

Standards-Based Middle School Reform
Long Beach Unified School District
Update Report

Written by
Judy Swanson and Gina Koency

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Education Matters, Inc.
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Standards-Based Middle School Reform Long Beach Unified School District

I. Introduction

Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) has been funded by The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Program for Student Achievement since 1995, to establish and sustain standards-based reform. Throughout this period, the district has maintained a constant focus on the goal that 75 percent of grade eight students will meet or exceed district standards in the four core academic areas by the year 2001.

Education Matters, Inc. has been studying and documenting the district's progress over the course of the Foundation's grant to LBUSD. This is the fifth in a series of reports on standards-based middle school reform in Long Beach Unified. The baseline report in August 1996 examined school and district change and described LBUSD's early standards implementation process. The follow-up memo in February 1997 looked at the districtwide initiatives that seemed most closely related to classroom practice that could lead to more rigorous instruction and improved student performance. The third report focused on change at the school level, highlighting the views and practices of the teachers and principals from the four schools in our evaluation sample. The fourth update report in December 1997 described the diffusion throughout the district of an increasing unity of vision and coherence for standards-based reform, particularly in the areas of professional development and student assessment. Looking across these reports, the observation that stands out is the comprehensiveness of the reform effort; the district has been systematically working on all parts of the reform simultaneously. In this report, we look back to the 1996 Baseline report, to reflect on LBUSD's progress toward reaching its goal.

In our Baseline Report, written in August 1996, Berns, Koency, and Talbot wrote:

Because Long Beach was already in the process of adopting new teaching strategies, the standards will not be the driver of all other components of systemic change. However, the standards can serve as a vehicle for the coordination and coherence of what is taught and assessed in the district. Content and performance standards can help the district, students, and parents understand what students are expected to know and be able to do at certain points in their schooling, ultimately leading to consensus about important learning outcomes.

Two years later, we acknowledge we underestimated the impact of standards reform. While it was true that Long Beach Unified was well on its way to adopting a middle school philosophy, new teaching strategies, and more challenging curriculum, the standards are now definitely the driving force for systemic change throughout the district, especially at the middle level. Two years later we continue to be impressed with the overall positive spirit that permeates the district,

and the enduring commitment to improving academic achievement of all LBUSD students. By the end of the 1997-98 school year we encountered a lot of tired educators, who had worked very hard all year, yet were enthusiastically talking about plans for the summer and next year.

Moreover, LBUSD is gradually, but steadily, evolving into a learning organization (Senge, 1990). Their approach is characterized by systems thinking, recognizing that all parts of the system are interrelated and that changes in one aspect affects the performance of other parts. The district commitment to standards reform is long term. District leaders are working to build an organization where everyone – teachers, principals, central office administrators – are continually expanding their capacity to understand the complexities of systemic change. By blending top-down and bottom-up efforts, the designers are learning to monitor the effects of their implementation strategies, seeking out feedback from both inside and outside the district, listening to the feedback they receive, engaging stakeholders in problem-solving, refining and modifying and trying again, while monitoring and evaluating the results. By giving individual schools the freedom to try out their own ideas, while holding them responsible for producing results, it engenders commitment to a shared vision.

Progress in implementing standards reform is in evidence at every level of the district.

- Content standards have been in place in the core academic subjects since 1996, and standards are now in place for English Language Development (ELD), health education, and physical education.
- Content standards guide not only the selection of instructional materials, but also the design and selection of professional development offerings, and the design of assessment tools.
- The Seamless Education initiative, a partnership between California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), Long Beach City College (LBCC), and LBUSD, has made significant progress in aligning the K-12 content standards with the university's entrance requirements, undergraduate courses, and the master's degree in teacher preparation.
- A major step forward in developing performance assessments that are aligned to the content standards was taken this year by piloting innovative performance tests designed to assess both content knowledge (science or history) and writing ability. The district continues to develop, pilot, and refine instruments that can be used to monitor both student performance and inform instruction. We see the impact of these tests to be a powerful example of assessment driving instruction.
- Efforts to end social promotion and hold students accountable for meeting standards were initiated when the Board of Education approved the Eighth Grade Educational Improvement Initiative and opened Long Beach Preparatory Academy in 1997. This alternative school is designed to address both the academic and the socio-emotional needs of students who received two or more F's on their final report card in grade eight.

- Performance standards have yet to be developed. This remains the missing piece to creating a comprehensive standards-based system. The first of the performance standards are due out in the fall. The complete set of performance standards for each of the content standards are scheduled for completion by the end of the 1998-99 school year.

II. Methodology

Our evaluation design has remained relatively constant over the course of the grant, although the composition of our evaluation team has changed. During a brief visit to the district in the fall of 1997, Barbara Berns introduced Judy Swanson, as her replacement to direct the evaluation for the new grant period, to key personnel in the district to facilitate a smooth transition. Gina Koency, our local researcher, provided stability and experience while Swanson learned on the job to understand the many facets of middle school reform in Long Beach Unified.

During our fall visit, we re-examined our evaluation sample, both in terms of the four schools in the sample, and the teacher sample within the four schools. In consultation with the four principals and district administrators, we decided to continue with three of the four schools in our original sample. Leland Stanford Middle School, which had participated in the evaluation of middle school reform over the course of two grant periods, will not be part of the evaluation study during the next grant cycle. The school, with its strong, stable leadership and teaching staff, continued to strengthen as a professional learning community. During the last grant period, the school intensified its efforts to provide challenging and rigorous curriculum, expanding its GATE/EXCEL program from one class to three classes at each grade. Stanford has maintained a strong emphasis on site-level professional development as well as encouraging individual teachers to attend conferences and further their own professional knowledge and skills. The result has been the creation of a close-knit team of teacher leaders who are helping to raise achievement among their diverse student population. Because of their progress and accomplishments, we agreed that other schools might profit more from being involved in the evaluation. We are confident that Stanford will continue on its standard-setting path. It was recognized this year by the California Department of Education as a California Title I Achieving School for their success in helping all children succeed.

Hamilton, Hill, and Marshall all indicated a desire to continue to participate in the evaluation. (A brief discussion of each of these school's progress can be found in Section IV, Standards Implementation at the School Level.) We will also be adding Long Beach Preparatory Academy (LBPA) to our evaluation sample. We felt that LBUSD's bold experiment to end the long-standing practice of social promotion was so important that it deserved further study. The staff at LBPA have eagerly agreed to participate. We look forward to a productive relationship with the Academy, one that will help all of us develop a better understanding of how to reach the students who are most at risk of academic failure.

Long Beach Prep is a unique school. With an estimated enrollment of 300 students for the 1998-

99 school year, it is a small school, housing only one grade. As a result, we plan to modify our evaluation strategy. We will select a small sample of teachers to observe and interview over the course of two years. In addition, we plan to select a sample of nine students (each member of our evaluation team will follow three students) who we will also follow for two years. During our visits to Prep Academy, we will talk with the students, attend classes with them, and document their challenges and successes during the year. We will then follow them to high school the next year, to learn about their transition back into mainstream classes, and their readiness to succeed in high school.

In preparation for next year, our evaluation team visited the Prep Academy three times during its first year in operation. This was in large part to understand the context of the school and its population. We conducted focus groups with students and teachers, and talked with the administrative staff about the programs and strategies they have developed to address student needs. We will work with the administration to select a sample of students, and plan to begin systematically collecting data during fall 1998.

As in the past, by design, our sample of teachers at each school does not represent the school as a whole. We asked principals to recommend teachers who have shown interest in implementing teaching reforms in their classes and across the school. Because of turnover in the staff, our sample for the new grant contains some new teachers as well as some teachers we have been observing for the last two years. We will continue to follow nine teachers in each of the three continuing schools, and a smaller sample at Long Beach Prep. We did have the opportunity this year to get a sense of just how representative are our samples of the entire teaching staff in two of the schools. During our May visit to the district, we took advantage of a unique opportunity and visited Hamilton and Marshall on the day the State Comprehensive Compliance Review (CCR) team conducted their visit. While it was not a "normal" day at the schools by any means, classes were still in session, and it gave our evaluation team an opportunity to see a much larger sample of classrooms than usual. The schools were very gracious in letting us come during a stressful time, and we benefitted by gaining a better perspective of where the schools are with respect to reform initiatives.

We have modified our evaluation design somewhat for the next grant period to address the need to get a better sense of the school as a whole. The visits to Hamilton and Marshall during the CCR were opportunities to do that. We also scheduled our visits at times when we could observe professional development, district conferences and events that are central to the districts reform agenda. This spring we attended parts of professional development Institutes for reading, writing, science, and ELD. We also attended the districtwide scoring day on May 18, where teachers scored performance assessments in Writing & Science (6th grade) and Writing & History (8th grade). In addition to classroom observations, we interviewed teachers, and principals at each of the schools. Data reported here are based on those interviews, as well as conversations with all of the curriculum leaders, the middle school summer school coordinator, Area Superintendents, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Instruction, & Professional Development, the Assistant Superintendent for Research, the Vice President of Education for the Long Beach Community Partnership, the Administrative Assistant for Middle School Reform,

and the Superintendent.

III. The District's Role in Leading Standards Reform

Standards Implementation

Since our baseline report, the district's progress with standards reform is best characterized as steady and ambitious, but with much work yet to do. As we described in our December 1997 update, we perceive an increasingly collaborative and coherent approach to middle school reform. The superintendent's weekly meetings, known as the "Area Supes meeting," are the nucleus for the district's work. The meetings include all the key administrators in the district: the executive staff, Area Superintendents, Assistant Superintendent for Research, Planning & Evaluation, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development, Human Resources, the Business Office, High School Superintendent, and Facilities. It is a decision-making, problem-solving group. Each week issues are raised, discussed, and strategies are adopted for investigating and addressing the matter at hand -- everything from leaky roofs to creating job descriptions for standards coaches. This structure has created a close-knit team with strong communication among the area offices and the curriculum office. Each area superintendent is informed as to what the others are doing. Although their approaches may vary from one area to the next, they convey a consistent message. They share information, resources, and even staff, when needed. For example, funding for a coach in Area C was given to Area A, because the group agreed that the needs were greater in Area A. This is an impressive demonstration of the collaborative spirit that exists within the district's administration.

Examples of how this group works together and with their constituents can be seen in two major initiatives this year that are pushing standards implementation to a higher level. First, this group was the mastermind for the new performance assessments, which attempted to measure performance in two domains with a single test. The concept originated and was developed within the administrative team, and a strategy was put in place to carry it out. The entire curriculum department participated in training on performance assessments -- writing prompts, creating rubrics, and learning how to do rubric scoring. Curriculum leaders worked with the research department to write and refine prompts that would meet the objectives of both the writing domains and the content areas. Curriculum leaders also enlisted teacher leaders in their discipline, to write, pilot, and revise classroom performance tasks that could be used in their classrooms to prepare students for the new districtwide tests. This was a major undertaking, involving everyone in the district. On scoring day, curriculum leaders were orchestrating the entire enterprise, solving problems and trouble-shooting as mix-ups occurred. Teachers, principals, and central office administrators all pitched in, working side by side, to score each student paper six times: twice (two readers) for content, twice for rhetorical effectiveness, and twice for conventions. Not surprisingly, they encountered some difficulties with this new format, and the research and curriculum departments are working together to resolve and complete the scoring process, having learned a great deal about what to do differently next time - - lessons they would not have learned if they had not conducted this ambitious pilot test.

The second significant development to evolve from this administrative team was the creation of new standards coaching positions to do in-class professional development to facilitate standards implementation. This action reflects the agreement across all areas of the need for more teacher support at the school level. Area B experimented with half-time standards coaching positions in literacy in the focus schools during the 1997-98 school year. Principals were pleased with the in-house coaching model and lobbied to keep the same model next year, with some additional half-time positions in other content areas. Other areas designed different models to address their specific needs. Most chose full-time coaches, some assigned to specific focus schools, and some to serve as a resource for the entire area. These coaches will be participating in intensive professional development this summer and will begin working in the schools in the fall. It will be important to evaluate the effectiveness of the various models. A number of questions come to mind: Due to the lack of applicants for math coaches, how will teachers get expert inputs to deepen their content knowledge and enhance their instructional skills in mathematics? How will the role of the coaches and department chairs be coordinated to supplement and not conflict at the school site? How will these coaches work with the coaches in the curriculum departments? How to identify teachers most in need of assistance? And how to foster receptivity to outside help? There are always unanswered questions until a program is up and running, but we are excited by the potential benefits of this new venture.

The philosophy guiding the district is that standards are the means to an end, not an end in themselves. They are the means through which LBUSD is striving to raise student achievement. From the perspective of superintendent, Dr. Carl Cohn, his assessment was:

We're making the type of progress in K-8, making sure that kids are moving from one level to the next better prepared. And the indicators with regard to progress are reducing those numbers of kids who are eligible for the major district interventions at each level. And then what I really see is an awful lot of, as I move around the district, students and teachers in their sort of lexicon, a lot of discussion around rubrics and scoring and arguments about who gets a four, who gets a five. That, to me, suggests that things are taking hold and becoming a part of the culture.

It is important to view this progress in the political context of today in the state of California. In the early days of standards reform, California was viewed as leading the charge with the development of the state curriculum frameworks and its groundbreaking work with a student assessment system, CLAS (now defunct), that was consistent with the state frameworks. Together they provided a strong foundation to guide standards development in Long Beach Unified. The state's Program Quality Review (PQR) process provided a vehicle for schools to examine their instructional program through the analysis of student work. It provided a convenient framework for guiding the implementation of standards at the school and classroom levels.

In addition, the subject matter projects and demonstration grant programs supported by the State Department were aligned with the state frameworks. These professional development

opportunities provided content-rich, in-depth learning experiences for teachers throughout the state. Many of the teacher leaders in the district point to these programs as some of the most powerful professional learning experiences of their careers.

However, in recent years California has experienced some significant shifts in the political winds, and new leadership in the State Department of Education. A conservative backlash has pushed a revision of the state frameworks, dropping the CLAS assessment system in favor of a more traditional norm-referenced standardized test, the SAT-9. (There are still plans to create statewide performance assessments.) Districts are required to establish an accountability system that is aligned with the state guidelines, but the requirements change on almost a daily basis (AERA Presentation, "Implementing Standards-Based Assessment and Accountability: The California Approaches," 1998). In June 1998, a state initiative was approved by voters, which eliminates bilingual education, and limits non-native speakers to English immersion classes before moving into mainstream English-only classrooms.

Although LBUSD has tried to stay focused on their goals for the district, the constant changes at the state level pose serious obstacles to maintaining a steady course. An administrator helped to put the challenge in perspective.

The situation in California today is that public education is under assault from all sorts of so-called top down experts. And it's very difficult to adopt a set of assumptions that make sense and really stick to them, although we are trying mightily to do that. But there's a whole host of people with schemes for what will get you -- what they believe will get you dramatic gains in school improvement. And so it's a very eclectic mix of missiles that are being fired at our schools. At both the local level, the state level. And the state level includes both the legislature and the initiative process. So anybody who comes out of this with a coherent framework for reform really deserves accolades given what's being fired across the bow. [Administrator A]

For example, he explained the implications of the passage of Proposition 227:

[V]ery few people have focused on the fundamental issue of it's a huge loss of academic freedom which at the K-12 level we rarely talk about. But this is a very ominous development. Where someone wants to walk into every classroom in the state, basically put a gun to a teacher's head and say, "You will do such and so. And if you don't, you will be personally sued and held liable." We have never had in the history of our state, that kind of prescriptive threat to academic freedom. [Administrator A]

Nevertheless, Long Beach Unified has made a valiant effort to maintain a steady course toward meeting its student achievement goals. LBUSD's progress in implementing standards reform is reflected in the three year evolution of Carpe Diem, the Middle School Conference supported by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. In 1995, the first year of the conference, every teacher

attended a two-hour session on the content standards in their specific discipline and grade level. For many teachers this was a first look at using content standards in their classroom. Year two, 1996, reflects an increased focus on raising student performance, with the introduction of a Student Achievement category, where most of the sessions focused on curriculum or instructional strategies to raise student achievement. For the first time there were a few sessions that introduced performance tests to assess whether or not students are meeting standards. Both years two and three witnessed a significant increase in the number of Long Beach teachers presenting. In 1997, there was also an increase in the number of content areas that focused on both content and assessment: history/social science, mathematics, physical education, language arts, English Language Development (ELD), science, and teaching practices in general, with a session that focused on the use of teacher portfolios in evaluation. The plans for Carpe Diem 1998 continue to reflect the district's progress with standards implementation, with a half-day session devoted to standards-based content area instruction. These sessions are designed to integrate content standards, instructional strategies, and assessment into a comprehensive unit plan. Teachers are also encouraged to include student work in their presentations.

The increasing coherence of standards reform we've seen has produced a deeper level of understanding at the school sites as evidenced in several observable trends. Principals seem increasingly aware of the challenges faced by middle school teachers in attempting to promote standards-based instruction in classrooms. They are clearer about their own responsibilities for helping teachers with instructional strategies and curriculum that will put the content standards into action. The district has planned professional development for principals to support them in this effort. Area office staff are more proactive in working with the schools, resulting in a growing partnership among area schools. Standards-based professional development institutes provide training and support to teachers in addressing the district's focus on literacy skills. New institutes on reading comprehension were developed and required of all teachers who wanted to teach summer school. This leverage significantly increased participation and emphasized the district's commitment to improving literacy. The goal is for all middle school teachers, regardless of content area, to take one of the reading comprehension courses. Content standards form the curriculum in most of the classrooms we visits. The district has achieved consensus on what to teach by sending a repetitive and consistent message to teachers. One teacher explained:

Really it's been made real crystal clear to me in every workshop, conference, in-service, both at the site and at the district level, it's been real clear what [standards] are and how they are helpful and so forth. I'm a consultant for PQR, which is our program quality review process at a different middle school. And the content standards are basically your working document. I mean, it's an internal review. Meaning we review each other. And this is the document [the content standards] that you use to see if that instruction happening at school "x", whatever it is. So my exposure to the content standards has been great. [Teacher A]

We have seen an increase in the use of rubrics and scoring guides in all of the schools. The district has also made progress in developing a core group of teacher leaders who have quite

sophisticated understanding of the implications of standards for teaching practices. The challenge now is to scale up the level of understanding among the rest of the teaching staff.

Professional Development

In our most recent update report, (December 1997), we noted that:

With greater coherence among central office, area offices, and schools, LBUSD now seems well positioned to implement a comprehensive model of staff development, one which has the capacity to integrate content standards and assessment into all training. Although the district is still developing this strategic plan, and not all of the pieces are in place, we saw evidence that a coherent policy is emerging.

The strategic plan is still evolving, but with each visit we learn of significant progress on this front. New institutes are in place in reading and writing that focus on teaching strategies to develop the skills students need to achieve the standards in every other subject area. In all the institutes we attended (reading, writing, science, and ELD) there was an emphasis on enhancing teacher's content knowledge directly related to specific standards. These institutes also provided teachers with the resources needed (books, science kits, handouts) to go back and teach new lessons to their students. Some of the courses effectively integrated content with instruction and assessment, providing a more complete understanding of the objectives. Others failed to model teaching practices that would help teachers visualize how to incorporate the new material into their classrooms. The availability of coaches to work with teachers in their classrooms is a positive step in addressing this need, and we anticipate that the introduction of additional coaches will increase the effectiveness of this support. However, the district will need to provide training and direction to presenters, particularly university faculty members, in presenting the content by modeling effective pedagogy.

Overall, we are impressed by the positive response we heard from teachers toward district-sponsored professional development. The consensus seems to be that there is a wealth of quality training available, and time is the only limiting factor. We heard high praise for both reading institutes (MSRI and MSCAT).

It's an awesome course. I just loved the training. And I did it actually because I'm planning on teaching summer school. But they are really useful strategies that all kids need. [Teacher B]

Teachers' comments indicate how much they learned and the new insights they brought back to their classrooms:

I attended the middle school reading institute and that's where I really received a lot of new information. I'm not a reading teacher. I didn't come from elementary. A lot of middle school teachers are elementary teachers.

I came from high school. So reading, to me, was just a mystery. Not a mystery, but you know, I didn't really understand the foundations of teaching reading. So I understand a lot better now. And with that came a lot of really neat things, some thinking map things, narrative versus expository text. And those are the most useful, I kind of starred little items as I was going along, places where I figured this would be a really good thing that, I could show a science teacher how to take this very dense text and pull things out and make it a little bit more accessible for students. [Teacher A]

We were able to attend one session of the reading specialists' study group on *Mosaic of Thought*, and were impressed with both their choice of book to read, and how well-read and knowledgeable the specialists were about current reading research. The teachers shared how they have used the ideas from the text in their classrooms. One teacher pointed out how all the bullets listed in a chart in the book were part of Content Standard #5.

The district's three year commitment to Writing to Learn provided week-long summer institutes and in-class support, involving over 300 teachers. For many non-English teachers this course significantly changed their practice:

I took Write to Learn and it changed my entire perspective of how to teach writing in history. I think my kids do a much, much better job of writing from the history perspective than anything else because of Write to Learn. The Write to Learn process developed the kids' writing skills and thinking skills on how to write. And there is enough practice and sharing and self-evaluation that there is real growth in the writing process that way. You know, I say to the kids all the time, you know, before we ever take a test. You know, I'll say, "Okay, now there's the writing process. Now on a test, now remember, you can't give your paper to your neighbor to edit. So you better edit it. And you can't do-- you know, have your neighbor look at your pre-write. So you better really take the time on that pre-write and really organize yourself." And this writing process up there, there's the how to read the essay question. And all that stuff is so faded because it's been up there for so long. But I don't care if they're writing their Civil War newspapers, I don't care if they're writing their paraphrases for the basic rights from the Declaration of Independence, that the process is the same. And I think that when the process is there and they practice the process, it becomes natural. [Teacher C]

We also got very positive feedback from training provided through the GATE office. Many teachers commented on the high quality of their courses:

The district offers really good training. They bring in professionals that are very knowledgeable about their particular areas as far as either whether it's differentiating the curriculum, how to plan your lessons,

how to add that little extra piece to it. It's hard to give a specific example. It's a challenge because it keeps you really thinking. [Teacher B]

LBUSD is also providing many non-traditional opportunities to learn through the classroom embedded assessments and rubrics they distribute to teachers, through the Middle School Conference, and through the districtwide scoring days. Although not all teachers view these days as professional development, a significant number do. During the training sessions we witnessed a productive discussion about the rubric criteria and the subjectivity of some of the judgments. Teachers really grappled with discriminating between a "3" and a "4" paper. Others were concerned about the problem that limited content knowledge could inhibit a student's writing, or vice versa, if a child's writing skills were weak, they might not be able to convey what they know about the content. They felt this was a particular worry at the lower end of the rubric. This kind of discussion and experience is critical for reaching a shared understanding of what quality student work looks like.

Another teacher noted that his opportunity to serve on the Middle School Advisory Committee had been an on-going learning experience:

And through the middle school advisory, we're always looking at-- Well, we visit at a different school all the time. The next meeting's at Stanford Middle School. So we're given the opportunity just to talk to teachers and visit classrooms and stuff. And of course I just sit down and talk to the kids. The kids will tell you what happens. So in that sense, I've had more opportunities over the last two, three years to attend professional development things than I've ever had. [Teacher D]

For those who participate, LBUSD seems to be meeting teacher's needs. Of course, the question remains, who is participating? In response to an external study conducted by The Achievement Council during the 1995-96 school year, the district has institute a computerized system to keep track of the professional development activities. They now have the capacity to monitor teacher participation. Furthermore, the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, & Professional Development is working with Policy Studies Associates to design a comprehensive evaluation system to monitor the impact of professional development on changing teaching practices and ultimately on student achievement. This is an important step for strategic planning that we hope will address a concern we have raised before in earlier reports -- reaching a broader range of teachers.

Recognizing that our data are incomplete and often anecdotal, we do have concerns about the breadth of participation in professional development. Based on our observations of classrooms, interviews with teachers and principals, and a review of the Institute participant lists that we receive from the district, we have the impression that many of the same names dominate the lists. Those most active in the reform effort are the ones who make up our evaluation sample, and they are also the names that appear consistently on the institute lists. The positive side of this is that a critical mass of teacher leaders is emerging at each of the schools and they continue to

strengthen their knowledge and skills. However, it also means that many of the teachers who are most in need of professional growth are not the ones who take advantage of the available training. We are encouraged by the number of teachers from focus schools who are participating in the National Faculty Institutes and the district's reading institutes. It is also nice see some of the veteran teachers bringing along some of the new teachers into a professional culture where on-going learning is an expectation. The New Teacher Support program is the optimal place to begin this critical socialization.

New Teacher Support -- The Induction Program.

Long Beach Unified is experiencing a significant growth in its student population as the baby boom "bump" enters the school system, and the number of recent immigrants continues to increase. The increase in population, coupled with the state class-size reduction in the primary grades, has produced a significant teacher shortage. Long Beach Unified has hired 800 new teachers in the last two years. The majority of these are brand new teachers, and a significant number are emergency credentialed. To support these new teachers, LBUSD greatly expanded it's new teacher support program, providing each new teacher with a more experienced teacher as a buddy or coach.

When in place, the induction program has been very effective. New teachers participated in a week-long orientation in the summer that provided a foundation for setting up a classroom, establishing classroom routines, and introducing teachers to the content standards. Experienced teachers served as coaches, providing one-on-one support in carrying out these responsibilities. In addition, each school also had one coordinator for every six new teachers. The coordinator was responsible for conducting evaluations using the Pathwise teacher assessment tool. Even with these supports in place, not every teacher makes it, but this support system seems to help identify those who are not cut out to be teachers early on. Overwhelmingly, coaches reported the greatest need among new teachers is classroom management. Teacher-coaches echoed that sentiment:

I don't think it's knowing any of the standards or any curriculum at all that's going to do any good if he can't even get the kids to listen to what he's saying. So I think that has to come first. [Teacher E]

You manage them first and then you teach them. [Teacher F]

How to get the kids engaged when they first walk into class. You've only got about maybe five or six minutes to get the kids drawn in. What do you do when they first walk in to get them focused and organized? [Teacher G]

The ones that I have observed fall into two categories. One category is just the discipline, okay, as a new teacher, just trying to, you know, manage a class of thirty five to forty kids. The other I see is just, okay, I've got the discipline under control, now how do I develop the curriculum? [Teacher H]

Under the circumstances, with 400 new teachers this year alone, LBUSD did an admirable job in providing coaches for the majority of their new teachers. But there were a few glitches, as there always are in launching new programs. First, a number of new teachers were offered contracts very late -- a few days before school started. Although they had already missed out on the orientation, as long as they were hired by the start of the school year, the new teachers were assigned a coach. However, new teachers who were hired later, for example at Hamilton, which was unexpectedly over enrolled, many new teachers were not hired until October. These late hires were never assigned a coach. Similarly, none of the new teachers at Long Beach Preparatory Academy were included in the program.

Furthermore, at Hamilton, a school with a history of high turnover in the teaching faculty, and 18 new teachers this year, the school did not have enough experienced teachers in all of the disciplines to provide a buddy or coach to each new teacher. At this school a third year teacher was considered a veteran and asked to coach a first year teacher. Due to the short supply of experienced teachers, many new teachers were coached by teachers in a different subject area. This was fine for the general issues like classroom management, grade reports, or discipline, but when it came to lesson planning and learning the content standards, some of the coaching arrangements were less helpful. The selection and assignment of coaches is a site decision, however, at a school that has a shortage of experienced teachers, the program can be problematic.

The late hiring of teachers was due to more than an unexpected increase in enrollment. There are issues about the efficiency with which the personnel office processes contract offers. In our sample, we know of two new teachers who were offered contracts by a principal, who were then lost to other districts because the personnel office was so slow in processing the paper work. We heard that this was a common problem, one that needs to be addressed if LBUSD is going to compete for the best new teachers in the competitive job market.

In general, most teachers had high praise for the district's commitment to providing the much needed support to beginning teachers. These were typical comments we heard from the coaches or coordinators:

I think, on the whole, that the new teacher program is really good if the teachers are accepting of what you're offering. I think that if they really want to better themselves and be better in the profession, then they take that on as help. And I think it does help. Being mentored by your peers is a lot less threatening, I think. And it's more-- it's intended to be more of a help situation. And so I think that that part's good. So you have the new teacher project where each teacher gets a coach and then, on top of that, layered on that, is the Pathwise where the coordinator goes in and observes and then gives them feedback -- They're real protective of those. The principal doesn't get to see that or anything... So I'm really pleased that, you know, a great number of the teachers have been willing to be team players. [Teacher I]

One coordinator was in awe of the benefits now available to new teachers:

They have six release days so that they can share with the coaches and the new teachers. So the coach can take off days and go sit in the classroom and work with them or even model lessons. Or they could take off together and to observe other teachers so that they can talk about what they see and did you notice what they did there and so on. So there's a lot of district resources I've seen go into the new teacher program I wish they had had that when I was a new teacher. Yeah, it's such an amazing resource, you know, we're saying here's those release days. You're never going to get them again. Go observe. Go see what's going on. That would be so wonderful. [Teacher H]

Beginning teachers on the receiving end, also valued the support:

The Pathwise coordinator comes in and, you know, tries to make helpful suggestions to what you can do to improve your teaching skills. And there are different categories and it's a very visual process and she will sit down with you explain what you succeeded in or what you were weak in....The objectives are identified before the observation takes place... They share common experiences, and then pulling out things from their files. Well, you know, this graphic organizer would have helped your students to visualize this part of your lesson more clearly. Or sometimes I will have spent too much on oral instruction and not enough student feedback. Or timing. What could I have condensed a little more? Because I over prepare my lessons quite a bit and there's too much to do, so I have to strip away some layers and simplify it a little more. I'm trying to accomplish too much at one time. So they will suggest what layers to take away to get to what I really, really want to do. Yes. So that's been very helpful. [Teacher J]

A strong induction support program should enhance Long Beach Unified's reputation and its ability to attract and retain new teachers. The district did report a significant decrease in the number of new teachers it lost during this first year. When the oversights of the first year are corrected, we are confident that the induction program will strengthen because of the district's willingness to learn from experience and their commitment to this program. One administrator was well aware of some of the complaints we heard, and plans were already in the works to correct problems. For example, the Pathwise assessment instrument was too cumbersome and time-consuming, so next year the instrument will be streamlined, and that responsibility will become part of the individual coaches's role. In this way, teachers will have to assess only one other teacher. There are plans to have the facilitators conduct monthly meetings with new teachers to go over operational tasks as the calendar dictates, (e.g., how to prepare for back to school night, how to do report cards). In response to concerns raised by new teachers, there are also plans to create a new teacher manual at every school site that outlines the rules for the school, the dress code, the discipline plan, etc. The resources allocated to the New Teacher

Support Program are an indication that it is a district priority. One administrator explained the district's position:

These new teachers, they're getting beat up everywhere. And I feel very uneasy about contributing to that. We hired them, we invited them in. Our job is to get them the training and the preparation that they need without criticizing them.[Administrator A]

Following through on that commitment, a forum was scheduled for new teachers to give them a chance to describe their experiences and identify unmet needs.

Overall, the professional development system is becoming more focused and the quality of training is exceptionally good. Teachers rave over the National Faculty Institutes, Reciprocal Teaching, GEMS (Great Explorations in Math and Science), the new reading and writing institutes, and the quality of consultants the district brings in. Debra Pickering, Elinor Dougherty, and Janet Allen were particular favorites.

We heard only two complaints regarding district professional development. The most frequent one was the amount of class time teachers had to miss in order to attend:

[Other teachers and the principal] will call to my attention any upcoming conferences and workshops and I have attended those. But those can be a source of frustration too because you're taken out of the classroom to learn how to teach in the classroom. There is an irony to all of this. And it's not a good or bad thing, it's just that's how it is. [Teacher J]

Last month and this month, it's been like twice a month. Which is really hard because it's out of the classroom a lot. That's my only-- It's my only complaint with the district. They offer wonderful trainings, but there's so many-- If you take advantage of them, it's just way too much time out of classroom. And I don't know how they work that. If they can start offering things more on the weekends or on Saturdays and offer stipends rather than class time. It's not bad occasionally-- But it gets to be too much. You know, I know there's no-- it's really hard to figure out the happy medium, how do you figure that out? But our district is great about offering trainings. [Teacher B]

But, again, all these meetings, we used to attend so many meetings when we were at Title I, and we were a pull-out. But now that we have regular classrooms, it's awful for the kids for us to just go back and forth. And if you choose people to be your Title 1 people because you think you know what they're doing, it seems a shame to take them out of the classroom to communicate.[Teacher K]

The second issue was more of a wish than a complaint. Some teachers expressed a desire for more differentiated instruction. Reading specialists wanted a refresher course that kept them

informed about the latest research, without repeating strategies they already use on a regular basis.

I would so much love an update. I've asked for it. Can you put together an annual, let's say, two-day update or something, so that teachers can refresh. Well, if you're doing guided reading it isn't guided reading the way you were taught a year ago. Well, I don't want to go back and miss class days to redo running records and redo what I know. I know I have more to learn. But I think a lot of it I don't need to do again. I think that is a common feeling, among the people that have been around for a while. [Teacher K]

The need for differentiation applies to more than just the advanced teachers. A department chair identified the need for deeper understanding, and was concerned about training for department chairs and coaches to understand what's involved in taking on new roles.

I just think we fall back too much on nuts and bolts issues all the time. And I know it is because we don't have enough time. You really have to be an instructional leader to be able to do that and also have to understand the standards really well, and about how to look at student work. [Teacher L]

For example, few teachers have internalized the paradigm shift that must take place to become a standards-based district. One of the new standards coaches recognized the challenge and importance of what she was attempting to do.

[MSCAT] is just to try to get all teachers to see that you've got to find ways for kids to access your text. Whatever it is. It doesn't have to be a book. But whatever you're presenting, it's your job to make sure that kids find a way to understand it. So that's really what the job has been. So I guess that's-- yes, that's pretty major reform. [Teacher A]

Similarly, another coach emphasized the need for additional training, to help teachers implement the strategies they've learned more effectively.

A lot of us now know how to teach writing, but we are still weak on providing students with feedback. I know that when we developed our cause and effect essay books that I experimented with this year, it takes a long time to write the notes to the kids. But it was worth doing that so that the kids would then reread the notes I made before they would do the next essay. It's something that, unless you were the English teachers -- but the math and the history and the science people are -- we're a little weak. We need to develop a system now of providing feedback to students so that we can really guide improvements. [Teacher C]

It is exciting to see the district capitalizing on the "pockets of excellence" we've observed, utilizing the knowledge and skills of teacher leaders to help other teachers' develop their understanding of standards reform.

Principal Professional Development.

Principals have not been overlooked in the district's comprehensive view of professional development, although there have been delays in getting the program started. In the fall, principals were excited by the Carpe Diem key note speaker, Debra Pickering, who described a new approach to teacher supervision, which she called, "Standards-based Supervision." This method shifts the traditional evaluation of teachers from a focus on teacher practices to an assessment of student learning. We heard that principals were anxious to learn more about the process, and were continuing to work with some of the ideas Debra Pickering presented as they discussed how to work with the new Differentiated Teacher Evaluation Model approved by the district. Principals, in collaboration with teachers, can now choose among three options: the traditional STULL evaluation, an action research model, or a portfolio. Due to scheduling conflicts, the district was unable to arrange a three-day institute with Debra, but there are plans to conduct monthly full-day trainings with one of her colleagues from McREL beginning in October.

Inspired by the positive response from their teachers, principals told us they also wanted to attend the Middle School Reading Institutes. However, they were all unable to because they couldn't afford to be out of the building for the full-day sessions. Area Superintendents have decided to arrange monthly one and half hour workshops, based on the content of the institutes for middle school principals. This is a decisive step, with the institution of reading classes and

the district's emphasis on literacy, principals need to know what reading strategies to look for in these classrooms. The greater their knowledge of effective reading comprehension strategies, the more effective they can be in support of teachers as they try to incorporate the strategies in their teaching.

In June, K-12 principals attended a full-day workshop on "Collaborative Action Research and Growth Oriented Evaluation," with Dr. Richard Sagor. Principals learned about ways to guide action research projects to answer two main questions: Are we achieving the desired outcomes? (i.e., are students learning?), and How might our work be refined to improve these outcomes? Another full-day follow-up session is scheduled for August to help principals prepare to implement the action research option with some of the experienced teachers in the fall.

The Long Beach Partnership's Seamless Education Initiative

LBUSD's perspective of school reform reaches beyond the district's boundaries recognizing that their success is dependent on the availability of highly skilled teachers. For this reason they have invested in the Seamless Education Initiative, a collaborative effort with California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), and Long Beach City College (LBCC).

The Seamless Education Initiative began when LBUSD started developing its content standards. It was during a period of economic hard times and people were concerned about the future. Simultaneously, the chancellor of CSULB was distressed by the number of college students needing remedial courses at the university. The collaboration began when the district asked university professors to work with them to develop the content standards. From there the collaboration has deepened and expanded to "remove existing barriers to higher education and create a meaningful higher education experience driven by higher standards of achievement at all levels." (1997 Overview of the Education Priority)

Significant progress has been made on many fronts that promise to contribute to improving the quality of education in Long Beach. Together, CSULB, LBCC, and LBUSD examined data to identify which students needed remedial support. This led to a discussion about the alignment of math courses and the university's math placement test. Tutoring programs have been funded by the university to pay college students to tutor high school students for the placement test. These services are available in the summer prior to enrolling or during the student's senior year in high school. Similarly, Long Beach's Eleventh Grade Writing Initiative grew out of the Seamless Education effort. After agreeing on the writing domain, looking at student work and grading criteria, representatives from all three institutions designed the test. The University has agreed to waive the English placement test for students who score a five or a six on the eleventh grade test. These agreements were possible because of the growing consensus about the standards all three institutions want students to meet.

The Partnership is now working together to improve teacher education at the university. They have developed and secured approval of a middle school credential. In addition, university faculty are team teaching some of the standards institutes with district staff. They have agreed

there is a need for faculty development before some professors, particularly in mathematics, would be ready to teach teachers to teach the way the district wants them to teach. The problem was that teachers usually teach the way they were taught, so the district has to retrain many who learned from university professors who lectured. This is an amazing concession on the part of the university. It is rare for higher education to question its own teaching practices. Moreover, the University has now made a commitment to teacher preparation as an institutional responsibility, involving the education faculty and professors from the parent disciplines. These are all very significant developments that will enhance K-12 education.

All three institutions are now engaged in collaborative research to develop a database to track student performance. The goal is to understand what contributes to success in college that would inform K-12 teachers what they need to do differently to be better prepare students. This is a very exciting partnership that works because each of the members recognize that the goals are interdependent and mutually beneficial to the mission of each institution. The Vice President for Education of the partnership and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum have invested significant amounts of time and energy to issues that were often not within their own organization. However, the long-term benefits to LBUSD are substantial, if teachers come to the district better prepared to teach. This is an excellent example of the district's long-term view, and systems thinking.

We turn back now to the internal operations of the district to examine the districts progress in developing an assessment system that is aligned with content standards.

District Assessment of Content Standards

LBUSD's effort to establish a set of assessments that are consistent with the vision of the Content Standards would best be described as a work in progress, one that took a significant step forward this year with the piloting of performance assessments in science and history. The district continues to develop performance indicators and other assessment tools through an iterative process of piloting and revising performance tasks, using teachers' feedback and student work to inform the revisions. This process reflects the ongoing nature of conversations in the district about how students should be assessed against the standards, and a commitment to an assessment system that is rigorously aligned to the Content Standards.

A significant change in the assessment system was introduced with the adoption of the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT-9) as the new state test in California, replacing the ITAS as the norm-referenced component of the assessment system. Because the SAT-9 is a secure test, the district was unable to follow through with plans to perform an equating study between the ITAS and the SAT-9. While this impacts the comparability of scores from last year to this year, to the extent possible the district does plan to examine relationships between scores on the SAT-9 and ITAS. The SAT-9 has also impacted the amount of time set aside for testing because it requires double the testing time of the ITAS.

Long Beach Unified developed performance assessments in writing and math three years ago, and organized districtwide scoring days to train teachers to use rubrics to score the tests. Each

year they have adjusted and refined the training process to increase the reliability of scores. This year, at the sixth and eighth grades, the district piloted an innovative performance task designed to evaluate both content knowledge and writing ability. The curriculum leaders in science and history worked with the research department and a small group of teacher leaders to develop prompts to assess observational writing in science and speculation about cause and effect in history. Each paper was scored for knowledge of scientific (grade 6) or historical (grade 8) content and for proficiency in writing on rhetorical effectiveness and use of conventions. This was breaking new ground as it was the first time the district has tested content knowledge in these two domains, and attempted to test two different domains with a single test. It was particularly challenging for science where there were differing opinions about the appropriateness of the genre of observational writing to assess science. Teachers' anxieties were exacerbated when the practice prompts (classroom embedded tasks) for science were not distributed until February, only a month before the test was administered. Administrators assured everyone that this first attempt was a pilot and that they were learning from their mistakes. After looking at the whole experience, the composition, administration, and scoring of the tests, revisions would be made in the process for next year.

In history, where the prompts included a substantial amount of complex text, the performance tasks were administered in Spanish to non-English speaking students in bilingual classes. Bilingual teachers' and students' reactions to the whole testing experience were quite negative, primarily because they did not have access to Spanish versions of the classroom-embedded assessments to practice with prior to the administration of the performance test. The plan is to provide translations of the classroom-embedded assessments as well in the future.

Marrying the writing piece with the content piece was a challenge that required collaboration and compromise. One administrator described the process as a struggle:

We were learning and tweaking as we went along. We didn't put anything in cement, we kept on saying don't have any ownership to any of the prompts so that if we change it, you won't feel badly about it. It was very, very open.
[Administrator C]

The impact of this pilot effort was felt at the district, school, and classroom level. One central administrator told us it was really fascinating to watch the whole process. She shared with us her thoughts:

That's probably one of the best things, I think, we've done in terms of pushing this whole effort forward is bringing those history and science teachers on board, not only with the classroom embedded tasks but that district level certification assessment. That really shows you better have taught the standards and used these classroom embedded assessments so that your kids are ready to compete at that district level assessment. [Administrator B]

In preparation for these tests, teachers reported they spent a lot of time having their students practice writing essays of the types expected on the assessments (observational at 6th grade; cause & effect at 8th grade). To some extent, this attention reflects the pressure teachers felt to prepare students for a test. As one teacher observed,

Teachers are feeling a lot of pressure from the district, to make sure that their kids perform. [The pressure] can be felt I think on every single campus. Everybody's feeling very pressured. [Teacher B]

District administrators were aware of the stress these tests generated, and they tried to alleviate teachers' concerns:

That science and history effort, I think - it was very hard, very hard, but it has had such powerful payoffs, in terms of collaboration. I thought we were going to lose some teachers in the process, because they were really stressed out. We gave them lots of opportunities, especially the science teachers, to talk about what their concerns were, what they were anxious about. They were concerned about whose name the score was going to be reported under, was it going to count toward a school-wide proficiency thing? I mean, all those things. And we tried to really just tell them that this is a pilot, this is the first time we've done this, we'll just report it out by grade level, one year only, if that'll lower your anxiety. [Administrator B]

We also heard teachers talk about several positive consequences resulting from the new assessment approach. For one, this assessment promoted collaboration among teachers from different content areas. Referring to English and history teachers, one teacher commented,

We worked together especially when we learned what the test is going to be like for the eighth graders. Speculation about cause and effect and Manifest Destiny. So we worked very closely from the beginning of the school year. [Teacher M]

Another teacher felt the assessment had the effect of elevating History to its rightful place among the core content areas.

History is often considered a poor cousin of all the content areas. By having an assessment like that, I think it makes it more important in everybody's minds. [Teacher N]

To help students prepare for the district administered performance assessments, teachers were given a number of classroom-embedded measures (some in draft form) to use during the course of the school year. Many of the teachers that we interviewed reported that they used these classroom-embedded assessments extensively during the past year. Others mentioned using the embedded measures as springboards for developing their own assessments. Reflecting on the use of the classroom-embedded measures, one teacher noted,

We model practices around them that we use all year long. We've had the practice writing all year long modeled around that. And it's been a good process because we've learned what is a good prompt and what is not and what kinds of things you need to look for. [Teacher B]

While the feedback regarding the classroom-embedded measures was encouraging, a few teachers were troubled by the additional time required to grade the tasks using the rubrics provided for this purpose.

Several teachers told us that they felt somewhat guilty because they spent so much time on preparation. One teacher confided,

I sort of feel like I'm cheating and yet I'm not, because I have no idea what the question's going to be -- I just have to be sure that my kids really understand this concept, and that they really have ingrained -- a five paragraph essay that looks like what the essential components are, and the kinds of language that needs to be used in their discussion. [Teacher C]

And so teachers did lots of practice with the classroom embedded tasks the district provided. They said they really worked hard in preparation, and then, when it was over, they stepped back and said,

Part of me feels like I've cheated because I was teaching to the test -- and part of me says, look how much kids learned and how much progress that we made through this effort. Look how much good instruction took place as a result of the tests. [Teacher L]

To help the district and individual schools monitor progress toward meeting the standards (as well as meeting Title 1 requirements), the district continues to report the percentages of students who are "globally proficient." Global proficiency is obtained by combining proficiency levels in literacy and mathematics. Proficiency in literacy or mathematics is determined, in turn, by combining performance and norm-referenced scores. The district is also considering incorporating additional performance tasks, math facts test scores and/or grades into this model. Schools that are targeted to receive additional district supports (focus schools) are identified by looking at the global proficiency vs. non-proficiency percentages. It is up to each area superintendent to evaluate these data and determine the schools that need additional support. Since scores on the district performance assessments (used to evaluate performance against the literacy standards) administered this past spring are not yet available, the data describing the percentage of students who are at least globally proficient has not been summarized for the 1997-98 school year. The district's goal is for 90 percent of the students to be at least globally proficient; however, 1997 data suggest it will take considerable work to achieve this standard. For example, in the three middle schools in our sample, the percentage of students that are at least proficient range from 14.3 to 26.9 percent. While the middle school ranked the highest in

the district had 64.6 percent of students at or above the proficient level, this was a drop from 69.4 percent the year before. With a new norm-referenced test administered this year, and concomitant changes in the criteria for determining proficiency, it is difficult to make comparisons with previous years.

As mentioned above, performance data with respect to the literacy standards has been delayed because the district has not completed the scoring of the writing assessments. While the district is considering adding more measures to the reporting system, and implementing alternative approaches to performance testing, considerable energy has also been spent a) developing and revising the classroom-embedded measures and accompanying rubrics or criteria for evaluation, and b) identifying sample student responses as anchor papers to help teachers and students understand the level of performance that is required to meet standards. Sets are being made available for the four core content areas. The different content areas are at different places in finalizing sets of classroom-embedded measures. In a number of cases, the types of prompts and demands of the classroom-embedded measures emulate those of the district performance tests. Without this classroom piece the assessment system would never be completely aligned because there is simply not enough testing time to do it all at the district level. In addition to helping teachers and students prepare for the district administered performance tasks, the classroom-embedded tasks provide models of good assessment that teachers can follow and use throughout the year to monitor their students' performances. They also serve to focus instruction on approaches that are most likely to engender success on the district-administered tasks.

A variety of classroom-embedded tools can be used to inform instruction, including: free response tasks, running records, math facts tests, projects, and portfolios. In our baseline report (1996), we indicated that "increasingly, teachers in all schools keep student portfolios, although the form, content, and use vary from school to school and classroom to classroom." This statement remains an accurate description of the status of portfolio use in classrooms. If anything, we may have seen a drop off in attention to portfolios. As before, among those teachers who use portfolios, we observed considerable variability in how they were used. The majority of teachers used portfolios as a simple collection of student work; very few teachers used them for assessment purposes. Many indicated that portfolios were most valuable as a vehicle for getting students to reflect on their work, their growth, and identifying the areas that need improvement. Some teachers indicated that they often learn from student's reflections what students have not understood, and what concepts require reteaching or clarification. Teachers also indicated that portfolios were useful in parent conferences to discuss student performance.

Among our sample schools, only Hill has a systematic schoolwide portfolio program (we understand that Hughes and Newcomb have some kind of system as well). Hill has a portfolio day at the end of the year when every student in the school shares his or her portfolio with members of the larger community. Students choose three or four of their favorite pieces of work to include in their portfolio, and they write a reflection for each piece explaining why they chose to include it. One faculty member described the approach for us:

[The students] have to talk about what they like best about it and they talk

about what they feel that they're doing well. You know, what their strengths are. And we highlight the strengths. They get to talk to someone other than a teacher, some total stranger from the community who is willing to come in here and share their work or share with the kids and they love it. [Teacher F]

However, even at Hill there is substantial variability in how the portfolios are used in classrooms beyond the day of sharing.

I keep a portfolio because I want kids to know that their work is valued, that it isn't just, OK, here's a B, you can throw it away if you want....It's my way of saying it matters. Keep it, it matters. [Teacher A]

It's an assessment tool for them. It's not for me. It's already, everything that goes in it as far as I'm concerned is assessed. Now at the end of the year what we'll do is we'll conference. And we'll do an informal/formal assessment. I will spend at least five, if I can, five to ten minutes with each student. I'm going to have them choose in order maybe their five best pieces and then the first piece that they wrote, and we'll look at it and we'll assess how they have progressed and look at what have they have done here that they weren't doing in the beginning of the school year? What do they think they still need to improve on? And we'll just discuss that. [Teacher F]

We identified at least two reasons for the confusion and variability about the use of portfolios. First, there was no clear policy, at either the district or school level, as to how portfolios should be used. The PQR process focuses on analyzing work in student's portfolios, but there is no specific requirements about what those portfolios should look like. In most cases the portfolios are simply collections of student work. The district has plans to send a group of science and health teachers, along with their curriculum leaders, to a conference this summer to learn about a system of classroom embedded assessments with portfolios. The goal is to use what they learn to inform the design of a district portfolio and accompanying performance standards that would be used to assess the collection of work. At this point, teachers expressed a vague understanding that they *should* use them, but how, or why was less clear.

We're supposed to use them. And I don't really know -- as far as I know, there's no specific policy on what you really want to do with your portfolios other than they want to see evidence of portfolios in classrooms. But as far as a teaching tool or an assessment, I really haven't gotten it. [Teacher B]

Moreover, many teachers who had used portfolios more actively in previous years, suggested that they had let them "slide" a bit this year, because so many other demands on teachers' time took precedence. One major time-consuming undertaking was preparing for the new districtwide writing assessments. Science, language arts, and history teachers spent a great deal of time meeting together and strategizing to design learning experiences that would prepare their students to respond to both the writing and the content demands of the new assessments. At Hamilton and Marshall, teachers had the additional burden of preparing for PQR and CCR

evaluations. Given the energy required for all of these activities it is understandable that portfolios were less of a priority -- another example of assessment driving instruction.

As mentioned above, a focus this year was the development of classroom embedded assessments in the four core disciplines. In language arts, all the middle school teachers were provided with a final set of classroom-embedded measures earlier this year. In science work on the physical science tasks has been completed; the earth science tasks are undergoing final revisions; and measures for life science are currently being written. The goal is to have physical, earth and life science tasks with sample responses and rubrics ready for every middle school teacher by the beginning of the fall of the upcoming school year. Similarly, in math the goal was to compile all the free response items into a book to be made available to teachers at the beginning of the school year. In history, the curriculum-embedded assessments were given to middle school teachers last fall and piloted during the year. This summer, there are plans for teachers to look over the results in light of the feedback from the pilot assessment and make any needed revisions. In history and science, some of the prompts for the curriculum-embedded assessments are presented through videos. These classroom-embedded measures are currently not part of the accountability system; therefore, it is impossible to determine the extent to which teachers are using the ones already made available to them. Some people within our sample feel, however, that the new assessments in 6th grade science and 8th grade history have had the effect of increasing teacher use of the classroom-embedded assessments. A selection of these classroom-embedded tests will be designated "core tasks" which will be utilized to further monitor proficiency against the standards at the district level. Evaluation of the technical qualities of these classroom indicators is also planned for the coming year.

In addition, the mathematics department has completed a draft of the first of their end-of-year exams, for Algebra I, a course that enrolls primarily 9th graders and a small percentage of eighth graders throughout the district. This draft will be revised in light of student responses to the administration this past spring, and be implemented in the 1998-1999 school year. While it is intended that such end-of-year exams will provide teachers with further guidance about expected student outcomes, it is unclear if students will be retained in a course as a consequence of failing this exam or, exactly how the score will be used. At the high school level, the end of course exams will be used to measure the effectiveness of algebra, geometry, and advanced algebra courses in Long Beach Unified schools, and to target professional development within the district and math teacher preparation at CSULB. This focus is a product of the Seamless Education Initiative, this time with the impetus coming from the university. Their motivation for launching this collaborative effort is to reduce the number of students in need of remedial courses after enrolling in the university.

Finally, one cannot talk about assessment without talking about grades. In LBUSD, grades are increasingly gaining attention as indicators of student performance in the assessment system. For example, consideration is being given to using grades in the district's reporting system. The attention to grades, however, has been driven primarily by the implementation of the Eighth Grade Educational Improvement Initiative. The use of grades to make important promotion and retention decisions means that grades should meet the most stringent standards for stability and

authenticity. To date, the district has not systematically evaluated existing grading practices, nor has it put in place a mechanism for ensuring the soundness of these indicators. We have observed variations in the criteria from passing grades to range from 60 percent to as low as 40 percent. While the district reports that the number of students with multiple-Fs has dropped, the issues surrounding the reliability and validity of teacher grades makes it difficult to know whether this drop is due to the interventions that have been instituted to support students at risk of failing. Furthermore, some focus schools, which initiated intervention programs for their failing students this past year, have actually experienced a small increase in the number of students with multiple-Fs. The coordinator of an intensive intervention program for eighth graders at one of the schools, enthusiastically described their efforts, which included an organized study hall during lunch, an elective class where students were given individualized assistance in areas of greatest need, parent conferences, and a performance contract signed by the student, the student's parent, and the program director. He confidently reported that if not for the program,

we would probably have at least a hundred more Fs than we do now.
And our grade point average is much higher. [Administrator D]

He also believed that the eighth grade class was the best grade in the school, and yet they were unable to reduce the number of students with multiple F's who were not promoted to high school. This perplexing observation underscores the need to carefully examine the effectiveness of the variety of interventions being tried. We are encouraged that the district and schools are recognizing that eighth grade is often too late for remedial interventions to make a difference, and are beginning to think about identifying students earlier. The district is introducing reading classes for all sixth grade students to strengthen their reading comprehension skills -- a critical skill for all subject areas. While strong instructional programs are critically important to raising academic achievement, we also believe the need to establish reliable, valid and fair grading practices is urgent because of the high-stakes consequences it has for students' futures. The district did decrease the percentage of eighth grade students with multiple Fs from eight percent of the 1997 eighth grade class to five percent of the 1998 class. They anticipate approximately 300 students will enroll at Long Beach Preparatory Academy (LBPA) in the fall.

Ending Social Promotion -- The Eighth Grade Initiative

LBPA has completed its inaugural year, graduating approximately 95 percent of the students who completed the school year. (Many students left the school during the year, some transferring to other districts.) After a challenging start, by mid-year the Academy settled into a comfortable operation, having modified the schedule numerous times, experimented with the composition of teams, revised the content of the Life Skills class, and struggled with high teacher turnover. In May we conducted interviews and focus groups with teachers, students, and the administration. The purpose of our visit was to gather background information to begin to

understand the issues for both teachers and students at the school. We needed that foundation to inform a research design that would be sensitive to the needs of the school. We will begin systematic data collection at LBPA in the fall.

Our initial impressions of the school are that a lot of dedication and hard work on the part of the administration, support staff, teachers, and Dorothy Harper, Area A Superintendent, produced some very positive results. We were impressed by the commitment of the staff to addressing the socio-emotional needs students. Teachers worked very hard to find ways to teach effectively, to connect with the students so that they would **want** to learn. Teachers told us that most of the students' difficulties came from lack of motivation. The students agreed that the major reason why they ended up at the Academy was that they just didn't do the work. Motivating some of the students continued to be a challenge all year, as demonstrated in the high absentee rate. Half way through the year, 20 percent of the students had already missed more than 20 days of school.

Teachers described their jobs as draining, but a labor of love. They were often overwhelmed by the issues in students' personal lives. One teacher admitted that,

Because of their learning styles and their personalities -- they are very, very challenging. [Teacher O]

Another teacher emphasized the challenge that teachers confront:

You can imagine one at-risk student in one classroom. Well, here our entire class is at-risk. That's why they are here. [Teacher P]

Even so, every teacher could identify strengths that the students bring that they could tap into to help them be successful.

We don't have stupid kids here. We have very bright kids. The problem is that their brightness and their intelligence are focused in different directions than most of the kids in regular schools. A lot of the kids here are extremely street smart. They have intelligences in ways that are just amazing. They know how to deal with situations. [Teacher Q]

Other teachers recognized their resiliency, the compassion and voice that comes through in their writing, and their artistic talents. But most described their academic skills as "abysmal." Literacy skills, in particular, were very low: reading, writing conventions, and spelling difficulties limited students' ability to communicate what they know. One teacher's frustrations were clear when he insisted,

These are bright kids, but they don't have the tools to express it. [Teacher R]

Teachers also identified weak math skills, and limited proficiency with English among END students as factors holding some of the students back. The extent of academic need among the Prep students did not surprise us. LBPA's reason for being is to begin to address this very issue of students being promoted year after year, without developing the necessary skills to be successful. However, we are concerned about the mismatch between teachers' descriptions of students' academic needs, and students' reports about their classes at Prep. Students responded positively to teacher's caring attitudes, and their responsiveness to their needs. They liked the smaller class size, the Life Skills course, and the block schedule, which gave them more time to complete their work. However, students reported that their classes were not very demanding. Many said that a lot of what they were learning they had had before and they did not find the classes particularly difficult. We also noticed during our brief tour through classrooms that most of the student work displayed was art work, rather than written work. While we agree that it is important to allow students alternate ways to express their thinking, if they are going to become competent readers and writers, they have a lot of work to do. We are also concerned about the reliance on a learning styles instrument that revealed that 90 percent of their students are kinesthetic learners. Research on learning styles to date is highly suspect. Practical applications of learning styles theory are characterized by weak measures that do not meet rigorous scientific standards of reliability and validity. Evidence, at this point, that matching instruction to students' preferences will boost their achievement is very slim (Curry, 1990; Snow, 1990).

We understand that staff at the Academy are desperately searching for answers to help these students be successful. We agree that it is good practice to recognize and accommodate individual differences. It is also good practice to present information in a variety of ways through more than one modality, but it is not wise to categorize learners and prescribe methods solely on the basis of tests with questionable technical qualities. Moreover, if these students are to be successful in high school, they will need to learn strategies to adapt to more traditional instructional approaches.

It is clear that the Prep staff has made a significant difference in the lives of the students they worked with this year. We were impressed by students' confidence and presence when they greeted us and welcomed us to their school. The counseling and support systems help students feel valued and safe. This is a major achievement, for which the staff deserves enormous credit. Now with the school established, a year of experience to build on, and additional academic support from the district's standards coaches, the Academy is well situated to focus on helping Prep students reach higher academic standards. We look forward to following their progress.

IV. Standards Implementation at the School Level

On the whole, we saw teachers and school administrators in all of the schools working very hard to focus instruction around the content standards and to improve student performance. Every school had instituted additional support programs to assist students at-risk of failing. We found an increased level of collaboration among school staff within and across department lines. This was in part due the new district performance tests, but there were also a number of school-based initiatives that were teacher-driven.

Marshall has a number of initiatives underway. In their effort to raise expectations for student achievement they launched a GATE program and expanded SEEK/EXCEL classes. They also started an AVID class this year and have plans to expand the program next year. Another major focus has been to develop a strong reading program at the school. A California Demonstration grant funded school-wide training in reciprocal teaching strategies, and many teachers have participated in the Middle School Reading Institutes. A team of teachers will be working over the summer to develop the reading curriculum for 6th and 7th grade reading classes to begin in the fall.

Hamilton used the PQR process to make significant strides toward implementing standards in classrooms across the school. Initial reviews revealed significant gaps in many areas that they spent most of the year addressing. By the time of their CCR review in May, the school looked significantly different: teachers had the content standards displayed in classrooms, all had student work folders, and the writing process was visible to guide students as they worked. During the year departments were given sub-release days to plan curriculum and write standards-based units. Although teachers were tired, we perceived a renewed sense of optimism in the school, having produced a strong, three-year plan for moving the school forward.

Hill teachers have also been busy. They've created a RISE program to address the needs of gifted and high achieving students. The program was initiated at the 7th grade level and will expand to include 6th and 8th graders next year. The program includes a service learning component and a requirement of maintaining a 3.0 to remain in the program. Hill also focused tremendous energy toward preparing students for the district performance tests. We were impressed with the collaboration that occurred among the history, language arts, and science departments at the school.

We were particularly excited about the way teacher leaders in the language arts/ELD department at Hill used the district's assessment system as an opportunity to look critically at their own teaching practices. Through the combined efforts of teacher-initiated staff development, an action research grant and a grant from the Mellon Foundation, the Language Arts/ELD department has developed a detailed assessment system for monitoring student progress in literacy. Teachers made the decision to:

teach these kids how to do these tests, but at the same time find out what they know, build on their strengths, find out what they didn't know and find out what we weren't teaching well enough. [Teacher F]

To accomplish these goals, the LA/ELD teachers developed (or adopted from the classroom embedded measures) prompts for three schoolwide writing tests and constructed three skills building tests for all students. The tests were administered to students at the beginning of the year, at mid-year, and near the end of the year just prior to the administration of the district-level assessments. Some of the LA/ELD teachers got together and scored the work for rhetoric using a common rubric. Then students' scores on both assessments were recorded on graphs used to

monitor progress. The ELD department is using a similar graphing process so that students can monitor their own progress. They have also developed analytic scoring guides to assist ELD students in monitoring their own writing. ELD teachers also do running records to supplement the data for ELD students. The grant funds support teachers getting together to look at student work and analyze their progress. From these sessions they have identified areas that require additional instruction and scaffolding to strengthen student writing. An ELD teacher explained their purpose:

We're trying to help students gain English literacy so they can attain the same high standards that we have for our fluent English speakers and fully prepare for high school and college. That's really our focus here is to get these kids into the regular program and give them a chance to take AP English. [Teacher S]

Based on the experiences and results from the first year, several revisions to the initiative are being considered. In addition to modifying some of the prompts and test items, the LA/ELD department plans to score the written responses for content and conventions as well as involve science and history teachers in the scoring and development of additional prompts.

Building on this work, two of the ELD teachers designed a Summer Reading Institute for the staff at Hill where they shared their findings from their action research. Together with their program facilitator and one of their standards coaches, they taught their colleagues to use reciprocal teaching, reading circles, and other strategies to help students access text in the content areas. Most of these strategies have come from the district's new reading institute (MSCAT), Middle School Content Area Teachers of Reading.

[MSCAT]-- that's where I got the idea. I thought to myself, damn it, let's help these people to help their students. That's our job. [Teacher F]

They hope to develop a special intensive instructional program using these strategies for the students during the first few weeks of school. As demonstrated in the following quote, teachers at this site clearly understand that beyond monitoring progress, assessment can and should serve to inform instruction.

I see this more as a constructive thing than a change thing. These are the things I've got, these are the things that are in place, these are the things that the kids are doing, this is where we're supposed to go, that's the high standard. Now, how are we going to get there? So I see a lot of people, hear a lot of people saying, how do we explain this to kids? And I think that the kids really explain it to us, that by kid-watching and observing, doing things like running records and classroom assessments, performance tasks, that you can really see how it all links together, how all those pieces build. [Teacher S]

This also demonstrates that the district is doing a good job providing schools with the tools that teachers need to build quality programs. Many of the schools need additional guidance in understanding how to utilize all the resources available to them.

We found extensive use of rubrics and scoring guides throughout the schools that we visited. Since the district performance assessments and classroom-embedded measures are accompanied by scoring rubrics, it is not surprising that mention of rubrics was frequently associated with use of the classroom-embedded measures or the district performance assessments. The use of rubrics primarily involved reviewing the criteria of the rubrics in preparation for tests, and familiarizing the students with the criteria of the rubric by having the students work with rubrics to score and discuss each other's papers. District-developed rubrics, however, are rarely used by teachers to evaluate other student performances. One reason cited for not extending the use of these rubrics was that the language of the rubrics is not easy for students to understand. In addition, some teachers noted that the rubrics are task specific; therefore, are difficult to apply to prompts teachers create for their own use.

Our experience in other districts suggests that engaging teachers in the development of global rubrics for certain performance tasks, such as problem solving in mathematics, and or writing a research paper, can foster deeper understanding of performance assessments in at least two ways. First, a generic rubric helps develop a shared understanding of expectations for student performance, reaching consensus on the components that are most essential in quality student work. Furthermore, it provides students with greater opportunities to understand what is expected. Second, a global rubric provides a framework that helps teachers understand how task specific rubrics evolve, thus enhancing their ability to create their own rubrics that are aligned with the tenets of the generic form.

At times teachers mentioned the use of generic rubrics developed and used by all the teachers within the department. For example, at one school, all the teachers in the science department use common rubrics for scoring labs, research papers and visual presentations. Similarly, at another school, the teachers in the language arts department all use the same rubric to score students' written performances. Only in mathematics did we not hear of any school-wide initiatives to develop and use common rubrics. While it appears that the efforts to standardize rubrics is happening within some of the departments of some schools, many of the rubrics we observed are developed by individual teachers for use within their classrooms. Some teachers have engaged students in constructing rubrics for major assignments. This strategy holds promise for helping students understand what exemplary student work looks like. Using examples of student work from previous years to give students concrete examples seems to foster critical discussions that enhance students' understanding of the process. Finally, while neatness, completeness and organization are criteria that characterize many rubrics, we increasingly observed rubrics that highlight content knowledge and quality of writing as the more critical attributes used to evaluate student performances.

Our teacher interviews left little doubt that Long Beach Unified teachers have acquired expertise in using rubrics; that they see the value of rubrics as tools for informing students of their

accomplishments; and that the standard by which these accomplishments are being judged is gradually being elevated. Given the breadth of rubrics use we observed, however, it is not clear to what extent teachers (within a department, school, or the district) agree on what qualities to look for in student work. We found teachers' understanding ranged from confusion to quite sophisticated understanding. At one school, teachers admitted uncertainty about when and how rubrics should be used:

We may need to have a staff development day that focuses on rubrics and scoring guides. Because there's a question as to which is which, when do you use what, how do you write them. You know, just numerous questions on the rubrics and scoring guides. But we use them, but how do we use them and when and how do we write them and things like that are some major questions that I think our whole staff has. [Teacher T]

Teachers will need additional training to develop an understanding of the purpose of rubrics, and how and when to use them. This type of training will also help to address the issue of consistency in grading practices.

In English/Language arts classes we continue to observe that students have numerous opportunities to engage in creative and thought provoking activities. The writing process is highly visible as all the teachers in our sample have participated in either Write-to-Learn, or the California Lit Project, or a variety of other writing courses. We also observed teachers using graphic organizers and visualization strategies to help students access and analyze a variety of text. All of the language arts teachers worked intensively to help prepare students for the district performance tests, and were extremely gratified to report that they had seen great improvement in students' writing.

Similarly, history teachers, especially 7th and 8th grade, were very focused on preparing students for the assessments. Students did much more writing this year in an effort to learn to write effective cause and effect essays. We also saw evidence of the writing process being used extensively in history. Teachers Curriculum Institute (TCI) History Alive! was pervasive in classes at every grade level. Students seem to respond enthusiastically to this multi-media, hands-on approach to history. While TCI provides a strong foundation, we observed a marked difference between the way the materials were presented across classrooms. Less experienced teachers tended to stick to the basic curriculum, selecting from the menu of activities the program offers. We observed more experienced teachers using the materials to launch into more challenging activities such as debates and Socratic seminars, to push students to question, and speculate, and infer, or write original newspapers in the voice of the historical period. Now that teachers are comfortable with TCI, it is time to focus on deepening the discussion to challenge students to think about history with a more critical eye.

In science classes, we observed mainly teacher-directed lessons, which seemed an effective way to manage experiments and lots of hands-on activities. All classrooms had the standards posted, and teachers explained the standards to students as their learning goal. In a few classes we saw

students engaged in journal writing to reflect on what they'd learned, and science teachers using the writing process to teach students to write five paragraph essays with strong introductions and concluding paragraphs. With an integrated, spiraling curriculum, where everyone teaches physical, earth, and life science at each grade level, some teachers were still confused as to what to teach when. Science departments were meeting to develop grade level and schoolwide plans for coordinating their curriculum, sometimes out of necessity because of the shortage of books. While we observed a few outstanding science classes, we did not see many teachers asking questions to assess understanding, asking students to explain their thinking, or to answer "why" questions. Questions too often targeted rote knowledge and procedures. Future science institutes and other professional development offerings need to focus on inquiry-based instructional strategies.

Across all of our sample schools, we find teachers in the area of mathematics have yet to grasp the full implications of standards reform. We saw evidence in every classroom that teachers use the content standards to guide their instruction. However, most teachers think of the content standards as a new curriculum scope and sequence, albeit one that is more challenging than the curriculum they had taught in the past. Teachers also agree that content standards are providing much needed consistency in what is taught across classrooms and across schools.

Well I refer to them a lot, especially when I'm looking through a chapter and I have to figure out what to cover and what not to cover and so I do refer to the standards a lot... But I have my own materials that I refer to where the standards are broken down and more detail about each standard. So I do refer to them a lot. They've been very helpful. I wish I would have had them when I started teaching math in middle school. [Teacher U]

It really gets the teachers focused on what to teach. For too long here I know teachers have just been teaching things that they thought that the kids should know, which have been low level skills and I think this raises the level of teaching, because now sixth grade teachers realize, oh, we have to teach algebra, one step equations. And seventh grade teachers are saying oh, we have to teach two step equations. And that really raises the level of expectancy of the teachers because many teachers I think this year are finally seeing that the stuff that I taught in the previous years was not, were not good enough for, for my kids. [Teacher V]

In mathematics, more so than in other subject areas, teachers in our sample have not yet adopted the belief system that is at the center of standards reform -- rejecting the notion of a normal distribution of student achievement in favor of the requirement that all children achieve at higher levels. Although teachers expressed concerns about the pressure and responsibility of being accountable for student outcomes, we rarely found math teachers focusing their energies on trying to figure out how to help children reach the standards. Rather, their response was to go "back to basics" and try to remediate the students' lack of skills.

The mastery part, where 100% of the kids will have mastery over these, that part, I don't like. Because it makes me feel like a failure when I have kids like this test, where they couldn't even, I mean, do these graphing tables. I mean, how am I expecting 100% of these kids to get this? I mean, there's a lot of pressure. [Teacher E]

I think it's just is basically I feel like it would be easier to teach down to a lower level. Like, you know, the 3rd to 5th grade level with some students. And I feel like I really have to try to teach it up to the 6th to 8th grade. I feel like I need to be up here, you know, this is where we should be for 7th graders and I feel like they're not prepared. I feel like I need to spend some time just going over the basics and going over that and that. I think that's one of the frustrations. [Teacher W]

One teacher's acknowledgment that it is the teacher's responsibility to learn how to provide the kinds of learning opportunities that will enable the students to achieve the standards, was a unique exception:

We still have to develop some growth within our department so that when the kids finally reach me, I can truly teach the eighth grade content standards and that's one area where we need, you know, maybe one or two years until we get there, because it's still to a point where eighth grade teachers are still reaching down and touching some of those sixth grade standards or seventh grade standards, you know, and sixth grades teachers are touching on some of the fifth grade standards, so we're still trying to refine it to where we can get all our kids up to the level where they should be. [Teacher V]

In mathematics, changes in teaching practices tend to be driven by the new textbooks which include less computation and more real world applications. We did observe teachers using activities that they had learned at district inservice workshops, but we did not hear teachers asking students the kinds of higher-order questions that would promote discussion or thinking that might lead to conceptual understanding.

The district has made improving literacy skills a priority for understandable reasons, and there is still much work to do in that area. We are, however, concerned about the lack of attention to mathematics. This concern is based on several converging pieces of evidence. Principals tell us that their weakest area is mathematics. The district's math scores on this year's state test, the SAT-9, indicate that math scores are as low, or in some cases, lower, than reading and language scores. Too many math teachers are either emergency credential or are not certified to teach mathematics. Furthermore, even when teachers have a math credential, we can not be confident that their preparation is adequate, due to inadequate preparation in the local universities' teacher education programs. The kind of instruction advocated by the National Council of Teachers of

Mathematics (NCTM) standards, and Long Beach Unified's district standards, requires much deeper content knowledge to be able to teach in new ways that will enable all students to be successful in math. LBUSD is well aware of this issue, and is working hard through their Seamless Education initiative to strengthen university programs in mathematics education. This, of course, is a long-term endeavor. In the meantime, the district has developed standards-based institutes, and employed mathematics coaches to work with teachers in their classrooms on implementing standards. We are not yet seeing those efforts changing either teacher's belief systems or classroom practices sufficiently. We have also found that mathematics teachers as a group, were less likely to pursue professional development to strengthen their content knowledge and instructional skills, than teachers in other disciplines.

V. Concluding Thoughts

Two years ago we wrote that "one of the district's greatest strengths is its understanding that standards, to ultimately become a part of teachers' and students' everyday classroom experiences, will have to be aligned with all other components of the school system." Substantial progress has been made in the intervening two years to create a comprehensive and coherent approach to standards reform. We credit the quality and boundless energy of educators leading this reform in the district offices and in the schools. In our baseline report we noted "pockets of excellence," where teachers were engaging students in creative and challenging learning experiences, using strategies that have a strong research base. We have watched those pockets of excellence expand to include new teachers, and we've seen new pockets open up at each of the schools in our sample. The challenge now is to address the substantial gap that still exists between this impressive group of teacher leaders and standard practice in many classrooms. We also believe that the district needs to make greater use of the existing expertise, perhaps by using these classrooms as exemplars for new teachers, or departments that are struggling to improve their programs.

We have observed the continual refinement of the district's professional development program into a more comprehensive and consistent focus on raising student achievement. Quality training in both instructional strategies and subject matter knowledge is available in a number of different forums. The challenge remains to reach the teachers most in need of additional training. The development of a data management system to monitor both participation and ultimately the impact on student achievement is an important step in being able to target professional development resources where they are needed most. The introduction of standards coaches to do in-class professional development should help in this effort, as well as to minimize time away from classrooms during the school year.

The assessment system is growing into alignment with the content standards. The district performance assessments and supplementary classroom-embedded measures can be a powerful tool for monitoring student progress and informing instructional practice. However, teachers need additional training to understand the potential, and put it to use. Performance standards are

the missing piece to both raising teachers' expectations and reaching consistency in grading practices. As long as grades continue to play a central role in the accountability system, there is an urgent need to address these issues.

Finally, we applaud the district's focus on literacy, and all the resources and supports provided to teachers in this area. While this focus must be sustained, we believe there is an urgent need for comparable attack on mathematics instruction.

We look forward to returning to LBUSD in the fall of 1998, and learning more about their progress in helping students achieve higher standards.