Standards-Based Middle School Reform
Long Beach Unified School District

I. Introduction

1998-99 was a challenging school year in Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD). It was a year filled with several new initiatives: the introduction of standards coaches, the Math Assessment Portfolio, curriculum mapping, thinking maps training, piloting of Reading Development classes, and the expansion and refinement of two middle school reading institutes. The district continued to experiment with combining content and writing performance on the districtwide assessments, while the inevitable SAT9 testing required by the State, this year with augmented sections, stimulated a new emphasis on test preparation. All of this occurred in the context of increasing accountability measures adopted within the district and imposed by the state. The eighth grade initiative and the creation of Long Beach Preparatory Academy (Fall, 1997) was the first step in holding students accountable for meeting minimum standards and ending social promotion. The piloting of the assessment portfolio in mathematics signaled the next step, developing a system to certify that students are meeting the standards in each of the content areas. In addition, Area Superintendents each implemented their own accountability measure, requiring schools to complete and submit some form of student work protocols. At the state level, it was the first year of a new high-stakes accountability system, based on the SAT9 standardized test and the SAT9 Augmentation test. Not only is the state publishing and rank ordering schools based on SAT9 scores, but low performing schools that fail to improve after three years face possible reconstitution. On top of all this, LBUSD was absorbed in a labor-intensive effort to pass a major bond measure to address the extreme over crowding in district schools. Not surprisingly, the number of new initiatives and the rapid pace of change produced a significant amount of stress, and at the same time significant progress, continuing to build on the foundation laid in recent years.

We believe there are important lessons to be learned from this challenging year that are instructive for the next phase of reform, which will require significant changes in instructional practices. Last year (August, 1998) we wrote:

> 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.

While the district continues to be responsive to teachers' concerns, inviting feedback and listening to input from the schools, many of the events of this year suggest that the district needs to do a better job learning from experience and to do more thoughtful, detailed planning upfront, before embarking on new initiatives. While it is true that not all of the consequences of new initiatives can be anticipated, many can. In the long run, the energy invested in eliminating as many unintended consequences as possible will be well worth the effort.

For example, five years ago, the district took the first step of developing content standards. It has taken several years to get to the point where teachers know the standards and use them to evaluate whether lessons address one or more of the standards. At this point, the content standards are well-established throughout the district. The standards have produced greater consistency in the content taught across classrooms and schools. In most cases, they have also raised expectations for student achievement, as the standards are indeed more rigorous and challenging than the curriculum of ten years ago. However, as we have said in previous reports (August, 1998; February, 1999), performance standards are the missing piece needed to help all teachers understand what is required to meet standards, to answer the question, 'how good is good enough?' Figuring out how to design performance standards in a way that will drive profound changes in instructional practice poses a significant challenge -- it is the difference between looking to the standards to guide instructional decisions to help students reach the standards, and simply following the text or curriculum materials and checking which standards a particular lesson might fit.

At the district level, administrators have done the hard work of developing an overall strategic plan for standards reform. It is a complex process, involving work on several different pieces simultaneously -- efforts that may at first appear unrelated -- but which are all important steps toward achieving the district's goals. The task before the district is analogous to the task that teachers confront when implementing standards in their classroom. We have found that what makes exemplary teachers stand out from their peers is the ability to dissect the standards into the component knowledge and skills, while maintaining a focus on the complex whole. First, teachers have to understand what the standards are asking students to know and be able to do. Next, they have to assess where their students are now -- identifying both what they are currently able to do and what students need to learn. Then teachers must use that information to construct

a course of instruction that starts with where the students are, incorporating direct instruction, mini-lessons, opportunities for students to practice and refine skills using the teachers' feedback, rubrics and scoring guides to shape and support student learning. All of this has to be integrated into a comprehensive approach that will enable students to demonstrate their ability to meet standards.

The following conversation between two experienced teacher leaders captures the complexity of what teachers are being asked to do:

> Teacher A: Ten years ago it was so much easier. But we're getting much better work out of our kids. It's very exciting, but the amount of time that it takes, the forward thinking that has to be done to really make the student work successful is unbelievable, isn't it?
>
> Teacher B: Yes. Just think about the modeling issue you raised. You're looking at student work the first time you do something, it's the first batch that generates next year's student products.
>
> Teacher A: Yes, and I find myself creating these models constantly. I'm just literally, OK, here's a good one, and pretending like it's student work because I don't have anything. Then listening to the kids critique it is my favorite.
>
> Teacher B: And you know the rubrics have to keep changing because what you find out is that either it's not leading where you want it to lead, or it needs modification for one reason or another.
>
> Teacher A: That's right. It's all process. And it's almost like you have to have this high tolerance for ambiguity and process. Because nothing is ever finished. We've [had to] become so much more reflective about what we do.

There are direct parallels to the task at the district level. Administrators need to begin where teachers are now, and figure out what teachers need to learn, how to provide opportunities for practice and feedback, and how to support teachers in adopting new practices. It was often the lack of attention to details in the implementation of new initiatives -- the lack of clarity of the goals, insufficient training and guidance, and the time to learn and experiment with new ideas -- that limited their effectiveness this year. Careful planning and "forward thinking" are becoming even more important at this point because the work itself is getting harder. Long Beach has reached the point in this reform effort that is most challenging -- *figuring how to bring about the changes in instructional practices that will help <u>all</u> children achieve at higher levels.*

II. Organization of the Report

Before turning to an analysis of the experiences of the past year, we begin by outlining the district's strategic plan for raising student achievement. It is important to understand the big picture of where they are and where they are going to comprehend the context and logic of how

the pieces fit together. Then to illustrate the implementation issues experienced this year, we have chosen to take a close look at three of this year's new initiatives that are key pieces of a grand plan for moving forward with standards: the introduction of Standards Coaches, the accountability measures instituted by the area superintendents as a mechanism to get teachers to engage in systematically looking at student work, and the new mathematics assessment portfolios.[1] As district initiatives tended to dominate so much of what was happening at school sites this year, our discussion of the schools will be embedded in our analysis of these three issues. We will then turn to a look at another one of the perplexing dilemmas of standards reform, what happens to students who do not meet the standards. We examine our observations of Long Beach Preparatory Academy after two years of existence, and reflect on the district's interventions for at-risk students. We conclude the report with a discussion of the communication challenges the district must contend with to coordinate and facilitate this complex change process.

III. The District's Strategic Plan

Meeting new and higher standards is a daunting challenge, one that Long Beach Unified has been wrestling with for many years. It is a perpetual work in progress that continues to evolve. While there are aspects that are still perplexing and "yet to be worked out," a coherent and thoughtful plan is guiding the district's work. Long Beach continues to develop professional development institutes, such as National Faculty, that focus on increasing teacher's content knowledge. In addition, recognizing that teachers are struggling with how to use the standards and curriculum objectives to increase student achievement, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development is working to help teachers connect the content to the delivery (Standard Time, December 1998) and ultimately to the performance goals. Two initiatives were introduced this year to help teachers make that connection. One was an instructional tool, Thinking Maps, or graphic organizers to support student learning. The second, Curriculum Mapping, is a tool to help teachers understand the big picture -- to understand the connection between standards, curriculum objectives, instructional practices, and how to use assessments to plan backwards -- as well as a tool to pace and scaffold instruction to assist students in meeting the performance expectations.

[1]Because our research design and data collection strategy have not changed, and to comply with the district's request that the report be more concise (i.e., shorter), we have summarized our evaluation design and data collection for this report in Appendix A.

Part of LBUSD's strategy for moving to this next step is to create an assessment system aligned with the content standards, that can be used to inform instruction aimed at improving student achievement. Although some researchers (Haertel, 1999; Herman, 1997; Koretz & Baron, 1998) are pessimistic about the potential for performance assessments to drive needed changes in teaching and learning, Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) has embarked on a thoughtful strategy that incorporates performance tests into an assessment system that is promising. LBUSD has invested in the development of sets of performance assessments aligned with the content standards as a means for transforming teaching and learning. For five years the district has conducted districtwide assessments in writing and math, trained teachers in rubric scoring, and involved all teachers in district scoring sessions. Last year, LBUSD expanded their assessment system to include performance tests in social studies and science. These tests will eventually become an essential part of Assessment Portfolios in each of the content areas, which will provide the basis for a standards-based report card. In response to the implementation of district tests, teachers have invested time and energy into preparing students, providing numerous opportunities to learn both the content and the skills needed for students to demonstrate what they know. In response to teachers' requests, the curriculum leaders with teams of teachers have developed multiple Classroom Embedded Assessments for each of the standards, with accompanying rubrics and anchor papers for teachers to use as teaching tools to prepare students for the district performance tests[2]. Chris Dominguez, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development explained,

> What we're trying to do is look at, and I think the closest we got to [identifying performance standards], is what we're doing with math. You collect a variety of tools, a variety of assessments, and you indicate students' attainment level on those. So you have an actual proficiency standard that defines what's good enough for each individual task.

The mathematics standards assessment portfolio integrates classroom embedded measures, districtwide performance tests, end-of-course tests and standardized tests, as well as teacher generated standards-based assignments. For example, for one standard, the

[2]This is a work in progress. While sets of classroom embedded measures have been developed in math, language arts, and 7th and 8th grade history, 6th grade history is not yet completed. Similarly, classroom embedded prompts are still being developed or revised in science.

class may have done two or three Open-Ended Math questions (OEMs). The teacher can then choose each child's best work, so it really is a measure of their attainment, of where they have gotten to, rather than their growth or average performance. Chris Dominguez further explained how the assessment system would work:

> My thinking in terms of the role of the district level assessment, is this a validation of what we said at the classroom level. So for example, if you have, if we continued with math performance let's say at the district level, then you could look at that OEM that was administered at the district level, and if a student got a 4 on that, and this portfolio, you pretty much feel that it's right on. But if a student here gets a 5 and down here gets a 1 or a 2, then it's kind of suspect. What's going on? Then we have to ask ourselves what's the role of the SAT9, since the state is putting all these additional things on us. And so, one of the things [the Asst. Superintendent for Research] has been doing has been a correlation study of our performance assessments with SAT9. Is there any way that the performance can be a predictor of how the student is going to achieve on SAT9, and she's found some real interesting correlations in terms of our students who are scoring a 4 in writing on our performance in writing. There's a very high correlation to them scoring about the 50th percentile in reading. Not in language, but in reading. And the same thing, there's a very high correlation between the OEM's and math, as well as the basic facts in math. Actually, the highest correlation is the basic facts in math on the SAT9. I thought that was real interesting. So then if that is the case, then SAT9 could be used as another validation tool for the classroom embedded measures.

Within the high stakes climate of the state's new accountability system, the district has tried to design a system that provides alternative measures to the standardized test, and gives students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their mastery of the standards, while maintaining a firm position about minimum expectations. As the district continues to refine the Math Assessment Portfolio, they recognize that they need to develop a full bank of curriculum embedded assessments that teachers of history, science, and writing can use to assess individual standards before developing the portfolios in those areas. However, the preliminary work with the district level assessments and accountability measures has in many cases already stimulated collaboration among departments and teaching teams to look closely at student work to monitor growth and identify student needs to focus their instruction. The plan is for these and other measures to be combined into an assessment system that document students' attainment on each of the standards, one that will become the basis for a standards-based report card. Because these are secure performance tests, teachers focus instruction on not only what students should know, but also on what they need to

be able to do with what they know, without directly teaching to the test.

The district's plans represent significant progress in the coherence of their reform efforts. They also point to the difficult work that lies ahead in getting to scale with the implementation. To facilitate this challenging work, the district developed the role of standards coaches to support standards implementation at the classroom level.

IV. Three New Initiatives

Standards Coaches.

Although standards coaches are a new district initiative this year, it was not LBUSD's first experience with coaches. First, the curriculum leaders in math and language arts were the first to explore the use of coaches. Second, last year, Area B introduced half-time literacy coaches. Both of these experiences were opportunities to experiment with and identify both the needs of teachers in the schools and the skills and supports that coaches would need to work effectively with their colleagues. During that first year, Area B coaches worked with Eleanor Dougherty from Education Trust on developing rubrics and scoring guides to understand the important role these devices play in helping both students and teachers understand what quality student work looks like. At the end of that year, reflecting on their experiences, and in an effort to define their role, the coaches and the Area Superintendent drafted a job description. Given this precedent, it is surprising that the role of standards coach was not more clearly defined before launching the districtwide effort. While it is true that the needs of individual schools vary greatly, requiring flexibility in the designs, many of the procedural issues could have been more clearly defined to guide the coaches in this new and challenging work.

Establishing guidelines might have made it easier for the coaches who were working under different organizational arrangements. In Area A alone, there were three different models. Four coaches have been assigned to Hamilton, one in each of the four core disciplines. At Robinson, a part-time coach covered all four subject areas at her home school. The sixth coach worked half-time at Lindbergh and half-time at Stevens, also covering all four subjects.

In Area B, the focus schools have two half-time coaches per school. The coaches split their day or week teaching and coaching. Their content focus varied from school to school, providing support to more than one content area. Area C had only two full-time coaches, one in science and one in history, who served all eight middle schools in their area, although as in other areas, priority was given to focus schools. One area superintendent told us,

> I like that we have the same goals but we all go at it differently. Because we've learned from each other, and our schools sometimes aren't as comfortable with it as we are.[Area Superintendent #1]

While the Area Superintendents were not concerned about the differences in the models, it has, nevertheless, presented challenges for the standards coaches. While the long-term goals may be the same, the different approaches are in fact producing different outcomes. These variations could potentially serve as a valuable field experiment, providing an opportunity to learn from the different models. However, a field test requires monitoring the actual design and implementation closely to be able to interpret what factors contribute to different outcomes. We found that no one was systematically following the work of standards coaches. In fact, Area Superintendents described the work of the coaches to be different from what coaches reported they actually did. Consequently, we are concerned that the opportunity to learn from the variations will be lost. Although our data are incomplete, we were able to meet with ten of the standards coaches, including representatives from all of the areas and all of the disciplines. We learned of a number of issues that often made their varied jobs problematic.

A major issue was lack of definition of the position itself. All of the coaches reported spending the first few months trying to figure out just what their job was. Most assumed that their primary role would be working directly with teachers to facilitate the implementation of standards-based classrooms. However, basic procedures were not outlined. Coaches wondered how to provide feedback to teachers, how to prioritize the many needs they saw, and what kind of documentation was needed. The frustration that many experienced this year is evident in the voice of one of the coaches:

> What I expected was clear guidelines on what you should do, how you should start. I've fallen into a lot of pitfalls because nobody said, well, don't write this down or don't write up your comments and give it to somebody. It's like procedural things that could have been out in the open were not explained. I wish they had modeled like what you should do with a new teacher, what should your conference look like, how do you document it, what's appropriate to write to that teacher, what's appropriate to write to the principal, what can and can't you do - all those things, there were no guidelines. [Standards Coach A]

Similarly, there was no clarification about the role of the standards coach vis-a-vis the department chairs or principals. Coaches who were actually based at a single school site had a different relationship with these individuals than coaches who worked at more than one school. In the extreme, coaches in Area C had to interact with eight different principals and eight different department chairs. To address this, the Area C coaches began attending principal meetings -- a strategy that proved quite effective in improving communication. Coaches in other areas have made a similar request for next year. This should reduce the possibility of conflicting expectations and clarify the role of the standards coach for everyone.

In addition, coaches encountered a number of obstacles in their work with individual teachers. The greatest challenge that all the coaches identified was working with reluctant teachers, especially more experienced teachers who think they don't need help. These are generally the teachers who have classroom management under control, but who lack depth of content knowledge that goes beyond the textbook or curriculum materials. It is the difference between

knowing one's content well enough to "present" it, versus knowing the content well enough so that if the students don't get it the first time, "you can present it 99 different ways." [Standards Coach B] Without the depth of content, coaches found that:

> Teachers could not answer questions like, 'how do you know that [the students] have learned this?' Or 'What is the most important concept for students to know?' [Standards Coach B]

Coaches struggled to figure out how to change attitudes of teachers with entrenched mindsets. Several coaches found that many teachers in focus schools do not believe that students at their school can achieve at higher levels. The following incident, we learned, was not uncommon:

> There was one teacher who asked for some information and after I gave it to him, he said, oh no, I can't do that, that's too overwhelming. Oh, but I'd be happy to work with you on this and show you how -- no, no, my kids can't do that. They could never do that, so just never mind. [Standards Coach C]

Coaches were also frustrated by the lack of time to work one-on-one with teachers. This proved to be especially problematic in Areas B and C, but it was an issue across the district for several reasons. First, because it was the first year of standards coaches, they were regularly pulled out for additional training. If they had not attended any of these trainings before, a single coach could have participated in Thinking Maps training, a Reading Institute, a Literacy Institute, BTSA training, and SAT9 preparation. For some of the half-time coaches, all of this training cut deeply into the time available to actually coach other teachers. Although Area C coaches were full-time, the additional training factored in because they were already stretched thin working with so many different schools. For all coaches, district priorities tended to interrupt the focus of their work with individual teachers. As one coach described, despite one's best efforts to work consistently with teachers, district priorities often took precedent:

> You come together and you decide you have a focus and you're going down the road towards the outcome and you take a sudden left turn, because now it's curriculum embedded practice time, and it's not that you aren't supposed to do that, it's not that that's not a good thing, it's that you kind of have this map (laughs) and curriculum embedded was part of the map but it wasn't right there on the map, it wasn't the city we were coming to next. But this outside person is saying, well, that's the next city you're going to, I don't care how far you are from there, you're going to get off the road and you're going to get to this city. So then you take this left turn and you try to come back to what your focus was, and bam - now it's SAT 9 practice. Because look at today. All we did was surface these issues of some gaps, we didn't even get to do that -- we surfaced some issues and we raised some questions and it's going to be a long time before I get back to that part with the little post-its on it, because there were some issues we need to grapple with. I guess I find that most frustrating. [Standards Coach C]

Time Management was a significant issue for coaches with multiple responsibilities, either teaching half-time, working with more than one school, or working in more than one subject area. In those cases, coaches encountered a number of logistical problems. The monthly meetings with curriculum leaders were always held at the same time, so coaches working in multiple subject areas could only attend one meeting at a time. Most coaches tended to go with their area of expertise, quite naturally, because their fellow content coaches formed their primary professional network. Math and social studies coaches, in particular, found the support from their curriculum leaders to be essential. Depth of content knowledge turned out to be an issue for coaches working out of their area of expertise. Coaches were clearly more confident and more effective coaching the subjects they had taught. Consequently, they tended to target their efforts where they felt they could be most effective. Teachers in the other subject areas felt that they did not receive the same benefit when there wasn't a coach specifically for their content area.

> Overall I don't think the impact for our department has been tremendous. I've had no real revelations ... We've missed out as a school on the history stuff, we've had a really strong history department but there's a lot of things that have happened in the other areas as far as moving forward with the essential questions, and we have not had any clue what is going on because we don't have that history link. [Teacher C]

The initial training failed to prepare the coaches for the jobs they were about to undertake. The week-long, half-day institute provided preliminary training on analyzing data, curriculum mapping, using the curriculum map to "unpack" the standards, developing standards-based units, writing performance tasks, developing rubrics and scoring guides, developing culminating tasks, while only briefly touching on group facilitation skills and peer coaching. Looking back once coaches had some experience on the job, most coaches felt that the training did not meet their needs, but reported that it did accomplish two important functions. First, the week gave coaches the opportunity to see the big picture of standards reform in the district. For many it was their first opportunity to understand the district's vision of where it was going and the steps that would help them get there. For example, the training on curriculum mapping helped one coach understand how the pieces fit together.

> Under this content standard goes this benchmark, and then under that goes the curriculum objectives. And that curriculum objective part was really easy for me to understand cause it was a document that was already there. It just, it kind of forced us to look back at those documents and realize, "Oh, it's all here." It's not like we're recreating, we're not trying to rewrite the curriculum, it's just taking what's already there and using it. And they gave us a lot of really nice template-pages where we could actually build units.... It's kind of like I have to keep visualizing it in my head and talking about it. And the more I talk about it, the more I kind of go, "Yeah. This all makes sense." I know sometimes it seems laborious and a lot of teachers are regarding it as another layer. You keep hearing that language. "It's just another layer. It's another layer." But, they all kind of, all

> the pieces all kind of dovetail. And so I feel like if we're doing one thing, it just naturally leads to another. [Standards Coach D]

There was also a focus on creating standards-based classrooms, not necessarily the specifics of what that meant, but the big picture:

> We knew that our jobs as coaches would be to help teachers in their implementation of the standards....Not particular standards, just content standards in general and about the purpose of standards in the district. [Standards Coach E]

The second major contribution of the Standards Coach Institute was that it provided an important team building experience, developing trust and comraderie among the standards coaches. This turned out to be extremely important as their fellow coaches became their most important support system, and the people they turned to when confronted with a difficult situation.

> I have these three wonderful coaches that I share an office with who are inspiring, caring, knowledgeable, respectful, three of the most wonderful human beings I've ever met in my life. I can come in and say anything and what we say in this office stays in this office, we really take care of each other. Because sometimes you get so frustrated coming in, you just sit down and want to cry because you think you've worked so hard, you planned this whole thing out, and someone doesn't care. [...] But I come in here and just feel like, we listen, we talk to each other, and pump each other up and go back out the door and try again! [Standards Coach E]

Several coaches reported that their initial training was not content specific enough to meet their needs. They felt the training was limited because it was put together by language arts specialists, with few opportunities to focus on the special needs of each content area.

> I don't really feel that I got a whole lot out of it.... It would have been more helpful if we had worked together with the curriculum people as far as a better strength of knowledge in what they really wanted the teachers doing. [Standards Coach F]

The consensus we heard from all of the coaches was the need for training in coaching skills. The coaches range in their experience and ability to work with adults, but they all expressed a need for additional training.

> We spent half an hour on one day on how to deal with personalities, different types of personalities and that was the beginning of what I would wish the whole five days was about, because that's all we do is run into different people and we're conferencing - if the whole thing had been on peer coaching models it would have been great. [Standards Coach A]

Even the most skillful coaches recognized the need for additional training to improve their interpersonal communication skills.

> The skills of being able to listen and not be judgmental, to see the big picture, to communicate, those you really need as standards coach. One of the key pieces we really need to look at is what are the communication styles of the coaches and what's a more effective way to work with people. I don't think we had a lot of training on that and some people instinctively have it, some people don't. And people can learn more how to be that way. We have to believe that everyone can learn, otherwise we don't need standards coaches. So even the standards coaches have to work on how effective they can be with teachers. [Standards Coach G]

Finally, conflicting reporting structures also complicated the work of standards coaches. While the coaches report to their Area Superintendent, their strongest support, in most cases, comes from the curriculum leaders and the other standards coaches in their discipline who usually work in different areas. Coaches described the differences in direction they received from Area Superintendents and curriculum leaders. Whereas Area Superintendents supplied the big picture, the district vision of where they were headed, the curriculum leaders focused more on the details and the substance of the coaches' work.

> Our superintendent gives us the overview. What does she want and where do people need to be, and the details she leaves to the coach. And I'm very detail oriented. In fact at our last meeting we were talking about what our plans were for next year, how do we need to move things along in certain areas, what's going to be our focus, and I said we can take scoring and student work analysis, but we have to break it down by a process, say in September we'll introduce them to the idea of it. And here we'll teach them how to do the rubric - she points at me and says, okay, good, you can write it up. [Standards Coach H]

In theory, this division of responsibilities can work, but only if the messages are consistent, rather than conflicting. This is especially important for the work coaches do in schools. Department heads receive their direction from the curriculum leaders, and the standards coaches need to work closely with department heads, but receive their direction from the area superintendent.
When each area is approaching things in different ways, the details can often end up being quite different from one area to the next. This can pose dilemmas for the curriculum leaders who work districtwide, and for the standards coaches who must reconcile competing agendas. This has been less of a problem in Area B, where the focus of the Area Superintendent is more closely aligned with the curriculum office.

Despite these issues, we want to emphasize that Long Beach Unified's first year of using Standards Coaches to promote standards implementation at the classroom level has been successful on many levels and holds great promise. The caliber of people hired for these positions is impressive. These teacher leaders were chosen for their demonstrated curricular

expertise through many years of successful classroom teaching, and they were able to put their knowledge, skills, and experience to use in a number of different ways.

The coaches provided support to department heads and have contributed to real progress in fostering a reflective and collaborative climate.[3] This was especially true in situations where the coach was in residence, more or less full time, at a single school site. Three different department heads attest to their contributions:

> The good thing is that when I have difficulty bringing something to the department or having them get feedback or buy in, she chimes in and from her point of view, being 20 something years in the district, the teachers really respect her and they really take what she says to heart. So that really helps! [Teacher D]

> I'd say we've made 180 degree turn and part of that has been the leadership of the coaches. We [the department heads] are just kind of the leaders in helping but we're doing this along with them. And [...] it is more collaborative. We've been working in small groups. We've kind of divided ourselves in half and then we switch [...] and we kind of blend it all together and it's great. It's been like I said, very productive, very successful. The release days are a joy. We work very hard. And we get a lot accomplished, which is good. [Teacher E]

> She's very open to what people have to say - if they speak with her about things, she's very knowledgeable. She has seized upon openings and used them very well. I think for [the department heads] she has served us differently than say our new teachers. The new teachers need a lot more in certain areas where we need a lot more in our growth beyond where we are. She has sought us out, asked us to do a lot of the [release days] too, and there have been times when [the department heads] have run the whole day and she's sat back and interjected this, that and the other thing. But when her expertise comes up, then she's right on top of it, which is mostly everything that she does she's very good at. I think as a standards coach she's helped us all to help ourselves. [Teacher F]

Coaches also worked extensively with new teachers and felt that they made their greatest contributions supporting first, second, and third year teachers. This first year teacher would certainly concur with that assessment.

> I find them to be - to me they're my lifeline because I do find that not only are they totally experienced in a lot of different things going on, they see the best and the worst of what goes on so they're a great sounding board and guide, but I really find them to be the only folks with time to really spend on the academics. What's

[3]In some cases, part-time coaches also served as department heads.

> the best experiment to do for this type of thing and what have you found to work well, and I'm doing a reading group, is that going to be okay with what is going on in the rest of the school system? ...So I find the coaches incredibly helpful for providing all kinds of assistance across the curriculum. So whatever it is you want to teach, whether it's a new idea, whether it's how is the best way to go about this, where is the resource for this, they'll come running, whether it's with ideas, resources, lesson plan ideas .... I just can't imagine not having them around. [Teacher G]

We would be remiss if we did not report that not all teachers look upon the role favorably. A number of issues have come up that possibly could have been avoided if more thought and definition and more targeted training had been provided at the beginning. These unresolved issues presented problems for the teachers the coaches were trying to help.

> I don't think there was a real strong boundary to set up what the job was....We saw her as being part of the team and being there to offer her expertise because we know she has a lot to offer us, but we saw her as part of - on an equal plane, help us out, give us some input, make suggestions, and she saw it as more top down, and so I think that's been the problem. It's not been clearly defined. [Teacher H]

> My training in coaching is that you have to identify what you want to learn and the coach then helps you work on that. But that's not what's happening. What the coaches are is a district attempt to help you do what the district wants you to do, which is not a bad thing, it's a way of communicating what they want you to do, and I feel like I'm an employee, I'm hired to do - they're the elected people - I should be doing what they want me to do. I don't object to that at all. It's just that there are so many people with so many different ideas and sets of instructions that don't always blend together. [Teacher I]

> We're thinking a coach is someone who encourages you, who helps you - you guys can do it, let's get in there. And then she came with this evaluation 'this is what I'm going to evaluate you on.' [Teacher J]

Although coaches did not evaluate teachers, without clear guidelines for working with teachers, the coaches were often left to figure things out for themselves. The lack of clarity in the coaches role and the lack of direction and training in coaching strategies made the coaches transition into their new roles much more difficult. Things could have gone smoother if those "in charge" (an issue that is not always clear) had consulted those with experience in coaching before expanding the concept. There was precedent that could have served as a valuable example from which to learn. Whereas previously, coaches in mathematics and language arts worked directly with the curriculum leaders, this year's model has coaches reporting to their respective area superintendent, and yet, working closely with principals and curriculum leaders for guidance in much of what they do. This ambiguity in the reporting structure not only made it difficult to

prioritize, but when the messages were inconsistent, it placed the coaches in the untenable position of having to choose between several bosses.

A perfect example of this is the role of the standards coaches in facilitating the process of looking at student work. We use this particular initiative to point out how conflicting directions can confuse the process and frustrate those asked to implement new practices. As one of the standards coaches reminded us:

> There is nothing that causes teachers more stress than to feel like the people who are supposedly telling them what to do can't even agree. That totally takes away all credibility when that happens. [Standards Coach G]

Moving Student Work to the Center of Teacher Practice.

Each of the Area Superintendents instituted an accountability measure that was intended to encourage staffs to Look At Student Work (LASW) to inform instructional decisions. The goal across areas is to raise student achievement, but the strategy varied from area to area. Area A teachers were asked to maintain Student Work Analysis Folders in which they followed three students throughout the school year-- one high achieving, one middle achieving, and one low achieving student. Teachers were asked to include the writing prompt, the rubric used to score the student work, and to describe the lesson, unit, the content standards, and curriculum objectives. After scoring the work, teachers indicated the students' strengths and weaknesses, and the strategies they might use to address students' needs.

In Area B, departments were required to find time to examine and discuss student work, and then look for trends in the work. Each teacher chose one class to study. School staffs were asked to complete data sheets which were submitted to the Area Superintendent six times during the year. They reported who participated in the meeting and who was absent, a description of the student work, how it was scored, and the rubric or scoring guide used to score it. Teachers also recorded their observations and findings, and conclusions (i.e., major trends observed, such as students have trouble with spelling, or understanding and responding to the prompt). The final box called for "Next steps," asking teachers to identify specific instructional strategies that would be used to address the identified student needs.

One of the standards coaches found the "next steps" to be the critical piece to making this a purposeful exercise.

> When we talked about that in my department, [we found that it] is a really valuable tool. Because we try hard the next time we get together to say okay, last time we said this is what we're going to do, are we doing that? And sometimes we were and sometimes we're not. It depends on what the next step was. If it's something we can tweak and fix within the next time period, great. If it's something that's a bigger issue that we have to kind of restart again next year. [Standards Coach D]

In Area C, the focus was on writing to specific domains and only involved language arts teachers. Teachers were asked to keep Writing Assessment Portfolios. At each grade level, they were responsible for two writing domains (Observation, and Problem Solution at 6th grade Speculation about Cause/Effect and Report of Information at 7th grade) and two forms of functional writing, either a business letter, a research paper, a report of information or a summary. Area C also developed its own rubric for scoring each of the domains, one that is somewhat more stringent that the district rubric. Teachers were required to report scores to the area office.

The Area Superintendents recognized that there was great variation in the process that was used even within one Area, in fact, they acknowledged that "each site took on a different look." However, they did agree that, "reflection on student scored work is the anchor around all of it."

> That was one of the things that was top down from us, was this is one thing that we really want everybody to work on this year. So that piece was established, and the same across areas. That one expectation of [the standards coaches'] job would be that they would work with teachers in refining this process of looking at student work and helping teachers to see the value of it. [Area Superintendent #2]

Although there was an expectation that standards coaches would facilitate the process of LASW, with the exception of Area B, the coaches received no training in how to do that. One half day session of the Standards Coach Institute was devoted to a discussion of scoring guides and rubrics and their importance within a standards-based system to communicate expectations to teachers and students. However, this discussion took place in the absence of any student work. In addition, the training was conducted by trainers who had not facilitated the process themselves. Implementing this process was further complicated by not having an agreed upon process for LASW, and by the different requirements in each of the three areas. Without consistent training across all areas, several standards coaches remained uncertain about their ability to facilitate this process. The coaches found that Area Superintendents did not always understand many of the issues that remain unresolved about LASW.

In one of the areas, the coaches put on a "workshop" for the area superintendent to clarify some of the issues.

> We went over how grades would tie to a 6 point rubric, because we realized that among ourselves, [we couldn't agree on] how good is good enough? What does that mean? And what grade do you tie to it? And if you're saying a 2 is not proficient, should that be a C? I don't think so. [The area superintendent] was up there with a chalkboard and mapping this whole thing out and it was sort of interesting having the coaches go through. ... We also needed the superintendent to talk through the analysis sheet with us so that we understood it well enough to share it with our staff members. Because initially there were two sections that seemed to be identical and in fact in one spot she wanted numbers, she wanted to

> know how many students did it and how many did this well, and how many did that well. And then on the reflection piece she actually wanted to know how those results would impact our teaching and what we would do next based on what we saw on the student work. [Standards Coach I]

A standards coach explained some of the issues she dealt with when trying to introduce the process at her school site.

> One of the things I noticed was that I didn't think [my school] had done enough sharing of student work and actual teachers physically holding work of students that wasn't their own students' work, but then I realized, and again it was part of the meeting with [a curriculum leader], there have been several different models for sharing student work. One through the PQR process where you have the high, middle, low student and you don't actually have to show much of the work. You have to talk about the assignment and then show what the students had done. Then again the protocol model and there's something that Hoover uses, there's a whole thing that they do, and so trying to get the idea across of what it meant to score student work. I brought in some of my own student work. I asked the staff to take the paper, look at it, and what do you notice about this to score it and what do you notice about the student work, talk about the observations. What do you think they learned? Did this assignment tie to the content standards? And we did it, but it wasn't the piece that people really continued to do, except maybe in the history department. [Standards Coach I]

As this passage demonstrates, there are still mixed messages among central office personnel, which significantly affected the implementation. When asked what process they were using to implement this practice, Area Superintendents responded, "protocol." Some of the curriculum leaders understood the process to be something different. However, in the 1998 Annual Report to the Foundation, the district wrote:

> Protocol has not been as successful as we would have hoped. Many schools found the model to be too restrictive. Our critical friends at Education Trust, informed us that protocol wasn't getting us to the "why" around the student work discussions. Why was the student work of poor quality? No real task analysis was done as part of the process. In fact, the process can lead to a blaming of the students for the poor quality, because they don't possess the skills needed to do the work. Instead, we have been using the process developed by the Hoover Middle School History Department, and will continue to find ways to share this process with all of our middle schools. (Final Report, June 30, 1998, p.5)

This, however, never really materialized. Even with the support of an additional Clark Foundation Grant to disseminate the Hoover model, and repeated open invitations to all middle schools in the district, representatives from only five of the district's middle schools ever attended the Hoover sessions on analyzing student work. Only one of those schools became a

consistent participant and has committed to implementing the model at their school site in the fall.

Administrators assumed that since all teachers have had the experience of scoring student work through the districtwide scoring days, and since most of the standards coaches had been table leaders to facilitate that process, that they were sufficiently trained in LASW. The scoring process itself is actually quite different from dialoging about what is evident in the student work that would inform one's instruction. Furthermore, when we asked teachers about the feedback they received about their students' performance on the districtwide tests, teachers can rarely tell us anything more than either their students did well or not, unless they themselves (or occasionally departments) took the time to go back and read all of the scored papers to look for strengths and weaknesses. That is a very different process than reading papers to put a score on them. In fact, the variability in the quality of training by table leaders and the shear volume of papers to be scored in one sitting on those days, make the kind of analysis that one would like to see when LASW impossible.

Our experience in studying this process in other districts, as well as learning from the experiences of the history department at Hoover Middle School, suggests that LASW is difficult work. There is also a readiness factor that must be considered. Teachers at Hoover spent several years learning together to enhance their content knowledge, to write stimulating curriculum, and to create stronger learning experiences for their students. It was only after several years of working together that they had created the climate and trust to focus on looking at student work to improve their teaching. Even then, it took time and the consistent help of a skilled facilitator, to develop the ability to critically reflect on their own practice.
Learning from many settings where LASW has not been a productive experience, and from the few places where it has become a powerful tool, there appear to be several factors that must be present for this practice to yield the desired results.[4] First, it needs to be collaborative to develop shared understanding and provide collegial support. Second, it requires a skilled facilitator to become adept at the process, and to learn to trust one another. Putting one's student work on display makes many teachers uneasy. Understanding the purpose of LASW and developing sufficient trust to be comfortable in sharing student work with colleagues is a slow process, and often does not happen without expert help. Furthermore, schools have to see the value of this work and make it a priority by setting aside time just for this purpose. This is a real dilemma in California where there are no longer staff development days during the regular school year. Ultimately, to benefit from this process, there needs to be an action plan that uses the insights gleaned from the student work to plan future instruction.

The lack of a consistent process or a skilled facilitator to support the process (many schools and departments do not have a standards coach) has limited the implementation and impact of this initiative. Few schools have allocated time dedicated for this purpose. Only in Area B did the

[4]These findings draw heavily from Education Matters, Inc. work in Boston, where LASW has been a central focus since the beginning of their standards reform efforts.

superintendent's accountability measures require that LASW be a collaborative process at the department level. Although that was the expectation in all areas, we found, and standards coaches confirmed, that it usually did not happen.

A few schools made some initial attempts to LASW with mixed results. Some clearly viewed this requirement to be an add-on, rather than the way it was intended, as a new way of working.

> We didn't get told to do the work analysis folders until a couple of months into the school year so we got a late start on them. By the time we got doing it, in all honesty, [it] hasn't helped me at all. We are resisting that because we have already heard the calculation is that you spend one minute for each student. That is 185 minutes. Try doing that once a month and how many extra hours are you working? So it is one more thing. [Teacher K]

Many others focused primarily on LASW to put a score on it.

> We did one day but it was so depressing because no one brought student work except me. It was a release day that we had and we were supposed to bring student work. We were supposed to bring open ended questions. So I had mine but no one else did so we looked at my work...Well, what we did, we went over the rubric and it was a seventh grade open ended question and then we discussed what's expected, what the kids should do and then we took papers and then we did basically just like we do on the scoring days, we just had another person grade it and then compare and then we went through and tried to see if everyone is close. We were trying to make sure we were all grading the same way. [Teacher D]

The situation was similar at another school, where a teacher confided:

> I'm not really sure if I grade them correctly and I'd kind of liked to have, if we had spent more time into it, have other teachers grade them also and see how we compared. We've compared a couple times, I think we get everybody, we pass them around, we look at them, and we kind of look for strengths and weaknesses and we look at the scores given, but we just haven't really discussed, I don't know, maybe we don't want to really say we disagree with somebody about how they scored. And again, some teachers were pretty competitive about that. Because I chose my 5th period class to be the one class that I'm going to be following with this, and they're an advanced class, and so like at the end we talked about how many people have 6's and 5's and 4's, and mine was way better than everybody else, but some of the teachers were upset about that. [Teacher L]

These teachers understand the process as one of scoring, rather than to use the work to reflect upon and inform their practice. This expectation is consistent with the training they have had up to this point, which has been largely through the district Scoring Day. The training sessions on

those days focus on how to use the rubric to score papers. There is little opportunity for reflection about the strengths and weaknesses of the papers, or the prompt. Furthermore, as many of the teachers score papers in subjects they do not teach, there is often no incentive to think about what implications the quality of student work might have for their teaching. Nonetheless, the district scoring process has made teachers familiar and comfortable with rubrics and scoring guides and using objective criteria to assess student work. Now teachers need further training to take the process of LASW to the next level.

Even without extensive training in LASW, there are some departments that have made attempts to engage in the analysis of student work to inform their instruction. One teacher described her departments' beginning efforts with the process:

> We don't have time on every single department meeting but we do generally bring some examples of work and say this is what I'm doing, so you can see how it looks. We usually bring high, medium and low. And also take a look at what we can do to make it better. 'I wasn't happy with the way this worked out, somebody help me out, what can I do to bring it up to the level that I want.' So we have some time to do that. And we do that also on an informal basis a lot of times, I'll be talking with colleagues in my department and say I did that but it just didn't work out and somebody will say this is what I did, okay, I'll try that for next year. So I think it happens even more often and some ways more valuably informally than in formal department meetings. [Teacher H]

Yet, even when teachers are beginning to value the process, we found that without the assistance of a facilitator to challenge many of the pervasive belief systems that are contrary to the notion of standards, teachers' personal perspectives still persist. Rather than using the rubric as an objective benchmark to evaluate student work, personal factors still permeate teachers' grading practices.

> In a lot of ways it's an intuitive thing, you can tell if they're really understanding what they've written down or if they're just kind of parroting back what's been said and then they haven't internalized it. You can have all the checklists in the world and say yes, they put that in, but it may not be a real understanding. They're just copying down something off of a paper somewhere. I think in a lot of ways it is very intuitive. Also knowing your students as well, just having the interaction with them in the classroom. You have to know your students a lot of times to interpret the work. Yes, sometimes I can hand the paper to somebody else who doesn't know the kid and they can read it, but if they don't know the student, they don't know what level of work that represents, if that's an improvement for that kid or if that's a half-baked effort that they gave. You have to be in tune with the kids too. [Teacher H]

Similarly, another teacher acknowledged:

> I think it was useful. It allowed us to see all the different levels that all our kids have, everywhere from ELD to Excel to RSP. So it was beneficial but then again we are all individuals so we're going to do what works in our classroom. That's an honest reality, that may be a negative thing, but we'll do what we know our students can do. I would have liked to see us do it again, or take it further.[Teacher E]

The schools where we find that the practice is beginning to yield powerful results share a few important characteristics. First, the practice was teacher-initiated, rather than a response to a district mandate. Next, these schools have been working at it for a longer period of time, they have set aside time to do it, and most importantly, they have one or more skilled teacher leader or coach to facilitate the process.

For example, one teacher in one of the more experienced schools, explained their approach:

> The teacher explained this is the lesson, this is what I wanted the kids to learn, and this is what they produced and kind of went around looking at it from that standpoint. Did the kids learn what the teacher thought she was teaching? So we look at what are the kids showing you as learning and how close were you to the mark? (laughs) Sometimes you teach something, oh yeah, I think I did a good job with that, and the kids turn their stuff back, and you're going - that's not anywhere near what I wanted. And then you kind of back up - I think that's where that's very valuable, that there's nobody threatened by it, this is not a threatening thing. They want to see work of my kids, I'll bring them all the little booklets - here's the good, here's the bad, here's the ugly, and here's the best. I'm not threatened by that in the least bit. If somebody can show me a way of doing it better, I'll be glad to do it .... And I think that's been a real positive thing with this whole protocoling thing. I think the kids need to know what a good product is and what one isn't. [Teacher M]

Another teacher shared his insights about the process:

> We talk a lot about assessing the kids but as we assess the kids, we assess ourselves too and find out where we are not getting the idea across, rather than where they're not getting it. We do a protocol, we come up with a central question, like very simply what are the glaring weaknesses in the papers that we see? And we find that maybe kids are not - usage problems or spelling problems and then we look at those and say okay, why don't we attack that? Make that our goal for the next all school write, see how it has improved. Again looking at the kids and seeing what we can do to get them up to the next level. [Teacher F]

There is evidence that teachers have made some important observations by LASW about where their students are, and where they need additional work.

> What we're finding is that they're having trouble as expository writers versus writers of narrative, when they're writing stories, things like that. But to switch over to an expository method of writing is a little more challenging and getting them to work on the organization of their ideas. This is why we're looking at the thinking maps so carefully because this we think might be one area that will help us with that. A lot of the students have exhibited the ability to organize their ideas in a fairly cogent fashion but there were gaps here and there or sometimes they tended to write in a more formulaic way: "I am now going to tell you about" and "this is what I just told you" kind of approach. We're looking for something a little more sophisticated than that. So now the question is how do we get them to that point? [Teacher N]

Another teacher observed:

> I think their biggest weakness overall is reading the prompt and pulling it apart and figuring out exactly what it is that they are supposed to do. We try teaching them the language of reading a prompt, but really, it's a very difficult concept. That was one of the biggest things we discovered. That carried over to the SAT 9 stuff as well. Kids don't read directions. [Teacher C]

Even within the schools that have more experience, different departments are in different places. After a year of LASW, one department head recognized what they would need to do to make it a more productive experience, and shared their plan for next year.

> Pre-test, post-test, probably lots of pre-test and then the student work analysis piece will really be done well. We are going to bring it all together and look at it as a group and look at the chapter tests and see where they are falling out and how can we, and if the same errors are occurring across the board is it because of the teacher or is it something that wasn't taught, or what. Keep track and change that so it doesn't happen again. I don't think that has happened in the past. We look at these papers, and what we are doing for [the area superintendent] here and this has started us, which I think is a really good thing. Started us opening our doors and letting other people in to our private little world of our grade book and how we grade papers. It really was a private little world before. It is no longer private and so I think there is drive to make what we have on that paper, what the students put on that paper, be impressive. It's a good thing. With these, we will be looking at the student work carefully and looking for their errors and analysis and having to share and get feedback and adjust. [Teacher O]

We did find a few conscientious, reflective teachers who did this on their own, without the benefit of the support of their peers or a coach, but this was the exception rather than the norm.

> One thing I can see, they're misspelling sight words, like "when" and "want" and "said," those are words they should know by sight already so I know I need to be

> teaching somehow get those sight words into their vocabulary so they're not - because that is a hurdle that the reader has to go over to get to the point we want. But what I'm really looking for with my kids with the writing is that they understand what they're supposed to be writing about. To me that's really important because I know they're getting the vocabulary, it's taking some of them longer than others, but right now I'm really - I want to make sure that these kids are thinking, doing critical thinking, and being able to put their thoughts down on paper. [Teacher P]

Overall, LBUSD has made significant progress in increasing teachers' experience and facility with using rubrics and scoring guides to assess student work. A lot of teachers now recognize that if you inform students of expectations, the quality is going to improve. These are important steps. However, for the most part, the Area Superintendents' accountability measures have not had the intended effect of moving student work to the center of teachers' practice. Recognizing that this is a slow process and will take time, there are several supports that need to be in place for school staffs to do this. The district needs to make a commitment to an agreed upon process and people at all levels of the district -- central office administrators, curriculum leaders, building administrators, standards coaches, department chairs, and teachers -- need on-going training, support, and practice before LASW will become a powerful tool for improving teaching and learning. And as always, there needs to be time allocated to do this work. Only then will teachers understand the purpose, as one teacher explained :

> To ask the basic question of each other, what can we do to make this better -- the assessment, the way that something is assigned, the way it's instructed -- how can we become better at this, that's the fundamental question . [Teacher Q]

In contrast to the Area Superintendent's accountability measures, teachers told us that the district-provided classroom-embedded assessments have been a real benefit in helping them understand what is expected in student work. Teachers have used the CEMs to focus their instruction and the time and effort invested in teaching the knowledge and skills required to perform well on these assessments is producing higher quality work. The district is now pushing teachers to move these into a standards-based grading system by combining multiple instruments into a Standards Assessment Portfolio.

Standards Assessment Portfolios: The Mathematics Pilot.

In past reports we have written about the different instruments designed or made available by the district for classroom-level certification of the content standards. These have included Running Records, math facts tests, open-ended questions, portfolios, etc. We have also observed that the knowledge about and use of these classroom-embedded measures in Long Beach middle school classrooms has varied significantly. In an effort, therefore, to provide a common framework for the organization and use of these assessment tools, the district pilot-tested an assessment portfolio during the 1998-1999 school year. The primary purpose of the Standards Assessment

Portfolios is to certify student achievement of the content standards; however, they may also serve instructional purposes such as helping teachers focus on the content standards, identifying students in need of additional help, and helping teachers with planning and pacing of the curriculum.

While the impetus for instituting this Standards Assessment Portfolio came from the district, the design of this assessment tool resulted from the collective effort of a group of middle school mathematics department heads that met in the summer of 1998. Initially it was planned that these Standards Assessment Portfolios would be pilot-tested in language arts and mathematics, however, given the stress levels in the district, it was scaled back to just mathematics. To further ease in the pilot-test effort, the mathematics assessment portfolio initially only focused on four standards (although teachers could still document all the standards if they chose to do so). Information and training about the mathematics assessment portfolios started to be disseminated late in the summer; however, the bulk of this effort did not get underway until after the school year had started. Most math teachers learned about the specific requirements of the assessment portfolio at Carpe Diem.

During our visit in November we found that all mathematics teachers were aware of the assessment portfolio initiative. However, it was readily apparent that there was some confusion about the purpose of the portfolio, the components that needed to be included, and even the pilot nature of the undertaking. In addition, none of the teachers we talked to at that time had received the folders needed to collect and track the assessment results. (Subsequently, we learned that the portfolio folders were received at the school sites in January 1999.) This uncertainty surrounding the portfolios, coupled with other demanding initiatives, caused initial reluctance to buy into this assessment tool. Furthermore, rolling out the portfolio after the school year was underway, even as a pilot effort, added to teachers' stress. Interestingly, as one standards coach observed, it was the veteran teachers who were initially more resistant to implementing the assessment portfolios than the novice teachers:

> At first especially your more experienced teachers had their heels dug in and they said we're not doing all this. We've taught for many years and we've not had to do it before, why should we have to do it now? . . . . The new teachers didn't resist as much, maybe because they didn't know any better or - it was very helpful to them because it helped them with the things that they need to grow in anyway. [Standards Coach F]

The four standards chosen for the first year pilot were Algebra, Geometry, Number, and Measurement. The portfolio outlined multiple assessments for each standard which could be used to certify mastery of the mathematics content standards. The number and type of assessment instruments varied from standard to standard. For example, for any one standard, the assessments might include Open-Ended Mathematics items, a selection of short-answer free-response items, math facts tests, End-of-Course exams (i.e., Algebra), and graded student work. While the graded student work that is recorded in the portfolio is left up to the discretion of classroom teachers, the remaining components of the portfolio are specified. This ensures that

the documentation and evaluation of student learning on the mathematics content standards can be compared across the district.

In addition to the assessments specified for each standard, a Learning Record (or Learning Log), which is in effect a note-taking tool, is part of the assessment portfolio. A rubric is provided for scoring the Learning Record, and the score assigned is supposed to be considered in the overall determination of whether or not the student is meeting the standards in mathematics. The Learning Record is the only piece in the assessment portfolio that was new to teachers this year; therefore, it did not come as a surprise that most of the negative comments expressed about the portfolio targeted the Learning Record. The response that, "That's another thing I have to grade," was a common sentiment [Teacher K]. We found that some teachers were unclear about how frequently the Learning Record had to be scored, or even if had to be scored at all. Other teachers grappled with how to reconcile the Learning Record with their regular note-taking and journal writing requirements. All the teachers we talked to, however, concurred that the Learning Record was either a useful learning or assessment tool. Teachers understood that "the whole purpose of the Learning Record was to make sure the teachers have their kids take notes [Teacher D]." Not everyone understood the distinction between copying notes that students often do not comprehend, and learning to take notes that could be used as a resource. The Math Learning Records are notebooks of organized notes the students take on all the new concepts and strategies they learn during the year. It is intended to provide a systematic record that students can use as a resource to help them study, complete their homework, and learn new mathematical concepts. While many teachers already have students take notes during class, the key difference with the Math Learning Records is that students are asked to record the new concepts in their own words, including explaining examples -- a strategy designed to enhance students' understanding of new ideas. Although this requirement is based on the notion that learning to take good notes will enhance student learning in mathematics, we often found that the purpose had not been explained to those asked to implement the practice. Math teachers need to understand the rationale for and the desired outcomes of new initiatives, before one can expect it to be effectively implemented. This is particularly true when the practice requires considerable time for teachers to implement and monitor.

During the pilot year the district had not yet determined just how to combine assessment results for each standard or how to combine results to generate an overall rating of the portfolio. Instead teachers were given options such as averaging scores or using the mode. We were told that the results from the pilot effort will inform the determination of valid approaches for combining indicators obtained from the different assessment tools utilized. This and other issues surrounding the portfolios will be the focus of a mathematics department head meeting scheduled for the summer of 1999.

When we returned in the spring there was a noticeable shift in the tenor of the comments about the assessment portfolios. We found that teachers had found ways to implement the Standards Assessment Portfolios to varying extent, which is what one would hope from a pilot experience. One teacher found that he could use the Learning Record in lieu of other writing requirements Others administered fewer numbers of assessments than specified in the portfolio, or allowed

students to select a "best" response to a task for the portfolio. Many more teachers had dealt with the portfolios by not attending to some component -- usually, the Learning Record. One teacher we talked to suggested that as her peers came to understand that the first year was a pilot year they felt justified in limiting the requirements attended to. In general, by the end of the school year the Standards Assessment Portfolio was being viewed in a more positive light as expressed by the following teacher who was asked if he saw the portfolios as a feasible tool.

> Yes I do see it as doable. It is a lot of work but I think to raise the standards, to make kids accountable for their learning, to put a little responsibility back on their shoulders, we can make these into something doable, workable. [Teacher R]

Overall, perhaps one teacher's comments best summarizes our observations of the Standards Assessment Portfolio in this pilot year.

> The purpose of this portfolio is a wonderful thing. The implementation of it [however] is something else. [Teacher O]

Mostly, teachers were concerned about the time to do all that was expected:

> [The principal] allowed us to take off a day this week, because we received so much information this year that we haven't had a chance to actually put it together and decide what we're going to do with it. We want to make sure that all seventh grade teachers keep the same open ended problem, have the same assessment for each standard so that each student is assessed the same way throughout the whole school. And that's what we'll be doing Wednesday, we will actually sit down [for the first time at the end of the year.] [Teacher S]

Finally, in order to ensure the validity of interpretations about student performance based on these assessment portfolios we recommend that additional consideration be given to the type of training that teachers need to implement and score the component measures in a reliable manner. After all, if teachers are not consistent in the scoring of the component pieces, this will undermine the validity of any decisions about student performance based on the combined results in the portfolio. While we understand the pilot nature of this first year of implementation of the Standards Assessment Portfolio, it is not clear that the technical adequacy of the component assessments has been thoroughly investigated at this point. Initial efforts to study the relationship between student performance on the classroom-embedded assessments and SAT9 is an important step toward testing the validity of some of the measures. It is commendable that the district does not want to rely exclusively on the SAT9 as the indicator of whether or not the district is meeting standards. As many of the measures currently included in the portfolio (e.g., short-answer free response items, and graded student work) are new and their technical quality has not yet been thoroughly studied, it will be important to ensure the reliability and validity of each of the component measures. Otherwise, combining assessment information could undermine the integrity of the portfolio if it were to incorporate a tool that has uncertain validity.

In each of the three initiatives discussed above, the introduction of standards coaches, the accountability measures designed to foster LASW, and the Mathematics Standards Assessment Portfolio, there were significant implementation problems. While we recognize that there will always be complaints when change occurs, timely and careful planning coupled with clear and consistent communication of goals will go a long way toward engendering greater support and success, while reducing frustration and confusion. We found that the lack of clarity about the purpose, insufficient training and guidance, and time to learn and experiment with new ideas limited their effectiveness this year. We will return to the issue of communication in the district after a visit to Long Beach Preparatory Academy, LBUSD's response to the question , What happens to students who don't meet the standards?

V. Long Beach Preparatory Academy (LBPA)

The establishment of LBPA two years ago marked LBUSD's first step toward ending social promotion in the district. The eighth grade initiative mandated that any student who received two or more F's on his or her final report card would be held back. Those students would attend Prep Academy for one year to refocus and hone their academic skills before matriculating into high school.

As LBPA is a unique school, we have taken a somewhat different approach to studying it. The issue of social promotion is so controversial and so much a part of the current political agenda, that we felt it was critical to look closely at LBPA to develop a better understanding of how to reach the students most at risk of academic failure. We were aware of the numerous start-up problems experienced during the first year, and we wanted to give the district time to establish the school. We did, however, make three brief visits to the school during their first year of operation (1997-98) to understand the context of the school and its population. During those visits we observed classrooms and conducted focus groups with students and teachers. Based on those preliminary visits, we made the following observations:

> 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 of 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. (August, 1998)

Nevertheless, it was clear to us that:

> [T]he 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. (August, 1998)

We felt that the staff deserved a great deal of credit for those accomplishments. However, we also expressed our concern about the mismatch between teachers' descriptions of students' "abysmal" academic skills and the students' reports about their classes at Prep. While students responded positively to teacher's caring attitudes, the smaller class size, and block scheduling, we also heard that their classes were not challenging.

Year two of the school got off to a much smoother start. Under the leadership of a new principal, the staff worked together for two weeks prior to the start of school, developing a shared vision, agreeing on core values, and focusing on the culture and climate they wanted for the school. The staff looked at survey data from students, indicating that students wanted to be challenged, that school was more interesting when they had to work hard. Teachers also participated in staff development on literacy strategies and using thinking maps to support student learning.

The principal described the message conveyed during those two weeks:

> Your classroom atmosphere is everything: that if you don't build that community in your classroom, kids aren't going to learn anything; that rigor must happen or behavior occurs; if kids aren't pushed and pushed and pushed, behavior occurs. We had many people who didn't understand that teaching wasn't just content. It's a complex profession. I think that assessment has to be ongoing. You have to understand what to do with it once they've used it, where it takes you next. And the value of individual instruction because every kid has the right to learn, every kid has the right to move along at their own level. [Principal A]

The staff also planned the first seven days of the school year to include team building activities within each homeroom.

> The bonding that was built with those kids I think was one of the most powerful things that we did this entire year. Because it just set us off on such a great note. People would come in and say gosh, your campus is so calm, the kids are so respectful, they introduce themselves -- that was all based on that.... If you want them to become respectful, if you want them to become responsible, if you want them to become trustworthy, or trusting, you need to show what that looks like through as many examples as you can show. [Teacher T]

At the beginning of the 1998-99 school year, with assistance from the principal, our evaluation team selected a sample of nine students to follow for two years, through their year at Prep Academy and next year to observe their transition into high school. We began systematically

collecting data during our Fall 1998 visit. We attended classes with the students and talked with them about their experiences in school. We were impressed by the caring, supportive atmosphere we found at Prep. We consistently heard from students that Prep was nothing like they expected.

> People used to think there was going to be all sorts of different culture groups. But everybody gets along. It's basically because of our teachers. That's what they are here for, to get along and help each other.[Student A]

> The classes are smaller, and the students are different because here, everybody just has one [goal], to go to high school. And everybody wants to help everybody. [Student B]

One of the staff members reflected on the climate that they have tried to create at the school.

> I think they [the students] know that people care for them. That's a big deal, that we like them, that we're here for them. That our whole concern is for them to be successful in life. A lot of them never had that in school, that teachers could actually care for them, that they'll actually cry if you don't do something - I sat down and cried before because it just hurt me so bad to see them not doing what they're supposed to do. [Their reaction was] - you know, she really likes us, she really cares for us. And I think that's a big difference. And they're loved here - we really love these kids. [Teacher U]

Even within this supportive environment, we lost a third of our student sample by January. One student was pregnant and she chose to attend another school designed to support pregnant teens, one student was in jail for a minor violation, and a third decided that school was a waste of her time. The frustration she experienced at Prep Academy and in previous schools ultimately led her to seek an alternative setting for completing high school. She complained that the classes were not challenging and just a repeat of the previous year (even though she rarely attended).

> That English teacher, all she does is give us a writing assignment like every day and it gets boring after a while. And I told her, I don't like her class because every Wednesday we get a ditto because it's short days and I think we could be doing some other stuff instead of a ditto. And I told her I think her class is stupid because that's how I feel here sometimes, like they're just giving us some little bitty work because we failed the 8th grade. Because we already know this stuff we had before. I mean in the [Life Skills class], you see what we do in there, we just sit there and do like the easiest little things. It's boring to me. [Student C]

Unfortunately, we had to agree. Many of their classes were boring -- watching videos, coloring diagrams of plant cells, round robin reading that lost most of the class, crossword puzzles of vocabulary words -- a lot of busy work. Not surprisingly, many of these classes were also unruly.

The student work we saw was largely in the form of worksheets and art projects, and of medium to low quality, although the recorded grades were quite high (A's, B's, and a few C's). Final drafts of papers were full of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors, that made them difficult for even the authors themselves to read.

One project that seemed to engage students was writing their "memoirs" in their English class. Their essays reveal the turmoil and angst that filled their troubled lives.

> I never thought that life would get better when I was sitting with my mom in the little rat and roach infested apartment. I was just a baby, I never realized life was bad. It just didn't occur to me. I guess because I had my brother and sister and my mom. I was happy just with my family, life was just a game to me. But then as I grew I began to see what was happening. My older brother was gone, my little brother was born. My mom worked a lot so I became sort of independent. My sister left recently so I feel more alone than ever. I still have myself and I write a lot of poetry and draw. I tend to imagine when I'm alone what I'm going to do next. I miss my sister and my brother but they have new lives for themselves and I'm happy for them. I guess I'll find happiness for myself one day, I know I'm getting closer. [Student B]

One of the things they were supposed to include in their memoir were "turning points" in their life. One student wrote about his initiation into a gang where he was required to shoot someone. Many wrote about being sent to Prep Academy.

> I realized that last year I just didn't care at all. All I cared about was going to a party and being with my friends. At school I will go and never do my work or else I would be absent and never get my makeup work done. My Mom would always tell me, "Do your work." Here I am talking smart. "Yeah, yeah, whatever." During school one day, it was during 4th period, I remember it. I was sitting in class jabbering with my friends about the weekend when I received a note. It was a note to the library. I looked at it mysteriously. I had no clue what it was all about. I was just clueless. So I am walking to the library so curious what this was all for. I was thinking so hard that when somebody talked to me I couldn't even mind them. I told myself and thought back, "Do I have an overdue book? Do I need to pay a fine?" But I just couldn't remember. I sat in the hallway by the library, and there were a lot of students, maybe around between 20 or 30. Only five out of all of them were my friends. They finally opened the library, and we all stepped in. Everybody was curious. "Have a seat," said [the counselor]. We had a seat. "We have good news and bad news. The bad news was that we were failing and that we had to come to Long Beach Preparatory Academy if we didn't bring our grade up." When they said that, I was so shocked I felt like breaking out in tears. A couple of other girls did. Everybody was just ashamed of themselves. I can still remember their faces. I was so mad at myself, I felt all sweaty. My face just automatically went down. My eyes got so watery

> and busted out in tears. I just couldn't believe myself. The good news was that we had a second chance to bring our grades up, if we were willing to stay in from lunch from there on. The students didn't like it, but I believed it was for the best of us. I was working my butt off getting all my work done. I raised one F up to a D, and I had to work on a report. I stayed up all night doing it but it was worth it. I was only failing that class due to laziness. I raised my science grade to a C because I did my science fair project. I worked extra hard on that one. My Mom found out I was failing, she didn't get mad, she was just very upset. All my Mom said was, "I told you to do good, look at you now." After that she was on my back all the time. "Get your butt off the phone and get started on your homework. "I will be off the phone in just one second." The day came, it was graduation and I didn't graduate. I wasn't there. I was really downcast because I was really trying my hardest to bring up my bad grades. Now here I am. I am just so thankful I got a second chance to learn the things that I didn't learn last year.... Thinking back, saying to myself, "I could have done this good last year and graduated, I would have been in high school by now." I guess I have to work harder and not let laziness take control over me, but I don't have to worry, I see changes already. Now I am all prepared for high school. [Student D]

Another student wrote about problems at home that had been the source of a great deal of pain and anger. He explained,

> I wrote about my family and how things, some of my people is gone, and I've been writing about how I miss them so much. Last time I didn't even get a chance to tell my aunt that I loved her before she left me. So I got over it though. It's still hard but I wrote about it, and since I told my teacher about it and all, it got some pain off of me. ...At first my family, we was all together but I got some people that's grouchy, they don't like one another. Like every time one of my cousins see another cousin, it's like words come out, bad words that we shouldn't be hearing. So I wrote about that. And now since I wrote that, and I shared it with my family, since Mother's Day, all my family's getting along now. That's a turning point right there. [Student E]

This is a student from one of our sample schools who we learned had a history of suspensions for fighting. The principal described the tremendous progress he and other students had made during the year in dealing with anger. However, she also recognized that they had much more work to do on the academic front.

> I pulled the discipline files and I highlighted kids who had multiple entries for fighting all through middle school, 6th through 8th grade, that have no entries from our school - zero. And it's quite a huge list. Well, [this student] was a fighter. This year when there have been confrontational situations, he has handled it so beautifully. He's used humor, I've seen him use just common sense, I've seen him be the bigger man and say this is stupid - I've seen him use a variety

> of strategies. So he's amazing. We have quite a few girls also that were big fighters last year that haven't had any problems. So that's amazing, isn't it? I always go, you fought? You pulled hair? You didn't really do that? So we have a lot [of successes] in the discipline area. Academics -- we have to get better academically here. We have to get better. Lots better. It's almost like we spend so much time - I have to find the simultaneous tool to be able to help with the behavior and all that other stuff and still be moving them towards that place. [Principal A]

Just as we indicated in previous reports, the ability of the teaching staff to connect with their students is impressive, however, the lack of rigorous instruction at the Academy continues to trouble us. Students consistently told us that their classes were easy, less demanding than 8th grade had been at their previous school. We are also concerned about the impact of grade inflation. Many of the students were under the impression that they were currently doing A or B-level ninth grade work. Responses from surveys sent to Prep's first graduating class by the school's administration indicated that students thought that the major differences between Prep and high school was that high school classes are much harder and there is much more homework. Some students even sent along their recommendations to this year's Prep class to "work harder, because it's way harder in high school."

We are concerned about whether or not there are supports in place to help these students survive in high school. We learned from one high school counselor that of the 48 students from Prep who started ninth grade at that HS, only seven students remained in late May. Clearly, students are finding re-entry into regular high school extremely difficult. In general, our sample of students didn't seem concerned that high school would get more challenging, only that teachers wouldn't be as helpful. One student confidently told us:

> Yeah, I feel prepared. Because while everybody else is failing now in 9th grade, they barely made it over the line with D's and C's and low C's and D's. We're probably going to succeed more because they all made it to high school but now they're probably going to be in the same situation we are. But since we took an extra year, we're probably going to be more prepared than them with what we learned here. [Student B]

One of the most obvious observations we made this year was that all of the students at Prep Academy were there because they each have serious socio-emotional issues in their lives. These issues were not just recent, temporary events, but had been with them for many years, interfering with their ability to focus in school. As a result, most of the students have extremely weak academic skills. One administrator described the challenge they faced:

> It's almost like kids -- our kids come to us and they have this schema for everything that they do, and none of it involves success. We have to attack everything from getting up in the morning to every single thing. We have to look at those values they hold and what they believe, and work on changing that belief

> system. Because they have a belief system that they don't have to get up in the morning. [....] We just need to figure out what it is we need to do and then look at the individual and see where it is their thinking is faulty, because they don't understand the complexity. It's attendance and it's attention, because showing up is not enough. No one has ever separated that all out for them and explained it to them. So individual therapy, it's psychotherapy! (Laughs) School psychotherapy. It's individual introspection and then finding, starting at the lowest common denominator, just like when you are teaching -- starting with the chunk of knowledge and building it towards the standard so that you master it all. And we have to do that on a real personal level with kids. [Principal A]

The Prep staff has worked hard to provide that personal support. Teachers and administrators call parents regularly. They have a full-time counselor, social worker, and social work interns to address student needs. The staff has recruited community organizations, written grants for supplemental funding to bring additional social and health services to the school. One example is a Healthy Start Grant that includes: 1) a social work component; 2) a mental health component; 3) vocational training called Career Prep; 4) a mentoring program that will include a homework center, sports, and the arts, called Prep Plus; and 5) a parent piece, called Parent Prep. The goal is to have every student have support from at least one component of this program.

The impact of social/psychological issues dominate LBPA and it raises concern about the timing and type of interventions other middle schools in Long Beach are providing for their students. Every school has instituted a number of early interventions in 6th and 7th grade to identify students at risk of academic failure. Most schools have tutoring programs, "homework clubs," study skills classes, and special classes to address academic needs. Some of these programs are after school, and are by necessity "voluntary," making attendance by those most in need problematic. In addition, we have observed the need for more thoughtful, sound academic interventions in mathematic, staffed by strong teachers. Schools piloted Reading Development Courses this year, which will be required next year for all students scoring in the lowest quartile in reading. These are all positive steps. However, all of the principals we talked to acknowledged that there is more work to do, and although there were a few supports in place to address socio-emotional issues, the current services do not meet the needs of those most at-risk.

All of the schools are utilizing the resources they have on hand, but they all recognize that the current practices fall short. Each of the principals explained the interventions they had in place to support students at-risk of failure.

> This year we have had a school psychologist who has been very instrumental in helping us create what we have called success plans for kids and they have been referred from their teacher to the academic coach. So it is more of a counseling kind of piece and folding in the parents as well. We still need to get better at the parents. I don't know, that is such a hard component to get the follow through with the kids, as well as the attendance. Those seem to go hand in hand with failing kids. We have had forums and seminars with small groups of our eighth

graders, specific letters, in fact our eight grade academic coach has sent out letters to all our kids with two or more D's and invited them in. Boy they came in droves. It was fascinating because they were very, very concerned that those D's would slip to F's. We talked individually to a lot of families. We are looking at, for next year, this new teacher that we are going to hire with a strength in English and reading, and work with the seventh and eight grade ELD kids who are below the 25th percentile in reading. Right now the district is saying we have to do it for the sixth grader. Well, you still have some other kids that definitely need that support. We have had a social worker that comes in once or twice a week and he has a group of kids that he is working with, and trying to reach out to other organizations. ... There is still a significant number of kids that we are missing and it is that emotional piece and the social that I think, has to happen first. But we are not equipped. We don't have the resources. [Principal B]

We put in a heavy duty guided study program, our best ever, just in 8th grade. Last year we did 6th, 7th and 8th. This year I said we're just going to focus on 8th grade because I have some other things going in 6th and 7th. So the guided study program has worked very well for about half of the kids. And what I see is more ownership this year than any other year on behalf of the kids....I would probably say the social emotional is neglected. Teachers are not equipped and of course not trained to handle that. I have three counselors and I have one more than -- most middle schools only have two -- and that third counselor deals with the affective piece, no testing, no scheduling, none of that other stuff. And she works with leadership development, conflict resolution. We have an extensive off-campus community based counseling group -- they gave us three counselors after three weeks, they doubled their counselors, they said there's just too many issues here. You've got too many needy kids. So no, that is a big gap we are not addressing and the families also. Those families do not have the skills to nurture and support these kids. [Principal C]

We have Focus on Youth which is the same as some schools' SST. Where the kids are brought forward and we have teachers recommend students who have any kind of need. We've done a lot of work with the staff that's not a special ed placement - if they need some kind of counseling, whatever, and then the counselor, 7th grade learning director, arranges groups, so we've had several groups, people come on campus and lead groups with the kids. I don't think we've had quite as many this year because of the change in personnel.[....] But I couldn't agree more that it's the attitude, the problems they bring with them, and obviously since the Colorado thing, that's been a biggie as far as looking at kids' attitudes, and I've been really pleased because we've had a lot of luck from the beginning of kids talking to teachers and I've put a lot of memos in their boxes about open lines of communications. [Principal D]

Fortunately, the Long Beach Education Partnership is well-positioned to work with schools to address this need. The Partnership has worked extensively with community-based organizations and written grants to bring needed resources to the students they serve. The Partnership's Youth Development and Resource Centers have been effective in raising student achievement among middle school students who receive their services. (LBUSD "Draft" Proposal to the Clark Foundation, 1999) As in the schools themselves, the Partnership's focus has been on providing additional **academic** support. While we agree that these programs make a positive contribution, the need for additional support from social and health services is evident. Research on resiliency suggests that the single most important factor in helping troubled youth become successful is a healthy connection with at least one caring adult (Deiro,1996; Hawkins, et al. 1992).

VI. Communicating the Vision

The organizational structure of the district presents some communication challenges that have hindered the implementation of many of the district's initiatives this year. We have always been impressed with the close working relationships among central office staff. The superintendent's weekly "Area Supes" meetings are important forums for maintaining communication about the work of the various divisions within the school district. However, when the pace of change accelerates, as it did this year, we found that many people proceeded on assumptions of mutual understanding that were in reality taking shape in quite different and sometimes conflicting ways. The curriculum office and the three Area Superintendents were often moving forward with the same initiative based on interpretations that varied just enough to send confusing messages to those trying to implement the ideas. Administrators proceeded on the belief that there was a common understanding when critical people, such as curriculum leaders and principals had received different messages, or none at all. They believed that training had taken place, when it had not. These incidents underscore the need for careful detailed planning and clear and consistent communication about both the larger goals and the steps to get there.

Everyone needs to know why doing something is important and what end it serves. (Kouzes & Posner, 1999). If people know that their work is purposeful, it helps to make people feel more significant and more in charge (empowered). Few people in the district have had the opportunity to understand the big picture, and how each of the individual initiatives are important ingredients for reaching the larger goal. Standards coaches, and principals, have benefitted from opportunities to understand the road map for the journey they are on. Few teachers have had that experience. One of the standards coaches remarked that one of the most important things she learned from the standards coach institute was how all the pieces fit together.

> [The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development] really has a command of all the content areas, and all the problems that each of us face, and the successes we've had. And the blueprint of standards based reform she presented to us like a kindergarten pre-primer reader. It was so easy to understand. It really was, and yet, she was so thorough, that it was a college dissertation. [Standards Coach B]

All teachers could benefit from a primer on the district's blueprint, so that they, too, can understand the purpose of what they are being asked to do. Ultimately, they are the ones who have to carry it out. Sometimes the rationale may appear obvious to the designers, but when a teacher is trying to incorporate two or three new things into his or her teaching, and faces 150+ children everyday, few have time to reflect and figure out how all the disparate pieces actually fit together. The district has put together some nice pieces in Standard Time to address this issue, but the message needs to be continually reinforced. If every training session reviewed the strategic plan and explained the role that each new initiative plays in moving the district closer to the goal, whether it's the Standards Assessment Portfolio or Curriculum Mapping, then teachers would have greater commitment to the implementation.

Although LBUSD has always been very inclusive, engaging teams of teachers in the development of standards, curriculum embedded assessments, and professional development offerings, teachers have not always had the opportunity to understand how each of these components fit together in the larger reform agenda. Understanding the principles behind standards reform is as important to classroom teachers as it to the Central Office team that designed it. Teachers need to understand the rationale to make sense of the practices they are being asked to adopt. Learning always involves new understandings and new behaviors, "thinking" and doing." (Senge, p. 374) It is by understanding the theory behind the principles, that teachers develop commitment to the new practices they are asked to implement. This understanding is also essential for helping teachers expand their ability to understand and cope with complexity, and commit to a shared vision.

We recognize that it has been an overwhelming year in Long Beach. One in which administrators and support staff had the additional job of trying to keep stress levels under control. When feeling overwhelmed by the workload, time constraints, and increasing accountability for results, it is often difficult to stay focused on the details -- the individual steps that are necessary to get to one's destination. Returning to the analogy we used in the beginning of the report, the task at hand for everyone in the district is to figure out how to help others experience success. After struggling to define her role, one of the standards coaches came to the realization that:

> My job is to empower [teachers] and give them lots of examples and guidance and facilitate their learning, that's really what my job is.[Standards Coach G]

Similarly, everyone in the district has a coaching role to play. Webster's defines a coach as one who "trains intensively by instruction, demonstration, and practice." Teachers coach their students. Standards Coaches, curriculum specialists, and principals coach teachers, while central office staff serve as their coaches. The more a coach knows about the current status of the knowledge and skills of their "students," the deeper their knowledge of the component parts of the performance target, the better the coach will be able to provide the right amount of support to guide everyone toward meeting standards.

Overall, despite the stress this year, it is important not to lose sight of the significant progress that has been made. Much of that progress was in the district's strategic thinking, the formation

of ideas, and the introduction of new practices. These are significant developments. The district has developed a coherent and thoughtful plan for rolling out standards reform and is responsive to teachers' concerns as they struggle with implementing each new initiative. The newsletter, *Standard Time*, is an important step in helping teachers understand how content and teaching practices are connected to achieving performance goals. Toward that end, the district's assessment system is evolving and is becoming more comprehensive and more closely aligned with the content standards. Moreover, the districtwide performance tests have had a significant impact on instructional practices in an effort to raise the quality of student work. Standards coaches have provided additional support to teachers at the classroom level, and even with some initial start-up problems, the coaches have already made significant contributions in their first year. The focus now must turn to coaching and supporting the implementation and refinement of all of these promising new initiatives.

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Appendix A. Methodology

Our evaluation design has remained relatively constant over the course of the grant, although the composition of our sample has changed somewhat. At the beginning of the current grant cycle, Hamilton, Hill, and Marshall all indicated a desire to continue to participate in the evaluation, and we added 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 eagerly agreed to participate. Our hope is to develop a better understanding of how to reach the students most at risk of academic failure. It is important to note that as a result of the changes in the schools we are following, our sample now consists of all Focus Schools. As a result, our report may be more representative of the lower achieving schools than of the district as a whole. This is an issue we need to considerate when we plan the evaluation strategy for the next grant period.

Long Beach Prep is a unique school. With an approximate enrollment of 300 students, it is a small school, housing only one grade. As a result, we modified our evaluation strategy to address the special issues at this extraordinary school. We selected a small sample of teachers to observe and interview over the course of two years. In addition, we selected a sample of nine students (each member of our evaluation team is following three students) who we also plan to follow for two years. The student sample is representative of the gender and ethnic composition of the school as a whole. In addition, we have several extensive conversations with the principal throughout the year. During our visits to Prep Academy, we talked with the students, attended classes with them, and documented their challenges and successes during the year. They shared their school work with us, and we also monitored grades and test scores of each of the students in our sample. We plan to follow them into high school next year, to learn about their transition back into mainstream classes, and their readiness to succeed in high school.

At the other three schools in our sample, we have continued to follow nine teachers in each school. We have modified our evaluation design somewhat for the current grant period to get a better sense of the school as a whole. Last year (Spring, 1998) we visited Hamilton and Marshall during their CCR review from the state. 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. During the 1998-99 school year, we attended a Seamless Education Conference, "All Teachers are Teachers of Writing," Carpe Diem, the annual middle school conference, Open House at one of the schools, and an inservice training designed to help eighth grade history teachers prepare students for the districtwide performance assessment. We also had the opportunity to participate in two Sub-release days to observe the work of individual departments at two of the schools. In addition to classroom observations, we interviewed teachers, and principals at each of the schools. We met with and observed ten of the Standards Coaches "in action" to learn about their evolving role in helping teachers implement standards. Data reported here are based on those interviews, as well as conversations with all of the curriculum leaders, Area Superintendents, the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Instruction, & Professional Development, the Assistant Superintendent for Research, the Middle School Communications

Coordinator, the Coordinator of the New Teacher Support Program, the director of bilingual education, the Administrative Assistant for Middle School Reform, and the Superintendent of LBUSD.[5]

[5]Some of the quotes are quite lengthy, while others are brief. We have made an effort to allow the voices of our informants to tell the story whenever possible.