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San Diego Unified School District Status Report: 2003-2009

July 2010

Cite as: Kemerer, F., Galloway, F., & Hubbard, L. (2010). *San Diego Unified School District Status Report: 2003-2009*. University of San Diego, Center for Education Policy and Law.

San Diego Unified School District Status Report

Center for Education Policy and Law • University of San Diego
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July 2010

This study was commissioned by an independent philanthropist and conducted by the Center for Education Policy and Law (CEPAL), a research entity operating under the auspices of the School of Leadership and Education Sciences and the School of Law at the University of San Diego. It focuses exclusively on the San Diego Unified School District and is a revised and updated version of an earlier study.

Established by a grant from the William D. Lynch Foundation in 2007, CEPAL's mission is to foster better linkage between educational research, policymaking, and practice. To this end, CEPAL undertakes empirical and legal research on educational policy issues, enhances communication between education leaders and state-level policymakers, and facilitates understanding among USD law students and education graduate students about the policymaking process through courses, internships, and research opportunities. Additional information about CEPAL is available at www.sandiego.edu/cepal.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The San Diego Unified School District is the seventh largest urban K-12 school district in the nation and the second largest in California. During 2008-2009, its 181 district-operated schools provide education services to 118,010 students (if charter schools located in the district are included, the number of schools increases to 218 and enrollment to over 132,000). This study encompasses school years 2002-2003 to 2008-2009. It consists of three research phases: (1) student enrollment, demographics, and performance; (2) finance and personnel trends; and (3) insights for future district improvement obtained from a series of interviews with persons closely associated with the district. A description of key research studies commissioned by the district related to these areas is set forth in a separate appendix.

Section I: Student Enrollment, Demographics, and Performance

- Enrollment in district-operated schools declined 11% between the 2002-2003 school year and the 2008-2009 school year. Enrollment in private schools located within the district declined 22%. Conversely, the enrollment of charter schools within the district grew 60%.
- The racial mix of the district has not changed significantly since the 2002-2003 school year, though the percentage of Hispanic students has grown slowly (from 41% to 44%). Nearly two-thirds of the district's students are low-income, 29% are English learners, and about 12% are enrolled in special education. The district has a greater percentage of African-American, low-income students, and English learners than the state as a whole.
- While the percentage of district students achieving proficiency or higher rates on the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's report card, in mathematics and reading in grades four and eight has increased somewhat since 2003, two-thirds or more of the sample of district students tested still fail to reach proficiency.
- Several student subgroups in the district showed little or no improvement on the National Assessment of Education Progress between 2003 and 2009, resulting in a significant, persistent, and growing test score gap. For example, Hispanic students reaching proficiency or higher on the NAEP fourth grade reading test in 2009 was 11%, a decline from 12% in 2003. The test score gap between White students and Hispanic students reaching proficiency or higher on this test has increased from 31% in 2003 to 40% in 2009. Low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities also lag far behind all district students in NAEP test score performance.
- Proficiency levels of district students on the California Standards Test in mathematics and English language arts are higher than on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and mirror those of the state as a whole. Sixty-five percent of all second graders in district-operated schools and half of all sixth graders achieved proficiency on the CST math test in 2009, while

approximately half of both second and sixth graders did so in English language arts.

- The same test score gaps evident on the National Assessment of Educational Progress are evident among subgroups on the California Standards Test. For example, on the sixth grade English language arts CST test in 2009, 39% of Hispanic students, 13% of English learners, and 20% of students with disabilities achieved proficiency or higher as compared with 55% of all students.
- A high percentage of all students pass the California High School Exit Examination for those who persist to graduation, though the passage rates are less strong for subcategories of students, particularly English learners and students with disabilities.
- The dropout rate for the district has decreased in recent years and is now below the state average.
- A recent national study shows that the district had a relatively low graduation rate (60%) for the Class of 2007 and ranked 29th among the nation's 50 largest school districts. However, using a different formula, the California Department of Education showed the district's 2008 graduation rate at 84%, exceeding the graduation rate for the state as a whole.

Section II: Financial and Personnel Trends

- Despite average daily attendance within the district falling over the seven-year time frame, dollars per-student increased by more than 15% after adjusting for inflation.
- Total general fund revenues increased by slightly more than 3%, led by a 35% increase in other local revenue and a 31% increase in federal revenues. Countering this trend was a 6% decline in other state revenue and a 1% decline in revenue limit sources.
- General fund expenditures increased in three areas during this period – a 42% increase in employee benefits, a 13% increase in classified personnel salaries, and a 1% increase in certificated personnel salaries. Overall, general fund revenues increased 7%. Meanwhile, spending on services and other operating expenses fell by 22% over the same period, while spending on books and supplies fell by 4%.
- Taken together, the number of teachers, pupil service professionals, and administrators fell by 6% over this time period; when disaggregated, the number of teachers declined by 7%, the number of pupil service professionals declined by 3%, and the number of administrators declined by 2%. These numbers contrast to an 11% decline in headcount enrollment and a 20% decline in average daily attendance.
- While overall employment in the district has declined by 6%, the ratio of students to district employees is currently about 7 to 1.

- Very few teachers were terminated for unsatisfactory performance during this period.

Section III: Areas for Future Improvement

Interviews with 26 individuals closely associated with the San Diego district were conducted. These provide insights for future district improvement in a number of areas including:

- Expand professional development to improve the capacity of administrators and teachers throughout the district. One example would be to provide more training for teachers on how to implement the district's new English Language Development program.
- Enhance support for English learners at the high school level.
- Build capacity among educators to use technology effectively and to secure more advanced technology for improving instruction.
- Provide alternative delivery systems to improve instruction. These could include career and technical education, on-line classes, and project-based learning.
- Provide more support for early childhood education teachers to enable them to offer a more rigorous curriculum for a greater number of students.
- Provide additional support personnel, particularly in the area of counseling.
- If educational reform is to take hold, there must be a change in the way the district conducts business. Some of the ideas mentioned included constructing a plan by which to guide the decisions of the district; improve relationships with the Board, the SDEA, and the community; and get buy-in from key constituents.

SAN DIEGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT STATUS REPORT

July 2010

The San Diego Unified School District is the seventh largest urban K-12 school district in the nation and the second largest in California. Nationally, it is 18th in size when all forms of school districts are included. Its 181 district-operated schools provided education services to 118,010 students in 2008-2009. In addition, the district provided some degree of services to many of the 37 charter schools within the district. If charter schools within the district are included in overall district statistics, the number of schools increases to 218 and the number of students to over 132,000.

This study encompassed three research phases: (1) student enrollment, demographics, and performance; (2) financial and personnel trends; and (3) insights for future district improvement obtained from a series of interviews with persons closely associated with the district. A description of key research studies commissioned by the district from 2002-2007 relating to these areas is set forth in a separate appendix.

Section I: Student Enrollment, Demographics, and Performance

This phase focuses on data collection related to students in the following categories:

- Enrollment in district-operated schools, charter schools, and private schools within the district¹
- Student demographics
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing performance
- California Standardized Testing and Performance (STAR) testing performance
- California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) passage rates
- Drop-out, graduation, and postsecondary attendance rates

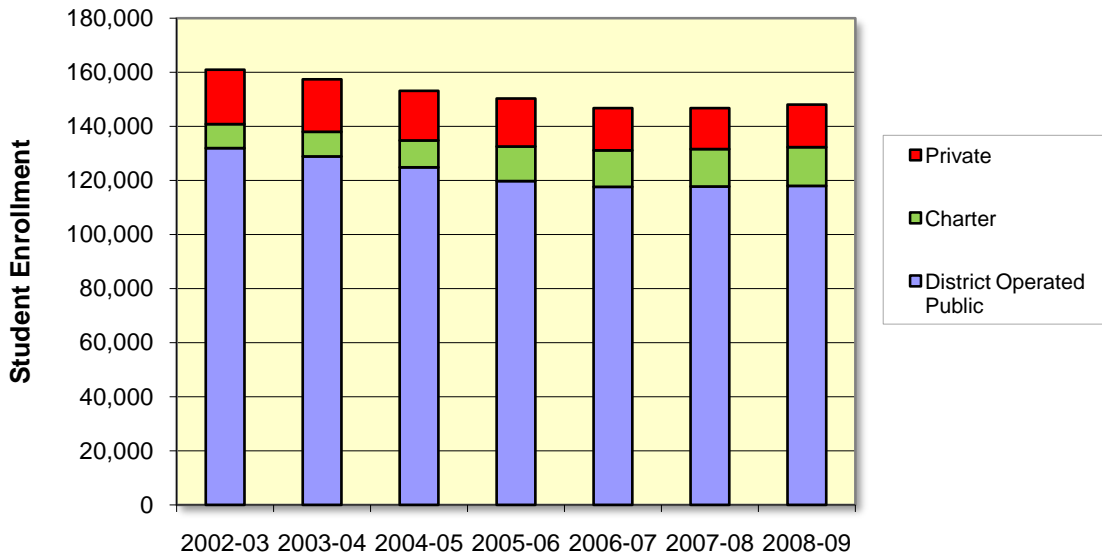
To allow for longitudinal analysis, statistics have been gathered wherever possible for the school years 2002-2003 to 2008-2009.

Headcount Enrollment

Statistics on student enrollment in San Diego Unified are available from the California Department of Education for district, charter, and private schools. These data are submitted by districts to the Department on one day in October known as "Information Day." As Figure 1 demonstrates, the mix of enrollment has been shifting over the past seven years. A noticeable decline has occurred in both public and private school enrollment, while charter school enrollment has been growing.

¹ The term "district-operated schools" means those schools that are directly administered by the district. In some data reporting, charter schools located within school district boundaries are included in the statistics for the district as a whole, because these schools were authorized by the district and the district is legally required to monitor their operation. In other data reporting, charter schools are not included. Clarification is provided in this report when charters are and are not included in statistics.

Figure 1
Enrollment by School Type San Diego Unified



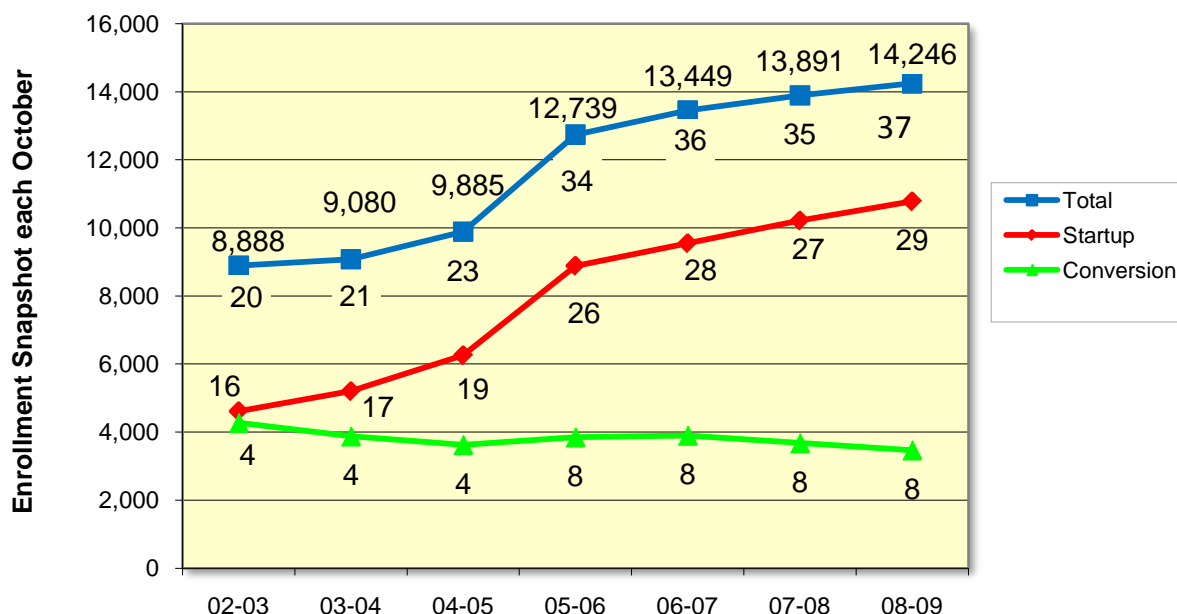
Source: California Department of Education

The graph shows that enrollment in district-operated schools has declined during this time span. The total number in district-operated schools is now 118,010 students, a decline of 11% since 2002-2003. In that school year, enrollment totaled 131,865 students.

Enrollment also has declined for private schools located within the geographic boundaries of the district. In 2008-2009, a total of 15,735 students were enrolled in these schools, a decline of 22% since 2002-2003. At the same time, charter school enrollment has increased as new charter schools have opened and word about their existence spreads. In 2008-2009, a total of 14,246 students were enrolled in 37 charter schools within the district, up 60% since 2002-2003 when 8,888 students were enrolled. The total number enrolled in San Diego charter schools is about 11% of the number enrolled in all San Diego district schools.

Figure 2 charts the growth in the number and enrollment of charter schools located within the San Diego school district. The increase in the number of conversion charter schools (from four to eight) between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 did not result in a significant enrollment increase. The reconfiguration of Memorial Charter School as a start-up charter during this time, the opening of five small conversion charter schools, and a slight drop of enrollment at O'Farrell Community School resulted in a total enrollment increase of about 200 students for conversion charters.

Figure 2
**San Diego Unified Charter Schools
 Enrollment and Numbers**

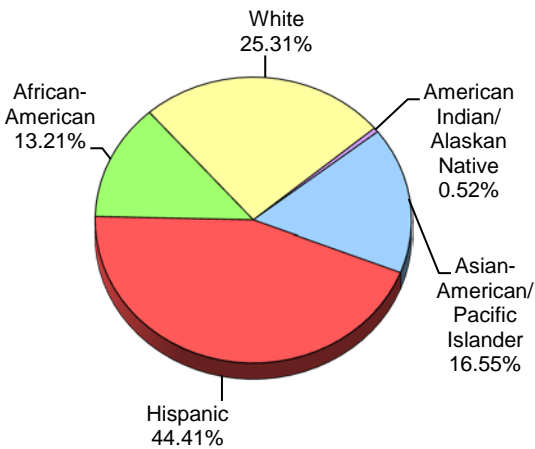


Note: Low-performing schools within the district that were converted to charter school status to institute reform are labeled as “conversion charters.” Start-up charter schools are those that sought a charter school petition from the district to operate a new school. Enrollment data were obtained from California Department of Education’s California Basic Educational Data System and are collected each year on a specific day in October.

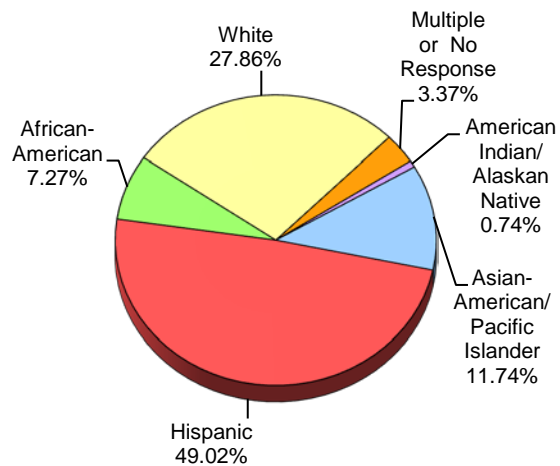
Student Demographics

As Figures 3 and 4 show, student enrollment in 2008-2009 for both the San Diego district including charter schools and for the state as a whole is racially diverse. In 2008-2009 the district as a whole enrolled approximately 44% Hispanic students, 25% White, 17% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 13% African-American. Though small, the percentage of African-American students enrolled in San Diego Unified is nearly twice that of the state’s public school population. However, it is important to note that most schools in both the district and the state do not mirror this degree of diversity. In fact, racial isolation in traditional public schools, charter schools, and private schools throughout the state is more the rule than the exception. Increasing ethnic and income isolation in the state’s schools is a major challenge for school officials.

**Figure 3
2008-2009 SDUSD Students
By Race/Ethnicity**



**Figure 4
2008-2009 California Students
By Race/Ethnicity**



Source: California Department of Education

The racial mix of the San Diego district has not changed significantly in the past seven years (data not shown), though the percentage of Hispanic students has grown slowly (from 41% to 44%). The percentage of White students has declined about 1% and of African-American students about 2% over this seven-year period. For the state, the decline in the percentage of White students has been more significant – from 34% to 28%.

According to California Department of Education, a total of 83,623 San Diego Unified students including those enrolled in charter schools within the district or about 63% were enrolled in the federal government’s free and reduced price lunch program in 2008-2009. For the state as a whole, the percentage was 53%. The number of students enrolled in the nation’s free and reduced meal program is the common standard used to estimate district poverty levels on an annual basis. About 29% of San Diego Unified students are classified as English learners. These are students who are fluent in another language and are in the process of acquiring English language skills. For the state as a whole, the percentage is 24%. Because San Diego Unified has a greater percentage of low-income students and English learners than the state, the challenge of meeting their needs is greater.

A total of 15,224 students aged 5-21 in the district – about 12% of the total – were enrolled in special education under the federal Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2008-2009. This figure includes both district and charter school students who have individualized education programs (IEPs) as determined by an IEP committee consisting of school personnel and others. IDEA also requires the district to provide a measure of special education services pursuant to what is termed an individualized services plan (ISP) to students with disabilities who are enrolled in private schools within the district. IDEA requires only that a proportionate level of funding be made

available for a student with a disability who is enrolled in a private school. If viewed by grade level rather than age, a slightly smaller number – 14,623 – received services in grades K-12. It is important to note that some students in district and charter schools (e.g., High Tech High) receive special education services through out-of-district special education agencies.

Student Achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress

Student achievement data are presented in this and following sections. First is the performance of the district's students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and administered through its National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP is the nation's only representative and continuing assessment of what students know and can do in various subject-matter areas. It is known as "the nation's report card" because it is administered to a sample of students in all 50 states in various subject areas at various grade levels. It thus offers a common metric for comparing states and selected urban districts on the performance of their students.

While the findings are revealing, it is important to note that the tests are administered to a sample of students at a particular grade level, not to the entire student population. No test scores are available for individual students or schools. Additionally, the tests are not directly reflective of a particular state's curriculum content in the subject-matter area, though it can be argued that knowledge and skills in such areas as math and reading should not differ that much from state to state and district to district. Thus, student performance will vary some between NAEP and state assessments such as California's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) system. At the same time, it is important to note that under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the degree of rigor of state assessment tests is based in part on their comparison with NAEP.

The math and reading tests are administered every two years to students in grades four and eight. The latest scores are from 2009. The test results for fourth graders who perform at or above proficient on the math and reading tests are presented in the following figures for San Diego in comparison with the nation, California, and large city schools (those located in cities with more than 250,000 population).² Note that because the percentage of students reaching proficiency or higher remains low, the vertical percentage scale on the left side of these figures only goes to 50%. All test score results are taken from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.

² Charter school data are included in the large city, state, and national statistics. At the district level, however, charter schools were not included in 2009. In previous years charter schools were included in the district sampling though were not statistically significant given their small enrollment numbers.

Figure 5
**NAEP Achievement Levels
 Math Grade 4
 All Student Populations**

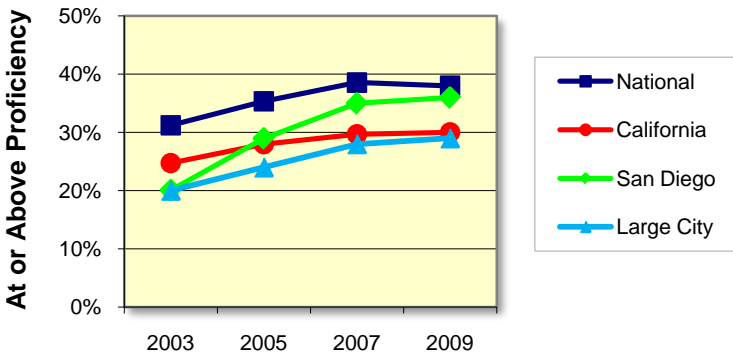
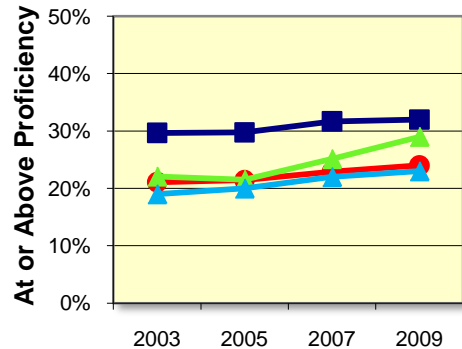


Figure 6
**NAEP Achievement Levels
 Reading Grade 4
 All Student Populations**



As both figures show, there has been improvement of San Diego Unified’s fourth graders on both tests between 2003 and 2009. While district students in 2009 did somewhat better than the state as a whole and other urban districts, they lag behind the nation. Even with the improvement, only 36% of the sample of San Diego Unified fourth graders performed at the proficient or higher level in 2009 on math and only 29% was proficient or higher in reading.

Test results on NAEP for the sample of the district’s eighth graders on these tests (not shown) show that district eighth graders again do better than California as a whole and other urban districts, but lag behind the nation. And the percentage of students reaching proficiency or higher is slightly lower than for fourth graders in the district – 32% in math and 25% in reading.

The next two figures examine the District’s fourth and eighth grade achievement on both tests by race/ethnicity. For these figures, the vertical percentage scale goes to 70% because some subgroups scoring at the proficient or higher level exceeds 50%.

Figure 7
**NAEP Achievement Levels
 Math Grade 4
 SDUSD Students by Race/Ethnicity**

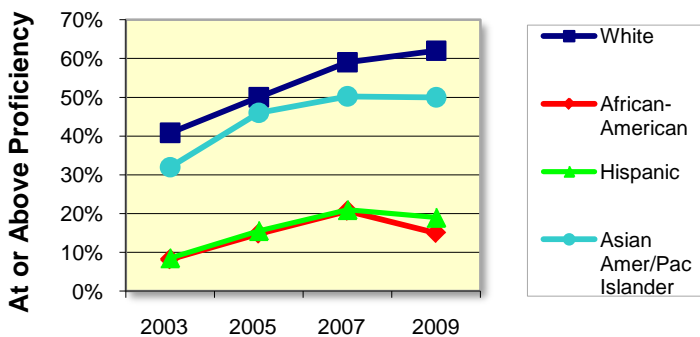
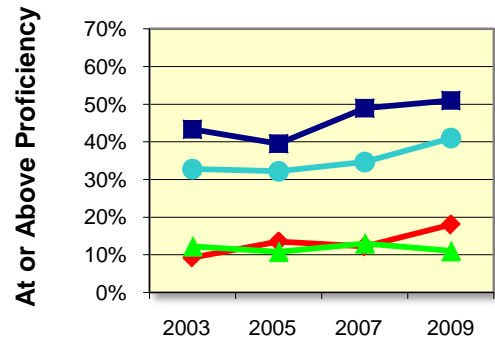


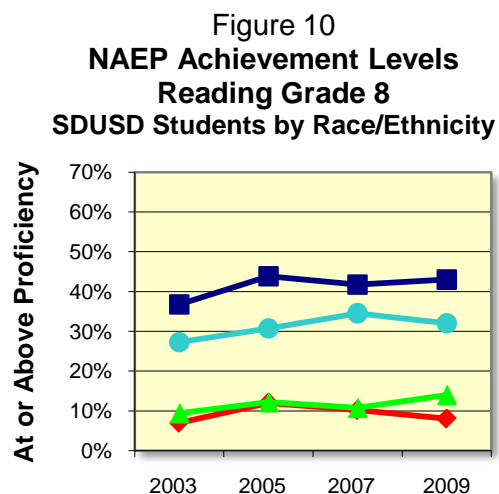
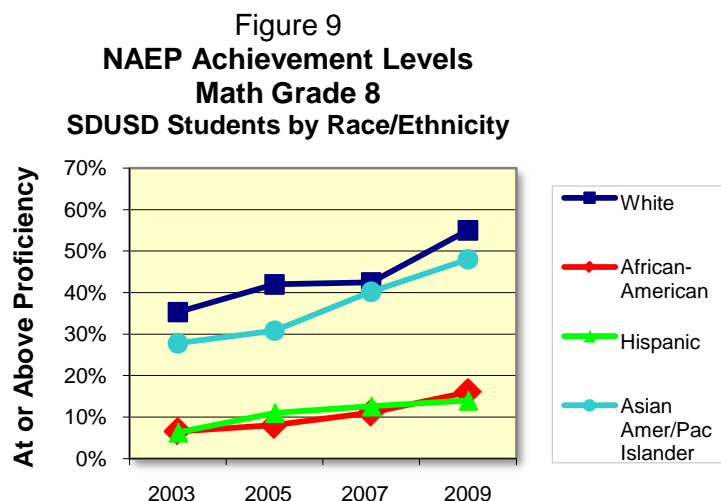
Figure 8
**NAEP Achievement Levels
 Reading Grade 4
 SDUSD Students by Race/Ethnicity**



These figures reveal that between 2003 and 2009 the performance of the four racial/ethnic subgroups in the district has improved, though some faster than others. Figure 7 shows that in 2009 over 60% of San Diego Unified White students and 50% of Asian-American fourth grade students included in the sample performed at or above the proficiency level in math but only 15% of African-American and 19% of Hispanic students did so. For both of these groups, their performance level was lower than in 2007.

Figure 8 shows that in 2009 on the NAEP reading test, 51% of White fourth graders in the district tested achieved at the proficient or higher level. The percentage of African-American students reaching proficiency or higher increased from 9% in 2003 to 18% in 2009, while Hispanic fourth graders performed at a lower level – from 12% proficient or higher in 2003 to 11% in 2009.

For eighth graders, Figure 9 below shows that despite improvement in NAEP math test scores from 2003 onward, only White students in the sample had more than 50% reaching proficiency or higher in 2009. No ethnic group in the district performed at this level in reading (Figure 10).

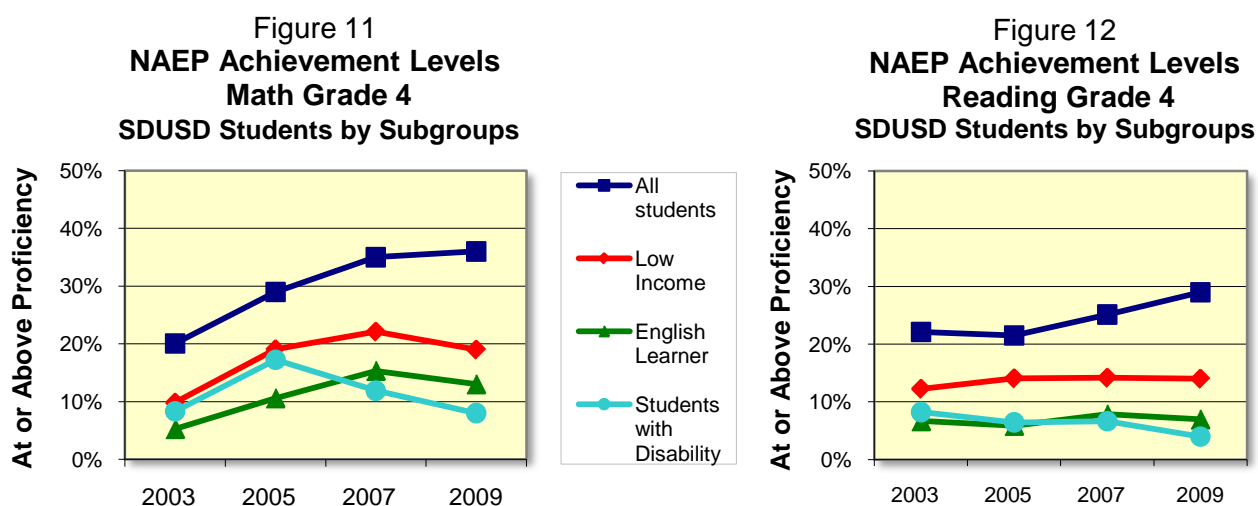


Another trend is noticeable. The slow rate of improvement of African-American and Hispanic subgroups over time has resulted in a test score gap between them and White and Asian-Americans students in the district. In fourth grade math (look back at Figure 7), the percentage of White students achieving proficiency or higher in 2003 was 41% as compared with 8% for African-American and 9% for Hispanic students, a gap of 33% and 32%, respectively. In 2009, 62% of White students reached the proficiency or higher level, compared with 15% of African-American and 19% Hispanic students, a gap of 47% and 43%, respectively. Thus, the gap increased by 14% between White and African-American students and 11% between White and Hispanic students during this time span.

In fourth grade reading, the test score gap increase is also evident between Hispanic and White students. Hispanic fourth graders reaching proficiency or higher on the NAEP fourth grade reading test in 2003 was 12% and declined to 11% in 2009. For White students, the percentages reaching these levels were 43% in 2003 and 51% in 2009. The test score gap thus widened between White students and Hispanic students from 31% in 2003 to 40% in 2009. However, the test score gap between African-American fourth graders and White students went from 34% in 2003 to 33% in 2009, a decline of 1%.

An increasing test score gap also is evident between White students and both African-American and Hispanic students on the eighth grade tests in math and reading (see Figures 9 and 10).

As the next two figures reveal, the same differential performance levels on NAEP are evident among the sample of fourth grade low-income students, English learners (ELs), and students with disabilities in the district. Given the low rate of proficiency, the vertical percentage scale has been moved back to 0-50%.



These figures show that, except for students with disabilities, performance levels are slowly tracking upward, though the percentage of students in all three subgroups meeting proficiency or higher on the NAEP tests is much lower than for all students and actually declined in math between 2007 and 2009. The performance level of students with disabilities in reading has gradually declined from 2003 to 2009. Only 4% of these students reached proficiency or higher in 2009 compared with 8% in 2003. Eighth graders in the three subgroups performed at even lower levels on both NAEP math and reading tests (data not shown).

Once again, the test score gap between all students and the three subgroups increased from 2003 to 2009. For example, the percentage of all students in the district at or above proficient on the NAEP fourth grade math test increased from 20% in 2003 to 36% in 2009 (see Figure 11). The percentage of students with disabilities doing so

remained at 8% in 2003 and 2009, low-income students rose from 10% to 19%, and English learners moved from 5% to 13%. The gap in test scores between the sample of all students and the subgroups increased by 16% (students with disabilities), 7% (low-income students), and 8% (English learners) between 2003 and 2009. For a district with a high percentage of students in these categories, these test results provide sobering information.

Student Achievement on the California Standardized Testing and Reporting System

The state’s Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) system consists of multiple measures of student performance. Its core component is the California Standards Test (CST) that assesses student progress in grades two through eleven in achievement on the state’s curriculum content standards. Though parents can opt out of the test, fully 95% of every student subgroup (there are many) must participate in state assessments for the school not to be classified as low-performing. California has indicated to the U.S. Department of Education that it expects to have all students at or above the proficient level on the state’s English language arts and mathematics standards tests by school year 2013-2014 in compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act.³ And as noted earlier, the degree of rigor of state assessment tests is determined in part by their comparison with the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The next two figures show the percentage of students in San Diego district-operated schools achieving proficiency or higher on the 2009 CST second grade and sixth grade math test (the last year most students take general math) and on the second grade and sixth grade English language arts test. Included in both figures is the performance of students by racial and ethnic subgroups.

Figure 13
**California Standards Test (CST)
 Mathematics 2008-2009
 SDUSD Students**

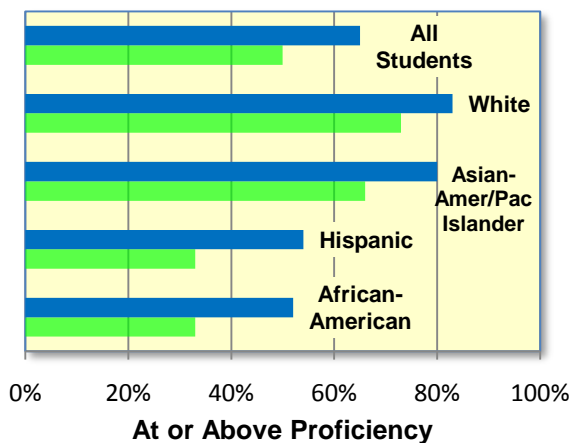
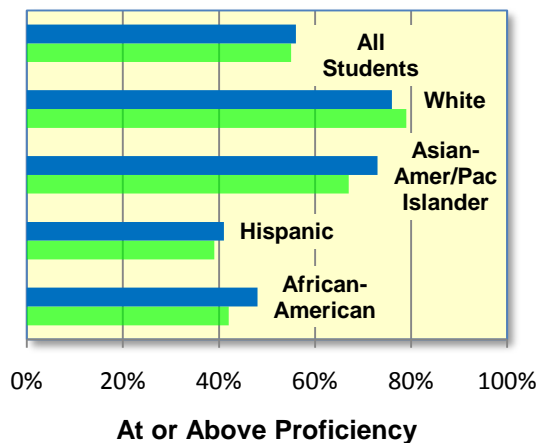


Figure 14
**California Standards Test (CST)
 English Language Arts 2008-2009
 SDUSD Students**



³ At this writing, the reauthorization of this federal law is pending in Congress. The Obama administration has proposed that this proficiency provision be altered, along with other provisions of NCLB.

As noted in these figures, 65% of all second graders and 50% of all sixth graders achieve proficiency or higher on the CST math test. For English language arts, the percentages are 56% and 55%, respectively. Student performance is up about 5% on average across grade levels in math and about the same in English language arts from 2008 (data not shown). District proficiency rates for these grades mirror those of California students as a whole. Because the CST measures how well students do on the California curriculum content standards that are taught in public school classrooms, the fact that the proficiency rates of district students on these tests are higher than on the National Assessment of Educational Progress is not surprising.

Both White and Asian-American students exceed these percentages, while African-American and Hispanic students lag behind. Just 33% of both African-American and Hispanic sixth graders scored at or above proficiency in math. The percentages for both subgroups are slightly higher for English language arts.

The next two figures show the percentages of low-income, English learners, and children with disabilities achieving proficiency or higher on these tests. These subgroups perform at lower levels than all students as a whole. This is particularly evident for English learners and children with disabilities, and the fall-off in performance is even more evident for both subgroups at the sixth grade level.

Figure 15
California Standards Test (CST)
Mathematics 2008-2009
SDUSD Students

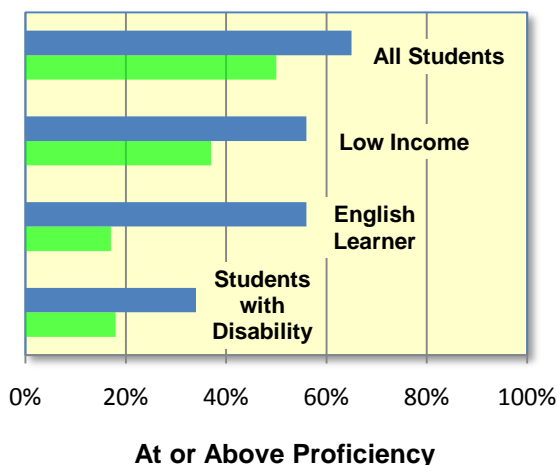
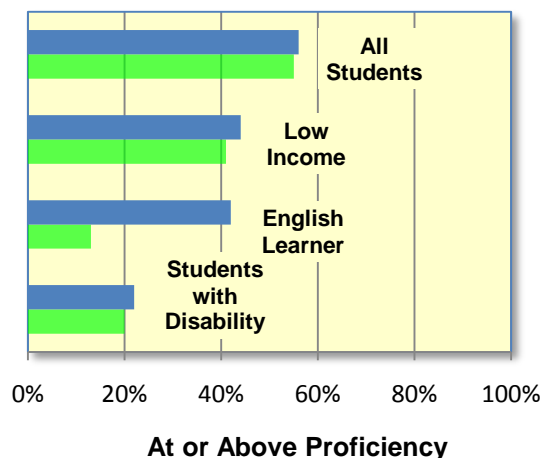


Figure 16
California Standards Test (CST)
English Language Arts 2008-2009
SDUSD Students



All four figures show the same test score gap among racial/ethnic groups, English learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities that was evident on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The fall-off in performance between second and sixth grade must be viewed with caution. Academic standards become more rigorous as student move through grade levels, and tests are not well aligned across grades. Lack of alignment means that later

tests may not incorporate material from earlier tests along with more advanced material to show the extent to which a student progresses from grade to grade. Other factors include smaller class sizes in kindergarten through three, lack of sufficient grade-to-grade curriculum coordination, ineffective implementation of the state's curriculum content standards at certain grade levels, student migration in and out of school at higher grade levels, the influence of student peer groups, and so on.

Finally, mention should be made of a comprehensive 2008 study comparing the performance of big city school districts including San Diego Unified. This study was conducted by the Brown Center on Education Policy under the auspices of the Brookings Institution, a private nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C. Researchers combined the fourth and eighth grade reading and math scores on state assessment tests into a single composite score for each of 37 big city school districts. To make scores comparable among the districts, the composite score was converted into a z score for each city, an indicator of distance -- expressed in standard deviation units -- between the city district's test score and the state average score. The state average score was fixed at 0.00. Then the researchers measured the distance between each city school system's z score and the state's average score to find out if these districts were advancing faster than other districts in the state or falling behind. Districts receiving a positive change in z score between 2000 and 2007 were above the state average and those with a negative score were below it. San Diego Unified was below the average California score in 2000 and even farther behind in 2007, meaning that the district's progress on these state tests was not keeping up with other districts in the state.⁴ During this period, the district's demographics changed little. San Diego was ranked fourth from the bottom of the 37 districts in z score changes for 2007.

Passage Rates on the California High School Exit Exam

In order to receive a diploma, California public school students must pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) in mathematics and English language arts. The test is aligned with the state's curriculum content standards. Students can begin taking the exam in their sophomore year and are allowed to continue taking portions they fail until all have been passed. The cumulative passage rate for the San Diego Unified's Class of 2009 is shown in the next two figures. Students enrolled in charter schools located in the district are not included.

⁴ *How Well Are American Students Learning?* (2008) Brown Center Report on American Education. Brookings Institution, pp. 33-35. The average z score for the San Diego District was -0.25 in 2000 and -0.28 in 2007.

Figure 17
**San Diego Unified Class of 2009
 CAHSEE Passing Rates
 for Mathematics (excluding Charters)**

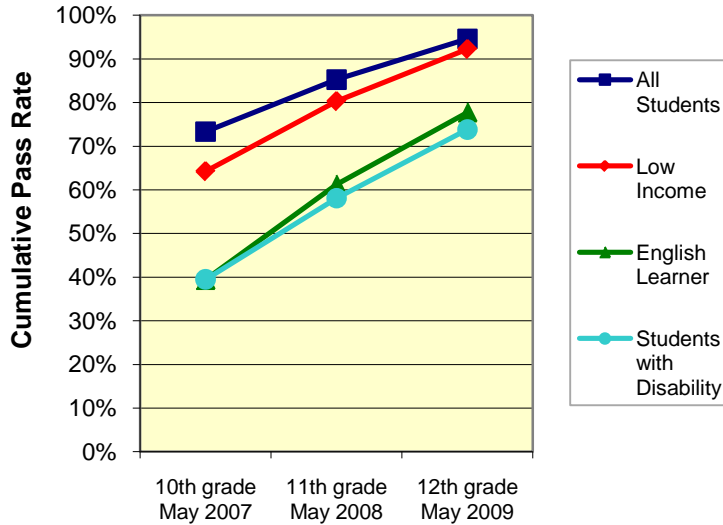
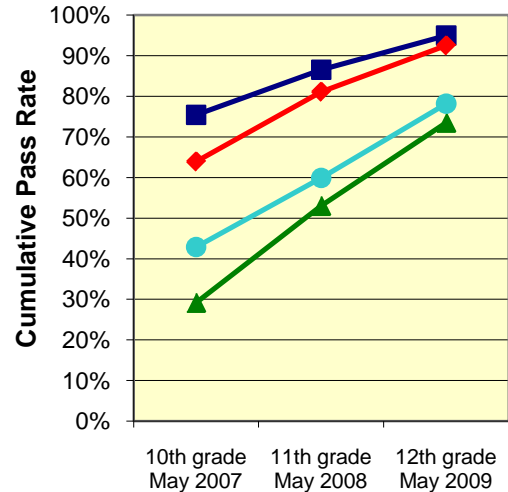


Figure 18
**San Diego Unified Class of 2009
 CAHSEE Passing Rates
 for Literacy (excluding Charters)**



Source: Data from SDUSD, Standards, Assessment and Accountability Department website at <http://studata.sandi.net/research/cahsee/index.asp>

As is clear from these figures, upwards of 90% of the Class of 2009 cohort eventually passed both portions of CAHSEE. These statistics encompass the 7,057 students in the Class of 2009 cohort but not the large number who left the cohort for various reasons. In its sophomore year, the Class of 2009 numbered 8,758 students.

The passage rate for low-income students was close to the rate for all students. However, the passage rate for English learners and students with disabilities was not as high. Following their senior year, students who do not pass the exam may seek supplemental remedial instructional in preparation for the test or other options to a diploma such as the General Educational Development (GED) test.

Dropout, Graduation, and Postsecondary Attendance Rates

Dropouts

Dropout rates are based on school district dropout numbers reported to the California Department of Education minus those students who enrolled in another California school district plus those students who were reported as transferring to another school district but had not done so. A four-year estimate is based on the percent of students who would drop out during this time span based on data collected for a single year.

Using this method of calculation, the California Department of Education (CDE) reported that 18.9% of students statewide in the Class of 2008 dropped out of high school over a

four-year period (statistics for the Class of 2009 are not available at this writing). For the Class of 2008 in the San Diego district, the reported four-year dropout rate was 9.2%, half that of the state as a whole. This represented a significant decline from the Class of 2007 when the district reported a four-year dropout rate of 17.80%, close to the state average for that year.

Viewed by racial/ethnic groups, the four-year dropout rate for the Class of 2008 compared with the Class of 2007 declined from 24.7% to 13.3% for Hispanic students, 21.7% to 10.9% for African-American students, 11.6% to 5.6% for White students, and 10.2% to 3.2% for Asian-American students (excluding Pacific Islanders and Filipinos).

The same decline in dropouts is reflected in the number of dropouts by grade that the San Diego district reported to CDE from 2003 through 2008. As noted in Table 2 below, a total of 1,427 students dropped out in 2007 over the four high school grades. For 2008, the figure declined to 937. For the twelfth grade, the number of dropouts in 2008 dropped almost half – from 633 in 2007 to 311 in 2008.

Table 2
**Number of Dropouts by Grade in San Diego Unified
 2003-2008**

	9th	10th	11th	12th	Total
2008	228	227	171	311	937
2007	284	260	250	633	1,427
2006	298	267	283	446	1,294
2005	333	230	241	278	1,082
2004	400	351	395	420	1,566
2003	347	442	483	520	1,792

As this table reveals, there is no distinct pattern to student dropouts. In some years, nearly as many students dropped out in ninth grade as in the twelfth grade. In other years, the twelve graders had the highest number of dropouts. At the state level, however, the dropout rate is considerably higher in the junior and senior years than earlier grades (data not shown). The dropout rates for ninth and tenth graders are about the same.

Graduation Rates

In the following paragraphs, we present findings on graduation rates from two sources, one national and one from the California Department of Education. The former provides comparisons with school districts and states across the country.

In a study released in June 2010, *Education Week's* Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) Research Center presented a comprehensive report on graduation rates for all

public schools and states.⁵ In compiling this report, the EPE Research Center used the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) method to calculate high school graduation rates. In the words of the researchers, "The CPI method represents the high school experience as a process rather than an event, capturing the four key steps a student must take in order to graduate: three grade-to-grade promotions (9-10, 10-11, and 11-12) and ultimately earning a diploma (grade 12 to graduation). Each of these individual components corresponds to a grade-promotion ratio. Multiplying these four grade-specific promotion ratios together produces the graduation rate." Critics of this method contend that, among other things, the focus is more on grade-to-grade promotion than on graduation. This has implications for urban districts that have high migration rates.

In determining who a graduate is, the CPI method follows the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) guidelines by counting only students receiving standard high school diplomas as graduates. Students receiving General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency certificates, certificates of attendance, and nonstandard diplomas are not included. States are required to follow a similar definition of a graduate for the rates they calculate for adequate yearly progress under NCLB. But NCLB gives states discretion on how graduation rates are measured, and this is why there is inconsistency at the state level in both methodology and rates. This discretion comes to an end in 2011-2012.⁶

It is important to note that the CPI method does not include students who take longer than four years to graduate such as English learners and students with disabilities. This method also does not distinguish between those who graduate in four years and those who graduate in fewer than four years.

Following the CPI method, the EPE Research Center lists the graduation rate for the Class of 1997 in California at 67.4% and for the Class of 2007 at 62.7%, a decline of 4.7%. California is listed ninth from the bottom of the 50 states and also is the state with the highest number of students who were projected to fail to graduate in the Class of 2010 -- 199,446 students. Texas is second with 135,121. The California Class of 2007 graduation rate varies from 83.5% for Asians and 78.2% for whites to 54% for African-Americans and 57% for Hispanics. Thus, districts with higher percentage of students of color are apt to have lower graduation rates.

In a calculation of the highest to lowest graduation rates in the nation's 50 largest school districts, SDUSD is listed in the lower half (29th, to be specific) with a graduation rate of

⁵ "Diplomas Count." *Education Week*, Vol. 29, No. 34. June 10, 2010. www.edweek.org/go/dc10

⁶ Beginning in 2011-2012, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires states to calculate a four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for all public schools in the state. The term "four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate" means the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for that graduating class. The term "adjusted cohort" means the inclusion of students who enter at grade 9 (or the earliest high school grade) together with those who transfer into the cohort in grades 9-12 minus those who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die. See 34 C.F.R. § 200.19.

59.9 for the Class of 2007, the latest year for which rates are available. Using this method, we calculate the CPI rate for San Diego's Class of 2008 at 63.5%.⁷

In California, two different methods can be used to identify the state's graduation rate. Under the first system, the California Department of Education uses its Statewide Student Identifying System (SSIS) to calculate the percentage of students dropping out of high school over a four-period along with the percentage of students transferring to a private school, leaving the state, or earning a General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency certificate.

Under SSIS, CDE reported that for the state as a whole, 18.9% of students in the Class of 2008 dropped out of high school over a four-year period, while another 12.6% transferred to a private school, left the state, or earned a GED high school equivalency certificate (also included were fifth-year seniors and special education completers). Thus, the statewide graduation rate was 68.5%. Because these percentages do not include those dropouts and student transfers who may have secured a high school diploma or GED, they underestimate the actual number of graduates.

A second method used by the California Department of Education and many other states is based on a leaver rate system developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NCES no longer reports on leaver rates. This system utilizes what is called the Graduation Leaver Indicator (GLI). The GLI is a measure of departures rather than a measure of on-time graduation. This formula basically sums up the number of dropouts over four years to arrive by default at an on-time graduation rate percentage.⁸ When calculated this way, the California statewide graduation rate for the Class of 2008 was 80.2%. The rate for San Diego Unified was 84.3%.

Regardless of which of the two method of calculation is used in California, it is clear that graduation rates are higher in some high schools within a district than in other high schools. For example, using the NCES Graduation Leaver Indicator method for 2008, graduation rates in San Diego Unified ranged anywhere from 51.2% at Garfield High to 70.0% at Hoover High, 88.0% at Mission Bay, and 97.8% at La Jolla High School.

Student demographics have a lot to do with differential high school graduation rates, as do a host of other factors such as the influence of the peer group, parent involvement, the quality of the teaching and student services staff, the mission and culture of the school, the relevance of the curriculum to student interests, and so on.

⁷ EPE Research Center calculated the CPI rate for SDUSD Class of 2007 using the Common Core of Date from the National Center for Education Statistics. The CPI rate for SDUSD Class of 2008 is calculated using data from the California Department of Education.

⁸ The NCES formula calculates graduation rates by dividing the number of students who received standard high school diplomas, including repeaters and early completers, by the total number of current year graduates plus the sum of all dropouts over the past four years. Some researchers assert that this formula inflates the rate because repeaters and early completers are included in the numerator and because the method relies heavily on unreported dropout data.

Postsecondary Attendance Rates

According to data from the California Postsecondary Education Commission, the percentage for students who graduated in 2008 from San Diego Unified with UC/CSU requirements fulfilled was 43%, up from 40.5% the previous year. Statewide, the postsecondary rate in 2008 was 33.9%, down from 35.5% the year before.

Section II: Financial and Personnel Trends

Financial Trends

This section begins by presenting financial information for the San Diego Unified School District over the most recent seven-year period available, 2002-03 to 2008-09. This information provides an important context for considering the academic performance of the district's students as presented in the previous section. However, given the volume of budgetary and personnel data available for the district, only the information necessary to identify major trends is presented here.

Budgetary Overview

To understand how California's system for funding K-12 education works, it is important to understand that California's current system for funding public schools has been in place for 38 years – with additions and changes that range from major voter decisions (Propositions 13 and 98) and judicial rulings (*Serrano v. Priest*) to annual tinkering by lawmakers. As a result of these semi-regular changes, the system of school finance in California is “extraordinarily complex and difficult to understand,” at least according to a popular website hosted by the California Department of Education. However, there are a few basic facts that will help make the tables in this section easier to understand.

Perhaps the most important fact is that throughout the state, about two-thirds of total funding for K-12 is for general purposes and the other one-third is for special purposes or categories of students, called *categorical aid* (two popular examples of categorical aid are funds for K-3 Class Size Reduction and Gifted and Talented Education). Although funding for categorical aid can be based on a myriad of things, general purpose funding is based only on two things – the average number of students attending during the year (called average daily attendance) and the revenue limit money the district receives based on average daily attendance, which is largely a mix of state and local funds. In fact, when we multiply average daily attendance by the district's per-pupil revenue limit (which since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 limiting property tax revenues has been set largely by the governor and state legislature) we get the district's total revenue limit income, which represents the bulk of funds available for general purposes.

To understand the concept of revenue limits, it is helpful to note that in 1972 the California Legislature set revenue limits for each district, roughly according to the district's expenditures on general education programs. However, the significant variation in revenue limits that existed between districts led the courts (via the second *Serrano v. Priest* case in 1976) to require that the state make these funds more equitable across districts. By 2000, almost 97% of the state's students were within a band (known as the Serrano band) of about \$350. It is important to note, however, that while the legislature and governor almost always provide cost-of-living adjustments to revenue limits, neither the school board nor local voters can increase the revenue limit. In fact, if local property tax revenues rise within a district, the increase goes towards the district's revenue limit with a concomitant decrease in the state's share; however, if local property tax

revenues fully fund the revenue limit, then the district gets to keep the extra property tax revenue. Only about 60 of the over 1,000 school districts in the state fall into this category.

One other important point needs to be made before moving to a brief overview of the research methodology used here. This point concerns the importance of the district's General Fund, often thought of as "the budget," which covers regular operating revenues and expenses and serves as the chief operating fund for school districts. Technically the General Fund is only part of the overall budget. Other components include special revenue funds, capital project funds, debt service funds, and enterprise funds. However, because these later funds are typically used for purposes other than K-12 education, we concentrate on General Fund revenues and expenditures in the first two tables presented below.

Research Methodology

All of the financial and personnel information except for teacher contract non-extension and termination presented in this section comes directly from the California Department of Education and reflects the most recent data publicly available (2002-03, 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09). For each of these years, we present the financial data in nominal terms, which means that it has not been adjusted for inflation, and the personnel data in terms of actual numbers, rather than their full-time equivalents. The staffing and enrollment data encompass both traditional public and charter schools within the district, while the financial data exclude charter schools. In addition, when we make the occasional reference to the rate of inflation over this time period, we use data on the urban consumer price index from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Specifically, the rate that we use is a simple average of three inflation rates calculated at different starting and ending places over this period to better approximate the timing of the actual school year (September 02 – September 08, January 03 – January 09, and June 03 - June 09). In addition to presenting data for each year, we also calculate the simple percentage change over the seven-year period to make trends easier to identify and understand.

Findings

The first three tables, which concentrate on financial issues, begin at the macro level with a look at general fund revenues (Table 3) and general fund expenditures (Table 4). Table 5 then presents average daily attendance and dollars per student within the district which help provide a context for the first two general fund tables. The final two tables, which highlight important personnel issues, describe the number of various types of certificated and classified staff over this time period (Table 6) as well as per-pupil certificated staff trends (Table 7).

As described in the preceding paragraph, the first of the budgetary tables (Table 3) looks at general fund revenues for the San Diego district in millions of dollars from 2002-03 to 2008-09. An examination of this table shows that over the seven-year period there was a modest increase in overall revenues (3.4%), driven by large increases in

other local revenue (35.4%) and federal revenue (31.4%). Countering this trend was a 5.8% decrease in other state revenue and a .9% decrease in revenue limit sources. To place these changes in context, the inflation rate over this period was 18.2%, suggesting that at least in real terms, total revenue for the district declined by 14.8% over this period (3.4 -18.2).

Table 3
General Fund Revenues (in millions) for San Diego Unified School District for 2002-03 to 2008-09 Including the Percentage Change from 2002-03 to 2008-09

Type of Revenue	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Change 2002-03 to 2008-09
Revenue Limit Sources	\$642.8	\$617.9	\$630.6	\$637.5	\$670.9	\$646.3	\$637.3	-0.9%
Federal Revenue	\$125.3	\$118.1	\$113.5	\$130.2	\$112.2	\$112.8	\$164.7	31.4%
Other State Revenue	\$315.7	\$279.9	\$279.3	\$286.0	\$364.3	\$316.1	\$297.4	-5.8%
Other Local Revenue	\$67.5	\$39.7	\$44.2	\$58.5	\$77.5	\$101.2	\$91.4	35.4%
Total Revenue	\$1,151.3	\$1,055.6	\$1,067.5	\$1,112.2	\$1,224.9	\$1,176.5	\$1,190.8	3.4%

To help understand this table, the following definitions may prove helpful:

- *Revenue Limit Sources* includes base revenue limits, plus other funds such as Equalization, Summer School, and Prior Year Adjustments.
- *Federal Revenue* includes all money received for the No Child Left Behind Act plus Special Education and other Federal programs.
- *Other State Revenue* includes lottery and state categoricals like K-3 Class Size Reduction, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE), and Economic Impact Aid.
- *Other Local Revenue* includes interest, donations and reimbursements, parcel taxes, rents and leases, and other local sources.

While the first financial table looked at general fund revenues, the second looks at general fund expenditures for the district over the same time period. An examination of Table 4 reveals that while *employee benefits* grew by 42.5% and *classified salaries* grew by 13% from 2002-03 to 2008-09, the *salaries of certificated employees* (like teachers, certified pupil support, and certified supervisors and administrators) grew by only 1.0% over this period, while spending on *books and supplies* fell by 3.7% and spending on *services and other operating expenses* fell by 21.6%. Taken together, the overall growth in these expenditures was 7.1% during the six-year period, well below the 18.2% actual rate of inflation over the same period.

Table 4
General Fund Expenditures (in millions) for San Diego Unified
for 2002-03 to 2008-09 Including the Percentage Change from 2002-03 to 2008-09
 (Excludes Capital Outlay, Other Outgo, and Direct Support/Indirect Costs)

Type of Expense	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Change 2002-03 to 2008-09
Certificated Personnel Salaries	\$568.5	\$511.3	\$500.3	\$507.3	\$543.6	\$569.1	\$574.0	1.0%
Classified Personnel Salaries	\$176.6	\$165.4	\$164.7	\$177.3	\$197.5	\$211.7	\$199.5	13.0%
Employee Benefits	\$174.9	\$201.1	\$226.5	\$239.0	\$250.4	\$258.6	\$249.3	42.5%
Books and Supplies	\$64.6	\$75.0	\$79.7	\$88.5	\$51.5	\$58.8	\$62.2	-3.7%
Services and Other Operating Expenses	\$105.9	\$70.6	\$41.1	\$52.8	\$86.1	\$100.6	\$83.0	-21.6%
Subtotal Expenditures	\$1,090.5	\$1,023.4	\$1,012.4	\$1,064.9	\$1,129.1	\$1,198.8	\$1,168.0	7.1%

To understand what is included in the categories in Table 4, the following information may prove helpful:

- *Certificated Personnel Salaries* includes the salaries of individuals such as teachers, certified pupil support, and certified supervisors and administrators.
- *Classified Salaries* includes the salaries of individuals such as instructional assistants, athletics staff, clerical and office, maintenance staff, and classified supervisors and administrators.
- *Employee Benefits* includes Health and Welfare, Worker's Compensation, and other employee benefits.
- *Books and Supplies* includes expenditures on such things as approved textbooks and core curricula material, books and other reference materials, and materials and supplies.
- *Services and Other Operating Expenses* includes expenditures on such things as travel and conferences, dues and memberships, housekeeping services, rentals, leases, and repairs.

The next table displays two important pieces of information for the district – average daily attendance and dollars per-student. Both of these numbers are legislatively required in that the “current expense of education,” defined as dollars per student, must

be calculated annually for every district. However, it is important to note that average daily attendance differs significantly from standard enrollment figures in that while enrollment is a count of students on a specific day in October, which was the basis for the enrollment data presented in the previous section, average daily attendance, which is reported to the California Department of Education three times a year, is calculated as the total days of student attendance divided by the number of instructional days in the school year. Typically, average daily attendance is less than actual enrollment because absences, even if excused, are not included in average daily attendance. This number, which does not include charter school enrollment, is then used to calculate dollars per student, by taking total expenditures, subtracting out food services, facilities acquisition and construction, and certain other expenditures, and then dividing by average daily attendance.

Table 5
**Average Daily Attendance and Dollars per Student for
 San Diego Unified 2002-03 to 2008-09 and the Real and Nominal
 Percentage Change from 2002-03 to 2008-09**

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Change 2002-03 to 2008-09
Average Daily Attendance	139,019	123,997	119,957	114,826	112,931	113,165	110,670	-20.4%
Dollars per Student	\$7,776	\$8,156	\$8,164	\$8,981	\$9,708	\$10,426	\$10,399	33.7% (nominal) 15.5% (real)

Examination of this table reveals a powerful trend within the district – average daily attendance has fallen every year but one for the past seven years, for a total decrease of more than 20% from the 2002-03 base. At the same time, dollars per student have risen significantly during this period – in fact, from a nominal perspective more than enough to offset the decline in students (33.7%). However, when adjusted for inflation, the real increase in dollars per student was 15.5%, less than the percentage decline in average daily attendance.

Personnel Trends

Changes in Number of Personnel

The first of the personnel tables, Table 6, shows the number of certificated and classified staff employed in San Diego Unified during the 2002-03 to 2008-09 time period. Among the certificated staff, close examination of this table reveals that during this seven-year period the number of teachers, pupil service professionals, and administrators all declined; specifically, the number of teachers employed in the district decreased by 7.3%, the number of pupil service personnel declined by 2.8%, and the number of administrators declined by 1.6%. As was noted previously, average daily attendance fell by slightly more than 20% during this period, helping to explain the

declines in the number of teachers, pupil-service professionals and administrators. Among classified staff during this period, the number of office and clerical workers decreased significantly (38.3%), as did the number of paraprofessionals (16.8%); this was partially offset by a large increase (24.8%) among other classified staff, which includes custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria staff. Taken together, these changes produced a decline of 5.8% in the total number of certificated and classified employees working for the district; as such, the ratio of students to district employees is currently about 7 to 1.

Table 6
**The Number and Percentage of All San Diego Unified School District Staff for
 2002-03 to 2008-09 and the Percentage Change from 2002-03 to 2008-09**

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Change 2002-03 to 2008-09
Certificated Staff								
Teachers	7,781 (46.0%)	7,668 (47.8%)	7,421 (49.9%)	7,555 (47.4%)	7,416 (45.7%)	7,325 (44.6%)	7,210 (45.2%)	-7.3%
Pupil Services	905 (5.3%)	795 (5.0%)	650 (4.4%)	704 (4.4%)	735 (4.5%)	888 (5.4%)	880 (5.5%)	-2.8%
Administrators	751 (4.4%)	610 (3.8%)	761 (5.1%)	660 (4.1%)	864 (5.3%)	796 (4.8%)	739 (4.6%)	-1.6%
Subtotals	9,437	9,073	8,832	8,919	9,015	9,009	8,829	-6.4%
Classified Staff								
Paraprofessionals	2,700 (16.0%)	2,575 (16.1%)	2,071 (13.9%)	2,493 (15.6%)	2,690 (16.6%)	2,755 (16.8%)	2,246 (14.1%)	-16.8%
Office/Clerical	1,740 (10.3%)	1,617 (10.1%)	1,646 (11.1%)	1,635 (10.3%)	1,736 (10.7%)	1,681 (10.2%)	1,073 (6.7%)	-38.3%
Other	3,037 (18.0%)	2,773 (17.3%)	2,335 (15.7%)	2,892 (18.1%)	2,779 (17.1%)	2,960 (18.0%)	3,789 (23.8%)	24.8%
Subtotals	7,477	6,965	6,052	7,020	7,205	7,396	7,108	-4.9%
TOTALS	16,914	16,038	14,884	15,939	16,220	16,405	15,937	-5.8%

To understand the categories in Table 6, the following definitions may prove helpful:

- *Administrators* are defined as those certificated employees who are not teachers or pupil services professionals, and include superintendents, principals, assistant superintendents, assistant principals, program directors or coordinators, and other certificated staff not providing direct services to students.
- *Pupil services personnel* are defined as those certificated employees who provide direct services to students but are not teachers, and include counselors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, librarians, speech specialists, and other medical personnel.

- While the definition of *teachers* is self-evident, this category does not include adult education, Regional Occupation Programs (ROP), child care, and preschool teachers.
- *Paraprofessionals* are considered classified staff and include teaching assistants, teacher aides, pupil service aides, and library aides.
- *Office and clerical* are considered classified staff and include those with clerical or administrative support duties such as the school secretary.
- The *Other* category includes all the remaining non-certificated staff, including custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers.

The next table combines some of the information from the previous two tables to show per-pupil certificated staff trends over the 2002-03 to 2008-09 time frame (although this table does not display actual employment figures within the district, interested readers can find them in Table 6). Examination of Table 7 shows that the number of students per teacher increased over this time period from 18.8 to 19.3, or by 2.7%. (Note: the number of students per teacher should not be confused with average class size since there are many teachers in the district who are not classroom-based.) During this time period, the number of students per administrator also increased – in this case from about 211 to 218, or by 3.2%. However, the number of students per pupil-service professional declined by 2.3% over this period, from 176.6 students to 172.5 students.

Table 7
**Per-Pupil Certificated Staff Trends for the
 San Diego Unified School District from 2002-03 to 2008-09**

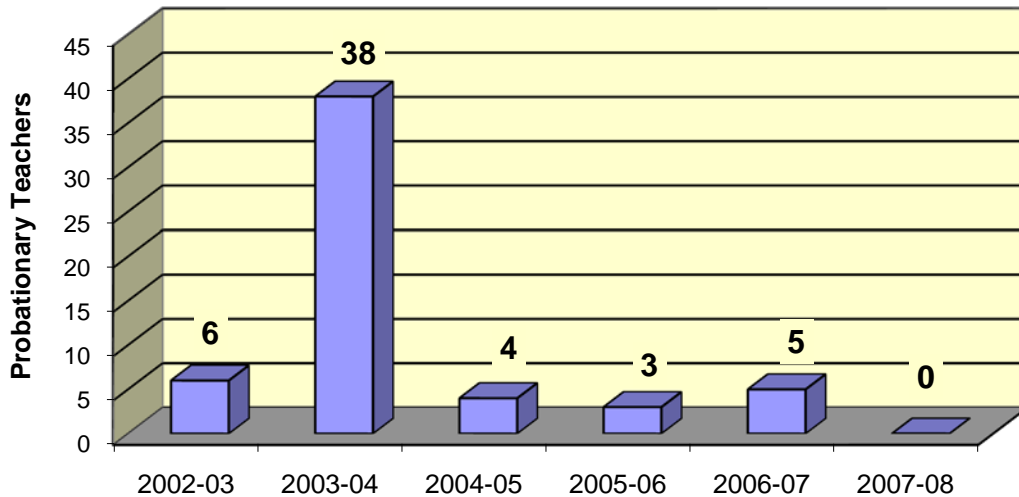
Per-Pupil Ratio for	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Change 2002-03 to 2008-09
Teachers	18.8	18.5	18.7	18.1	18.4	18.8	19.3	2.7%
Pupil Services	176.6	186.1	222.2	199.9	194.9	159.0	172.5	-2.3%
Administrators	211.2	229.7	182.1	204.6	177.2	200.1	218.0	3.2%

Teacher Terminations

With regard to the termination of teachers, there are two kinds of action that a school district can take under California law. The first, and by far the easiest, is simply not to extend the contract of probationary teachers. Probationary teachers are those serving the first two years of employment in the district. If during this time, the district decides a probationary teacher should not be retained at the end of the year, it simply opts not to extend the contract. While the teacher needs to be informed of the action, no reasons

need be given and no due process hearing is required.⁹ The graph below shows the number of San Diego Unified probationary teachers whose contracts were not extended for each school year between 2002-2003 and 2007-2008, the last year statistics have been made available. The information for this and the following figure was obtained from the San Diego Unified School District Human Resources Services Division.

Figure 19
Nonextension of Probationary Teacher Contracts



It is clear that there was spike in the number of contract nonextensions in 2003-2004. The total number of teachers on first and second-year probationary contracts this year totaled 1,052. In 2007-2008, no probationary teachers experienced nonextension of their contracts. Though there were 203 teacher layoffs because of financial exigency that year, all were recalled.

Most of the district’s teachers are on permanent contract and terminating a permanent teacher’s contract is much more difficult because the contract by definition does not end until the person retires or dies. California law specifies in elaborate detail the causes for termination of a permanent contract and the due process procedures to be followed. Because constitutional law requires that the employment action must be justified (termed “good cause”) and because there is a tilt in the law toward remediation rather

⁹ Note. Negative employment decisions in school districts are never easy, in part because teachers as public employees have property rights in their employment and in part because the California Education Code specifies in considerable detail the steps to be taken in termination actions. The statutory legal requirements only can be marginally affected by collective bargaining. To illustrate the complexity, consider the situation where a school district wishes to terminate a probationary teacher’s contract *during* the year (termed “a mid-contract termination”). Unlike contract nonextension at the *end* of the year, a constitutionally protected property right exists during the contract term and California law details the due process requirements for ending it. Because of the legal requirements, few probationary teachers have their contracts terminated during the year. It is simply more cost-effective for the district to place the probationary teacher on administrative leave with pay and nonextend the contract at the end of the year. However, even a nonextension decision can be challenged through the grievance process or in court as illegally motivated (e.g., triggered by discrimination or retaliation for the exercise of a constitutional right) or unfair.

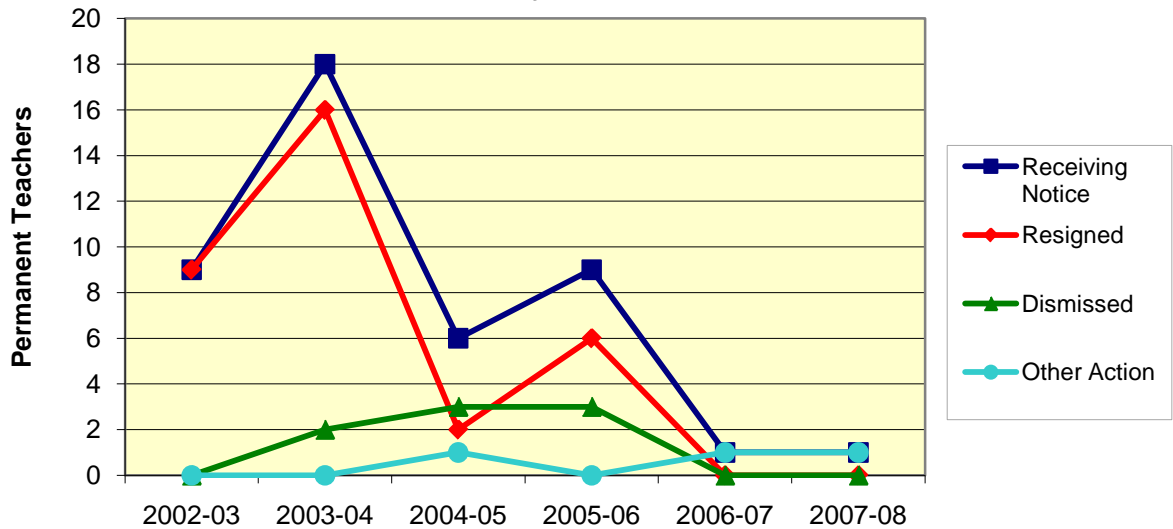
than termination, the costs in time and money to terminate a permanent contract are high.

Figure 20 on the following page shows the number of permanent contract teachers in the San Diego district who received notice of possible termination for unsatisfactory performance since 2002-2003. Unsatisfactory performance is one of nine permissible reasons set forth in the California Education Code for the termination of permanent teacher contracts.¹⁰ Before termination proceedings can be initiated against a teacher for unsatisfactory performance, the teacher must be given 90 days to remedy the deficiencies under California law. If school officials have done a good job of documenting teacher deficiencies and already have gone through remediation steps with little success, the teacher may opt to resign rather than go through the trauma and pain of contesting the action. As noted in the figure, nine teachers received initial termination notices for unsatisfactory performance in the 2002-2003 school year and 18 teachers received such a notice in 2003-2004. Of these, most opted to resign. Of the handful who did not resign, the district followed through successfully with contract termination. The only exception is one teacher in 2004-2005 who successfully challenged the action.

Note that as with probationary teacher contract nonextensions, dismissal notices to permanent teachers for unsatisfactory performance spiked in 2003-2004. In 2006-2007, one permanent teacher received notice of unsatisfactory performance and began improving. In 2007-2008, the latest year for which information has been provided by the district, another permanent teacher received such a notice and was placed on leave pending termination.

¹⁰ The other eight include (1) immoral or unprofessional conduct, (2) dishonesty, (3) evident unfitness for service, (4) physical or mental condition unfitting him or her to instruct or associate with children, (5) persistent violation of or refusal to obey school laws of the state or reasonable regulations prescribed for the government of the public schools by the State Board of Education or by the governing board of the school district employing him or her, (6) conviction of a felony or of any crime involving moral turpitude, (7) violation of Section 51530 [teaching communism] or conduct specified in section 1028 of the Government Code, and (8) alcoholism or other drug abuse which makes the employee unfit to instruct or associate with children. Of these, unprofessional conduct requires a 45-day period for the teacher to improve after receiving initial notice of contract termination. At the end of the 45 days, the district can initiate a dismissal action, following all of the due process requirements set forth in the Education Code.

Figure 20
**San Diego Unified Permanent Teachers
 Receiving Dismissal Notice
 for Unsatisfactory Performance**



As noted above and in the footnote, there are eight other reasons for permanent contract teacher termination other than unsatisfactory performance. No permanent teachers in the San Diego district received notice of contract termination for any of these reasons in 2002-2003 (data not shown). In 2003-2004 and again in 2004-2005, nine teachers did so. Three received a termination notice in 2005-2006. Once again, most opted to resign. The exception is 2004-2005 where of the nine receiving dismissal notices, one resigned and two were dismissed following a due process hearing. Of the remaining six, three were involved in due process hearings, two were suspended rather than dismissed, and one was in criminal prosecution.

Section III: Areas for Future Improvement

This portion of the study provides insights for future district improvement. Interviews were conducted with 26 individuals closely associated with the district. Each interview was conducted between June and September 2008 and ranged from 45 minutes to one hour. They included seven principals, one vice-principal, four teachers, seven SDUSD district administrators, four community members, San Diego Education Association (SDEA) officials and one San Diego Board member. Respondents were chosen either on the recommendation of district employees or randomly, and on their willingness to be interviewed. They were asked to comment on their relationship and/or position within the district and on the needs of the district. The overwhelming majority of those interviewed have had a relatively long history with the district - some as much as several decades. For example, many of the current central office administrators were teachers and principals in the district prior to their current appointment. These lengthy tenures allowed for a perspective on district policy and practice, as well as on educational reform that was grounded in experiences with the leadership of several superintendents including Alan Bersin, Carl Cohn and most recently, Terry Grier. Comments from respondents are included periodically but not specifically attributed in the interest of anonymity.

While recommendations from those interviewed were decidedly connected to their unique position within the district, there was considerable consistency across respondents regarding the general needs of the district. Responses coalesced around the following major themes: 1) professional development, 2) support for English learners, 3) technology, 4) instructional improvement, 5) early childhood education, 6) additional personnel support 7) changes in the way SDUSD currently conducts business. Their order of importance varied across respondents.

Professional Development

A consistent response regarding the needs of the district was in the area of professional development (PD), specifically the need to improve instructional knowledge and leadership skills for educators at all levels of the system. Those interviewed were accustomed to receiving a lot of professional development during the Bersin years. In the words of one respondent, Superintendent Cohn's administration was seen as "shying away from imposing a uniform set of instructional strategies and not exerting direct control of professional development activities." Today, educators are concerned because they do not know what to expect in the way of PD from Superintendent Grier's administration.

PD for Central Office Administrators

Illustrating the need for professional development "at the top," a 27 year veteran of the district and current administrator explained how the district's newly designed organizational arrangement requires a professional development plan that will provide coherence across district leaders. The new leadership team will be comprised of four Chief Improvement Officers. They will work with 10 School Improvement Officers,

charged with supporting all principals at all schools. In the view of this respondent, it will be their responsibility to help principals strengthen teacher practice by conducting classroom walkthroughs, monitoring achievement and helping to arrange site-based professional development. The district will need to provide these top leaders with support to “really calibrate with each other, get trained and focused in the same direction.” Professional development is understood to be crucial to their success.

Respondents spoke about the mistakes made during the Bersin and Alvarado years. (Tony Alvarado was hired by Bersin to implement the Blueprint for Student Success). They noted that often instructional leaders didn’t take time to make sure principals understood what good instruction looked like or to retrain them. In the words of one administrator, they often “bullied people.” Respondents were unanimous in not wanting to repeat these mistakes. Instead, they called for a wide and deep professional development strategy that would take coherence into account, respect the learner and importantly “ensure that PD be studied” so that everyone would be held accountable. “Last time, it was all too easy to blame Bersin and Alvarado for what was a district-wide implementation problem,” according to this administrator.

PD for Principals

PD was also deemed to be important for principals. Principals interviewed for this report recognized the need for PD to help them stay current with research. Some principals (those who could afford to) have been attending PD outside the district. Several mentioned attending the Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) conferences at the University of San Diego. While viewed as very helpful, they also saw it as an expensive alternative to district-led PD and as an expenditure that took resources away from other student needs. One principal who had been in the district since 1978 stated it this way:

Actually the professional development piece is a big piece... and it goes all the way up [the professional ladder]. I think we’ve gone away from training principals and teachers. We need to train principals so we can lead, and I think we need people who are released from classrooms, whatever their title is, to support schools and professional development [for teachers].

Although the district more recently has invested some money into PD, for which these respondents were grateful, it was perceived to be more for the purpose of explaining the rationale for the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLC), a major district initiative, and less about helping principals create them. Principals advocated for PD that is grounded in learning theory with goals and purpose clearly articulated.

A business community member, very involved in the district during the Bersin/Alvarado years, also supported the need for PD. He suggested, “Principal training and development is key.... If the school has the right principal or the right leader and given the tools and the support to the people under them, schools are going to do much better.”

One administrator explained that it is incumbent upon district leaders to identify and train future principals. In the past there was strong support for the training of aspiring principals.

PD for Teachers

The respondents in this study also emphasized the need for professional development for teachers with a particular focus on job-embedded professional development and coaching. Currently there is no coaching system in the district. From the perspective of these respondents, the district needs to reinstate teacher coach positions and provide them with training, but many principals acknowledged that coaching is expensive. This year the current administration will support two teacher leaders at every elementary school and four teacher leaders at the middle and high school. This was viewed as a good start, but respondents noted that extra funding is needed to adequately enable teacher coaches to implement instructional practices and build school-wide capacity. One administrator explained it this way: “We need one-on-one, side-by-side coaching about leadership decision-making, about content knowledge, and about building teacher decision-making in the classroom because there is nobody there to help problem-solve. If this doesn’t happen, the district will continue in a ‘status quo’ situation.”

An elementary school principal explained how job-embedded professional development and teacher coaching would look at her school. “The way teachers are going to get better at their jobs is to have release time during contracted hours to sit and look at student work with a colleague, or with their administrator, or with a resource coach, or whomever the specialist might be, but you need the actual analytical *time* to do the work.” If she had \$60,000 right now she insisted she would:

Hire a teacher (not a substitute teacher) at her school who was really skilled whom I could send into classrooms..., have a little bit of cross interaction with the teacher, encourage and support some self-evaluation and self-monitoring, and ask the important questions about how [teachers] could change the lesson to improve it.

One principal noted that PD is not merely a set of workshops during the summer; it is about rethinking the school day. According to this principal:

I’m wondering if we can’t fund the school day differently. In other words, for the school to have an art and music teacher, and so when those teachers are [leading] the classes, then the classroom teachers are free to meet and go over student work and that kind of a thing.

Implementing PD was typically described as cost prohibitive. In the words of one principal:

If you are not a program improvement school, there isn't money for anything else but just basic things. I would like more equity. It's all a money game. The more students you get, the more money you get.

This principal engages in a tactic that may well be becoming a more common practice. She recruits students from "program improvement schools" to increase her ADA (average daily attendance) funds from the state. This means enrolling students who have been given the option of choosing another school because their school has not adequately served them under the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) guidelines. She explained the consequences:

This is a double-edged sword. You're moving the lowest performing students out of a [low performing] school that has gobs of money and gobs of resources like tutoring. You can spend the money on technology, everything, but then they come here and there's no tutoring, no extended day... Teachers are now overwhelmed with the additional number of students. Instead of around 20 there are 36-38 students in their class.

She recently enrolled 100 students exiting program improvement schools, which is between 10-15% of her student population. She predicts that each year the number will grow. The problem is that the teachers in her school have typically taught White middle class students. This new population of students is predominately low income and English learners who present some different challenges for the teachers and require additional resources.

A Caveat

Respondents warned, however, that broad-brush, one-size fits all approach to professional development would not produce the results that the district needs. A Board member pointed out that the PD during the Bersin/Alvarado tenure didn't differentiate PD and ignored their own advice to "know your learners." Instead, the district should collect the data to identify the needs of individual teachers and individual schools. Noting that the demographics are different across schools and across teachers, one community member warned that it does not make sense to provide a third grade teacher who excels in teaching math with professional development for math instruction. The district needs to find out the needs at each school for each teacher, and construct PD accordingly. "It may mean that every teacher at every school does not get PD. It would be a waste of money."

Support for English Learners

The Challenge

As noted in the first section of this report, a major challenge facing San Diego Unified is the high number of students dropping out of school. Respondents felt that this problem was connected to the needs of English learners (EL). Slightly more than 28% of the district's total student population is classified as ELs. Hundreds of other students who

have moved out of the EL classification continue to have significant difficulties with reading and English comprehension. Complicating the issue is that the majority of them live in poverty.

Because EL students are continuously being reclassified, it is difficult to know exactly how many of them are passing the California exit exam. What seems clear, however, is that many classified and reclassified EL students are struggling academically and ultimately dropping out.

District Response

For the first time the district is implementing a district-wide systemic and sequential English-Language Development (ELD) program. This is different from previous ELD programs that were described as “watered down language arts programs.” Teachers are given a resource binder that provides scope and sequence for the new comprehensive program. As one administrator explained:

The curriculum plan is laid out but teachers *do* have to plan, you know, the day-to-day instructions. There are some structures and there are some formats that become increasingly familiar to teachers as they use it. There are some tools and some supports for teachers. The district is developing overviews and some demonstration lessons.

Capacity-building

Administrators, principals and teachers seem to agree that the new program is definitely a step in the right direction. The problem, however, is that there is not sufficient staff at the school sites to support teachers with the planning that is necessary to implement the ELD program. Many fall back on old teaching habits because they feel they do not have sufficient expertise to do the job. Part of the problem is lack of time. Instead of getting a daily class preparation period, elementary teachers get only about an hour a week. The real challenge then, is how to structure planning and collaborative time for teachers. Given the recent budget cuts, teachers and principals are now challenged more than ever to support EL students. This point was made clear in an interview with an elementary school resource teacher assigned to work with ELs. The only one of five not to lose her position because of budget cuts, this teacher observed that this new situation would not allow her to work closely with children in small groups on phonics and reading comprehension – a strategy that is definitely needed at her school. In her words:

About 90% of the students [at this school] are EL students. We reclassify approximately 5% a year. Most of our primary students fall in the intermediate area, and what we’re finding at our school is that our students are staying at intermediate for three or more years, second, third and fourth grade and beyond. So they get stuck at that level. We have this whole cohort of kids that haven’t moved... there is a huge cohort of

students that are two-plus years behind where they're supposed to be in their English language level.

She and her colleagues have taken action. They arranged for a full 45 minutes of focused English language development for the whole school. Her principal paid for all of the staff to be trained in the "Systematic ELD" program, something that she said does not happen in every school. They were able to structure that block to take advantage of the knowledge they gained from the training. The block became a really important part of the school day. However, this lone remaining resource teacher likely will be able to provide only minimal support in the future.

EL needs at the high school level were described as "great." A district administrator noted that while there are a few EL support teachers at some elementary and middle schools, there are none at the high school level. Many high school students are not proficient in English, they are not passing their classes and they are not passing the CAHSEE. She explained, "Teachers need training in how to differentiate [instruction], that is, how to reach second language learners in their classrooms."

In addition, math, social studies, science and English language arts teachers need to be brought together to talk about best practice and instruction for ELs, using some of the work that the district has been doing through QTEL (Quality Teaching for English Learners). West Ed's funding for QTEL at the middle school level was described as helpful but an administrator working closely with this population called for help at the high school level.

Other Recommendations

Other recommendations respondents advanced to help ELs included the following:

- Offer a yearly conference where ELs from every high school in the district would come together to learn about college, to help them know "there is a place for them and that there's a future for them."
- Conduct a systematic investigation into the possibilities of adopting an instructional model being used in St. Paul Minnesota. The St. Paul school district has developed a co-teaching model that teams an English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) teacher with those teaching content areas such as social studies. Teachers plan and work together to provide really focused instruction.
- Reduce class size. Currently, low performing students (many who are EL students) move from a class size of about 20 in K-3, to classrooms with about 35 students.
- Study efforts recently begun to help the newcomer population. This group of English learners presents additional challenges for the district, especially when the children enter at high school age. The district has currently established

newcomer centers, but additional support for them is needed. The district has settled on regional centers hosted at high school sites, rather than establishing a stand-alone school. A study of these centers could potentially help to ensure that this is the best structure by which to improve academic achievement for EL students and to make sure that there is close instructional alignment with grade level expectations.

Although most agreed that the district's Office of Language Acquisition is engaged in some thoughtful work around EL issues, few teachers have had the opportunity to attend the necessary training to learn how to use the system.

Technology

Another major area of need identified by respondents was technology, both in terms of the need for capacity building among educators to effectively use existing technology and the need to purchase more advanced technology. They were both viewed as being essential to support student learning.

Capacity-building

Recently the district has invested considerable money in a very sophisticated new data management tool. They are in the process of rolling out the hands-on training for principals and central office staff. One administrator explained it this way:

Sites are now going to be able to scan their own benchmark assessments, end of course exams and those sorts of things on site, and the data will automatically be uploaded. It is an extremely powerful tool. It will help them immensely to do formative assessment and to generate student profiles. You can monitor progress, target your resources, create interventions and build supports for kids differentiated by need. It is a real strength of the district but also a challenge.

Given the recent budget cuts, nine people were let go in the assessment department. The district is scrambling to figure out how to work through the structure with limited resources to make sure that all administrators and teachers will have the support they need to use the system. A recommendation was made for support for data coaches and for ongoing training, not just basic training. As one administrator noted:

They have to get deep understanding of how to use this. Someone needs to work with the Chief Improvement Officers (CIO) because the value in this system is going to be, if for example Carol [a CIO] and her people decide how they want to use this system and they build reports so they can monitor their progress, use benchmark assessments, use formative assessments. There has to be a structure in place. She can't go out to 218 schools. This would make a *huge* impact on achievement.

Principals interviewed for this study worried too about their limited capacity to use the new data system. While excited about the opportunities that the system would allow, they felt a strong need for tech support to help them understand how the data would inform their decision-making.

New Technology

Some respondents focused their comments on the need for more sophisticated technology to help improve instruction. As explained by one administrator:

Students need to become technologically savvy and it is our job to prepare them — the future of our students is in technology. They're hooked in already... we should do it with pod casts, online courses. But students need more. At some schools students have an eight hundred dollar device in front of them and have their textbooks and everything on that—it will be the future, diverting textbook money into electronic books.

E-Books were thought to be especially helpful for foster children and for the homeless. As children move from school to school, they could take the e-Book with them. Laptops were also mentioned as an important technological tool for student learning. Some students do not have computers at home and no exposure to computers. This is particularly the case for English learners. According to those interviewed, the San Diego district does not have enough computers in the classrooms and when schools do have a computer lab, access is often limited to after school hours, which poses transportation difficulties for some children. One principal stated the need for computers this way: “Middle class kids are so technologically savvy that if we don't start getting our poorest kids having the same access...well I'm worried that our kids in poverty will fall even further behind....” A teacher observed, “[when kids have laptops] an additional benefit is that parents become computer literate.”

A math teacher also noted how disadvantaged his students were in the area of technology. While he has a Document Camera (described as an essential tool, yet not available to all teachers in all schools), other technology is needed to capture students' attention and to provide the best instruction. He recommended purchasing more Smart Boards and graphing calculators because “that's what holds their interest. They know technology, they know phones, they know text messaging, they're tech savvy and then they come to school and they are bored.” In this school there are no graphing calculators in the seventh grade algebra classes, yet these are classes where he claims the calculators would be most useful. Moreover, with the recent state law requiring all students in California to take algebra in the eighth grade, this teacher feels that graphing calculators are essential. According to him, Texas Instruments is willing to give training on calculators with probes that allow them to be used as thermometers, which would be extremely useful in science classes as well. In other words, the technology is available, but not to his students.

A district administrator highlighted the importance of technology for EL students. He said that these students could really benefit from having teachers use microphones so

voices could be amplified making it easier for them to hear. There are also benefits in providing I-pods for EL students because it would give the students a chance to hear the language again, especially if they were allowed to take them home.

A Caveat

All the teachers and principals who spoke about the need for more and better technology offered an important caveat: Whatever technology the district provides, it must come with training opportunities for principals and teachers.

Instructional Improvements

Along with technological changes several educators recommended instructional improvements, which in some cases meant the need for alternative instructional delivery systems. A community member who is very involved with the district said the district needs to focus on building coalitions to bring instructional delivery into the 21st century. Noting recently released dropout statistics, he was adamant that there should be some changes. He lamented that the public school system is supposed to be the great equalizer, but the so-called pipeline to opportunity is not doing what it is supposed to do. His suggestion was to recreate high schools by focusing on career technical education:

Career technical education is absolutely critical; maybe the most important thing that we need to be focused on over the next decade in the district are a variety of pathways that kids can be excited about. Of course we should have good rigorous pathways to college, and we never want to get back into a situation where we're sort of stereotyping kids, particularly kids of color, and saying that they shouldn't be going to college, they should be doing something else. But we should have high-standards, high-rigor programs that create a pathway for kids to get into the trades.

The San Diego district currently offers a few options including a high school program on the Mesa College campus and a Construction Academy at Kearny High School, with more programs like these in the works. A community member added that the success of these alternative delivery systems is that "kids are engaged in what they're doing... they are motivated to push themselves. They get to do the kind of stuff that is really beneficial to them."

Other instructional improvements (some already existing but needing expansion, others needing the push to get going) were suggested by respondents. They included: differentiated instruction, project-based learning and on-line classes. These instructional methods were seen to offer the kind of support that would improve the learning of a broader group of students. Of particular note was the need for more and better tutoring and mentoring. As one administrator noted, under NCLB "I think there's some six or seven thousand students eligible [for after school tutoring], but they can only fund three thousand with the money they have. This would be another area that someone could come in and supplement the money available for outside tutoring and it could be focused on a certain grade level to help the issue of social promotion." One community

member stressed the importance of tutoring and noted that strategies could be borrowed from successful programs such as the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program and The Compact for Success program to bring students up to grade level. She stressed that after school programs can't be more of the same, and "while we can't do anything to change the tenure situation, tutoring can begin to combat weak teaching."

Improving instruction is not necessarily about adopting "new" ideas, claimed these respondents. Several of them pointed out that the new superintendent is initiating a lot of new ideas but that it's really about providing teachers with support for existing programs. Class size reduction at all school levels was identified by nearly all teachers at almost every school in the district during a recent study conducted by the teachers union (March, 2008), as well as by some respondents in this study. Doing so could enable teachers to give children the attention they need.

Early Childhood Education

Respondents in this study who were involved in some way with early childhood development pointed to the need for support in this area. Citing a recent RAND study on early childhood education, a business community member explained:

If all children received a rigorous preschool and kindergarten curriculum, one that provides them with the necessary skills to do well in first grade, they will graduate reading at grade level and it will have more of an impact on their future, more than economics or ethnicity.

Enhance Opportunities

Public schools, including those in the district now offer pre-school education to children in almost 170 early childhood classrooms serving students in real high poverty areas. These programs are mostly subsidized by the state. Respondents described the need for pre-school education as being much greater than what they can provide for. They are turning many children away. Those who spoke to this issue were in agreement that expanding opportunities and providing professional development for teachers would help teachers, in the words of one administrator, "make this year of schooling a *rigorous* experience for kids...so that all kids entering kindergarten really are ready."

An administrator explained some of the problems with early childhood education in San Diego. There are real language development needs here because the district serves a very diverse student population. But the problem with early childhood education, according to her, is not just an EL issue, but an economic issue, because all of these students are from extremely disadvantaged homes. What is needed, in her view, is the following:

A digging down deep kind of study of these kids over time. We fail them year after year after year. So I think somehow we've got to pull them aside, figure out who they are, what they look like, and maybe the real

question is what are they succeeding in and what seems to be the missing pieces. Part of the problem as I see it is that teachers don't know how to do it [what they are asking their students to do] and thus they surely don't know how to teach it. Moreover, when early childhood teachers get their credential they move up to K-12 and we lose them. There needs to be some support for PD for them and compensation, or some problem solving in this area.

Additional Personnel Support

A frequently mentioned need was for additional support personnel. One middle school principal explained the importance of hiring more counselors:

We believe the counselor is very vital to a school like this because ...kids were not responding to the interventions. It had more to do with counseling issues that children bring from home that need to be addressed and helped before interventions were ever going to touch them... I can sit here and tell you horror stories of little kids and how resilient they are, but really no one should have that going on in their life. I think if we don't address the social needs of the children, then we're never going to reach them academically.

Professional development for counselors was also noted as district need, as captured in the comments of this administrator:

The counselors' professional development is something we really haven't seen in the last three years...It's the group that was kind of forgotten, and I know that maybe four years ago we started to do some good things, but it dropped off. If training were available, that would be wonderful to make them more effective.

Several respondents mentioned the need for other resource personnel, such as nurses and social workers. Many schools get a nurse for only one day a week requiring that teachers take up the role. Social workers are not on site. One middle school principal explained that she does not have "adequate support in this area, yet health issues are very important at this age, with obesity on the rise, issues with drugs, sex, etc." One respondent noted that teachers are always having more and more added to their plate, with nothing taken off. They need support to do their job. Hiring more support personnel to work with economically disadvantaged kids would relieve teachers and help to provide students with what they need.

Changes in the Way the San Diego School District Does Business

Get a Plan

For several community members, the most significant step the district could take is to change the way it is doing business. Community members did not see the district as

having a focused plan. They recommended that the district identify its goals; set a plan grounded in what the data tells them is the most pressing needs of its students; improve relationships with the Board, the SDEA (teachers union) and the community; implement a plan with “best practices”; and get buy-in from major constituents. A respondent described the existing problem:

The district doesn't seem to have a clear strategy. It's like what are they trying to do? With the Blueprint, [during the Bersin administration] I think they had a strategy... As good as it might have been, it didn't move the organization, and so I think one of the real needs [in order] for the district to move forward is to have a strategy that is embraced by the players ... the teachers, the parents, community leaders, etc. So I think one of the biggest things is to figure out what the heck you are all about. With Cohen it just seemed like nothing was happening and now the stuff that you hear ... it just seems like it's kind of random.

Another community member agreed and emphasized that any effort by the district or any funding from outside the district ought to be driven by a district plan that is generated from “real concrete data, and where it will make the biggest bang.” She explained that politics and the media often drive decisions and do not always serve the needs of kids. From her perspective one of the greatest needs in San Diego is in the area of student attendance. She pointed out that kids who attend school everyday do not drop out, yet attendance in San Diego is disappointingly low. Twenty-seven percent of elementary students and 24% percent of students in middle and high school attend school less than 95% percent of the time, which is the equivalent of missing roughly 18 days. She stressed that if children don't attend school, it doesn't matter what the quality of teaching looks like. If these students could be identified, if the district could “hone in on the problem,” it could gain a better understanding as to how to draw from “National Best Practices” to address the issue.

Another respondent from the community said that the fact that the district fails to have a “budget format that makes sense” signals concern and reinforces her belief that the district needs a plan. This respondent added:

... they're still struggling to get a budget format that makes sense and that is actionable where the Board can actually look at it and say, 'Okay' gets back to having a strategy – a plan. You want the Board making decisions about a budget based on a strategy. 'Here's what we're trying to accomplish and here's how we're allocating our dollars to accomplish that,' and if you don't have a strategy, or if you have a budget format that doesn't allow you to really see what you've got and where you've got that flexibility, I think that's a problem.”

The absence of an identifiable plan, according to this respondent, is possibly the result of an organizational structure that is too bureaucratic. “You've got this huge bureaucracy and so it's wasteful and it gets in the way of getting things accomplished

because the organizational structure is top heavy or has too many layers or odd combinations of things.” Frequent change in superintendents along with improper job reassignments and ill-advised new placements were thought to contribute to the problems. “I have heard things in the past that have suggested that the organization isn’t conducive to making decisions ...and then on the finance side you just hear about problems with computer systems and problems getting data and a lot of stuff... that impedes people’s ability to do their jobs.”

Getting Along is Essential to Successful Education Reform

Many respondents commented that the district needs to learn how to get along with the Board, the community and teachers union if education reform is going to take hold. Relationships in the past have been dysfunctional and have severely undermined reform efforts. According to one community member, this pattern continues:

The dynamics between the Board and Superintendent position--it’s just atrocious and so it makes it very hard to make progress ... it makes it very hard for someone to feel confident about putting their money into the district because you just don’t know what’s going to happen and whether things will change. The last time, where it really seemed like you had some kind of coherence between the Board and the Superintendent was with Alan Bersin and the three to two [Board voting pattern]. At least he had three Board members who were working with him to advance the agenda and with Cohen that was not the case, and this whole notion that he had free reign and that they weren’t going to micromanage was a joke.

Relations with the San Diego Education Association (teachers union) have been troubling for decades and there is little indication that the situation is about to change anytime soon. Respondents noted that union representatives are accused of being over reactionary, while school board members and superintendents are accused of being too top down and of giving no attention to the needs of the teachers.

In sum, the most commonly noted needs of the San Diego school district, according to the respondents in this study, centered on building capacity at all levels of the system (administrators, principals and teachers). Principals and teachers particularly recognized the need to more adequately support EL students, improve technology and hire more support personnel. While instructional improvements were called for, the sentiment was that they didn’t all have to be new ideas, but merely improving and expanding such things as tutoring, mentoring and class size. Underlying all improvement was the general recognition that the district needs help to improve the way in which it does business with all major constituents. According to several respondents who closely monitor district practice, deliberate and focused attention on communicating and creating a new set of relationships is essential to educational reform in the district.

Appendix

Research on Education Reform Initiatives in the San Diego Unified School District 2002-2007

Education reform efforts in the district have garnered attention from a broad spectrum of researchers at both the local and national level. This summary of research sets forth significant internal and external research studies completed within the past five years relating to district student performance, organizational management, and instructional strategies. The studies summarized here are available through the San Diego Unified School District's Research and Reporting Office. Contact 619-725-7188.

Bersin Administration 1998-2005

In 1998 Alan Bersin was hired as superintendent of schools. Bersin immediately initiated a major school reform effort called the "Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards Based System," a plan touted to narrow the achievement gap and increase student achievement. Components of this major initiative were quickly launched district-wide and included a common instructional practice, intensive teacher professional development, and an emphasis on literacy and mathematics instruction at the elementary level. Comprehensive systemic change of this kind had never been attempted before in an urban school district. The Blueprint attracted funding support from large philanthropic organizations including the Broad Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Carnegie Foundation. This funding supported professional development programs, peer coach/staff developer jobs, and the design of small high schools. Along with external funder reporting requirements, the Blueprint contained a monitoring component requiring an annual formal evaluation conducted by an independent evaluator. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) was selected to serve as the Blueprint independent evaluator in November of 2000.

American Institutes for Research (AIR)

AIR published the first of three evaluation reports in January 2002. The "First Year Findings" were noted as very preliminary. The study included a thorough analysis of student achievement data and analyzed student achievement improvement for all students in all subgroups in reading and math.

The second evaluation report published in July 2003, continued to examine the implementation of Blueprint instructional strategies and reviewed student achievement data. AIR used staff surveys, site visits and interviews to determine changes in attitudes or activities since the 2002 report. Student achievement data from the SAT 9 years 1998-2002 was analyzed as well as California Standards Test (CST) data from 1999-2002 and the district administered Developmental Reading Assessment from 2000 to 2002 for grades K-3.

The initial introduction of the Blueprint to the San Diego education community was reported to be controversial and fast-paced. The reaction of principals and their “Instructional Leader” supervisors was noted to be generally positive although teacher reaction was more negative. The literacy framework and plan for teacher professional development were noted as solid. The district was recognized as having a good data system in place to evaluate student achievement progress. Slight improvement was noted in some academic areas for students receiving the benefit of Blueprint strategies, although AIR cautioned that it was not possible to make definitive statements on student achievement based on one-year data. The report questioned how long the pace of activity and changes could be maintained.

Surveys revealed that teachers and parents felt the needs of all students were not being met and that they generally held negative views of the implementation of the Blueprint. Parents felt they had been ignored or left out of the process, and school staff reported a climate of fear and suspicion. AIR strongly recommended that district communication and collaboration with stakeholders and the community needed to immediately improve if the Blueprint was to succeed and be sustained for any length of time. District administration and stakeholders were urged to “lay down the rhetoric and give the reforms a chance to gain foothold.”¹¹

In the second year the district administration continued to maintain a strong reform vision. Key strategies of the Blueprint were beginning to take hold, particularly in the area of improved teacher professional development and instructional leadership of principals. Slight improvement in student achievement was noted in reading and language arts, particularly at the second grade level. A slight narrowing of the achievement gap was noted for English Learners, particularly in reading, although the gap continued to be wide. It was noted that this study did not examine which, if any, of the Blueprint strategies could be linked with this growth. The implementation of Blueprint instructional strategies was found to be uneven across schools in the district. Teachers continued to express concerns about the usefulness of professional development activities and continued to express feelings of being under-valued and disrespected. Student achievement in mathematics at the middle and high school level was slow or stagnant.

For the third year of evaluation, AIR proposed to analyze student achievement data, attempt to link Blueprint strategies with student outcomes, and analyze the sustainability of the reform effort. Two specific areas were noted as critical to the success of the Blueprint: Continuing stable allocation of resources, including public and private sources of funding, and the establishment of a “foundation of trust” with district teachers and parents. In the words of the researchers,

[This] study demonstrates the difficulties of launching and sustaining ambitious district-wide reform... it involves strengthening the core of educational practice, requires stable and supportive leadership, cultivating

¹¹ Evaluation of the Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards Based System, American Institutes for Research, January 2002.

broad support among all stakeholders and sufficient time to ensure that practices are put in place in a thoughtful way that will ensure their longevity. Conditions have not been ideal in San Diego; furthered weakened by a budget crisis that threatens to undercut the financial foundation.¹²

In July 2003 facing a state and district budget crisis, the board of education rejected a proposal to continue funding the AIR Year 3 Report at a cost of \$300,000. AIR was encouraged to find outside funding to complete its study. In December 2003 AIR submitted a proposal to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to fund an independent, second phase evaluation of the district. The new evaluation design for the reforms focused more closely on professional development for classroom teachers and the implementation of instructional strategies in K-8 classrooms. The objective was to better assess the connection between these activities and student outcomes. The study was to be conducted over three and a half years. The final report is expected to be published this summer. AIR is also conducting a separate evaluation of high school reform efforts funded by Gates and Carnegie Foundations. This study is expected to be published in June 2008.

Determinants of Student Achievement: New Evidence from San Diego.

Julian Betts, a professor of economics at the University of California, San Diego, has analyzed student achievement in the San Diego Unified School District for the past eight years. Published and funded by the Public Policy Institute of California in 2003 this study analyzed the allocation of school resources and district trends in student achievement. Betts also linked data with school and classroom factors most likely to influence student achievement. The study analyzed student achievement progress from fall of 1997 to spring 2000 and serves as the baseline for future district studies that he is conducting.

Betts found that district schools with the lowest socio-economic status had less experienced and qualified teachers than schools in more affluent neighborhoods. The study went on to note, however, that although teacher experience makes a difference, it is not a noticeable factor in test outcomes or gains in math and reading achievement. Betts observed that teacher contractual issues in San Diego Unified contributed to inequalities in teacher assignments throughout the district. The strongest positive influence on student achievement was grouping students together by varying levels of ability in an integrated classroom. Betts noted that the instructional strategies implemented by the Blueprint slightly narrowed the achievement gap over a two year period. However, a large gap continues to exist.

¹² Evaluation of the Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards Based System Year 2, American Institutes for Research, Revised July 2003.

San Diego Review: September 2004

After the suspension of the third and final AIR final study, Superintendent Bersin garnered financial support from major philanthropic organizations to conduct an extensive study of the San Diego Unified School District in January 2004. "The San Diego Review," a compilation of 18 different research papers prepared by leading national education policy researchers, was produced under the direction of Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute. Philanthropies that underwrote the project included the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, the Broad Foundation, the Donner Foundation, the Foundation for the Improvement of Math & Science, Harcourt Achieve, Houghton Mifflin, New American Schools, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and the Walton Family Foundation. The papers were presented at a conference co-sponsored by the Council of the Great City Schools at the University of San Diego in September 2004. The Review was later published in 2005 by Harvard Education Press as *Urban School Reform, Lessons from San Diego*.

Covering topics such as governance, professional development, instructional improvement, accountability, union relationships, charter schools, and more, the papers presented a critical review of the implementation of the Blueprint. Research findings mirrored those of AIR to a certain extent. Hightower and McLaughlin studied the implementation of the Blueprint and discussed whether or not the pace and stability of reform could be maintained. They recommended that the district examine differences within schools and within the district, work to sustain a stable source of revenue, and take an honest look at outcomes. A review of small high schools by Campbell, DeArmond and Taggart observed that "A portfolio model of school management offers an attractive reform agenda, but it is not easy." It requires "bringing along many different players, managing competing interests, and making the hard choices to fully engage with the portfolio idea and give it a chance to succeed." They further stated that improving high schools may ultimately be more complicated than improving elementary schools. Betts and Zau reported on school choice, magnet, and charter schools. They reported that there is little to no information on whether school choice serves as a competitive force on student achievement in schools that typically lose students to other schools. Maloney and Kemerer reviewed the district's growing charter school movement in depth. The study suggested that relationships between district administration, teachers unions, and charter school advocates need to be strengthened in order for charter schools to be integrated and accepted into the district educational system and to promote change. Lesaux and Crosson studied the delivery of literacy instruction to English Learners (EL) and concluded that while the biliteracy program had great potential to succeed, the district had not yet invested in the structures and teaching capacity to deliver the program as designed. Student achievement results for EL's were uneven. A study of the performance trends of the Blueprint stated that efforts to improve literacy in the lower grade levels were effective and worth continuing, but middle school showed weaker performance overall and high school performance actually declined during the first years of the Blueprint. The district record of academic achievement was mixed with the biggest gains shown in the area of literacy.

The Review was initially designed to be a working analysis of the Blueprint that district administrators and policymakers could use to make mid-course adjustments. A new school board majority elected in November 2004 immediately suspended the implementation of the Blueprint.

Hubbard, Mehan, Stein

Local sociologists Hubbard and Mehan teamed with national educational psychologist Mary Kay Stien to study district reforms beginning with the appointment of Alan Bersin as superintendent. Hubbard, et al., conducted research and produced *Reform as Learning: School Reform, Organizational Culture, and Community Politics in San Diego* published by Kindle Books in 2006.

The study reviewed “content driven reform” from an organizational context and looked at both the effects of the reform strategies on the system and how the individual educators charged with carrying out the strategies impacted the reform. “Local choices about whether or how to put a policy into practice,” the researchers noted, “are of far greater importance than policy design features such as technology, funding or governance. – success depends on how policy is interpreted and transformed.”¹³ The Hubbard research team found that although the administrators implementing the Blueprint had a clear understanding of education reform, they missed or underestimated the need to achieve teacher and community buy-in and the impact local culture would have on the efforts. It was noted that many teachers took the strategies learned from professional development and adapted them for their own classroom use even though this was not encouraged in the program design. Teachers and principals modified reform strategies to meet their own needs and the needs of their classrooms. In some cases this strengthened the reform, and in some cases it did not. The district-wide implementation of the Blueprint was found to be uneven with frequent misunderstandings of key concepts. The study recommended that other districts attempting to undertake reform initiatives adapt them to local circumstances, work to build trust among teachers and staff, and use the existing knowledge base of the district when building programs. The researchers pointed out that “consensus must be achieved never decreed and must be subject to revision.”¹⁴

Cohn Administration 2005-2007

The new school board majority elected in the fall of 2004 negotiated an end to Alan Bersin’s contract a year before it was set to expire. The board reversed many of the directives of the Blueprint and eliminated the position of peer coaches/staff developer. The classroom literacy instructional structure imposed by the Blueprint was loosened as well. After a nationwide search, the board hired former Long Beach superintendent Dr. Carl Cohn, who came out of retirement to take the post in October 2005. Cohn did not finish his four-year contract and retired from the district in 2007. Cohn’s short tenure focused on improving employee morale, restoring a less combative relationship with

¹³ Reform as Learning, Hubbard, Mehan & Stein, page 240.

¹⁴ Reform as Learning, Hubbard, Mehan & Stein, page 267.

employee organizations, and de-centralizing many of the components of the Blueprint. His administration shied away from imposing a uniform set of instructional strategies and did not exert direct control of professional development activities. Cohn was quoted as supporting many of components of the Blueprint including the early focus on literacy, quality staff development for teachers, data to give a clear picture of which students are falling behind, support for intervention strategies, and extending the school day and year. The central curriculum department under his leadership put together a “Plan for Accelerating Gains in Student Performance” in the spring of 2007 that spanned all content areas as well as specific programs for special education and English Learners.

Cohn took note that the controversy surrounding the Blueprint centered on its implementation and worked to include teachers in the new administration. He expressed concern that a divided school board would not be able to focus on reform strategies and move forward with a unanimous vote. “The forces of the status quo in an urban school district are legion, and board unanimity becomes really important,” he said. “The problem with a 3-2 split [on the board] is that it encourages the forces of the status quo. They think, all we have to do is pick off one person in the next election and we can change this.”¹⁵

Few research studies were published during the Cohn administration. One study commissioned during this time was “Special Education – San Diego Unified School District, Special Education Issues Document, Final Report and Recommendations,” prepared by Hehir and Lesaux. The Portolan Group Inc., a management-consulting group, conducted a comprehensive organizational and operational analysis of the Maintenance and Operations Department in 2006. Several internal studies reporting on the student achievement of English Learners were produced by the district Research and Reporting unit during these years.

Hehir and Lesaux –Special Education

The board contracted with Harvard researchers Thomas Hehir and Nonie Lesaux in November 15, 2006 to conduct an overview of the special education delivery service system and make organizational recommendations on the major strengths and concerns of the district special education program. The researchers reviewed student performance data and interviewed teachers, staff, administrators, parents, community members and school board members. The study also reviewed compliance complaints lodged against the district by parents.

Hehir and Lesaux found committed and competent special education administrators at both the central and site levels. The study noted that the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) comprised of parents and community members was committed to improving special education. District spending on the special education program was found to be reasonable and in line with other school districts of similar size.

¹⁵ Q & A with Carl A. Cohn, Superintendent, San Diego Unified School District, The San Diego Union Tribune, December 4, 2005.

The report called out areas for further attention and improvement including increased focus on the student achievement of special education students, the role of site administrators in operating special education, the insufficient provision of services by charter schools, and the disproportionate placement of African-American and English Learners in special education. The performance of students with disabilities was found to be relatively flat on the California Standards Test. District charter schools were found to be serving fewer students with disabilities overall and fewer students with severe disabilities in particular. The study concluded with recommendations that the district improve the educational program for students with disabilities and take steps to ensure that all schools, including charters, take greater responsibility for the education and achievement of these students.

Portolan Group Inc.

The Portolan Group Inc. was hired by the Board of Education in August 2006 to conduct an organizational and operational analysis of the Maintenance and Operations Department. The intent of the analysis was to help district administration streamline services; re-align resources where necessary; and assist the operations department meet the district's goal of safe, clean, neat, well ordered and maintained facilities for students and staff. Portolan reported a district bureaucratic culture observed by other research studies of instructional and overall management of the district. The analysis observed that the district's maintenance function appeared isolated from the district as a whole, was widely perceived as not meeting its customers' needs, and not in step with the direction of the rest of the district. It was observed that managers chose the path of least resistance reflecting a "this too shall pass" attitude towards change. The board of education approved the Portolan recommendations for a management and staffing reorganization of the Maintenance and Operations Department over a three-year period.

The following three studies were produced by the district internal Research and Reporting, Standards, Assessment and Accountability Division.

Report on the 2005 Test Results for Court-Identified Schools and for District-wide Ethnic Groups and the 2005 California Standards Test Results (CST) for English-Fluent Students District-wide by Grade Level and Ethnicity.

Data from the 2005 California Standards Test revealed that Asian students outperformed students in other ethnic groups in all content areas and grade levels. Students in all ethnic groups outperformed Hispanic and African-American in all content areas and grade levels. The overall findings were consistent with prior reports that identified a persistent achievement gap between the performance of African-American and Hispanic students and that of other groups, particularly Asian and White students.

District Progress Report on English Learners and Former English Learners 2007

The number of students designated as English Learners (EL) has remained constant over the past nine years. More than one in three district students are designated as EL and are concentrated in a select number of schools mostly at the elementary level. A

fourth of district elementary schools have an enrollment of at least 50% EL students. These schools were among the largest elementary schools in the district, the majority serving anywhere from 400 to 950 students. As many research studies have noted, district programs designed to improve the language proficiency of ELs have met with mixed results over the past 20 years.

Grier Administration 2008-

With the departure of Carl Cohn, the board of education conducted its second nation-wide superintendent search within three years. In January 2008, Dr. Terry Grier, formerly of Guilford County, North Carolina was appointed Superintendent. Grier joins the district in the midst of a severe state budget crisis, upcoming contract negotiations with the teachers association and flat student achievement results. In the short time he has been superintendent, Grier has signaled that he will work to focus district resources and efforts on raising student achievement.

Curriculum Management Systems Inc.

Grier commissioned Olive McArdle Kulas of Curriculum Management Systems Inc. to conduct an “External Study of the Curriculum and Instruction Division” in March 2008. The intent of this study was to determine if the central curriculum organization structure and staffing were appropriate in the face of anticipated budget cuts and in the context of the superintendent and board priorities for the next 3-5 years. The study assessed the quality of the curriculum design and the connection between the curricula, student achievement data, and federal accountability in the district.

The consultant group found that rather than being overstaffed, the central curriculum department is not adequately funded to carry out the stated objectives of the district. The study notes that “curriculum management has been fragmented due to the changing philosophies of different administrations.” Although curriculum department staff has initiated plans with the potential to make instruction responsive to student needs, the study points out that board policy and the management organization of the district into K-8 and 9-12 divisions does not establish expectations for a centrally defined curriculum with accountability for the success of all students.

The study further noted that 60% of all district students are not proficient in English and mathematics and that funding related to the success/achievement of students of poverty and English learners is not aligned with the work of the Curriculum and Instruction Division, making it likely that current achievement levels may not be improved. Recommendations of areas for improvement included the development of a work plan for teacher delivery of a common curriculum in all subjects for all grade levels that is not currently in place.

The study concluded:

Current efforts exist within a context mired by angst over a “top down” era of mandates followed by an era of decentralization. Current efforts

represent a collaborative approach to curriculum development. Such an approach is strategic in terms of healing past memories and moving the district forward in defining a common curriculum for all students.¹⁶

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¹⁶ External Study of the Curriculum and Instruction Division, Curriculum Management Systems Inc., March 2008