is vague or misleading. Vocabulary and precision of language are a struggle for student understanding and access.	1	2	3	4	Vocabulary is direct, fair, accessible, and clearly understood by students, and they are expected to attend to precision in response.
Time allotment	Few students can complete the assessment in the time allowed.	1	2	3	4	Test can be successfully completed in the time allowed.
Appropriate scoring rubric (points)	Scoring rubric is not evident or is inappropriate for the assessment tasks presented.	1	2	3	4	Scoring rubric is clearly stated and appropriate for each task or problem.
Integrated content at Grade Level	Content given is not at grade level standards.	1	2	3	4	Content given is at grade level and has evidence of intergration. Ex. If standard is for informational text, Science or Social Studies text is at grade level standards
Designated Supports and Universal Tools and Accomadations	Supports are not matched to student needs	1	2	3	4	Supports are seamlessly embedded allowing for student access.

Source: Adapted from Kanold, T. D. (Ed.), Kanold, T. D., & Larson, M. R. (2012), Common Core mathematics in a PLC at Work, leader's guide, p. 94. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

APPENDIX E: MTSS Feedback Loop

Sanger Unified: *MTSS Cycle of Improvement and Self-Correcting Feedback Loop*

Cabinet MTSS Data Review
Inform Supt. Of current levels of performance
Guide focus of strategic implementation of initiatives
Cycle of Inquiry for improvement areas
Ability to share data, implementation, progress with staff, board, & community

SAALT
District and Site Leadership
*discuss MTSS Data for upcoming month
*Site based insights/reflections/Improvement Action Plan

Admin PLC
Monthly collaboration, capacity building, vertical articulation, sharing best practices
*discuss MTSS Data
*Site based best practices-high light

MTSS District Data Team
Review & analyze district data to understand what is/is not working
Provide opportunities to high light & scale up best practices across the district
UDL to create access for ALL

SUSD AW 11/3/17

MTSS Site Leadership/Grade Level PLC
*Site Leadership and Grade level PLCs collaborate and discuss data from the student-class-site level perspective