

LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Colleagues:

The Long Beach Unified School District is please to share this summary of our promising practices. Our school district is a past winner and three-time nominee for The Broad Prize for Urban Education. In 2007, we became the only former winner of The Broad Prize to return to competition as a finalist.

Among the promising practices here are those in curriculum, instruction, professional development, assessment, strategic planning, instructional and district leadership, and other processes and systems.

As intended by The Broad Foundation, we continue to learn much from our fellow Broad-nominated school districts, and we hope that others will find our practices and experiences informative to their efforts.

We deeply appreciate The Broad Foundation's commitment to America's schoolchildren. We thank the Foundation for providing a growing clearinghouse of information on what works in some of America's best urban school systems.

Sincerely,



Christopher J. Steinhauser
Superintendent of Schools

Promising Practices in the Long Beach Unified School District

Curriculum

LBUSD has comprehensive curriculum guides and course outlines that contain essential skills and knowledge across all grade levels and subject areas. To increase fidelity of implementation and to enhance district curriculum, instruction and assessment practices at the elementary level, LBUSD adopted the Reading First program and a district-developed Mathematics Achievement Program Professional Development (MAP2D).

The district provides pacing guides that include the recommended sequence and duration for each unit/lesson, suggested instructional materials, assessment correlations and the essential academic vocabulary. Middle and high school course outlines have been developed to address the learning needs of beginning, intermediate and advanced learners. The district also provides course outlines for before-school, after-school and summer intervention/enrichment programs. All curriculum guides and course outlines are available online through the district website.

In the 2003-2004 school year, 13 eligible elementary schools participated in the national Reading First program at the K-3 grade levels. The program's success led Long Beach to go further than the national

standard to implement a comparable model in fourth and fifth grade in these schools. Key to the successful implementation of Reading First has been ongoing, intensive professional development provided by site-based coaches.

MAP2D is a comprehensive, data-driven program for grades K-6 to further refine the delivery of the mathematics curriculum. The MAP2D pacing charts have been designed to allow teachers to cover blocks of content standards at a pace that encourages student mastery. MAP2D was rolled out in four elementary schools in the 2004-2005 school year and in a total of 15 elementary schools the year after. Early results reported by the 2007 Broad Prize Long Beach Unified School District indicate that students at MAP2D schools, which have a higher percentage of English language learners and free/reduced-price lunch students, performed 9 percent higher on the California State Test (CST) than their district peers. In the 2006-2007 school year, the MAP2D program was rolled out in 47 elementary schools. A version of the program is currently being piloted in kindergarten, first grade and sixth grade.

Instruction

LBUSD has clear expectations and requirements for delivering and differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students. The adoption of a “core common pedagogy” and a plethora of teacher training and support have resulted in the institutionalized, effective use of instructional strategies and practices to promote student learning.

Beginning with lesson planning, teachers are required to identify strategies that will address the needs of students at different achievement levels. A district-provided lesson template serves as an “instructional thought process.” While the format varies from school to school, specific components must be addressed in each lesson plan. LBUSD teachers are provided extensive training on lesson development and guidance on how each of these components is used to drive sound instructional delivery. In addition, lesson planning is linked to the teacher evaluation process. Since 2003, example lesson plans that correspond with the curriculum and course outlines across subject areas and grade levels have been available on the LBUSD website.

LBUSD has “common core pedagogy” that is grounded in the use of differentiated instructional strategies. The district mandates use of the Essential Elements of Effective Instruction (EEEI). EEEI strategies include, for example: active participation, classroom management, Bloom’s taxonomy (higher order thinking strategies) and teaching to the objective. The use of the Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) approach, which includes elements such as tapping prior knowledge and building background knowledge, multiple intelligences and cultural connections, is a key district instructional initiative.

The MAP2D program prescribes a specific lesson structure that is designed to incorporate collaborative group work and active participation. MAP2D incorporates strategies such as: student math logs as reference tools to record math problems, rules and vocabulary; student presentations to increase mathematical talk; and an additional 30 minutes of “math facts,” using a district-developed book.

Assessment

A range of assessments across the district at all grade levels is designed to monitor student learning, promote advancement and make decisions at all levels.

Reading benchmarks (K-5) are used to assess student skill and content acquisition and to inform instructional planning. Math facts (1-8) are used to assess basic math skills and fluency. In addition, schools that participate in the MAP2D program have math trimester exams (K-6) to inform instruction and determine skills and concepts that need re-teaching. At the school level, assessment information is used to

determine students in need of intervention. District staff use assessment information to determine students in need of summer school, student program placement and/or retention and staff professional development needs.

End of Course (EOC) exams are administered in grades 6-12 and correspond with the district's course of study. EOCs are used by teachers to identify areas of need and to inform course grades; by schools to determine program success and/or to make curriculum modifications; and by the district to develop instructional materials, determine professional development needs and determine student placement.

LBUSD has established student performance and grading criteria that align with course outlines at the middle and high school levels. At the elementary level, schools are required to use the K-5 report card and grading criteria, which are aligned with the district curriculum and state proficiency standards. These systems, in combination with assessment results and teacher recommendations, are used to determine student intervention needs, course placement and/or retention.

Instructional Leadership

LBUSD's "top down, bottom up" model of instructional leadership includes frequent and regular communications between various levels of the district and the deployment of experts to provide support to improve teaching and learning on an ongoing basis.

At the school level, the principal serves as the instructional leader. Many district schools also have site-based coaches (math, reading and science) who are embedded resource supports to teachers. School representatives also meet regularly with district curriculum leaders to provide feedback on potential curriculum gaps, to share course materials and lesson plans and to bring content-related information from the district back to the school.

Finally, the district deploys curriculum specialists across content areas based on each school's needs.

Teachers councils, comprised of representatives from each school, participate in regular work sessions with their respective assistant superintendent (elementary, middle or high school) to address school issues and to drive initiatives forward.

School and classroom walk-throughs are conducted frequently at all schools. Walk-through teams include district administrators, principals and other school-based staff. Walk-throughs are primarily designed to increase dialogue among teachers, school leaders and district administrators, with a focus on examining teaching and learning so instructional improvements can be made.

District Leadership

District governance and leadership must support the essential work of teaching and learning in schools. To communicate and realize a clear mission for student learning, research shows that district leadership must set clear strategic goals and hold the organization accountable for implementation. LBUSD's carefully developed mission, vision and values now drive a lengthy but deliberate ongoing process to develop a strategic plan. Ongoing communication and collaboration is central to the LBUSD performance and evaluation system that holds the district and its constituents accountable for improving teaching and student learning.

Mission, Vision and Values

The LBUSD community shares a strong commitment to the district’s mission, vision and values, developed after a year-long process of gathering input. The district’s mission is “to support the personal and intellectual success of every student, every day.”

Surveys, evaluations, public forums and various committee meetings provided extensive input from thousands of stakeholders to ensure that the mission, vision and values reflect the district’s many institutionalized practices, known as “The Long Beach Way.”

Strategic Planning

LBUSD has formally developed a strategic plan. The district purposefully and strategically uses pilot programs—encouraging innovation and ensuring program effectiveness—before initiatives are rolled out on a larger scale.

In 2005, a strategic planning committee of approximately 40 representatives began a year-long analysis, grounded in the use of Baldrige strategies and facilitated by an executive on loan from The Boeing Company. District executive staff regularly discuss the organization’s values, directions and performance expectations.

The district collected a range of data to inform the strategic planning process through a number of channels, including parent and employee forums, community meetings, board meetings, surveys and evaluations.

LBUSD strategically uses pilots as a key source of data to analyze program effectiveness and to prioritize initiatives that have had the greatest impact on student achievement. The district encourages staff, school leaders and teachers to be innovative and develop new programs and initiatives that will drive student achievement. Staff who create pilots must include research-based components and must put systems in place to measure their effectiveness. Many district programs (e.g., MAP2D), have resulted from pilots and have since been widely expanded.

Performance and Accountability LBUSD’s performance and evaluation system relies heavily on communication and continuous reflection to measure and monitor the performance of district administrators, school leaders and teachers. Incentives and supports are based on student achievement results.

At the central office level, the superintendent meets regularly with executive staff to monitor performance. As part of the district’s “top down, bottom up” structure, the district considers stakeholder input (e.g., employee satisfaction surveys) when working with staff to set goals for the following year.

Principal performance evaluation criteria, linked to school and personal goals, are established at the start of each school year. The evaluations include mid-year conferences with an assistant superintendent and result in a summative evaluation document. Progress toward goals is monitored and discussed throughout the year.

The teacher evaluation process includes formal walk-throughs three times per year and a “lesson analysis” linked to a teacher’s proficiency in using the Essential Elements of Effective Instruction in the classroom.

During the teacher evaluation, some principals even document a teacher’s classroom delivery—minute-by-minute—along with student responses, and then they review the transcript with the teacher as part of their evaluation.

The district recognizes and celebrates school success. For example, high-performing schools are marked with a large, painted star on the outside of their building, which allows achievement to be recognized throughout the Long Beach community.

Schools identified as “in need of improvement” by the state and those schools the district has identified as struggling are given additional support. LBUSD does not penalize struggling schools, but rather focuses supports for struggling schools based on needs. Following extensive data review and conferencing with school leadership, a school might receive, for example, additional coaches and/or extensive training and professional development.

Operations and Support Systems

Research shows that the design and implementation of district operations and systems directly impact how well teaching and learning is supported. In LBUSD, learning and growth opportunities for students and teachers are bolstered through strong fiscal practices, effective organizational structure and strategic training and professional development programs.

Allocation of Financial Resources

The district has taken significant steps to ensure that fiscal stability and equitable financial decisions support student achievement.

In 2004, the district took significant steps to ensure fiscal stability. Faced with impending budget shortfalls, the district formed a budget advisory committee made up of approximately 35 stakeholders, including a representative from the teachers union, principals, members of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and community representatives. The committee examined a broad range of programs to determine how best to balance the budget without affecting student achievement. The process required each program to use student achievement data to justify its existence. LBUSD maintains financial stability through careful forecasting of future revenues and through strong controls on expenditures.

Organizational Structures and Management

Several LBUSD key initiatives are specifically designed to promote achievement and encourage student success, including the “school of choice” program, large comprehensive high schools and a strong commitment to advanced placement courses and gifted programs.

LBUSD has a large school of choice program. One third of students choose a school other than their neighborhood school. School of choice placement is determined through an application process and lottery system. The district conducts school fairs and education celebrations to provide parents and students with information on the programs that various schools have to offer (e.g., dual immersion, marine science, etc.).

Six, large comprehensive high schools have been arranged into smaller learning communities that provide additional programming to appeal to students’ personal, career and/or academic interests. While optional course work and topic-related programs vary across small learning communities, student services like intervention and advanced placement courses are consistently available across all smaller learning communities.

The district has increased its commitment to student advancement programs. The Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, designed to prepare students for college, has been expanded to all middle and high schools. Elementary schools also are implementing AVID in grades four and five. In addition to its Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program, LBUSD has established the EXCEL

program, a pathway for “potentially gifted students.” EXCEL programs are being rolled out across all middle schools and in some elementary schools in order to increase future enrollment in AP courses.

An Advanced Placement leadership team has been charged with generating support for AP expansion, emphasizing the needs of under-represented students taking AP courses for the first time. As a result, enrollment in Advanced Placement college prep courses has increased dramatically. The district now requires and pays for the PSAT for all tenth graders. PSAT data is used to generate Advanced Placement Potential reports from the College Board, identifying students who have the potential to take AP courses. These data are used when counseling students about course selection. To address the needs of students taking AP courses for the first time, schools offer a summer AP Bridge program to help students identify and strengthen skills to complete these courses. During the school year, teachers also provide after-school tutoring to help students prepare for AP exams. To reward students who take AP courses, the district provides a special sash, worn with the cap and gown, during commencement ceremonies. To meet teachers’ professional development needs, the district has become a College Board-certified training center for Advanced Placement.

Support for Teaching and Learning

The district strategically designs professional development and training delivery, and a wealth of opportunities exist for teachers to grow professionally. Systems for evaluating professional development are also in place.

For the past seven years, LBUSD has strategically offered professional development in alignment with district goals.

The district has three primary mechanisms to deliver training to teachers: 1) institutes or workshops throughout the year to roll out major district initiatives and/or deliver specific content; 2) school-based coaches and/or teacher representatives who are charged with bringing information (train-the-trainer) from district trainings to other school staff; and 3) school-embedded support through coaches and curriculum leaders.

LBUSD makes a concerted effort to ensure that professional development trainings promote consistency of implementation. School-based coaches and curriculum leaders also participate in teacher trainings so that the expectation is clear for both the trainer and the trainee. District leaders report that teacher training initiatives are also conveyed to principals so they know what to expect when they walk into a classroom. Nearly all district-provided training is conducted by in-house staff, primarily teachers on special assignment, to ensure a consistent message and district-culture is delivered.

A hallmark of LBUSD’s professional development program is the new teacher institute, a three-year, tiered program that includes a five-day pre-service before a teacher begins teaching. The institute delivers extensive professional development to teachers either new to the profession or new to the district. In the first year, the new teacher institute is designed to train teachers on core district practices (e.g., EEEI, lesson plan development, etc.), to provide differentiated trainings on programs central to elementary-level teachers and to provide content-specific trainings for middle and high school teachers. During the second and third years of the institute, teachers receive training to advance instructional and classroom practices. All new teachers are also provided a coach.

A unique relationship with California State University at Long Beach provides significant opportunities for LBUSD to build the capacity of potential teachers. A large number of district administrators teach at Cal State Long Beach, and LBUSD hires nearly 80 percent of its instructional staff from the university. As a result, before young teachers are even hired by the district, they have been trained in Long Beach’s teaching expectations.