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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Process Adequacy: Successful School Districts Model

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Isaac Estrada

Committee in charge:

California State University, San Marcos

Professor Jennifer Jeffries, Chair  
Professor Mark Baldwin

University of California, San Diego

Professor Alan Daly

2010

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The Dissertation of Isaac Estrada is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

California State University, San Marcos

University of California, San Diego

San Diego State University

2010

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my two wonderful children little Isaac and Ella. They amaze me and inspire me every day. I feel blessed with the joy and enthusiasm they bring to my life. They are my inspiration. To my sister Edna who has been an excellent role model and source of inspiration. Finally, to my family who has always been there for me. Thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	xi
VITA .....	xii
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION .....	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Overview .....	1
Background of the Literature .....	2
Problem Statement .....	6
Research Questions .....	7
Methodology .....	7
Significance of the Study .....	8
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....	11
Overview .....	11
Definitions of Adequacy .....	12
Adequacy Models .....	13
Successful School Districts Model .....	13
Cost Function Model .....	16
Professional Judgment Model .....	18
Whole School Reform Model .....	19
California Studies Applying Successful School Districts Model .....	21
Advancements in Methodology .....	22
Factors Related to Student Achievement .....	24
Standards Based Curriculum .....	25
Coherent Instruction .....	26
High Quality Teachers .....	28
Assessment and Data Driven Decisions .....	30
Student Services and Interventions .....	32
Theoretical Framework of Achievement Factors .....	33
Research Limitations .....	35

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	37
Overview .....	37
Justification for Case Study Research Strategy .....	39
Logic of Design.....	39
Multiple Sources of Evidence.....	40
Theory Guiding Data Collection.....	41
Research Design.....	41
Research Questions .....	42
Successful Schools and Districts Selection.....	42
Successful Schools and Districts Profiles .....	45
District A.....	45
District B.....	47
District C.....	49
Data Collection .....	51
Interviews.....	52
Participants.....	52
Electronic Records and Documents.....	54
Data Analysis .....	55
Limitations .....	58
 CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....	 60
Introduction.....	60
Collaboration.....	60
Stakeholder Involvement .....	61
Teacher Collaboration.....	63
District A.....	64
District B.....	65
District C.....	66
District Wide Collaboration.....	67
Resource Allocation.....	69
General Fund.....	69
District A.....	70
District B.....	72
District C.....	74
Categorical Funding.....	75
District A.....	78
District B.....	79
District C.....	79
Financial Management.....	80
Budget Development Process Overview .....	80
Communication the Budget .....	82
District Budget Development and Assumptions.....	83
Average Daily Attendance.....	83
Student Enrollment .....	86
Rollover.....	87

Cola.....	89
Budget Monitoring.....	89
Monthly Budget Reviews .....	90
Interim Reports .....	91
Audits.....	92
Position Control .....	92
Best Practices.....	93
Personnel.....	93
Instructional Programs and Academic Interventions.....	97
Professional Development .....	99
Ongoing Assessments .....	101
Flexibility and Accountability .....	102
Leadership.....	104
Overview.....	104
District A Leadership.....	104
District B Leadership.....	109
District C Leadership.....	115
Summary .....	119
 CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS.....	 120
Introduction.....	120
Summary of the Study .....	120
Problem Statement.....	120
Purpose Statement and Research Questions .....	121
Review of Methodology .....	121
Findings Related to the Literature.....	122
Collaboration.....	122
Leadership.....	127
School Level Leadership.....	128
Teacher Leadership.....	130
District Leadership.....	132
Superintendent Leadership in Successful School Districts.....	133
School Board Leadership.....	136
School and District Level Best Practices .....	138
Professional Development .....	138
Student Interventions .....	140
Resource Allocation and Personnel .....	141
Positions That Impact Student Achievement.....	141
Conclusions.....	143
Collaboration.....	143
Systematic Collaboration Focused on Results.....	144
Collaborative Processes and Structures .....	144
District Collaboration.....	145
Collaboration with Governing Board.....	146
Leadership.....	149



School Level Leadership.....	149
Teacher Leadership.....	150
Superintendent’s Leadership.....	151
Professional Development .....	151
Flexibility with Accountability .....	152
Recommendations for Future Research .....	153
Insights of the Researcher.....	154
APPENDICES .....	156
A: Protocol for High School Principal.....	156
B: Protocol for Chief Business Officer .....	162
C: Protocol for Superintendent .....	165
D: Protocol for School Board Member .....	168
E: Consent to Participate Form San Marcos State University .....	171
REFERENCES .....	173

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework on Factors linked to Student Achievement.....	34
Figure 3.1: School and District Documents for Data Collection and Analysis .....	55
Figure 4.1: Research Questions Linked to Themes .....	60
Figure 4.2: Parent and Stakeholder Involvement.....	63
Figure 4.3: District Budget Development Assumptions .....	84
Figure 4.4: Teacher Hiring Process in District B.....	97
Figure 4.5: Focus on Results Program in District B .....	99
Figure 5.1: Enhanced Conceptual Framework: Successful School Districts.....	143

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: General Fund Percent Revenues by Categories .....	69
Table 4.2: Table 4.2 General Fund Percent Expenditures for 2007-2008 .....	70
Table 4.3: Summary of Assigned Personnel Units (APU) .....	73
Table 4.4: Categorical Funding by Source for 2007-2008 .....	76
Table 4.5: Federal and State Categorical Programs for 2007-2008.....	77
Table 4.6: State and Federal Categorical Programs: High School in District A.....	78
Table 4.7: State and Federal Categorical Programs: High School in District B.....	79
Table 4.8: State and Federal Categorical Programs: High School in District C.....	79

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Process Adequacy: Successful School Districts Model

by

Isaac Estrada

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

California State University, San Marcos, 2010  
University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor Jennifer Jeffries, Chair

The purpose of this study was to examine how three successful high schools and districts in California allocate human and fiscal resources. This study sought to understand how successful high schools and districts serving a diverse student population link financial decisions to student achievement data. Three successful high schools and districts serving students enrolled in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, the English Language Development (ELD) program, and minorities were the focus of this multiple case study. The three high schools and respective districts were systematically selected using multiple criteria including student achievement data from AYP and API reports, and student demographic information. In order to be deemed “successful” for this study, the districts and high schools needed to meet all criteria for AYP and demonstrate API growth for all subgroups. The primary sources of data collection were twelve

interviews with school administrators and school board officials. The Superintendent, Chief Business Officer, a School Board Official, and a High School Principal from each of the three successful school districts were interviewed using a semi structured interview protocol developed by the authors of the project “Getting Down to Facts”. The interview protocols were grounded on effective schools and educational adequacy frameworks.

Key Terms: Adequacy Studies, Successful School Districts, Effective Schools, High Performing High Schools, Leadership K-12, Resource Allocation K-12, Educational Finance.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Federal and state educational initiatives are having a profound impact on state accountability and finance systems across the nation. The strong emphasis on all students achieving high standards has created opportunities and challenges for many state educational systems. Under the federal mandate “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) states are required to develop rigorous content and performance standards for students. Most importantly, school districts are accountable for ensuring that all students meet ever increasing proficiency targets. For school districts with diverse student populations, the requirement that all students, including those that have been deemed “underperforming” meet proficiency targets presents several challenges and implications for how resources are strategically allocated to support student achievement. At the same time, unprecedented budget cuts to education are taking place (Hanushek, 2007). Consequently, educational researchers and school practitioners are rethinking how to use school resources to improve student achievement. Furthermore, school finance experts and practitioners are dialoguing, writing and considering what types and amount of educational resources would be adequate to meet student educational needs. Critical to this discussion are emerging school finance studies which place a strong emphasis on exploring and examining how human and fiscal resources are linked to high levels of student performance. These inquiries are known as *adequacy* studies.

California public schools serve a significantly diverse population. Loeb, Bryk, and Hanushek (2007) acknowledge that the student body in California is the most diverse in our nation. Close to 90% percent of students in California attend public schools.



California serves 6 million students of different ethnic and language backgrounds. Two-thirds of the students are minorities (Hanushek, 2007). Close to 50% of the students come from low income households. California has the largest proportion of students learning English as a second language. One out of four students is a second language learner. Finally, “more than 10% of students have been identified as needing special education services” (Ed Source, 2007). In sum, the state of California serves students of different ethnic and language backgrounds. Consequently, this has presented many opportunities and challenges in meeting the diverse educational needs of all students.

### Background of the Literature

An emerging body of research examining adequacy through statistical models indicates a strong relationship between student educational needs and outcomes (Imazeki, 2006; Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003; Baker, 2005; Perez et al., 2007). Leading researchers have examined and linked student educational needs with student outcomes to determine the amount and type of educational resources needed to educate all students from diverse backgrounds. For instance, Imazeki (2006) examined the relationship between students from low-income households and their achievement and found that higher costs are associated with meeting the educational needs of the students. Similarly, Perez et al. (2007) found a strong relationship between students in poverty and low achievement levels on state assessments. In addition Baker (2005) found that students learning English as a second language need more resources to meet state standards. In summary, a growing number of research studies that examine issues of adequacy through statistical models strongly suggests that students who come from low income families

and are learning English as a second language require additional educational resources to meet rigorous state content and performance standards.

The multiple lines of research linking student educational needs with additional costs to meet state standards has many implications for policy makers and school administrators in determining the amount of resources needed to educate all students in our state. Considering the challenges presented by the diverse student population in California and the higher educational costs associated with educating students in our public schools, it is troubling that California spends below the national per pupil average (Loeb et al., 2007). According to the National Education Association's (NEA) Rankings and Estimates (2008), California spent \$8,486 per pupil compared to the national average of \$9,100. California's per pupil spending is 93% of the national average. California ranked 29<sup>th</sup> in the nation on per pupil spending levels. In addition, spending on teacher per pupil is lower compared to other states. Consequently, California has 1 teacher for every 23 students compared to the national average of 1 teacher for every 16 students. In sum, California is currently serving the most diverse student population in our nation by spending less than the national average. This disparity merits a closer look at the rationale and structure of our state finance system if we are to support the achievement for all students.

The literature examining issues on California school finance describes a faulty finance system in desperate need of reform. Loeb et al. (2007) describe the current finance system as centralized, restrictive, and consisting of many regulations. In addition, Loeb et al. (2007) emphasize that the current finance system is "complex and irrational". Kirst (2007) contends that the "finance system is broken" and "unstable".

Finally, Hanushek (2007) affirms that our current finance system “does not work to promote the achievement of all kids.” Thus the different researchers examining various aspects of the finance system shed light on needed improvements that merit immediate attention.

The current finance system is centralized and restrictive (Loeb et al., 2007; Timar, 2006). It is centralized in the sense that how much money school districts have to spend each year is determined by the state legislature. Moreover, the majority of the funding is allocated by the governor and the legislature which decide how funds are allocated to districts serving a wide range of students with different needs. The funding for school districts comes from different sources. School districts receive 67% of their funding from the state, 22% from local resources, 9% from the federal government, and 2% from state lottery. Allocations are restrictive in that 40% of the state funds are restricted and must be applied to specific educational programs. These programs and the funds allocated to them are often referred to as “categorical.” This results in less flexibility in spending and constrains a district’s decision making processes when considering the educational needs of a diverse student population. School governing boards and district and site administrators must contend with state developed spending policies, which have resulted in more than 100 categorical funding programs. In an age of strong accountability for student achievement, and the need for financial resources to support achievement for all, it is problematic that so many resources are tied up in categorical programs, especially since there is no empirical research that speaks to the positive impact of the categorical programs on student achievement. In sum, the current system is highly complex, centralized, restrictive, and does not promote the achievement of all kids in California.

In the context of what researchers describe as a complex, broken, and irrational finance system, ironically, there is a strong emphasis on all students achieving high standards. The pursuit of an equitable, standards-based education is mainly a product of NCLB. Federal initiatives under NCLB are charging states with unprecedented responsibilities. For instance, states need to make certain that all students meet rigorous state standards in math and English Language Arts. Consequently, school districts are required to reduce the prevailing achievement gap between ethnic groups. The strong emphasis on all students achieving is strongly promoted by federal initiatives grounded on the principle of providing an equitable and quality education for all students.

Despite the strong emphasis on all students achieving high standards, California still lags behind other states in achievement in different subject areas (Loeb et al., 2007). For example, California ranked 7<sup>th</sup> lowest in eighth grade math in the nation. The state of California also performed third lowest in reading and 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest in science on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). In sum, California is performing at significantly lower levels compared to the rest of the nation. Hanushek (2007) captures the gravity of this problem with the following words, “we are not serving any of our student population very well” (n.p.).

The *Getting Down to Facts* (2007) research project revealed significant findings around issues of adequacy and educational finance. For instance, a number of public schools in California are having tremendous success with state and federal accountability systems. All students including those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are achieving at high levels in multiple measures of progress in school that are “Beating the Odds”. The *Getting Down to Facts* research project examined successful schools that are

beating the odds and revealed how several school level resource allocation practices are linked to high levels of student achievement. This groundbreaking study revealed school level key practices including teacher collaboration, data-driven decision making and instructional leadership. Most importantly, the research revealed that “what matters most are the ways in which the current and new resources are used” (Loeb et al. 2007, p. 4).

In spite of the advances in the field that the *Getting Down to Facts Project* (2007) brought forward, there is still a knowledge gap in the relationship between school and district level decision making practices and how they positively impact student achievement. We still need to learn more about how district administration supports school administrators in the area of school finance and allocating resources effectively to maximize student achievement. There is little research that emphasizes how successful school districts work as an organization and allocate human and fiscal resources to school sites. Most importantly, there is more to learn in how school level allocation practices in high performing high schools are linked to high levels of student achievement. This research study will assist in filling this knowledge gap.

### Problem Statement

Student achievement is the core mission of public education. Human and financial resources are essential to fulfilling this mission. As a publicly funded institution, public schools have finite and restricted resources that must be used strategically and efficiently to attain the highest student achievement levels for all students. In order to advance our understanding of resource allocation practices and their impact on student achievement, the issue addressed in this study is determining what district and site

resource allocation processes and practices are associated with student achievement levels.

The underlying assumption that guided the investigation and consequently the research questions is that through a rigorous examination of how three successful high schools and respective districts allocate resources, we will be better positioned to make informed decisions that will benefit student achievement.

### Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do successful schools and districts in which they are located allocate human and fiscal resources?
2. To what extent are decisions regarding resource allocation linked to student achievement data?
3. What practices do educators feel are linked to school success?

### Methodology

This study examined complex district and school level resource allocation practices and procedures that appeared to be linked to higher student achievement levels in three successful high schools and their respective districts. The focus of this study was three successful high schools serving at least 15% students enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP), 15 % enrolled in a program for second language learners, and at least 20% minorities.

The primary sources for rich data collection were from 12 interviews with district and school administrators and school board officials. The administrators and school board officials from the three successful high schools and districts were interviewed

using a semi structured interview protocol from the research project *Getting Down to Facts* (2008). The pool of participants from each district included the: (1) Superintendent, (2) Chief Business Officer, (3) High School Principal, and (4) a School Board Official. Each interview lasted an average of fifty minutes. The longest interview lasted 90 minutes.

Other important data sources included in the data analysis were extensive financial documents for each district found in the financial sections from three websites including Ed- Source, Ed Data, and School Services of California. In addition, financial, personnel and other school level information were collected from the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) found in the high schools' websites. Finally, the information from each high school's Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) was collected and analyzed. These online resources provided valuable and rich data on categorical funding and educational programs linked to student achievement.

#### Significance of the Study

The body of knowledge gained from the study may inform school practices and the identification of key resources linked to high levels of student achievement. As stated in the first chapter of this study, public schools in California are challenged with providing an adequate education for all students in a time where unprecedented budget cuts in K-14 public education are taking place (Ed Source, February 2008). Fortunately, within this context, there are a number of public schools serving a diverse student body who are experiencing high levels of student achievement. There is an opportunity to explore how these successful schools and districts strategically and effectively allocate available human and fiscal resources to further student achievement. Previous research

on successful schools has identified critical factors linked to student success at the school level (Perez et al., 2007; Parrish et al., 2006; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). There is a need to explore and understand how research-based factors at the district and school level coexist and interact to support student achievement. As such, this study sought to address this knowledge gap in the literature and examined the relationship between the factors through the lens of administrators and school board officials.

Most recently, researchers emphasizing adequacy examined how identified successful school sites and districts are allocating their human and fiscal resources. In a groundbreaking study, Perez et al. (2007) examined how successful schools in California, as determined by student achievement data, are allocating human and fiscal resources. In addition, the authors examined the type and amount of school level resources found in successful schools and compared them to resources in underperforming schools. The researchers primarily used qualitative data from phone interviews with principals to explore how school sites are using their human resources. In addition, Perez et al. (2007) used data from CBEDS to learn more about staffing and how much each district and school site is allocating financial resources. This study found that “successful schools” did not have more resources compared to schools that were not meeting state standards as measured by state assessments. Rather, it was how they used their resources that differentiated these schools from each other.

Although this study paved the way for how school districts and school sites are identified as successful and how they are using their resources, there is still a need to learn more about resource allocation processes and practices in successful schools and districts. There is a gap in the literature that speaks to the processes which successful



schools and districts use to make resource allocation decisions. This study contributes to filling this knowledge gap.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Overview

This chapter includes four sections of recent research examining issues of educational adequacy. The first section discloses how educational adequacy is defined in the emergent literature. Additionally, emphasis is placed on how different leading authors constructed the concept of adequacy. For instance, adequacy will be examined as the construct that is linked to academic achievement (outputs) and educational resources (inputs). Most importantly, this section will highlight how inputs and outputs are linked in educational adequacy studies.

The second section of this chapter focuses the discussion on four models of educational adequacy validated in the recent literature. This section also discloses the relative strengths and weaknesses of the four models. The application of these models to school districts is examined and the lessons learned from adequacy studies are reported.

The third section addresses the research question related to identifying *successful school districts* emphasizing how the *successful districts model* is used to measure educational adequacy in different school districts. This section discusses in depth a breakthrough research initiative, *Getting Down To Facts* (2007), which examines issues of adequacy in California public schools. These studies are the foundation for how the present study identified the successful high schools and districts that serve a diverse student population.

The final section of the literature review addresses the third question of this study which examines factors or elements observed in *successful school districts*. This section explains what successful schools are doing that might explain their success. Significant

findings regarding school practices and processes linked to student achievement are emphasized. The lessons learned from the research on elements of school effectiveness are the main framework for this study. Additionally, the interview protocols in this study are grounded on this framework of educational adequacy in the context of *successful school districts* (Perez et al., 2007).

### Definitions of Adequacy

A growing number of researchers have been examining questions around educational adequacy. Adequacy studies focus on how much money and educational resources are needed to ensure that all students receive an adequate or “sufficient” education (Baker, 2005). Researchers and practitioners across different fields use educational adequacy to refer to the different approaches, methods, or strategies used to determine or measure the cost of an adequate education for the average child (Picus, 2000, 2004).

Some researchers from an economic background have emphasized statistical approaches as a tool to measure the cost of an adequate education (Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001; Imazeki, 2006; Baker, 2005; Duncombe & Yinger, 2000; Chambers, Levin & Parrish, 2006). Other researchers have examined educational adequacy with an emphasis on the costs of educational resources (Odden, 2000; Monk & Theobald, 2001; Sweetland, 2002; Augenblick et al., 2002). Few researchers have linked the relationship between educational costs and desired student outcomes. There is little research examining how educational resources (inputs) are linked to student achievement (outputs) to provide an adequate education in successful high schools and their respective districts. Despite the differences in emphasis on adequacy, most of the researchers refer to four

approaches used to determine the cost of an adequate education (NCES, 2000; Verstegen, 2002; Picus, 2000, 2004; Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001; Baker, 2005; Odden, 2000; Monk & Theobald, 2001; Baker & Duncombe, 2004). The four approaches are: (1) *Successful School District Model*, (2) *Cost Function Model*, (3) *Professional Judgment Model*, and (4) *Whole School Reform Model*.

#### Adequacy Models

The majority of researchers consistently identify four approaches used to determine the cost of an adequate education. The four models include: (1) *Successful School District Model*, (2) *Cost Function Model*, (3) *Professional Judgment Model*, and (4) *Whole School Reform Model*. All four adequacy models have been developed and refined in different contexts and state finance systems. One key difference is the type of student achievement and resource data used to determine the cost of an adequate education. All previous research on these approaches has been predominantly quantitative and has included district and state level data. Monk (2000) asserts “there is no single best method for determining the cost of an adequate education” (p. 30). Other researchers have echoed this sentiment (Picus, 2004; Odden, 2000). Regardless of the differences in definitions, all the approaches seek to determine the cost of an adequate education (NCES, 2003).

#### *Successful School District Model*

The successful school district model is recognized as being one of the first methods used to determine the cost of an adequate education. Augenblick et al. (2002) are credited for introducing this model. They led the implementation of this model in several school districts in the state of Ohio. Other terminology researchers have used to

refer to this method include the Ohio adequacy model (Picus, 2000), resource cost model (Baker, 2005), exemplary districts (Verstegen, 2002), and empirical observation approach (NCES, 2003). The successful school district model is used as a term in the majority of the research studies to address the problem of identifying and quantifying resources needed for an adequate education (Picus, 2004; Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001; Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003; Addonizio, 2003).

The successful school district model involves identifying a set of school districts within a state that have achieved targeted performance objectives. In addition, the successful school districts' spending levels in different educational services are closely examined. Other district financial and resource allocation data is collected and analyzed in order to derive an average per pupil spending level. The average spending per pupil of these successful school districts is used as a statewide base cost of providing an adequate spending level per pupil (Picus, 2004). Data from school districts with high and low levels of property wealth are considered outliers and are excluded from the analysis. Findings from the state of Ohio and later from a study of Mississippi reveal the relative strengths and weaknesses of the successful school district method (NCES, 2003).

Research conducted in several states clearly reveals the strengths associated with the successful school district method (Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2003; Verstegen, 2002; NCES, 2003; Augenblick, Meyers, Silverstein, & Barkis, 2002; Addonizio, 2003, Perez et al., 2007; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). This method is less complex compared to other methods and involves fewer statistical techniques than other adequacy methods. This approach, compared to other models, is easier to understand and explain to stakeholders. Consequently, policymakers, administrators and stakeholders are more

likely to consider this approach to inform school finance practices and guide policy development. In addition, the base cost for an adequate education is based on empirical evidence from successful school districts (Augenblick et al., 2002). The relative effectiveness of this approach has been observed in Ohio, New Hampshire and Mississippi state finance systems. However, studies also show the challenges and shortcomings of this approach.

Researchers clearly point out the weaknesses of this approach tracing it back to a case study in Ohio (Verstegen, 2002). Several studies reveal that this method does not adjust the base cost to reflect additional costs associated with factors outside the control of the school district (Augenblick et al., 2002; Verstegen, 2002; Imazeki & Reschovsky, 2003). For example, the cost associated with special needs students is higher than the average student. Other special needs include learning disabilities, second language needs, and low socio economic level (NCES, 2003). Thus one shortcoming from this approach is that it does not account for additional costs associated with educating students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Another criticism from the research is that the average spending figures from successful school districts might not be applicable to other school districts due to differences in student demographics and other district characteristics. For example, an adequate spending level derived from data from a successful homogenous school district might not translate to a heterogeneous school district. As a final consideration, given the relative strengths and weaknesses of this approach, three states have successfully established costs for targeted outcomes using this adequacy model. The states are: Ohio, Mississippi, and New Hampshire. All three states used the average base cost observed in

successful school districts and additional criteria to adjust for the additional costs associated with educating children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The research on these studies does not describe specific changes in resource allocation practices but it does indicate that the school districts made some adjustments to their spending practices.

### *Cost Function Model*

The cost function model is the preferred approach to determine the cost of an adequate education among economist and statisticians, but not by practitioners and policy makers. This model emphasizes the use of complex statistical techniques to estimate the minimum amount of money necessary to achieve predetermined performance goals and includes controlling for school and student characteristics. Cost function analysis examines the relationship between inputs and outputs through statistical techniques. Using this model, cost function studies on school districts examine the relationship between spending levels in educational services and student achievement. District level finance and student performance data from standardized assessments are commonly used for the analysis. The research identifies several variations of the cost function approach. Within the family of cost function models, researchers have identified the *Jay Chambers Method* (Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001), *Cost Function Approach* (Baker, 2005; Picus, 2000, 2004; NCES, 2003), *Inference from Statistical Analysis* (NCES, 2003), and *Econometric Modeling* (Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001; Verstegen, 2002) forms of this model.

The research highlights several strengths from the cost function approach. For example, the cost function approach links educational cost with student outcomes whereas other approaches exclusively emphasize inputs or educational services (Baker,

2005). Reschovsky and Imazeki (2001) declare that this statistical approach to adequacy yields formulas and cost indices that consider the additional cost needed to provide an adequate education for students with special needs. In addition, cost function analysis yield indices that provide useful information on the additional costs of providing an adequate education that are outside the control of school districts. By *indices* it is meant statistically derived factors that positively impact student achievement, which can assist districts and schools make best use of resources. For example, research suggests that the cost of recruiting teachers in certain regional areas is higher, especially in high poverty school districts. This is more prevalent in districts with high levels of student poverty. This emphasis on statistical methods to derive the costs for an adequate education also brings some challenges when used to inform practice in finance.

Econometric studies in New York, Wisconsin and Texas school districts speak to the challenges from using the cost function approach. First, the complex statistical techniques used to derive the cost estimates of an adequate education have been difficult for different stakeholders to understand (Odden, 2000). Consequently, legislators, school administrators, researchers and finance practitioners have found it challenging to inform their practice and develop policy through this method (Verstegen, 2002). In that regard, preliminary findings from the econometric studies in New York, Wisconsin, and Texas yielded mixed results, depending on which data set on spending was included. The cost indices and formulas derived from the districts were not the same across schools with similar characteristics. Findings were not conclusive in these studies. In sum, the cost function approach is useful in identifying the additional costs for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and for costs that are outside the control of school districts.



However, other research reveals that this approach needs to be coupled with a more practical approach that links funding practices to student outcomes.

### *Professional Judgment Model*

A third approach referenced in the literature is the professional judgment model (Picus, 2000, 2004; NCES, 2003; Baker, 2005, Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001; Addonizio, 2003). Other studies identify this approach as the resource cost method (Verstegen, 2002, 2007). For this approach, a panel of experts in the field of education is responsible for identifying the types and quantities of educational resources needed to provide a basic or adequate education for a typical elementary, middle school and high school (Augenblick et al., 2002). For example, educators and other stakeholders identify the types of personnel, appropriate ratio of students to teachers, supplies, materials, and other related educational resources deemed necessary for a basic education (Verstegen, 2002). Once the essential “ingredients” are identified, cost estimates for these resources are calculated to produce average costs. Two studies reveal the strengths and challenges around the application of this approach to state finance systems (Augenblick et al., 2002; Verstegen, 2002).

Empirical evidence from case studies in Wyoming and Illinois speak to the strengths of this approach (Augenblick et al, 2002; Verstegen, 2002; Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001). First, the professional experts from the state of Wyoming finance system found the figures and cost estimates relatively easy to understand. In contrast to the cost function model, the professional judgment method does not involve complex statistical analysis. Consequently, the cost estimates created for the state Wyoming finance system were easy to understand and apply (Augenblick et al., 2002). A second benefit is that the

cost estimates of the basic ingredients are derived from a panel of experts that are in some form connected to the field of education and have a vested interest. In addition, the panel of professional experts who identify the “ingredients” may use empirical research to inform their practices. Finally, the established base cost of an adequate education for the average child may be adjusted to account for differences in cost through additional funding as evidenced in Wyoming and Illinois. These states have capitalized on the strengths of this approach as evidenced by their success in revamping their finance systems.

The research reveals the challenges and shortcomings that have been experienced in the application of the professional judgment approach in several districts. First, there is the potential bias embedded in the “panel of experts” making the decisions on resources and cost (First & Deluca, 2003). Ultimately, decisions on adequacy targets and resources may be based on political deliberations rather than on research based practices (Odden, 2002; Sweetland, 2003; Baker & Duncombe, 2004). Furthermore, Addonizio (2003) asserts that this method does not specifically link cost or expenditures to student achievement levels. Finally, Addonizio (2003) and Verstegen (2002) observed that this method does not provide a systematic process to account for differences in the cost of educating children with special needs. As a final consideration, the challenges and strengths referenced from the literature reveal that this approach might benefit from a more careful consideration of a disciplined process for accounting special student needs and school district characteristics.

*Whole School Reform Model*

The fourth approach to developing an adequacy target in school finance is the *Whole School Reform Model*. Other terminology associated with this approach includes the *resource cost model* (Picus, 2000), *whole school design* (Addonizio, 2003; NCES, 2003; Picus, 2004), *comprehensive school reform* (Augenblick et al., 2003), and *costing comprehensive school-wide reform* (Verstegen, 2002). For this method, the cost of an adequate education is based on the estimated cost of implementing school wide reforms in typically low poverty and/or low achieving schools. The estimates are derived from school and district finance data. In addition, cost estimates are derived from careful analysis of instructional programs, personnel, and other educational services provided under whole school reforms (Addonizio, 2003). Verstegen (2002) asserts that there are currently seven prototypical school reform models that have been implemented in schools with high concentration of low-income students. Two of the most common reform models are *Red Wings* and *Success for All*.

In contrast to the other three approaches, there is not enough empirical evidence that speaks to the effectiveness or shortcomings of this approach. The lack of empirical research on this approach suggests that the cost estimates from current reform models need to be interpreted with caution (Addonizio, 2003; Augenblick et al., 2002; Verstegen, 2002). Adequacy targets derived from one reform model in a school setting might not be applicable to other settings or schools due to differences in student populations (Reschovsky & Imazeki, 2001). In addition, this method has yet to establish a relationship between costs and student achievement targets in a systematic fashion as evidence in the cost function approach. Finally, this approach does not account for additional costs associated with differences in economies of scale. As stated earlier,

when we put all approaches in perspective, this strategy has yet to evolve as a systematic method of setting adequacy targets.

### California Studies Applying Successful School District Model

The central idea behind the successful school district model is the same across research studies from different states. These studies identify successful schools or districts that meet specified student performance benchmarks on state assessments. The performance benchmarks are determined mostly by the state department of education or by the state's legislature. Consequently, schools or districts meeting the performance benchmarks are examined in terms of their revenues and basic expenditures. A base cost is derived from the observed spending of successful school districts to determine the amount and type of resources needed to provide an "adequate" education. It is a common practice to report the base cost in the form of per pupil spending.

There are important underlying assumptions behind the successful school district model to consider. A major assumption similar to the other adequacy models is that the amount and type of educational resources are linked to student success. Another assumption behind the successful school district model is that state assessments are a valid measure of student achievement. In addition, the assumption is that student achievement can be measured through standardized assessments. The underlying assumptions of adequacy studies may inform and guide future studies in examining and enriching the body of knowledge focusing on school and district level factors that appear related to school success. In addition, it should be noted that these assumptions, although relatively simple to understand, are limited in that not all factors may be observed during a study of a successful school district.

*Advancements in Methodology*

Important lessons can be drawn from the different educational adequacy studies using the successful school district model in California. There are two instrumental and recent studies that advanced the methodology for identifying successful school districts. Perez et al. (2007) and Gandara and Rumberger (2006) departed from other studies because both controlled for student demographics when examining successful school districts. This was a major breakthrough in adequacy studies. These studies were designed and grounded on previous research indicating that certain student and district characteristics were associated with higher educational costs (Imazeki 2001; Baker, 2005). In this way, these studies examined adequacy in the context of different student needs and the cost associated with educating children in California.

Gandara and Rumberger (2006) conducted a case study of five high performing schools in California. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the types and amount of resources needed to provide an adequate education in high performing schools with a high concentration of second language learners. The authors examined assessment data on student performance on English language arts specifically for second language learners. Most importantly, the authors observed and reported the types of resources that were linked with high student performance. The authors found that principals and teachers that were interviewed as part of the study identified critical factors or areas that appeared related to higher student achievement levels and they include: (1) highly qualified teachers, (2) additional instructional time, (3) professional development, (4) ongoing assessment, (5) parent involvement, (6) ongoing assessments

to inform practice, and (7) a safe and secure environment. These factors are discussed in depth in the next section of the literature review.

Perez et al. (2007) conducted an unprecedented mixed method approach to identify successful schools in California and learn about resource allocation practices linked to high student achievement levels. In contrast to previous studies examining district level assessment data, Perez et al. (2007) used assessment data from individual schools to identify Beating the Odds (BTO) schools and low performing schools (LP). The authors used a regression model to identify high and low performing schools controlling for student demographics and school characteristics. The regression model included math and English language arts assessment data for English language learners (ELL), students participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch program (FRPL), Hispanics and African Americans. In this way, Perez et al. (2007) identified BTO and LP schools, which could be compared to learn more about school practices that promoted student achievement and the challenges the LP schools experienced. One major finding from this study is that successful schools did not have more resources than low performing schools with similar demographics. In addition they found the following factors appeared related to high levels of student achievement in successful schools: (1) high quality teachers, (2) standards-based curriculum, (3) coherent instruction, (4) assessment data to inform instruction, (5) teacher collaboration, (6) intervention and student services and, (7) high expectations for student learning.

A second and equally important contribution to the methodology on successful school districts by Perez et al. (2007) is a qualitative study on resource allocation practices in BTO and LP schools. Guided by a research-based framework on school

effectiveness, the authors developed a protocol to interview schools principals. The protocol focused on school elements or factors that appeared related to school success as noted by previous research. In this way, the authors interviewed principals about ELL and FRPL programs and parental education in a “hand-picked” sample of BTO schools. Data collected from the principal phone interviews corroborated findings from previous research on elements of school effectiveness. These elements include: (1) high quality teachers, (2) standards-based curriculum, (3) coherent instruction, (4) assessment data to inform instruction, (5) teacher collaboration, (6) intervention and student services and, (7) high expectations for student learning.

#### Factors Related to Student Achievement

This section addresses question number two of this study. The literature review includes three qualitative case studies conducted in California K-12 public schools. In addition, the studies included in this section are grounded on effective schools and educational adequacy theoretical frameworks. The research includes empirical studies of successful public schools in California serving a diverse student body including Hispanics, English Language Learners (ELL), and students participating in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) program. The studies focused on schools that experienced success with the current state and federal accountability systems. In other words, the students in high performing schools are achieving higher proficiency levels on state assessments compared to similar students in other schools. In sum, this section highlights lessons learned from three case studies on factors and school practices that appear to be linked to higher student outcomes.

The research studies conducted in successful schools consistently identify key elements linked to student success. The school organization, structures, practices and services observed and noted in the case studies conducted in successful schools can be categorized into the following areas:

- a) High Quality Teachers (Gandara & Rumberger, 2006; Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007)
- b) Standards-based Curriculum (Gandara & Rumberger 2006; Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007)
- c) Coherent Instruction (Perez et al., 2007; Parrish et al., 2006)
- d) Student Services (Perez et al., 2007; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006)

In addition to the factors listed above, the case studies highlight other critical factors that appear related to school success. For instance, the ongoing use of student achievement data to inform instruction is noted in the research. Consequently, the data informs instruction in the classroom and also guides teacher collaboration and professional development activities. The authors of the three case studies note that having high expectations for all students has a positive impact on student achievement. As a final thought, the research emphasizes that the factors linked to student achievement work as a whole and student success depends on the complex interaction of all factors (Perez et al., 2007).

#### *Standards-Based Curriculum*

The evidence from the case studies is clear; a standards-based curriculum guides the work of instructional leaders and staff in successful schools. The strong emphasis on standards is the most frequently cited factor in successful schools research. School and



district administrators declare that teachers are accountable for teaching the content standards. Principals also noted that it is important to align standards-based curriculum with state assessments (Perez et al., 2007). The three case studies indicate that all teachers from successful schools are required to teach the content standards (Perez et al., 2007; Parrish et al., 2006; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). Most importantly, school and district administration provide the support and training to increase teacher capacity on organizing teaching and learning around the California content standards.

Perez et al. (2007) highlight the relationship between the content standards and the curriculum materials. The school districts and, in some cases, the school sites decide which curriculum materials will be used to teach the content standards. In this way, schools and districts make critical decisions on the curriculum materials that best match the student population they serve. Gandara and Rumberger (2006) also highlight the importance of instructional materials. They assert that curriculum materials need to match the diverse needs, interests and background of the students, especially if a school serves second language learners and minorities. In sum, the research suggests that instructional materials aligned with the state standards that address the specific learning needs of students is a critical element to student achievement.

### *Coherent Instruction*

The research on successful schools highlights the relationship between a standards-based curriculum and instruction. As stated earlier, student success depends on the interaction of all the factors that are related to student achievement. In this way, classroom instruction that includes relevant instructional materials is another critical factor related to school success. The research from the case studies reveals that

instruction in successful schools has three characteristics which, when skillfully connected to other important elements of school culture, produce coherent instruction.

First, instruction is linked to a school-wide vision or common goal. For instance, Perez et al. (2007) observed that some schools have a school-wide focus on the California standards. Similarly, Parrish et al. (2006) found that effective schools had a strong emphasis on literacy across all subject areas. Effective literacy initiatives focused on academic language specific to subject areas. Teachers in successful schools are required to organize and deliver instruction based on state standards. Perez et al. (2007) also discovered that some principals leading Beating the Odds (BTO) schools hold teachers accountable for teaching the state standards. Finally, these findings corroborate previous effective schools research on curriculum and instruction (Parrish et al., 2006; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006).

A second observation from the case studies is that there is consistency in instruction within and across grade levels (Perez et al., 2007). For example, teachers use a pacing plan or curriculum guide that guides the content of the instruction. This allows teachers within a grade level to be on the same page which results in effective dialogues focusing on solving problems on curriculum and instruction and sharing of best practices and instructional strategies. In addition, this ensures that all teachers cover the standards during the school year. Similarly, Parrish et al. (2006) found that teachers used similar instructional practices and strategies to teach specific standards. In this way, teachers looked at assessment data to determine how to modify or refine instructional practices to best serve students and increase achievement levels.

A third observation is that teachers differentiate instruction based on student performance (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). The teachers from successful schools have the capacity and support to use student performance data from district benchmarks, common and state assessments to inform instruction. More specifically, in schools serving a diverse student population with a wide range of academic and language needs, teachers have the capacity to differentiate instruction based on student needs. The training and support on differentiating instruction comes from different resources. Perez et al. (2007) observed that support comes from instructional coaches who meet and collaborate with teachers to decide how to interpret achievement data and to inform instruction accordingly.

### *High Quality Teachers*

Another frequently cited factor related to student achievement is the characteristics, skill sets and services that high quality teachers provide for the students. The evidence from the three case studies suggests that teachers are highly collaborative. This is consistent with research on school effectiveness that suggests that teachers develop capacity mostly through ongoing peer collaboration (Parrish et al., 2006). A second characteristic of high quality teachers is that they believe that all students can learn. High quality teachers also have high expectations for all students. Principals in the three case studies reported that teachers care for student learning and go above and beyond to make sure students are making progress towards the state standards. This commitment is reflected in the manner in which teachers find methods and resources to make sure students have the support they need to meet the standards. Finally, principals repeatedly reported that teacher leadership is crucial for student achievement. Teachers

in successful schools are leaders and take on various leadership roles. In this way, teachers are involved in the decision making process, especially on decisions that impact their work as educators.

The three case studies note different support systems and training used to build teacher capacity and secure high quality staff. For instance, Perez et al. (2007) observed that the principals from BTO schools secure regular collaboration time for teachers to share best practices and analyze student achievement data to inform instruction. Similarly, teachers build capacity within their school by sharing instructional practices and sharing their unique strengths as instructors. Another source of teacher support is training offered through the district. Parrish et al. (2006) emphasize that district leadership is involved in building capacity at the school level. District administrators provide support to schools and offer needed training identified by school principals and teachers. In addition, the authors found that the district leadership builds in three professional development days for each year for teachers to attend conferences or workshops relevant to their subject area.

Perez et al. (2007) found that instructional coaches play a critical role in developing teacher capacity. Successful schools hire instructional coaches to support a team of teachers. Coaches work with teachers in using student achievement data to inform instruction. In some schools, instructional coaches facilitate teacher collaboration through the use of assessment data. They help teachers focus on what is important from student achievement data and how the information translates into instructional practices in the classroom to support students with different learning needs. Finally, instructional

coaches demonstrate instructional strategies for teachers to observe, reflect, and apply to their own classrooms.

The case study research also suggests that peer coaching and mentoring is used to develop teacher capacity. Perez et al. (2007) found that informal or formal collaboration between effective and new teachers is an effective way to support new staff. In the case of struggling teachers, the principal deliberately assigns an effective teacher to a struggling teacher and gives them time needed to improve instructional practice. The struggling teachers are offered ongoing support and are also held accountable for their performance.

#### *Assessment and Data Driven Decisions*

The research suggests that successful schools have structures, processes, resources and practices that involve using assessment data to make critical decisions that impact instruction, curriculum, and staffing. Parrish et al. (2006) and Perez et al. (2007) found that schools and districts use several assessment measures to monitor student progress, inform instruction, and monitor teacher practice.

State assessments and district benchmarks are the most common measures of student achievement used by successful schools. The California Standards Test (CST), California English Language Development Test (CELDT), and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) were the most cited in the three case studies. The authors also found that schools and districts developed core subject benchmarks aligned to state test and used the results to inform instruction.

Successful schools monitor student progress in different ways. For example, Perez et al. (2007) found that in some schools CST data is used to create a profile or

“comprehensive picture” of each student. In this way, teachers and staff know exactly the instruction each student needs. In another example, teachers use benchmark results on a weekly basis to identify where students are excelling and where some are struggling. In some BTO schools, teachers and students review the benchmark results together to find out what teachers and students need to focus on next. This opportunity allows students to have ownership of their own results.

Successful schools also use several assessment measures to inform instruction. For example, Perez et al. (2007) found that teachers in successful schools review benchmark results every six weeks to plan the next unit of study and identify skills or knowledge that need to be reviewed. Teachers in BTO schools also use assessment data to identify which instructional practices are more effective than others. Perez et al. (2007) also observed that principals ask teachers to share their strategies with their peers if their students demonstrate high success rates on district and school benchmarks.

Principals from the case studies also reported several benefits from common assessments. For instance, when teachers give the same test in the same course, comparisons can be made to identify students who are performing at high levels and identify best practices. In turn, teachers who experience success with certain instructional practices can collaborate with other teachers who are not experiencing high success rates. Finally, data from frequent common assessments can guide decisions around professional development and inform other interventions or educational programs for struggling students.

Perez et al. (2007) found that high achieving schools used data monitoring systems. More specifically, the authors found that BTO schools invested in computer

software programs used to store and analyze assessment data. Teachers and administrators used software programs to make group or individual reports. Consequently, these reports are then used to inform instruction at the classroom level or inform educational programs at the school level and additional interventions for students who need additional time to make progress towards the standards.

### *Student Services and Interventions*

The research on successful schools consistently emphasizes the importance of having a clear plan of action to support students who do not make adequate progress towards meeting state standards. The high performing schools included in the research studies experienced success with students from low socio economic backgrounds and language minorities. In contrast to other research findings where these students tend to under perform, students in successful schools demonstrated higher achievement levels in state and district assessments than expected. The research clearly suggests that successful schools had a clear plan for helping students catch up. In this way, schools developed methods, practices and processes for using student achievement data to develop and implement educational programs, services, and interventions to ensure that students meet state standards.

Successful schools offer educational programs and services beyond the instructional day to help students catch up. For instance, Perez et al. (2007) and Parrish et al. (2006) found that after school tutoring programs and Saturday school sessions were used to help struggling students. These extended day programs are typically facilitated and taught by certificated teachers or instructional aides. It is during the instructional program that students benefit from one on one academic support. In addition, Parrish et

al. (2006) found that several high performing schools serving language minorities extended the regular school year to provide more instructional time for students. In sum, it is clear that high performing schools provide additional interventions and ensure that students have additional instructional time and support. In this way, schools find creative ways to support all students.

Another important factor observed in successful schools is counseling services (Perez et al., 2007; Parrish et al., 2006; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). The authors found that many of the students from low socio economic backgrounds deal with issues that get in the way of their learning. Consequently, effective schools ensure that struggling students receive counseling services through school counselors. Other successful schools that do not have full time school counselors work with outside counseling agencies in the community to support their students. Gandara and Rumberger (2006) found that counseling programs targeting language minorities are an effective resource. The counseling programs help newcomer students learn more about the school culture and other student expectations. In summary, it is evident that effective schools provide the interventions and services that target specific needs. The interventions observed in the research are effective because they address the specific needs of their students.

#### *Theoretical Framework of Achievement Factors*

Figure 2.1 illustrates a theoretical framework that Perez et al. (2007) developed from their examination of school and district level factors linked to student achievement in successful schools in California.



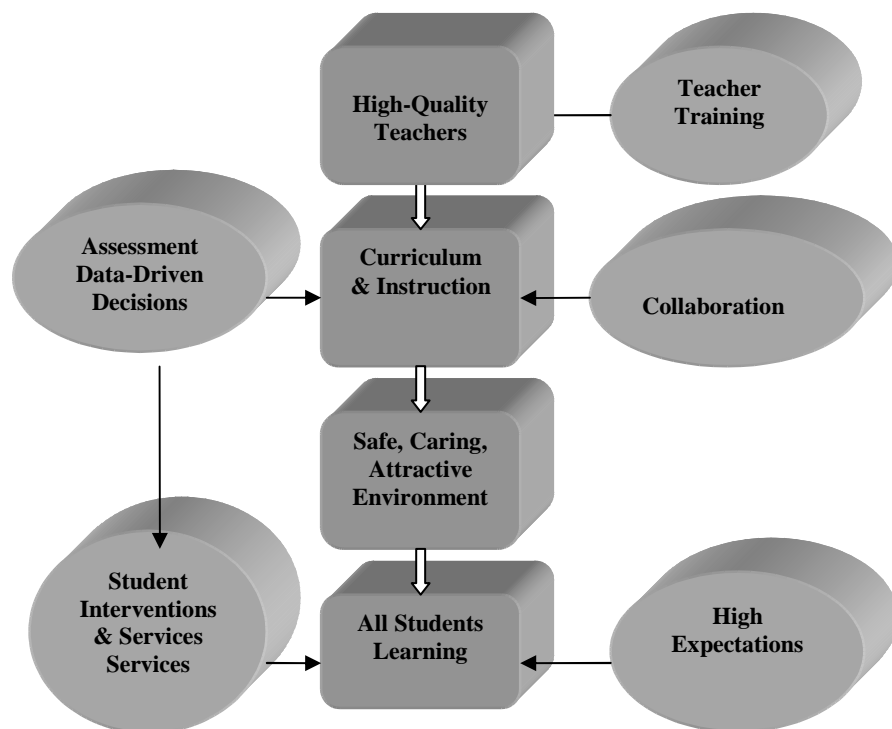


Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework on Factors Linked to Student Achievement (Perez et al., 2007)

High-Quality teachers and staff provide high quality coherent instruction to students with different educational needs. School and district administrators play a key role in securing and supporting high quality staff. Administrators provide the time and other resources, such as collaboration time, counseling services and professional development to build individual and organizational capacity. High-Quality staff develop instructional and leadership skills through collaboration and staff development. The training and professional development opportunities are used to develop and implement a coherent and standards based instruction for all students.

All research studies emphasize that the factors work as a whole and there is no single recipe for school success. Rather, it is the interaction between these factors that

are attributable to school success. Following this line of research this study dug deeper into the factors in the form of practices, services, and processes evident in successful schools. Question number two of this study guided the data collection around factors related to success and that impact student learning.

### *Research Limitations*

There are some important limitations to acknowledge in the California adequacy studies. Future research will benefit from building on strengths from the California studies and addressing the limitations as they relate to methodology for identifying successful school districts. For instance, Perez et al. (2007) and Gandara and Rumberger (2006) collected mathematics and English language arts assessment data by grade level. The drawback from grade level aggregated data is the masking of possible achievement gaps between ethnic groups and language minorities. When school data is collected in this fashion, it is impossible to know if all students are achieving high levels as measured by state assessments or meeting state objectives. Future research needs to address this problem by aggregating student performance data by program or by subgroup. If research studies are to impact and improve practice, it will be necessary to get information by subgroups from successful schools and learn how they perform in relation to state standards.

A second limitation of California adequacy studies methods is the single sources used to collect data on the culture and practices of successful school districts. For instance, Perez et al. (2007) chose to conduct one-hour interviews with the school principals of successful schools to learn more about how schools use different resources. The use of one source assumes that the important practices and culture of a successful

school is captured through the school principal. It is important to recognize that the work of successful schools exist in the context of leadership from district administration.

Unfortunately, California studies focused on the individual schools and one data source (administration) to capture the complex interactions of school human and fiscal resources.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes two sections related to the methodology. First, this chapter provides a broad overview of the research design in relation to the purpose and questions of this study. This section also includes a justification for applying a comprehensive case study strategy with an emphasis on the logic of design, multiple sources of evidence to address research questions, and theory on effective schools guiding data collection and analysis. The second section includes a detailed discussion of eight elements guiding the qualitative research design including: (1) research questions (2) context (3) data collection methods, (4) data analysis and management, (5) issues of validity and reliability, (6) role of the researcher, and (7) limitations of the study.

### Overview

This study examined complex and ongoing interactions of school factors related to student achievement in three successful high schools and their respective districts. The factors of interest to this study were grounded on effective schools and adequacy frameworks illustrated in Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2. As such, this study focused on district and school level resource allocation practices, procedures, operations, and student services that appear related to high levels of student performance on various achievement measures including state assessments. In this way, three successful high schools and districts serving at least 15% of students enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP), 15% enrolled in the English Language Development program, and a large number of minorities were the context of this multiple case study. The primary sources of rich data collection were from 12 interviews and school and district online documents. There were four participants interviewed from each school district, the

superintendent, the chief business officer, the principal and a school board official. All participants were interviewed using a semi structured interview protocol grounded on effective schools and educational adequacy frameworks.

This study sought to explore how district administration was involved in supporting successful schools through the allocation of human and fiscal resources. In this way, district administrators involved in the decision making of resources were interviewed. The study also sought to understand the key players in the district office that were directly involved in decisions that affect school level resources. In addition, this study sought to understand how the district works with school leaders to provide adequate resources needed to support all students in achieving proficiency targets. As such, district administrators were interviewed using a semi structured interview protocol. On average, each interview lasted 50 minutes. The interview questions used were grounded on previous research findings on effective district practices (Gandara & Rumberger, 2006; Perez et al., 2007; Parrish et al., 2006). Most importantly, the voice of district administration was included in this study by interviewing key personnel involved in resource allocation decisions. In this way, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge and advanced the methodology.

The body of knowledge gained from the study may inform school practices and the identification of key resources related to student achievement. As stated in the first chapter of this study, public schools in California are challenged with providing an adequate education for all students in a time where unprecedented budget cuts in K-14 public education are taking place (Ed Source, February 2008). Fortunately, within this context, there are a number of schools serving a diverse student body who are

experiencing high success rates. Thus, there is an opportunity to explore how these successful schools and districts allocate available human and fiscal resources.

Previous research on successful schools has identified critical factors related to student achievement at the school level (Perez et al., 2007; Parrish et al., 2006; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). These studies have focused on collecting school level information and have advanced the research on effective schools. Yet, there is a need to explore and understand how research-based factors at the district and school level coexist and interact to support student achievement. As such, this study sought to fill this knowledge gap in the literature and examined organizational resource allocation practices through the lens of school and district administrators and elected school board officials.

#### Justification for Multiple Case Study Research Strategy

##### *Logic of Design*

Yin (2003) who is a leading authority in methodology notes that a case study designs is an empirical inquiry that “investigates contemporary phenomena within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). In application of this strategy, this study sought to explore and understand complex interactions between school and district level factors that are related to student achievement. The phenomenon of interest was the decision making around resources available in successful high schools and districts. The underlying assumption that guided this study was that existing educational resources in successful high schools and districts are related to high levels of student achievement. In this way, a case study approach was most suitable to examine the culture, structures, and practices in successful high schools that appear related to high levels of student achievement.

### *Multiple Sources of Evidence*

To gain a deeper understanding of how resources are linked to high levels of student achievement, multiple sources of evidence were examined. For instance, three high school principals were interviewed to explore decision making at the school level and also the resources that appear to be related to high levels of student achievement. District office administrators were interviewed to investigate how they allocated resources to school sites and explore other decision making processes. For each successful district, one representative from the governing school board was interviewed to gain insight as to how the school board works with district and school administration to make resource allocation decisions. Finally, this study examined school and district archives and records in an effort to triangulate the evidence from all sources and unveil similarities and differences (Yin, 2003).

An extensive analysis of each high school's most recent Western Association of School Credentialing (WASC), School Accountability Report Card (SARC) and Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) was conducted. These documents provided significant amount of rich data that informed all three research questions. These documents provided rich data on different school level financial and resource allocation practices and services that are linked to high levels of student achievement. In addition, a detailed analysis of district level financial information was conducted using data available on the Ed-Data website. Each school district's general budget was analyzed extensively to gain an insight as to how each district links priorities with school services and personnel. In sum, the strength of the case study approach of including multiple sources of data collection and evidence benefited this case study.

### *Theory Guiding Data Collection*

Yin (2003) asserts that there are benefits from using prior theory to guide data collection in case studies. The data collected in this case study is grounded primarily on two theoretical frameworks. First, lessons learned from effective schools research guided the data collection. As such, the focus of data collection was on previously identified school and district level factors that appear related to higher student achievement. Furthermore, theory on educational adequacy emphasizing the successful schools approach guided the development of criterion used to identify the schools and districts that have experienced success with the state and federal accountability systems including API and AYP. In addition, previous research on educational adequacy was used to focus this study on identified critical elements and practices in schools that were linked to high levels of student achievement as reported by school principals. As a final thought, this study also validated unanticipated themes or factors that surfaced from the 12 interviews and from the extensive document analysis. The interview protocols were also used as a formative tool to record and probe deeper on unanticipated themes. Furthermore, the unanticipated themes that surfaced were used to guide collection for subsequent interviews and also for analyzing school and district documents related to school finance.

### **Research Design**

This study applied a multiple case study design to examine how human and fiscal resources at three successful high schools and their respective districts are linked to high levels of student achievement. More specifically, this study sought to understand how research-based educational resources including high quality teachers, collaboration time, data systems, and student services among others were developed and sustained in three



successful high schools and districts. Figure 2.1 illustrates the critical factors associated with student achievement that previous research has identified through empirical studies.

The underlying assumption that guided this investigation is that the amount and types of educational resources available to schools and districts are linked to student achievement levels. Furthermore, successful schools develop and implement processes where decisions around human and fiscal resources are linked to student achievement data. In this way, a careful examination of how human and fiscal resources are developed and implemented in successful organizations is an effective and valid method to learn more about educational adequacy. This approach helped to advance our understanding of how to use resources more effectively to support all students learning at high levels. The following questions guided the investigation:

1. How do successful schools and districts in which they are located allocate human and fiscal resources?
2. To what extent are decisions regarding resource allocation linked to student achievement data?
3. What practices do educators feel are linked to school success?

#### *Successful Schools and Districts Selection*

Three successful high schools and their respective districts were examined to address the main research questions emphasizing district and school level resource allocation processes and practices. The identification and selection of successful schools was mainly based on the methodology and guidelines used in three groundbreaking studies conducted in California. In this way, this study used student achievement data from the AYP and API accountability system and student demographics (Perez et al.,

2007; Parrish et al., 2006; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). The selection of successful high schools and district focused on the following observable student achievement measures: school proficiency rates on math and English language arts state assessments, Academic Performance Index (API) scores for the schools and districts, and API scores for significant subgroups.

The selection of the three successful high schools and their respective districts was a disciplined and multi-step process. This study drew upon on district and school level site data as primary source used to obtain student achievement and demographic data required for the state and federal accountability systems.

This study first identified all high schools in California who met all the criteria for the Academic Yearly Progress (AYP) for 2007-2008. More specifically, proficiency rates of students in English Language Arts and mathematics were carefully examined. In addition, other student achievement measures that were examined and helped in the selection process for successful high schools and districts included high school graduation rates and test participation and proficiency rates of significant subgroups including English Language Learners (ELL) and students participating in the Free and Reduced Price Meal program.

After all high schools that met all AYP criteria for 2007-2008 were identified, this study then screened and identified the high schools with student demographics similar to the state average. The “compare schools” feature from the Ed.-Data website was used to identify the high schools serving at least 15% of second language learners and also 15% of students participating in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch program. Both of these figures represent state averages for our students enrolled in public K-12 schools. The

results from this search also included math and English language arts proficiency rates for each high school. From this list, the top twenty-five high schools with the highest proficiency rates for English Language Arts and math were selected as the “top 25” pool of successful high schools.

The next step in the selection process involved narrowing down the list of twenty-five schools with the highest proficiency rates for English language arts and mathematics. The high schools that pre select their students based on student and/or parent interviews or achievement scores were excluded from the list because this study focuses on successful schools that have open enrollment to students living within the school boundaries. In addition, charter schools and atypical schools such as magnet schools were eliminated from the list.

The researcher then examined student achievement data from the Accountability Reports search tool from the Ed-Data website to gain a deeper insight on student achievement. The data analysis focused on the school-wide API growth for the most recent academic school year, 2007-2008. Most importantly the API growth for all significant subgroups was strongly considered. The researcher also examined high school graduation rates and proficiency rates for all significant subgroups on math and English language arts assessments. Following the data analysis and screening process, the researcher then organized and created a student achievement and demographics profile for all schools and districts. The profiles included the following data:

- a) School-wide API growth target
- b) School-wide growth API
- c) API targets for all significant subgroups
- d) API growth for all significant subgroups
- e) Statewide API rank

- f) Similar schools API rank
- g) Graduation rates
- h) School-wide English language arts and math proficiency rates
- i) English and Math proficiency rates for all significant subgroups.
- j) Percent of students participating in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) program.
- k) Percent of students participating in the English Language Development (ELD) program.

After the school and district data profiles were completed the researcher selected the top five high schools and districts that demonstrated through different academic achievement measures that students were achieving at high levels. All schools that did not meet the school-wide 2007-2008 API target were eliminated. Next, schools that did not meet the API target growth for more than one of their significant subgroups were eliminated. Finally, the schools showing the highest increase in API growth for their subgroups, highest graduation rates, and highest proficiency rates in English Language Arts and mathematics were selected for this multi case study.

#### Successful Schools and Districts Profiles

##### *District A*

District A is a K-12 unified school district located in a southern California suburban area. The district covers four cities and suburbs in the north part of San Diego County. The district serves 17, 851 students from diverse ethnic and language backgrounds. The district has two comprehensive high schools, one continuation school, three middle schools and 11 elementary schools. In addition, there are two charter schools in the district that operate independently from the school district. The middle school serves students with home schooling needs. A recently opened high tech charter

high school emphasizes technology and career technical education. There is one community college and a distinguished four-year university located in the area.

Student enrollment in all grade levels has significantly increased for several years. The district student enrollment increased from approximately 10,000 to 17,000 in ten years. Unlike the majority of school districts within the county, the student enrollment has grown an average of 6.3 % over the last three years. Consequently, an increase in student enrollment brings in additional dollars to the district to support student learning.

The district serves students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Currently, the district serves a student body comprised of 47.3% Latino/Hispanic, 39.3% White, 3.2% African American, 4.6% Asian, and 3.2% Filipino (CDE, 2008). In addition, 25% of students are classified as English Language Learners (ELL), 38% of students participate in the Free and Reduced Price Meal (FRPM) program, and 25% of students qualify for the Compensatory Education Program.

The Academic Performance Index and Adequate Yearly Progress for District A show significant gains in student achievement for the majority of students and the significant subgroups. That is, in one year, District A increased the Academic Performance Index from 785 to 810, which is a 25 point increase. The two comprehensive high schools increased the Academic Performance Index by 39 points. In addition, the English Learner API increased by 35 points in one year. Finally the district met all 34 criteria for the Adequate Yearly Progress. The district achieved significantly higher proficiency rates in all core areas compared to other similar districts throughout the state. These indicators suggest that the students are making remarkable progress in state assessments and surpass the district, county and state averages.

*District B*

District B is a K-12 unified school district and serves 37,464 students. The district lies in the northern part of Fresno County in Central California. The district has five high schools, one continuation school, five middle schools, and 32 elementary schools. One school board official described the community as a “conservative based part of California.” He added “families are very, very proactive with their children’s education” (personal communication, December 23, 2008). Similarly, the school Chief Business Officer recognized that the parents in the community have been very supportive in passing bonds to build new schools. The superintendent affirmed “We do have tremendous community support” (personal communication, September 30, 2008).

The Chief Business Officer recognized a trend in increased student enrollment and characterized the district as “a growing school district”. The student enrollment has been growing since the 1970s. That is, student enrollment has grown by approximately 700 students each year for the past several years. In the span of seven years, the student enrollment has significantly increased by more than 13%.

A second trend in the district is a diverse and changing student population. The student body is comprised of 50.2% White, 23.8% Hispanic, 13.3% Asian, 3.5% African American, 1.6% Filipino, 1% American Indian, and .2% Pacific Islander. The Hispanic population attending the district has increased compared to other ethnicities. In just seven years, the Hispanic population has grown by approximately 4%. In contrast, students identified as White has declined by 10%. Consequently these changing demographics have brought more diversity and the district has also experienced shifts in students qualifying for specialized programs.

District B has experienced an increase in student participation in three specialized programs that provide supplementary education to disadvantaged students. For instance, students from low socioeconomic and second language background qualify for Compensatory Education services. In 2007-2008, 29% of students qualified for the Free and Reduced Price Meal (FRPM) program. In addition, 9% of students were classified as English Language Learners. The participation rate for students qualifying for the Free and Reduced Price Meal program has increased by 1.4%. The student participation rate for other programs remains constant.

District B has a long-standing tradition of recognition for academic excellence. First, the state of California has recognized the district under the California Distinguished Schools program 80 times. The district has been awarded 29 times for the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program. The District's Title I schools have also achieved distinction through the California Academic Achievement Award designation on 12 different occasions. Finally, the district is the only organization in the nation with three intermediate schools selected as *Taking Center Stage-Schools to Watch Program*. The long-standing tradition of excellence is also evident in state and federal indicators of progress.

District B's strong emphasis on academic excellence is also evident in their continuous success with the Academic Performance Index and Adequate Yearly Progress. In one year, the district Academic Performance Index increased by 14 points. All comprehensive high schools increased the Academic Performance Index by more than 10 points. Similarly, one comprehensive high school increased the Academic

Performance Index by 27 points. The district successfully met all 42 criteria for the Adequate Yearly Progress in 2008.

### *District C*

District C is a K-12 unified school district and serves 26,744 students. The district serves students from urban and suburban areas that lie within its boundaries. The district superintendent characterized the northern part of the district as suburban where families from high socioeconomic status reside. In contrast, the southern part of the district is urban where families from lower socioeconomic background reside. The southern part of the district tends to be more ethnically mixed. The district has four high schools, one continuation school, four middle schools, and 20 elementary schools. The district is known to be one of the largest Armenian communities outside of the capitol of Armenia Yerevan. Most importantly, the superintendent acknowledged that “The district has been recognized for high achievement despite the demographics that very much look like the state” (personal communication, September 30, 2008).

The student demographics in the district are significantly diverse and resemble the state averages. The student population is 55.1% White, 21.3% Hispanic, 13% Asian, 6.2% Filipino, .2% American Indian, and .1% Pacific Islander. The Hispanic and White student population has declined by 2.1% during the past seven years. In contrast, the Filipino population has increased by 1.6%. This shift in student demographics has had an impact on student participation in specialized programs that provide supplementary services for students from “disadvantaged” backgrounds.

The district has a significant number of students enrolled in state and federally funded specialized programs. For instance 41.3% of students participated in the Free and



Reduced Price meal program, 24.6% were classified as English Language Learners and 64.1% qualify for Compensatory Education program. Student participation in all three programs has declined significantly during the past seven years as enrollment has dropped in the district. The student participation rate in the English Language Program has declined by 14.5%. In addition, the student participation rate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program declined by 5.5%. Moreover, the student enrollment in the Compensatory Education Program declined by 1.5%.

Another trend and challenge to the district is the continuous decline in student enrollment. The district has experienced declining enrollment during the past eight years. The Chief Business Officer recognized that student enrollment has declined as much as 800 students in one given year. The greatest decline in enrollment has been in Kindergarten through sixth grade. On average, the district has experienced a decline of 6% during the last seven years. With the continued drop in enrollment there have been continued cuts to the general budget. The Chief Business Officer explains this phenomena as follows “So as district’s housing prices became much more expensive... cost of living, we found people moving out of our district into a place where they could really afford to live” (personal communication, December 12, 2008).

District C has traditionally been recognized for high achievement despite the fact that the student demographics and participation in specialized programs look much like the state average. For example, 23 out of 31 schools have been recognized as California Distinguished Schools. In addition, nine schools have been selected as National Blue Ribbon Schools. Finally, 11 schools have been named Title I Achieving Schools for the continuous high academic results for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

There are numerous indicators within the state and federal accountability system that demonstrate improved student achievement over several years. For instance, the district increased 84 points in the Academic Performance Index (API) in six years. Similarly, the majority of the subgroups from disadvantaged backgrounds made significant gains in student achievement. For example, the API for English Language Learners increased by 19 points in one year. In addition, student achievement for all subgroups in mathematics and English Language Arts is superior compared to the state average. For example, the percent of students scoring proficient or higher in English Language Arts and mathematics exceeded the state average by 10% in 2008. Thus, the improved and sustained student achievement is evident in the district's success with the state and federal accountability systems.

#### Data Collection

Three primary data sources were used to address the research questions: (1) twelve interviews, (2) electronic student achievement records from official web pages, and (3) district and school public documents. Yin (2003) suggests that using multiple data sources validates the studies findings and addresses issues of reliability. Interviews with key stakeholders and administrators in successful schools and districts provided rich and thick data related to school and district level resource allocation practices and decision making. Electronic documents from several sources including the California Department of Education web site and the school districts' websites were used to triangulate the data from the interviews. These records were used to inform and corroborate the information from collected from the 12 interviews. Official documents regarding school board

policies and administrative regulations for allocating resources were analyzed and used to corroborate observations from the interviews and electronic records (Yin, 2003).

### *Interviews*

Yin (2003) asserts that interviews are an effective data collection strategy for multiple case study designs. As such, this multiple case study focusing on decision-making and resource allocation processes and practices included thick data from key informants from the district, high schools, and governing school boards. The key informants were administrators directly involved or responsible for making resource allocation decisions. Each of the 12 participants was interviewed once. All were interviewed using a semi structured interview protocol adapted from Perez et al. (2007). The interview questions were grounded on effective and successful schools research and focused on school and district level factors that are related to high student achievement. All 12 interviews lasted an average of 50 minutes. All 12 interviews were recorded, transcribed, and saved to a database exclusively accessible to the researcher.

### *Participants*

There were four participants from each of the three selected successful high schools and districts: (1) Superintendent, (2) Chief Business Officer, (3) High School Principal, and (4) School Board Member with at least five years of experience with school finances. All participants were selected and invited to participate in the interviews using job titles and descriptions with the exception of the school board member. During the interviews with the Superintendents, the researcher asked for a school board member who would be a good candidate for the interview and who had extensive experience and knowledge with governing school finances. All three Superintendents made a

recommendation and the researcher then contacted the school board members by phone to inform them of the nature of the study and to acknowledge the support from their superintendent. All three agreed to participate.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher solicited and secured the support from all the participating successful school districts' superintendents. The three districts superintendents were informed of the student achievement and demographic criteria that guided the selection of three successful high schools and respective districts. The researcher mailed a written summary of the purpose and scope of the study, potential benefits to the field of education, and participant rights to all superintendents. After two weeks, the researcher contacted the superintendents to follow up on the letter mailed to them two weeks prior. Upon agreement from the superintendents to participate in this study, the researcher mailed the informed consent letter including a welcome, overview and focus of the study and the informed consent letter for them to sign and return if they chose to participate in the interview. (See Appendix E) Most importantly, careful attention was given to ensure participants' rights as human research subjects were protected as stated in the schools Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures.

Different case study strategies were implemented to ensure and increase the validity and reliability of the study. Yin (2003) and Merriam (1998) observed the benefits of using a semi structured interview protocol. As such, the researcher used a semi structured protocol to guide and collect rich data from all 12 participants. The protocol was adapted from the groundbreaking study "Getting Down to Facts" (2007) project. The protocol consisted of predetermined questions focusing on themes and

concepts identified from previous research examining successful schools. (See Appendices A-D) The questions focused on issues of adequacy and how successful schools allocate resources. Most importantly, the data collected from the interviews was analyzed and used to guide additional probing during subsequent interviews. In other words, the researcher used the protocol as an ongoing formative tool to guide data collection (Merriam, 1998).

The interviews were conducted in person and over the phone. The average interview lasted on average of 50 minutes. The longest interview lasted 80 minutes. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded and then transcribed. The digital recordings were saved and organized by school district on a computer that was only accessible to the researcher and also password protected. All the digital recordings were also saved on a flash drive and later secured. The information from the interviews was then transcribed and saved on word format for initial analysis. Finally, all transcriptions were revised and formatted in rich text format and later saved for the data analysis software Hyper Research.

#### *Electronic Records and Documents*

Yin (2003) and Merriam (1998) emphasize that documents are an important source of information and when used wisely, can enhance the reliability and validity of the information. The researcher collected extensive information readily available from different websites including the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS) and the California Department of Education (CDE) websites. These reliable sources of information are easy to navigate, are accessible to the public, and contain rich information. The researcher also collected and analyzed official documents from the

school district and school board policy to corroborate observations from the interviews. The documents that were collected were school board meeting agendas, minutes, and board policies and administrative regulations, and other relevant documents. Figure 3.1 summarizes all the documents that were collected and analyzed for this study. Yin (2003) emphasizes that multiple sources of information in case study designs can be used to validate observations through data triangulation.

<b>Electronic Documents</b>	<b>Type of Data</b>
School Accountability Report Card (SARC)	Student Achievement and Personnel
Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)	Educational Programs and Practices
Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA)	Goals, Action Plans
District Financial Profile	General Budget, Expenditures, Finance
District Profile	Student Demographics
School Board Policies and Regulations	Budget Development Standards

Figure 3.1: School and District Documents for Data Collection and Analysis

### Data Analysis

Miles and Hubberman (1994) and Merriam (1998) emphasize that analyzing and collecting data is an iterative process and a major strength of qualitative studies. Other notable researchers concur and suggest that collecting and analyzing the data strengthens the quality and analysis of the data (Merriam, 1998). This study approached data analysis and collection through a disciplined and multi-step process. Most importantly, this study brought order and meaning to the data using research based strategies and analytical techniques to increase validity and reliability of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003).

The first step in the data analysis process was to listen to each interview within one week of the interview. A contact summary highlighting key concepts and

preliminary themes was developed for each participant. In addition each summary included the main ideas or themes as they related to the three research questions guiding the study. Most importantly, new discoveries and themes were carefully considered when developing additional probing questions for the next interview. After all interviews were transcribed, the researcher used different colors to highlight segments of text related to each of the three research questions. The researcher then reviewed the sections related to each question to determine the depth of the data informing each research question.

The next step was a preliminary analysis of the content of each interview. The researcher labeled chunks of text including words, sentences, phrases and paragraphs using codes that emerged from the interviews and were linked to each of the three research questions. In addition, the researcher also highlighted segments of text that were relevant to the current study and were unanticipated findings. Miles and Huberman (1994) recognize this approach as a preliminary data analysis that is descriptive in nature. This method allows the researcher to start thinking of the data in terms of categories and themes that can be linked to other ideas for deeper analysis. The researcher specifically used the left hand margins to write down codes and themes next to the corresponding text on the right hand margins to make reflective notes and questions. The questions noted on the margins were used to inform the probing for the next interviews and to dig deeper into concepts, practices or new insights.

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend using contact summary sheets to bring order to the data to facilitate ongoing analysis and quick access. The next natural step was to fill out a contact summary form after coding the transcriptions for each interview. This was a simple and practical tool that the researcher used to document new insights

and themes to help with preliminary analysis in the form of coding. In addition, this strategy allowed the researcher to make connections between research questions, themes and the information that each interviewee provided. In addition, the contact summary form included codes with a brief description and a corresponding page number where more information can be found. In this way, the researcher efficiently accessed the data throughout the ongoing data analysis. The following questions and suggestions guided the content the researcher recorded in the contact summary sheet for each interview:

- a) What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?
- b) Summarize the information you got on each of the target questions you had for this contact.
- c) Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting or important in this contact?
- d) What new target questions do you have in considering the next contact in this district?

The next step in the data analysis process was to conduct a deeper level of analysis of the codes and collapse interrelated codes into broader themes and categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Other researchers recognize this as interpretive coding that allows researchers to make connections between ideas through a deeper level of analysis. This extensive analytical process involved the review of approximately 200 codes generated from all the interviews and generating themes that were linked to the research questions. The interviewee data for each school district was reviewed carefully and ultimately seven themes stood out from all interviews. The researcher then analyzed all interviews and reassigned codes to align closely with the following themes (1) district



and school profiles, (2) collaboration, (3) financial management, (4) resource allocation, (5) decision making, (6) best practices, and (7) leadership. The researcher observed that all themes were linked to at least one research question.

This study also included a thorough analysis of extensive school and district archives focusing on resource allocation practices, decision making, and funding policies. Yin (2003) recommends using multiple sources of data as a strategy to increase construct validity. As such the researcher analyzed school and district documents and triangulated the data from the 12 interviews. In addition, the research brought order and meaning to the rich and extensive information from the documents by developing document summary forms for all reviewed documents that are related to the research questions.

#### Limitations

There are some important limitations in this study to consider. The first limitation relates to the methodology used for identifying and selecting successful schools and districts. This study collected and analyzed student achievement data from state assessments that are reported as averages for schools and subgroups. The limitation from this approach is that student achievement data in the form of percentages or averages could possibly mask the achievement gaps between ethnic groups and language minorities. When school data is collected in this fashion, it is impossible to know if all students are achieving at high levels. To address this limitation, this study strategically focused on different measures of student achievement including graduation rates by subgroups, drop-out rates and also achievement measures for different subject areas to select schools and districts where students were achieving at high levels.

A second limitation to consider is that the findings for this study were grounded on the information that three administrators and one school board official from each district provided during a one-hour interview. Furthermore, this study sought to examine resource allocation practices linked to high levels of student achievement. There are many observable and unobservable variables involved in organizations that may not be captured during one-hour interviews with school administrators and school board officials. To address this limitation, the researcher collected and analyzed information from a significant number of documents collected. Most importantly the observations and findings from interviews were triangulated with findings from public school archives and documents. This strategy strengthened the data analysis and mitigated potential biases that result from single data collection sources.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study investigated how three successful school districts in California allocate human and fiscal resources in high performing high schools. Moreover, the study examined the link between resource allocation decisions and student achievement data. This chapter presents the findings by themes that emerged from the investigation of the three major research questions posed in Chapter 1. Figure 4.1 illustrates the themes in relationship to each major research question.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Corresponding Themes</b>
How do successful high schools and school districts in which they are located allocate human and fiscal resources?	Collaboration Resource Allocation
To what extent are resource allocation decisions linked to student achievement data?	Financial Management Resource Allocation
What do educators perceive as best practices?	Best Practices Leadership

Figure 4.1: Research Questions Linked to Themes

### Collaboration

One key finding is that all three districts have a culture of collaboration and high levels of stakeholder involvement in the decision making process. All three successful school districts have structures, processes and systems in place to support an infrastructure of ongoing collaboration at every level of the organization involving different stakeholders including administrators, parents, community members, teachers and students. The superintendents and high school principals from the three successful school districts have different mechanisms in place to collaborate with teachers and involve parents and the community at large in the decision making process and to include

their perspective on how to best allocate resources to improve student achievement. While there are significant similarities in collaboration practices amongst all three successful school districts, they differ in their structures and processes and cultures of collaboration.

By collaboration, it is meant that teachers, administrators, classified staff, community members and school board members regularly meet through different committees and teams to discuss student results and provide input as to how to allocate human and fiscal resources in a way that best impacts student achievement. Furthermore, by teacher collaboration it is meant that each successful high school has mechanisms and processes to support teacher collaboration with a strong emphasis on ongoing formal and informal discussions that deal with problem solving in areas of curriculum and instruction through data analysis, sharing of best practices, and building knowledge through careful examination of student results in relationship to instructional practices and curriculum development.

#### *Stakeholder Involvement*

The district superintendents collaborate and involve key constituents in the decision making process. All three superintendents involve parents, staff and community members to make informed decisions and to plan significant changes that impact the community at large. All three superintendents involve constituents through advisory committees. For example, the superintendent from District A leads the “Superintendent’s Advisory Committee” that meets on a monthly basis to include the perspective of parents and other constituents and to discuss how different educational initiatives and changes impact the community at large. In addition, the superintendent involves the community

through the “Calendar Committee” and “Boundary Committee”. The superintendent noted “we don’t want to make decisions in a bubble so we try to get their voice on most of those things and how it impacts them and their families” (personal communication, November 25, 2008). Something distinctive to District B is that the superintendent involves different constituents through committees and formal annual assessments to make important decisions such as changes to the general fund and to develop district wide priorities to support student achievement. The superintendent provides and guides the structure and process for stakeholders to weigh in on critical decisions that impact student achievement. He provides an opportunity for different stakeholders to weigh in on how to best allocate funding from the general fund on a yearly basis. The Budget Standards Committee is comprised of parents, community members, certificated and classified staff, three school board members, and administrators that collaborate around making resource allocations decisions. In addition, the superintendent organizes and leads the Strategic Planning committee to work on the district’s four-year strategic plan that gives the direction and focus to different initiatives to improve student achievement. Furthermore, the superintendent involves the parents and community members through a yearly survey each year to solicit feedback on all the schools in the district. The superintendent works with district and school administrators to address issues or suggestions from the surveys. Most importantly, the superintendent shares the results with the district governing board. The superintendent noted that the annual assessments are an opportunity for parents and community members to grade their schools and to work with administration on areas of concern. Figure 4.2 illustrates involvement opportunities for various constituents.

<b>District</b>	<b>Committees</b>
District A	Calendar Committee, Boundary Committee, Foundation Committee
District B	Budget Standards Committee, Parent Annual Assessments (Surveys) Diversity Committee, Foundation, Strategic Planning Committee
District C	Strategic Planning Team, Superintendent's Advisory Committee

Figure 4.2: Parent & Stakeholder Involvement

The superintendent from District C collaborates with district staff and community stakeholders through the Strategic Planning Team. The team is comprised of 36 members, including staff, school board members, parents and community members, business leaders and students. The superintendent collaborates with the team to develop district wide priorities to support student achievement around six strategic directions that guide the change initiatives for all the schools in the district. The *Six Strategic Directions* are aligned to the school board priorities and include the following areas: (1) Teaching and Learning, (2) Assessment & Accountability, (3) Professional Development, (4) Connections and Communications, (5) Leadership, Governance & Resources, and (6) School Climate. The systematic and cooperative collaboration brings the superintendent and stakeholders together to develop the vision, goals and the strategic directions that will guide and inform school level educational programs and the allocation of human and fiscal resources throughout the district.

#### *Teacher Collaboration*

Teacher collaboration is heavily engrained in each of the three high school cultures. One high school principal noted “the single greatest influence on student performance is teacher collaboration” (personal communication, December 12, 2008).

There is a clear structure and process for teacher collaboration in all three school districts and high schools. The teacher collaboration at the school site level is systematic, deliberate and is focused around student results. The three successful high schools have implemented and sustained the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model for collaboration (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The main focus of teacher collaboration is using student achievement data to inform classroom instruction and professional development on instructional strategies that support student achievement.

*District A.* The principal from District A reported that he had an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to open up a high school that embraced diversity and where teachers collaborated with one another. The principal played a significant role in building a culture of consistent collaboration to the school and the district where student results were at the core of their conversations in relationship to instructional strategies. In this way, the principal worked with district administration and the teachers' union to help carve out a collaboration model that was built into the instructional day. The principal sums up the experience of building a culture of collaboration as follows "that was not part of the culture, so it's taken two to three years to shift the culture by adding new teachers who use strand data, and standards, and choosing essential standards" (personal communication, December 12, 2008).

Similar to the other successful districts, teacher collaboration is best described as ongoing, deliberate and with a strong emphasis on student results. In addition, common practices during collaboration include identifying essential standards, developing common formative assessments, benchmarks, analyzing student results and reflecting on student results in relationship to instructional strategies and assessment. Most

importantly, the principal noted, “it allows teachers to set goals, look at data, and constantly analyze data, and figure out strengths and growth opportunities” (personal communication, December 12, 2008).

The successful high school from District A has a clear structure to support teacher collaboration. First, all teachers have weekly collaboration time built into the instructional day. Second, the principal expects all teachers to take at least two full days of teacher release time to work and collaborate within their department on curriculum and instruction. Teacher leaders and other teams working on special curriculum projects may take up to ten release days. In addition, the high school principal used the school’s Full Time Equivalent (FTE) units to secure a release period for each department chair to work on instructional leadership practices and support teachers in their teams.

*District B.* The successful high school from District B has a systemic collaboration structure where teachers in a department alternate between subject specific and grade level meetings. In this way, all teachers get to collaborate and articulate standards and assessments vertically and horizontally. The principal noted “it is a truly collaborative effort to ensure that all teachers are on the same page” (personal communication, September 16, 2008). Through this collaboration model, the principal and other administrators work with the Learning Director who collaborates with all the department chairs to guide and focus their collaboration efforts on student results.

The principal asserted that teacher collaboration focuses on student achievement results as a means to reflect and refine instructional practices to ensure that all students meet district and state benchmarks. For instance, teachers analyze results from subject specific benchmarks, state assessments, common formative assessments and other teacher



developed assignments to identify areas of strength and areas of concern. In addition, teachers who achieve the desired student results within certain academic areas share their instructional practices with other colleagues. Other practices during collaboration time include aligning curriculum with instruction, unpacking the standards, developing common formative assessments, and having discussions around rigor and assessment practices. The principal conveys the importance of collaboration by noting “continuous growth is going to come through collaboration” (personal communication, September 16, 2008).

*District C.* The successful high school from District C has a distinctive systematic collaboration model involving different lead teachers from various site based leadership teams and departments. All teachers collaborate in their department once a month. The teacher collaboration focuses on student results from benchmarks and also on instructional practices that support the school-wide focus on non-fiction writing. Moreover, teacher leaders get to collaborate during release days. The work focuses on instructional strategies and curriculum development. In addition, principal leads school initiatives through ongoing collaboration with department chairs and the instructional leadership team who oversee the implementation of the school’s vision and instructional focus on non-fiction writing. The principal brings these two teams together twice a month as the Instructional Cabinet to collaborate and discuss progress towards their goals and make informed decisions around instruction and professional development activities. The principal noted that their collaboration model was based on high levels of staff involvement in the decision making process. The principal further acknowledged:

So those regular dialogues were really powerful in terms of setting the school vision and getting buy in from the department chairs because they are who are elected by their department to lead them. And so as long as they understood where we are moving, there would be no problem in getting a hundred people moving in that direction. (personal communication, November 23, 2008)

The high school principal designed and implemented a distinctive infrastructure within the instructional day to support ongoing collaboration amongst members of the instructional cabinet to sustain school improvement efforts. The high school principal revealed that the “Instructional Cabinet” team members have a 6<sup>th</sup> period preparation block. In this way, a common preparatory period at the end of the instructional day allowed the principal and the members of the Instructional Cabinet team to meet and collaborate as needed and also extend their meeting time beyond the instructional day if necessary. The principal shared her thoughts on this strategy as follows, “by aligning our resources in that way, I mean, it did not cost us anymore but it did allow for that collaboration time” (personal communication, November 23, 2008).

The principal also acknowledged that the common preparatory period for the Instructional Cabinet team allowed them to collaborate on best instructional practices in relationship to student results. One key strategy during the collaboration time was ongoing walkthroughs to observe best instructional practices. The principal and selected members of the team would have the opportunity to observe other teachers and dialogue about what is working in the classroom, student engagement, best practices and what course of action would best support teachers in their efforts to improve student achievement in the area of non-fiction writing.

*District Wide Collaboration*

All three districts provide district-wide teacher collaboration opportunities. Teachers meet within subject areas across grade levels to build knowledge around issues on curriculum and instruction and capitalize on their individual and collective strengths and expertise. Teachers and administrators from District A collaborate through different subject councils where they focus on issues and solutions around curriculum and instruction such as identifying essential standards and formative assessment techniques. Similarly, in District B, teacher leaders from different schools collaborate around curriculum initiatives to support district wide curriculum changes. For instance, the district administration used a grant to pay for teacher release days to revamp the curriculum for Geometry to increase student achievement. District C coordinates and holds three district-wide teacher collaboration days during the academic year for teachers to collaborate on identifying power standards and developing formative assessments and build knowledge on instructional practices.

All three successful school districts have collaboration structures and support systems in place throughout the organization. The ongoing dialogues between staff, students, administrators, and the community at large enhance student achievement through the collective knowledge, expertise and social capital from strong partnerships. Most importantly, the strong collaborative cultures in the three successful school districts provide the foundation and a systematic structure where important decisions are considered regarding the resource allocations that impact educational programs throughout the district.

## Resource Allocation

This section describes how the three successful school districts and three high schools within their jurisdiction strategically allocate human and fiscal resources. More specifically, this section will describe how the superintendents allocate the majority of the general fund for the cost of personnel. Furthermore, this section will describe in depth how three principals leading successful high schools make decisions around staffing, allocate their categorical funding, and personnel to further district and school goals.

The three school districts' revenue comes from three main sources including federal, state, and local. The majority of a school district's budget is in the form of unrestricted resources. Most state officials also refer to this as the revenue limit or general fund. Categorical funding from the state and federal government requires school districts to allocate the funding to specific programs and disadvantaged students through the use of formulas. Table 4.1 illustrates the major funding resources and their respective source for all three school districts.

Table 4.1: General Fund Percent Revenues by Category for 2007-2008 School Year

<b>District</b>	<b>Revenue Limit</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>Other State</b>	<b>Other Local</b>
District A	72 %	6%	12%	10%
District B	68%	4%	22%	6%
District C	65%	10%	20%	5%
<b>Average Unified</b>	64%	6%	24%	6%

### *General Fund*

The school districts' largest fund is the General Fund and is based on a per pupil allocation formula. Typically, the general fund is used to cover all aspects of a school's operation and instructional staff. All three districts allocate the majority of the general

fund to the cost of salaries and benefits of classified and certificated employees. All three districts allocate approximately 85% of the general fund for the cost of personnel and benefits. Table 4.2 illustrates the percent of the general fund that each successful school district allocates for the cost of salaries and benefits.

Table 4.2: General Fund Percent Expenditures by Category for 2007-2008

<b>District</b>	<b>Salaries</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Total</b>
District A	66%	22%	88%
District B	63%	23%	86%
District C	65%	20%	85%
Average Unified School District	65%	19%	84%

*District A.* The district administration headed by the Superintendent and comprised of the Assistant Superintendent of educational services, the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, and Director of Categorical Programs, and the Chief Business Officer use a center-based management approach to determine staffing needs for each school in the district. The Chief Business Officer noted that in a center-based management approach the district administration is primarily responsible for determining and monitoring the human and fiscal resources that go to each school within the district. The superintendent recognized that the school district allocates staffing resources using ratios to staff teachers, administrators and other personnel. In this center-based management approach, the district also assigns staff and allocates funding to schools based on student educational programs and student needs. The superintendent noted “I look at student need versus student numbers” (personal communication, November 25, 2008). Similarly the Chief Business Officer revealed that “we’re more center-based management and try to look at the population and match the staff

accordingly” (personal communication, December 10, 2008). He further acknowledged that the principals have the ability to make special requests for staffing and additional funding to the district administration as long as they provide a rational or basis of how their request for additional staff and funding will support student achievement. Finally the CBO asserted that the number of teachers needed at a school site will be largely determined and driven by class size average and the number of kids in the school.

District A uses a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) system to determine how many teachers will be needed at each school site. The FTE is a numeric representation of how many sections will need to be taught at a school site. The district uses a ratio of 30 students to 1 teacher to determine the number of sections at each school. The number of students will drive the number of sections. The district administration will use student enrollment to figure out the number of sections needed at each school site and communicate the FTE allocation to the school principal. The principals will then weigh in on the allocated FTEs. One full time teacher is equivalent to one FTE. In some situations, principals hire less than one FTE to cover two to three sections. The district uses the student to teacher ratio to determine the number of sections and teachers needed at the school site level.

The Chief Business Officer and the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources works with the principal to staff other positions including custodians, health technicians, librarians, and media technicians which is not part of the FTE allocation but a flexible ratio based on the size and unique facility features of each school. One high school principal from this district capitalizes on the FTE flexibility to buy or allocate an additional block or section for lead teachers to work on instructional leadership duties.

More details about the specific team leaders will be discussed in the section “Best Practices”.

The principal from District A reported that one of his main responsibilities is to assign staff to sections to run the school. He explained that every year the district office determines the budget from x amount of students. The Assistant Superintendent from Human Resources links the budget to a number of FTEs based on student numbers. The district administration then works with the principals of each school to communicate the number of Full Time Equivalents at each school site. Principals have the opportunity to request different or additional FTE based on student needs or other factors they believe necessary to hire more staff. In this way, the district and school administrators use student needs and staffing ratios to drive major decisions around staffing to support student achievement.

*District B.* The Superintendent’s Cabinet from District B uses different formulas to allocate staffing resources to all the school sites. The school board member reported that the district has a long history of using and refining the formulas each year to determine staffing needs and assign a budget to each school site. Each year, district administrators review student enrollment and per pupil allocation from the state to determine the amount of funding available for the school district. Then the business office will apply their traditional formulas, which will then generate the Assigned Personnel Units for each school site. The allotted Assigned Personnel Units (APUs) are closely linked to the student enrollment and grade level. The district typically allocates more APUs to high schools compared to middle and elementary schools.

There are different steps involved in budgeting and assigning Authorized Personnel Units to the school sites. First, the business department determines how many dollars the state will allocate per pupil and figure out how much funding will be available for the entire district. Next the business department projects student enrollment and the average daily attendance from each school to determine the APU. Since the APUs is based on grade level, elementary, middle and high school have a different student enrollment to APU ratio. The school business office determines the cost of teaching staff based on district enrollment and figures out the specific Assigned Personnel Units that will go to each school site.

Once the Assigned Personnel Units are determined for each school site, the principals are responsible for staffing their schools with teachers, clerical support, librarians, counselors, and other support staff staying within the allocated APUs. Each position is linked to a specific fraction or amount of an APU. In this way, some positions will cost more than others. For instance, an administrator is assigned a unit of 1.2 whereas a teacher is equivalent to 1 and a custodian is .4 of an APU. Table 4.3 illustrates the relationship between staffing positions, APUs and duty days.

Table 4.3: Summary of Assigned Personnel Units (APU)

<b>Position</b>	<b>Assigned Personnel Unit</b>	<b>Duty Days</b>
Classroom Teacher	1	186
Principal Secondary	1.510	220
Assistant Principal, secondary	1.240	205
School Nurse	1.020	186
School Psychologist	1.130	200
Resource Teacher	1.045	186



A school board member noted that the school principal has the flexibility to staff the school in a way that best supports their students' needs. The principal has significant discretion to work with stakeholder groups in defining the best way to allocate APUs. For instance, some principals may decide to hire an additional counselor or additional librarian while other principals may hire more teachers to support lower class sizes in the core content areas. In addition, individual school sites are not responsible for the difference in costs between a new and seasoned teacher to a school site. Rather, the district accounts for these differences in a centralized manner and uses a district wide average for the cost of a teacher when calculating APUs. In this way, principals are not penalized for the additional cost of hiring a teacher with many years of experience. The school board member repeatedly emphasized that school principals do not see the cost of hiring a teacher but rather the assigned personnel unit which is the same for all teachers regardless of years of teaching experience. The district's superintendent reported the APUs and the formulas as a best practice when it comes to allocating resources that can be used in the most effective manner to support student learning.

*District C.* In District C the general fund allocation is based on a staff ratio model. A school board member from District C described the use of staff ratios to determine the type and number of staffing resources needed at each school site and observed 85% of their general fund goes to staffing. The district has administrative, teaching and classified ratios which the school board approves every year. For instance, the district currently has a teacher to student ratio of 1 to 32 in grades 4th-12th. The district participates in the K-3 class size reduction program where the teacher to student ratio is 1 to 20.

In addition, the school board member described that school principals have discretion to use categorical funding for staffing. For instance, the principal from one successful high school uses some of the categorical funding to pay for additional administrator time. Each school site has also discretion to hire additional staff or provide extra hours for positions using categorical funding if available.

The high school principals use a strategy to save money in the general fund for staffing. This involves giving additional teaching assignments to teachers instead of hiring additional staff members. This means that some teachers will teach additional sections and get compensated using a prorated formula. This is where principals have some flexibility when hiring teachers to cover all their sections.

### *Categorical Funding*

All three districts participate in state and federal categorical programs that bring in additional revenue to support educational programs that serve students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Table 4.4 illustrates the state and federal categorical allocations for all three school districts. The table includes the allocated amount per pupil funding broken down by revenue source for each school district and the total amount allocated to each district. In comparison to the general fund, the categorical funding is a modest amount. Revenue from categorical funding represents approximately 20% of a district's general budget.

Until recent legislation in February 2009, categorical funds have traditionally been assigned for very specific services. These services may include, but are not limited to additional instructional materials and services for English Language Learners, tutoring

for students from low socio economic background and extended instructional services for students who are not making adequate progress on state and district assessments. There are over 100 categorical programs from the state and federal government. School districts who wish to participate in the programs need to apply and use the state and federal guidelines to allocate funds to schools who serve students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The categorical programs are formula driven and have specific guidelines as to how they can be used.

Table 4.4: Categorical Funding by Source for 2007-2008

<b>District</b>	<b>Dollars/Students (ADA)</b>	<b>Total Amount</b>
<b>District A</b>	Total ADA 16,811	
Federal	359	6,041,012
State	1,046	17,586,557
<b>District B</b>	Total ADA 35,797	
Federal	389	13,940,683
State	1,711	61,244,611
<b>District C</b>	Total ADA 27,295	
Federal	935	25,527,000
State	1,812	49,446,000

All three Chief Business Officers acknowledged that state and federal categorical funding gets distributed to school sites through very specific formulas based on student numbers. Most of the programs and how money is spent is decided at the school level under the leadership of the principal. Once the district determines the dollar amount for each state and federal categorical program going to the different school sites, the principals collaborate with the School Site Council to decide how to best allocate their categorical funding to support student achievement. The School Site Council is comprised of representatives from classified and certificated staff, students, parents and

community members. The site council's charge is to review and provide input to the principal's recommendations on the allocation of categorical funding outlined in the *Single Plan for Student Achievement*. The Single Plan for Student Achievement describes how the school plans to use all the categorical funds from different sources in a cohesive way to support all students in making adequate progress.

Table 4.5: Federal and State Categorical Programs for 2007-2008

<b>District and Categorical Programs</b>	<b>Per Pupil Allocation \$</b>	<b>Total Allocation</b>
<b>DISTRICT A</b>		
Federal		
NCLB Title I	95	1,600,00
NCLB Title II	31	518,000
Special Education	179	3,000,00
State		
Special Education	568	9,542,000
Economic Impact Aid (EIA)	118	1,977,000
School and Library Improvement Block Grant	71	1,193,00
<b>DISTRICT B</b>		
Federal		
NCLB Title I	114	4,089,000
NCLD Title II	31	1,098,000
Special Education	159	5,691,000
State		
Special Education	612	21,898,000
Economic Impact Aid(EIA)	63	2,272,000
School and Library Improvement Block Grant	59	2,108,000
<b>DISTRICT C</b>		
Federal		
NCLB Title I	360	9,813,000
NCLB Title II	86	2,338,000
Special Education	333	9,082,000
State		
Special Education	736	20,079,407
Economic Impact Aid(EIA)	90	2,445,000
School and Library Improvement Block Grant	80	2,188,000

The largest federal categorical program for all districts is Title I. Table 4.5 illustrates the apportionments for each school district from the major state and categorical programs for 2007-2008.

District A allocated federal and state categorical funding to a successful high school totaling \$1,646,936.00 for the 2006-2007 school year. The majority of the funding came from state programs including School and Library Improvement Block Grant, Site Discretionary Block Grant, and Arts & Music block Grant. Table 4.6 includes all state and federal programs with specific apportionments for the successful high school in District A. These block grants provide the most flexibility for spending. Interestingly this high school does not receive Title I funding although the school would qualify for this type of funding because of their student demographics.

Table 4.6: State and Federal Categorical Programs: High School District A

<b>Program</b>	<b>Allocation</b>	<b>Source</b>
Allied Health-Quick Start	\$5,472.00	State
College Board Advanced Program Grant	\$500.00	State
AVID-Region 9 EDFUND Grant	\$21,209	State
Arts & Music Block Grant	\$65,566	State
Career Tech Ed Equipment	\$19,317	State
Title IV – Safe and Drug Free Schools	\$5,400	State
School Safety & Violence Prevention	\$140,055	State
Arts, Music, Physical Education Block Grant	\$183,213	State
CAHSEE Intensive Instruction	\$88,322	State
GATE	\$16,149	State
Microsoft Technology Voucher Program	\$97,298	State
Project Workability	\$86,643	State
Pupil Retention Block Grant	\$18,915	State
Site Discretionary Block Grant	\$136,954	State
Title II-Part A	\$5,099	Federal
Title III-LEP	\$86,665	Federal
Vocational Education	\$28,949	State

Table 4.6: (continued). State and Federal Categorical Programs: High School District A

<b>Program</b>	<b>Allocation</b>	<b>Source</b>
School Library Improvement Grant	\$120,000	State
GEAR UP	\$33,857	State
ROP	\$482,353	State
Western Growers School Garden	\$5,000	State

The high school in District B participated in four categorical programs as evidenced in the *Single Plan for Student Achievement*. Table 4.7 illustrates the federal and state categorical allocations for the high school in 2007-2008. The largest categorical allocation for the high school was from the state program Economic Impact Aid.

Table 4.7: State and Federal Categorical Programs: High School in District B

<b>Program</b>	<b>Allocation</b>	<b>Source</b>
Economic Impact Aid: EIA	\$174,217	State
Pupil Retention	\$14,339	State
NCLB Title III	\$33,225	Federal
Supplemental School Counseling Program	\$103,278	State

The high school in District C received a total of \$1,572,946 in state and federal categorical programs. For 2006-2007, the high school reported one federal and two state grants and the majority of their categorical funding came from Title I funding. Although the high school reported three grants, it is important to recognize participation in the School Based Coordinated Program, which is a blended grant from two state programs. Table 4.8 provides specific amounts for each program along with an explanation.

Table 4.8: State and Federal Categorical Programs: High School in District C

<b>Program</b>	<b>Allocation</b>	<b>Source</b>
Economic Impact Aid: English Learner Program	\$212,122	State
School Based Coordinated Programs	\$203,781	State
Title I, Part A: School-wide Program	\$1,157,043	Federal

## Financial Management

This section reports three subtopics around the theme financial management including (1) budget development, (2) budget oversight, and (3) effective management of resources. In addition, this section presents a synthesis of the financial practices from all three successful school districts and highlights the practices linked to effective management of resources. First, this section will report out the action steps that the school district business office takes to develop the district budget including projecting the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and student enrollment. Secondly, this section will highlight the budget monitoring strategies involving different district administrators and the county office of the superintendent. Finally, this section will present other financial best practices that the three Chief Business Officers and School Board Members reported.

The Chief Business Officers from the three successful school districts reported that one of their top priorities is to maintain a healthy fiscal budget. For this reason, a critical responsibility is to accurately project what the general fund budget would be on a yearly basis. In addition, all three CBOs indicated that there are some critical steps that they need to take to develop a district budget. In addition, all CBOs reported that they are bound by state regulations and Education Code as it relates to budget development and management.

### *Budget Development Process Overview*

The budget development process starts with the Governor's budget proposal in January. At this time, the Governor reports out the general state budget for the upcoming fiscal year. The Governor reports out how much funding will be allocated to K-12 public

schools in California. Traditionally, the state legislature provides a specific amount per pupil that will be assigned to each school district in California. In this way, school district administrators project the general fund budget and thus can start planning for their resource allocations. The school business officers and other administrators start building the general fund budget for the following academic year, which begins the first day of July and ends the last day of June.

The Chief Business Officer from the district office then works with the business department to develop a tentative budget for the upcoming year based on the Governor's proposal in January. The business department carefully works through a new budget and determines how the new state budget will impact their district general funding. The business department then communicates the information regarding the impact on the general fund budget to the superintendent who then, with the Chief Business Officer, presents the new tentative budget to the school board.

The three superintendents affirmed that a critical step in the budget development process is key stakeholder involvement. The superintendents involve teachers, administrators, and parents and community members to solicit their input that would be considered when they make decisions on how to allocate resources that directly impact student achievement. This includes decisions in augmenting resources, making staff reductions and, to an extent, eliminating educational programs. The superintendent from District C effectively captures this sentiment and reveals:

Ever since I have been here, I have been a district of declining enrollment. For the last five years, it has been nothing but reductions. When it comes down to reductions, what I traditionally have done is I believe that the principals are the key factor in making those decisions. I set up a committee and allow principals to help me prioritize recommendations for



reductions. Through that process, the board is usually very comfortable with where we usually end. That may be reduction in staffing at the district office and may be reduction of maintenance and operational people; it could be all kinds of things. One of the things that we have said to them and it has been a priority of the board is as we've (district administration) made reductions, the board has said let's keep those reductions as far away from classroom as possible. They send a general tone and then I work with that. (personal communication, November 13, 2008)

### *Communicating the Budget*

The three districts strategically communicate with all constituents and decision making committees the state of the budget on a yearly basis. For example, the superintendent from District A reported that once his Chief Business Officer provides him with the information on how the Governor's proposal would impact the district financially, he would take the information and present to all the directors and supervisors from each department and each school principal to inform them of the current financial situation. Moreover, the superintendent reported that he also presented financial information to the Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) of every school. The superintendent emphasized that it was important to him to allow staff, parents, and community members to ask questions about the budget and to consider their feedback.

The CBO from District B reported that once the Governor's proposal was available in January, the business office department prepares a financial report highlighting how the Governor's budget proposal impacts the district's general fund budget. The Budget Standards Committee (BSC) comprised of teachers, school and district administrators, school board members and community members then convene for several days to review the different components of the budget, to analyze student achievement data and to make recommendations to the school board on how to best

allocate general fund resources that also support the district's aims and school board priorities. The superintendent effectively captures the main responsibility of the BSC as follows: "The charge is to make recommendations to the governing board related to the allocations of general fund resources, unrestricted general fund resources" (personal communication, September 30, 2008).

The superintendent from District C reported that once the Governor's budget proposal comes out he communicates the impact on the district general fund budget to staff, district administrators and community members and solicits their input through the Superintendent's Advisory Committee. In addition, the superintendent noted that in times when he has to eliminate staff positions and educational programs, he involves the school principals in making recommendations to the school board. He further acknowledged that through this process of involving the principals, the school board is "very comfortable" with the recommendations.

#### *District Budget Development and Assumptions*

*Average Daily Attendance.* Projecting the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and enrollment is a first critical step in the budget development process. The Chief Business Officers from the three districts reported that one of the most important things they do is projecting ADA and student enrollment. The CBO from District A noted that "projecting is the biggest thing I do in this district" and that "revenues follow ADA and your decisions come after your revenue" (Interview, December 10, 2008). Since all schools in California are funded based on their ADA and student enrollment, the Chief Business Officers use different statistical techniques and strategies to accurately project enrollment which ultimately will determine how many dollars the school district will have available.

Most importantly, enrollment projections will drive the number and type of personnel needed to support educational programs throughout the district.

<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Source</b>
Average Daily Attendance	The average attendance for all students in the district from the previous year up to the P2 or March.	School District, Business Office
Enrollment	The number of students expected to enroll in the district by grade level and enrollment in Special Education program.	School District, Business Office
Revenues	The total dollars for the district based on the number of enrollment adjusted for the ADA. This includes state revenue limit, categorical funding from the state and federal government, lottery, Mandated Costs, etc.	School District
Cost of Living Adjustment	The statutory COLA which will affect the revenue limit	County Office
Salaries and Benefits	The cost of maintaining the current staff and associated benefits including steps and columns.	School Districts, HR

Figure 4.3: District Budget Development Assumptions

The Chief Business Officers from the three districts reported different strategies for projecting the ADA and student enrollment. For instance, the Chief Business Officer from District A reported using ADA and student enrollment trends for the last ten years for each school in the district and for each grade level. Moreover the CBO analyzes student enrollment and ADA for all 20 schools to accurately project staffing needs and incurred costs. More specifically, the CBO analyzes the data to discover any oddities or trends for any particular grade level such as kids coming out of middle school or elementary or students leaving high school before graduation

The Chief Business Officer from District A reported that projecting student enrollment is a complicated process and the context of the school district needs to be carefully considered along with statistical information and other strategies. For example, he asserted that an effective practice is to research student enrollment from private schools and observe trends in their student enrollment. For instance, the CBO investigates if students are transferring to and from private schools or graduating from K-8 private schools. In addition, he researches current and future housing developments and the type of families that are moving to those areas to determine future student enrollment. Finally, the CBO reported that another strategy is looking for trends in pregnancy rates in the area which will help in planning out four to five years down the road when the children reach the age of four and they start attending school.

Another important strategy that the CBO from District A uses is a “place development growth”. The Chief Business Officer uses the traditional cohort model and adds information on past experience and wisdom. He acknowledged that using this strategy has been effective in some years and not so effectively in others. From past experience, he has also learned to consider the changing educational practices and the dynamics of the student populations. For instance, he noted that most recently, more affluent students are moving into the area and at the same time that the dropout rates have been declining. Consequently, more students have remained on campus, increased enrollment and brought additional revenue to the district.

The CBO from District A noted an example of how the Average Daily Attendance and enrollment significantly impact major decisions in a school district to illustrate the importance of accurately projecting student enrollment. For instance, he

affirmed that thirty new enrollees bring in additional revenue of approximately \$160,000. Consequently, the district will need to hire a new teacher, which is a cost of approximately \$65,000 including benefits. The district profit is close to \$100,000. In contrast, if a district loses 30 students the district loses the \$65,000 dollars but also the additional \$100,000 that is already factored into the budget. This is a significant loss because it also impacts additional funding for other areas of the general budget.

*Student Enrollment.* The Chief Business Officer from District A reported that an effective practice is to conservatively project student enrollment. In addition, he acknowledged that there are many negative financial repercussions when a school district over projects student enrollment. Furthermore, he reported that when a district over projects enrollment the district could potentially hire additional teachers without the student numbers to support the salaries for those teachers. He reported that as an effective strategy, the district offers teachers a “temporary” contract. This means that if the district projections are off and student enrollment is lower than previously anticipated, then the contract for the teacher becomes null. Thus, the district avoids overstaffing and incurring additional costs.

The CBO from District C reported that a financially sound practice is for districts to develop two student enrollment projections to plan for the future. The CBO reported that the district uses one projection for staffing and a more conservative projection for projecting revenue. In this way, the school district uses the conservative projection to set money aside to offset the difference that may result from a decline in student enrollment. For example, the school district will project a decline of 400 students to plan for staffing needs. In addition, the district will project a decline of 600 students and the impact on

the budget. In this way, if there is a decline of 600 students, the district will have the money to offset the costs.

*Rollover.* Another important part of developing the school budget is to account for all rollover costs. Rollover refers to the costs over which the district has no control due to contractual agreements with employee unions, individual management employees and/or multi-year contracts with vendors. The most significant rollover assumption that must be carefully accounted for is the cost of automatic salary and benefit increases for all employees. In California, teachers get a step salary increase due to their teaching years of service in the district. In addition, teachers who complete units or credits through coursework and completion of degrees such as a Masters or Doctorate, get a column increase. While the largest rollover impact is felt due to teacher step and column increases, classified and management employees also receive various annual incremental salary adjustments. Each year, the CBO determines the cost of the increase in step and column for all employees and these figures are factored into the budget preparation. The same is done for all rollover costs.

The Chief Business Officer from District A reported that each year he calculates the cost of the step and column increases for each employee and makes the entries using a computer application for each employee to account for benefits, salary increases and other stipends. He further acknowledged that the business department completes approximately 55,000 entries of employee information on a computer database that is used to figure out the costs from year to year. He also affirmed that all districts in California have step and column increases that are very similar. However, some districts

offer longevity bonus pay or longevity pay increase after serving the district for several years.

A school board member from District B reported that forecasting at least five years down the line as an important budget development strategy. Moreover, he affirmed that the district is always financially solvent and in excellent fiscal health due to the practice of multi-year forecasting to determine future financial impacts to the district budget. The school board member provided an example that illustrates how current financial decisions have a significant impact on the school budget for many years into the future.

District B school board member related a critical financial decision and the impact on the district budget over time. He noted that several years ago, the school district applied for the K-3 Class Size Reduction grant from the state and used the funding to cover the costs of hiring additional teachers to make the class size reduction in grades K-3. Although the state provided funding to cover the initial salary costs of the teachers, the district had to cover the costs of the longevity steps. In addition, he acknowledged the possibility that the state can eliminate the funding from this program in times where the economy is down. Consequently, districts would have locked in teachers on a contract and have to use their funding to cover the costs. In sum, the school board members noted that under the leadership of the Chief Business Official, the district business office has learned to carefully consider how financial practices and decisions, such as the one noted above, have a direct impact on their general fund budget in the years to come.

*Cola.* Another important assumption that business offices factor in when developing the budget is the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). Each year, the state legislature provides all the local County Office of Education agencies with the COLA that all school districts must include as part of their assumptions when developing the district budget. Most importantly, the amount of COLA is a reflection of the economic condition of the state. A school board member affirmed that one of the challenges in developing the district budget is making decisions about COLA and keeping in mind future impacts on the district budget. COLA does not have to be used for compensation.

One school board member from District B reported that it is very important to think about long term effects on the budget when giving a raise through COLA adjustments. More specifically, he asserted that the state government may provide the COLA for the current year with a “windfall of dollars”. However, in the next few years, the state economy may go through difficult times and the state will discontinue the increase in funding. The school board member noted that some school districts do not think about the long term effects and this could have very negative consequences on the budget. Furthermore, the school board official recognized how the negotiations with employee unions also play a critical part. Moreover, he affirmed that for a district to be fiscally solvent, the district administrators need to negotiate salary increases, which they are able to afford in the future, not just for the current year. Finally, administrators who agree on a contract that grants a salary increase each year may have a negative impact on the budget because in bad economic times, the state may not provide funding to sustain this increase.

*Budget Monitoring*



The Chief Business Officers from the three school districts noted that close and ongoing monitoring of the school budget is essential to maintaining the budget in good standing. More specifically, they reported three main categories for monitoring the budget including yearly audits, interim reports to the school board and county superintendent's office, and position control. The three school districts emphasized compliance with budget monitoring requirements required by Education Code. Most importantly, each district implemented sound financial practices to monitor and adjust the general budget using a clear chain of command and involving district level administrators and school board members.

*Monthly Budget Reviews.* There is budget oversight at different levels of the three school districts to ensure fiscal solvency. Moreover, district administration involves the school board, the county superintendent and state officials as part of the process to ensure fiscal solvency. The Chief Business Officer from District A reported that once the budget is developed and adopted, the business office communicates all the expenditures for the month and provides an updated budget to the school board. The business office gives the monthly expenditures in advance to the school board members. During the monthly school board meetings, the school board members have the opportunity to scrutinize and ask questions about the reported expenditures.

The Chief Business Officer from District B reported that the school board has an opportunity to ask questions on any reported expenditures during the school board meetings and often there is a discussion on the expenditures. In addition, he noted that the school board members review expenditures two times per month and they have an opportunity to "interact" with the Chief Business Officer during the meetings to clarify or

ask any questions regarding the expenditures. In addition, one school board member from District C reported that the oversight of the budget involves examining expenditures from different accounts and also reviewing and approving transfers between accounts. In addition, she contended that there are multiple layers of review for the budget because it is critical to have different people look at it as part of the overall process.

*Interim Reports.* Another layer of fiscal oversight is through the state required interim reports. Education Code requires that all districts report expenditures and updated budgets during the months October and April. All three school districts submit at least two interim reports to the local county superintendent for review and approval, which the county superintendent then sends to the state Department of Education. District A and C reported that their business office submits a total of three interim reports to the school board which includes the two state required interim reports in October and April. Additionally Districts A and C submit their final and non-required interim report at the end of the school year once the “books are closed”.

The Chief Business Officers from the three school districts affirmed that the interim reports include standard financial information including expenditures and recent balances for all accounts in the general budget. One school board member from district A reported that the interim report requires a projection of at least two years to the future which makes school administrators think through all of their expenditures and commitments they will need to fulfill. In addition, the business offices must project how the general budget will reflect two years in the future. Moreover, the interim report discloses information on how the business office is projecting their enrollment and how this impacts their overall budget. The Chief Business Officer from District B recognized

that they have never received a negative or qualified certification on their interim reports. In sum, all three districts revealed that the process for reporting interim reports is one of the effective strategies to ensure fiscal solvency.

*Audits.* All three Chief Business Officers reported that another layer of the budget review involves a yearly audit from an independent contractor. Moreover, since the school fiscal year ends in June, the school districts finalize any changes to their budgets and provide the information to their auditors for a complete review of the budget numbers from all their accounts in the district budget. Once the auditors provide an analysis of their expenditures, transfers, and the overall budget, the school board reviews and adopts it and then it goes to the local county superintendent. One school board member from District B asserted that they contract a Certified Public Accountant every three years. Furthermore, he added it is important that the auditors are familiar with the process and also with the current system so this saves money and time when they have an auditor familiar with the process. A school board member from District C revealed that the audit review is very helpful for the school board members to review and understand how the money flows in their district.

*Position Control.* Most notable in the budget monitoring process is the strategy of position control. The Chief Business Officer from District A and the superintendent from District C repeatedly emphasized the importance of using position control to closely monitor the budget and evaluate decisions that impact the general fund budget. This strategy involves a person or administrator to constantly and carefully examine all district expenditures from all the accounts in their general fund budget and to question any expenditure that appears to be unaccounted for. The CBO from District A acknowledged

the importance of always monitoring the impact of hiring of new employees on the general fund budget and making sure that when staff are hired that there is a check point or method to communicate between the human resources and the business department.

The superintendent from District C noted that it is important to use position control to keep track of students who transfer out of high schools to continuation schools or alternative programs. He further added that one way a school district “gets in trouble” is when students from school sites transfer to other programs without proper monitoring from district administration. This becomes important because the schools receiving new students typically request new staff to support the new students. However, it is important to assess if the district has the funding to hire additional staff because the district has the same number of students but in different locations and therefore no new revenue is being generated.

### Best Practices

The three successful school districts reported four main categories of best practices linked to student achievement. The four categories of best practices focus on district and high school level factors that appear related to student achievement. The four categories include: (1) personnel to support student achievement, (2) decision making processes and models, (3) instructional programs, and (4) professional development.

#### *Personnel*

*District A.* One of the themes for best practices evident in the three successful school districts is creating and adding staff positions that impact student achievement. For example, the superintendent from District A reported that hiring additional high school counselors played a significant role in improving student achievement. He further

added that the two high schools in the district experienced significant gains in student achievement during the years when additional high school counselors were hired. In addition, the superintendent noted that hiring additional counselors increased the level and scope of services for students and parents. The additional counseling services increased the opportunities for students and parents to meet with the counselors to create plans for success and chart out four year plans for graduation and post secondary opportunities.

The superintendent from District A reported that the addition of three key personnel positions in the district significantly impacted student achievement. In addition, the superintendent noted that the following three positions at the district level created a strong impact and support for school sites. The positions were: (1) student achievement data specialist, (2) intervention specialist, and (3) director of secondary education.

The expanded services that were made possible with these positions include identifying students who were not meeting district targets and assisting school leadership teams in developing plans for student achievement. In addition, the position of data specialist allowed principals and teacher leaders to be trained on how to use technology applications to collect, disaggregate, analyze and interpret student achievement data.

The superintendent and the high school principal acknowledged that the position of director of secondary education helped the district and all school sites improve student achievement across all subgroups. Prior to this addition, the superintendent realized that the focus on professional development around instruction was at the elementary level, whereas at the high school level there was a void in this area. In his own words, the

superintendent noted “I really believe that our success, especially at the secondary level is that two years ago we made a decision to add a director of secondary education; we didn't have one before” (personal communication, November 25, 2008). For this reason, the superintendent led the district in creating a position, similar to the elementary position, to support teachers and lead collaboration efforts and professional development for secondary school teachers to best support student achievement.

A high school principal from District A also noted that the director of secondary education was of significant help in their efforts in identifying professional development needs at the high school site. As an example of this effort, he reported that the director of secondary education facilitated district wide efforts to create and identify power standards, benchmarks, and common assessments. Consequently, teachers and administrators had access to meaningful student achievement data to guide district level or district wide teacher collaboration.

A school board member from District B explained that through the additional high school counseling time and positions, counselors were able to target students for academic interventions and offer extended learning opportunities which put students in a better position for success. More specifically, the counselors played a key role in identifying students who were struggling academically and also recommending them for after school and Saturday classes that focused on helping students pass the California High School Exit Exam. The school board member acknowledged “that was one specific thing that we did in the last three to four years that has really helped us a lot in terms of the high school students” (personal communication, December 23, 2008).

The superintendent from District B recognized that the teacher hiring process is highly effective in recruiting highly qualified teachers. The recruitment and hiring practice for teachers involves as many as six interviews. Most importantly, the multi step process allows for district and school level staff to be involved in the interview process and the selection of the best qualified candidate.

First, the department chairs and the learning director interview a pool of candidates for the teaching vacancies. The learning director and department chair make their recommendation of one or more candidates to interview with the learning director and the principal. For the third interview, the principal meets with the final candidate. In some situations, the principal will interview more than one candidate. The fourth interview involves the assistant superintendent of human resources and school administration including the principal and learning director. Then, the learning director, the principal, the assistant superintendent and the deputy superintendent interview the candidate. Finally, the superintendent meets with the candidate, which involves a ten-minute lesson plan presentation. Figure 4.4 summarizes the teacher interview process for this district.

The superintendent and principal reported that this practice sends a strong and positive message to the new teachers that they will have the support from school and district level administrators and that they are here to offer the best support they can give so teachers can do a great job in the classroom. The superintendent noted that on average, 200 teachers are hired each year and the superintendent spends a tremendous amount of time interviewing each teacher that is hired. Similarly, the principal notes that the different interviews involved in hiring new teachers is to support the candidate but

also let him/her know that they are the best qualified person for that position. In addition, the superintendent added that the hiring process lets the candidates know that the district administration is not a bureaucracy but rather to be a support for administrators in getting their job done.

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Personnel Involved</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Interview	Two teachers including the department chair and the Learning Director interview the candidate.	Interview panel recommends one or two candidates to the Principal
2 <sup>nd</sup> Interview	The Learning Director and the Principal interview the Candidate	Interview panel recommends a candidate to principal
3 <sup>rd</sup> Interview	The principal interviews the candidate(s)	Principal recommends the candidate to district office.
4 <sup>th</sup> Interview	The Principal, Learning Director and the Assistant Superintendent interview the candidate	Interview panel gives recommendation to Deputy Superintendent
5 <sup>th</sup> Interview	The Deputy Superintendent, Principal, and Learning Director interview the candidate	The panel makes a final recommendation
6 <sup>th</sup> Interview	The Superintendent, Principal, and Learning Director Interview the candidate who gives a ten minute lesson	The panel makes the official offer of employment.

Figure 4.4: Teacher Hiring Process in District B

### *Instructional Programs and Academic Interventions*

All the three school districts reported that creating instructional programs and implementing research based practices at the district and school level significantly impacted student achievement across all subgroups. Targeted academic interventions and support classes in English Language Arts and Mathematics were identified as best practices. All three districts reported academic intervention programs to support students who were not making adequate progress on the core academic areas.



The superintendent from District B reported a reading intervention program at each school in the district as a best practice. The superintendent noted that the Budget Standards Committee allocated approximately \$10,000 to each school site for a reading intervention program to target students reading below grade level. Through this initiative, high school principals hired retired teachers with a strong teaching background in reading and English Language Arts to teach reading strategies to students who were identified as reading below grade level. The superintendent emphasized that he believed that all primary and secondary schools had success with this reading intervention program.

*District C.* The superintendent from District C reported that one of the main reasons the district's Academic Performance Index increased is because of the Focus on Results Program that all schools implemented. The Focus on Results program requires that each school in the district focuses on one instructional area to improve for all students. For instance, a high school principal from a high performing high school reported that their instructional leadership team decided to improve all students' critical thinking skills in application to non-fiction writing. In this way, the Focus on Results Program focused all resource allocation decisions to support this key area.

A high school principal from District C reported that the collaboration, professional development, instructional time, and other funding was strategically aligned to support the school wide effort around improving the students' critical thinking skills. Moreover, the superintendent noted that he expected the principals and instructional leadership teams to focus and target their available resources in a way that impacts student achievement. The high school principal described the Focus on Result program as

a cohesive approach to student achievement because all efforts were focused on one area for improvement across subject areas. The superintendent from District C acknowledged that the Focus on Results program is a research based framework and contains four elements that are conducive to the organization's continuous improvement. The key to continuous improvement in student achievement is driven through data and best instructional practices that have been implemented and evaluated by the teacher leadership group or cadre. Figure 4.5 illustrates the elements of the Focus on Results program.

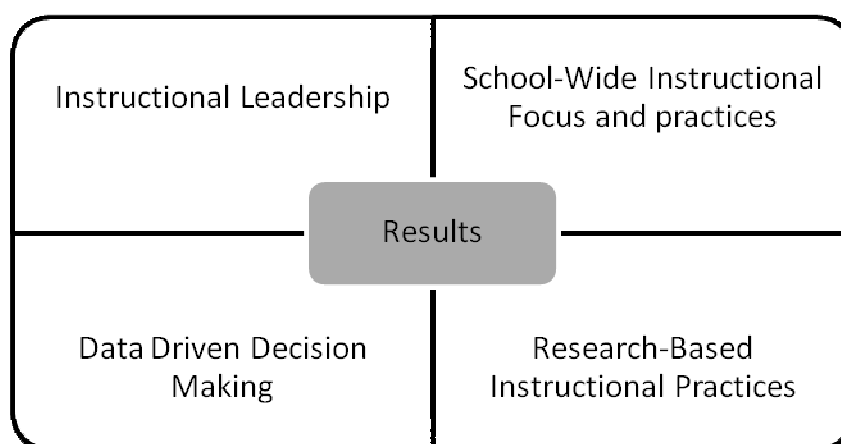


Figure 4.5: Focus on Results Program in District B

### *Professional Development*

All three successful school districts reported that ongoing professional development is one of the most effective strategies to improve student achievement. All three high school principals reported that the professional development for teachers focused on curriculum and instruction. In addition, all three principals noted that a best practice is professional development around identifying power and essential standards for each core subject area. The three principals emphasized that collaboration and professional development opportunities that were based on standards based instruction

and linked to school-wide goals had a strong impact on student achievement. The high school principal from District A described the link between professional development and data analysis and student achievement through the following:

And then we base the professional development upon the goals that come out of the analysis, and so people have buy in, why I'm doing this. Every teacher goes, I look at the data, I can see that in Biology we were doing fairly well here, but my gosh, we really missed the mark, so we need to rewrite our pacing guides, we need to be on release days, so we can request the school site council to fund, you know, \$3,000.00 to do a revamp on Biology which we've done. (personal communication, December 9, 2008)

A high school principal from District A reported that a best practice is around researched based instructional practices to ensure ELD students' mastery of the content standards. The high school principal from district A reported that new and veteran teachers participate in a wide variety of professional development opportunities. One of their professional development programs is an element of effective instructional practices that work for English Language Learners. The high school principal secured the support and expertise from the school district to provide the training for all teachers teaching second language learners. In addition, the school districts holds summer academies for teachers interested in developing their skill sets in different areas of the teaching standards. Furthermore, all teachers new in this district participate in ongoing professional development that emphasizes researched based instructional practices. Finally, the high school principal reported that all teachers go on release time for professional development and teacher leaders get up to ten release days per school year.

A high school principal from District B described that their professional development is based on the school site needs. Furthermore, the principal noted that

teachers are provided with student achievement data, which they use to identify instructional areas of strength and for future growth. In this way, the professional development activities focus on the needs of the schools, which are based on student achievement data. The principal described part of the steps of developing a professional growth plan as follows:

So really, it's the school site... school site once again, it's all school site driven, and so based off of the needs of the individual administrator, the individual teachers, the teachers draft on staff development on our campus. This is all wrapped around our goals on our campus, so if our goal's trying to align our curriculum to the standards, then all our professional development is going to be surrounding that goal. (personal communication, December 9, 2009)

A high school principal from District C described a professional development plan that focused on curriculum and instruction with an emphasis on formative assessment. In addition, the high school principal noted that the professional development activities were linked to the school wide goals and instructional focus in improving student achievement in non-fiction writing. In describing the importance of professional development the principal stated:

And so, our professional development we were able to tailor to our own school. The next logical step in terms of our growth in curriculum was also developing common formative assessments and using those as kind of the next steps in terms of student learning and in order to get those regular interim measures so that students aren't dinged at the end of the year with one final. And so that really was our... we looked at it as let's do, um, regular... let regular checkups or biopsies as opposed to autopsies. So that was the intent. (personal communication, November 23, 2008)

### *Ongoing Assessments*

The high school principals from the three districts affirmed that a best practice is developing and implementing common formative assessments across core subject areas

to monitor student learning. The student achievement data from the common assessments is critical because teachers and administrators use it to guide classroom instruction and plan the interventions for students who are not meeting grade level standards. Furthermore, all three high school principals asserted that when teachers implement a common assessment, they have the data to reflect on their practice and focus their collaboration on results.

Another important best practice is the use of data from benchmarks, common formative assessments, and also state assessments to guide the professional development program and instructional focus of the school. All three principals from the successful high schools reported that it was important to identify areas for growth using multiple sources of student achievement data.

District A created goals and an instructional focus on raising the achievement for English language learners in the core subjects. Similarly, District B reported that all schools focused on developing and implementing an intervention emphasizing reading skills for students who were reading below grade level. Finally, a principal from district C indicated that through the Focus on Results Program, there was a school-wide emphasis on critical thinking across core subject areas. In sum, all three districts asserted that a best practice is identifying a school-wide focus for improvement and monitoring the effectiveness using student achievement data. The high school principals noted that an instructional focus drives the resource allocations including professional development, instructional time, training, and collaboration time around the school-wide focus.

*Flexibility and Accountability*

Another common and underlying theme around best practices is flexibility and accountability. All principals and superintendents reported that the reason why the achievement scores increased is because administrators at the school level have the ability to work with their staff in making decisions around how to best allocate their resources and are held accountable for those decisions. For instance, a principal from District A reported that he has complete autonomy of critical decisions including hiring personnel and using categorical and general funds. Similarly, a high school principal from District B noted that the district gives the school site or administration significant flexibility in terms of staffing decisions and how to best allocate their resources. In addition, he acknowledges that the relationship with the district is based on trust, accountability and site based leadership.

The superintendents from District A and B acknowledged that their districts support a site based leadership and decisions making approach to the allocation of resources. The superintendent from District B said that the district gives flexibility to the school sites but at the same time they are held accountable for their student achievement scores. The superintendent from District A noted that he does not micro manage the school sites and that he expects all school principals to develop goals and also holds principals accountable for reaching their school-wide goals. Moreover, the superintendent from District C reported that schools decide how to best support student achievement at the school level but also expects that principals target their existing resources to support one instructional area for improvement. In summary, it appears that a best practice is to give tremendous flexibility to school leaders and to hold schools accountable for student achievement.

## Leadership

### *Overview*

The three successful high schools in the three districts have distinctive leadership structures that are a critical part of the decision making process in all aspects of school operations but with emphasis on instructional leadership. In addition, at the core of the leadership structure for all districts is high level of stakeholder involvement and data driven decision-making processes. Most importantly, all three superintendents strongly emphasized the importance of site based leadership, flexibility and accountability within the organization.

The superintendents' leadership, beliefs, and convictions in improving student achievement shapes the culture of the school district and has a tremendous impact in "how things are done" in each district to improve student achievement. The three superintendents, in their own distinctive ways, involve all stakeholders in their vision of student achievement. Furthermore, all three superintendents provide leadership structures and processes to bring stakeholders together, allowing for flexibility in spending and hold all constituents accountable for student achievement. Most interestingly, the three superintendents have distinctive beliefs that have shaped the culture in benefit of student achievement.

### *District A Leadership*

The superintendent from District A holds high expectations for student achievement and offers high levels of support to the principals and staff in their collective efforts to improve student achievement. Furthermore, the superintendent expects that all school principals provide systematic interventions for students who are not meeting

district and state benchmarks. The superintendent asserted “I believe that sites need to be responsible to provide either the targeted interventions or the opportunities to extend student learning in whatever way is going to meet their student population needs” (personal communication, November 25, 2008). The superintendent provides additional funding and the flexibility to the schools to support students who are not meeting state benchmarks.

The superintendent from District A leads through high levels of parent, staff and community involvement. In an effort to build consensus on a mission statement that would guide major decisions on resource allocation, the superintendent brought together a group of stakeholders including staff, business leadership, and parents. The superintendent best describes this effort through the following words:

So we spent the whole first, my first year I had community members, business people, parents, board members, teachers, classified staff, DO (district office) staff, and we just talked about who we were and we created a new mission statement, we created a great tag line, we created belief statements and commitment statements and this is how we make all of our fiscal decisions now. (personal communication, November 25, 2008)

The superintendent further acknowledged that through this work and articulation of beliefs about educational programs, the district administration focused their conversations on the things that really mattered to them.

The superintendent is a strong communicator, is inclusive and leads through a district office that is transparent and involves many constituents including teachers, classified staff, parents and community members in the decision making process. The superintendent noted that when making tough decisions such as making reductions, he



uses different venues to communicate his recommendations to all constituents and gives the opportunity to ask questions about the budget. The superintendent revealed:

I created this PowerPoint and all these recommendations of how we (district office) would make reductions district wide and I went to every department at the district office; I went to transportation, maintenance operations, and facilities. I met with everyone in this building; I went to every school site and met with every teacher, got my PowerPoint, talked about the impact of the budget, talked about my recommendations, my rationale and was just available for people to ask questions and make any comments, so I tried to be really inclusive. I went to PTA meetings at every single school site and just let everybody know what I was thinking and took their input and then final recommendations were made in cabinet and then I made them to the school board. (personal communication, November 25, 2008)

In addition, the superintendent regularly communicates budget updates through PowerPoint and pod casts and makes this information accessible to the public through the school district's business department web page. Furthermore, the superintendent noted that the business department posts the adopted district budget on the website for all interested in reviewing it. The superintendent noted:

So, I just believe that, you know, now with the internet it is so nice that parents can access those things, so instead of just making some verbal report I try to put it in a PowerPoint so parents can access it or community members can access it if they're not able to come to the meeting. (personal communication, November 25, 2009)

In sum, throughout this inclusive process and ongoing communication the superintendent acknowledged that he is able to get valuable feedback and recommendations which he then shares with his instructional cabinet to make final recommendations to the school board.

Three important beliefs stand out from the superintendent's approach when making resource allocations. First, the superintendent reveals that one of the things that

matter most to him is ongoing professional development for all staff. To facilitate this process, the superintendent created a different account for professional development and allocates an undisclosed amount each year to support the professional development of staff at each school site. In addition, the superintendent believes in allocating resources equitably. He asserted that “I think your budget needs to be allocated equitably, not equally and I think that you need to put personnel where their need is greatest” (personal communication, November 25, 2008).

The superintendent revealed a strong belief in all students reaching high levels of achievement and also providing academic support through extended day programs and activities. The superintendent affirmed that the school sites have the responsibility to provide targeted interventions through extended learning opportunities in a way that best meets student needs. Most importantly the superintendent asserted that he holds all school sites accountable for student achievement.

Similar to the superintendent, a high school principal from District A described the importance of having high expectations for student achievement and setting goals to support student achievement. The principal noted “We’ve have two core values. One is high standards the other, we nurture, we care, so every goal will somehow be derived from this” (personal communication, December 9, 2008). In addition, the principal also described the challenges and strategies for setting goals in a large organization. He added:

Obviously I want to try to develop something, but it’s easier said than done. So my job is take all the data and all the input, separate myself because I’m looking at these trees up front, and then set back, what’s the forest look like, to think where will we be in five years, because it’s not just about for this year because I’ve got to have a plan in mind for many

years. So I create goals in the context of both the data that I'm looking at, from all of these programs, but I've also got a vision of where I want this school to be in five to eight years. So when I come up with goals, it's straddling these many environments. (personal communication, December 9, 2008)

The high school principal from district A supports a distributive leadership model that emphasizes instructional leadership through high involvement of department teacher leaders in the decision making process. The principal asserted that "another significant piece of why we are improving is distributive leadership, it's that at every level, there's ownership in the team leaders" (personal communication, December 9, 2008). In addition, he asserted that the team leaders work on instructional leadership, which includes data analysis and overseeing the professional development activities.

Furthermore, the principal noted that he expects his teacher leaders to be instructional leaders and support their colleagues in their department. To facilitate and support this structure, the principal revealed that he provides a release period for the instructional leaders to fulfill their responsibilities mentioned above. Finally, the principal recognized that he supports his team leaders through individual mentoring and coaching. The principal asserted "it is part of my job to train leaders" (personal communication, December 9, 2008). The principal then added:

On a regular basis, we talk about how to lead when they face issues in their department, frustrations with their teams. You know, why are my teachers not listening? And I certainly do that with APs, it is part of my job to train leaders. (personal communication, December 9, 2008)

The principal acknowledged that part of his job is to teach leadership skills to teacher leaders and assistant principals. He further added that he meets with his

department leads to discuss any issues within the team such as teachers not listening or following through and gives feedback to teachers on how to overcome challenges and barriers so they can move forward with their action plans. The principal asserted that his department leads are not the traditional department chairs where they are mainly responsible for receiving and giving information and updates to teachers. The principal noted that the team leaders are “decision makers” and “instructional leaders”. The principal added the following that captures the essence of instructional leadership:

So the team leader analyzes that data, works with the assistant principal who oversees that department, and they need to report to me. So they give me a full analysis, and then I weigh in, and then part of my job is to establish goals and priorities, but I've asked them to make recommendations just as department chairs will ask individual teachers to analyze the data and to say what's working, and what the teacher recommends. So everybody has input and everybody has ownership. (personal communication, December 9, 2008)

The high school principal acknowledged that he promotes leadership for all staff members through leadership retreats twice a year where some district leaders are present as well. Teachers, classified and other instructional support staffs also participate in the leadership retreats. Most importantly, the principal asserted that through these leadership retreats the staff has the opportunity to work on leadership skills and develop leadership goals. Furthermore, the principal includes an instructional leadership goal each year which outlines the action steps that the organization will take in order to increase leadership capacity and participation of different staff members in leadership roles.

#### *District B Leadership*

The superintendent from District B believes that a key ingredient to student success lies in the expertise and ability of district and governing board to provide the

support and flexibility to school sites to use their personnel and financial resources. The superintendent affirmed:

I think the key to whatever successes, if you want to call it that, that our district has had has been the ability of school site administrators to be able to make decisions regarding how their resources are allocated that best meets the needs of their communities and our ability, by our the administration and the board's ability, because they are given the flexibility to hire their staff, because they are given the flexibility to utilize the resources that are made available to them. (personal communication, September 30, 2008)

The superintendent further asserted that because the school sites have the flexibility to spend and use their resources, then the district holds the principal and staff accountable for student achievement. The superintendent noted "I think that is the key to what has made our school district not any better than anyone else but certainly a little bit different" (personal communication, September 30, 2008).

The superintendent believes in leading the school district through high levels of staff and parent involvement, transparency, and accountability. For instance, the superintendent notes that the district conducts an annual assessment where parents have the opportunity to provide feedback on the schools their children attend. The results from the survey are sent to the school sites, to the district office and to the governing board. The school site administrators are responsible for reviewing the data and holding monthly dialogues with parents and other constituents to address the areas of concern that come up on the surveys.

The superintendent provides a leadership structure where all constituents are highly involved in the decision-making processes and they are given the trust to make critical decisions on the allocation of resources to support student achievement. For

example, the Budget Standards Committee is a group of stakeholders including staff, parents, and school board members who make recommendations to the school board on the general budget. In addition, the superintendent affirmed the following:

Overall just the allocation process that we use allows our departments, allows our school sites to number one buy into it because they have at least representatives on our Budget Standards Committee that are making decisions on their behalf. (personal communication, September 30, 2008)

Most notable in the superintendent's leadership approach is his productive working relationship with the school board members and the opportunity he gives them to be involved in different committees. In contrast to the traditional governing boards who typically adopt recommendations, the superintendent involves all school board members in committees that make important decisions that affect student achievement. For instance, three school board members are part of the Budget Standards Committee where critical decisions are made regarding the general fund.

Furthermore, the school board members also participate in several "board subcommittees" that focus on curriculum and instruction. In this way, the leadership from the superintendent provides the opportunity for board members to actively participate in the decision making process through ongoing collaboration with all constituents.

Through the superintendent's leadership, the school board members collaborate with district and school level administrators to provide leadership and focus in four areas including (1) curriculum, (2) technology, (3) facilities, and (4) human resources. Through this process the board officials meet with school and district leadership teams twice a month to discuss the issues, changes or initiatives within each area. The board

members then report back to other board members and discuss with the intent to adopt a recommendations that emanate from these committees and subcommittees. This leadership structure and process allows board members to gain deep insights on important issues that affect student achievement and also become active participants in the decision making process. In sum, this exemplifies how the superintendent's leadership is inclusive at all levels of the organization.

The superintendent's leadership through high levels of teacher, administrator and parent involvement is similar to the leadership from a high school principal from District B. The high school principal has structures and processes in place to involve teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators in co leading instructional initiatives and changes that support student achievement. The principal described the leadership at the school as follows:

Well, I could say, you know, we're pretty much a site-based leadership so they're really there to support whatever we need. They give us the responsibility to analyze our school and find out what our needs are, and through conversations from us, our area superintendents, teachers, the district will occasionally start new initiatives. (personal communication, September 16, 2008)

A successful high school principal from District B affirmed that there is a clear line or leadership structure in place at the school site that drives the teacher collaboration. In addition, he added that ongoing collaboration and leadership drive the change initiatives in curriculum and instruction. The principal and the superintendent acknowledged that the district has a long-standing tradition and philosophy supporting "school site based leadership". The superintendent noted "philosophically going all the way back to maybe before I got here, the decisions related to staffing and how they are

going to use their other resources are essentially made at the school site” (personal communication, September 30, 2008). He further added “we are very, very much of a school site and department driven decision making operation” (personal communication, September 30, 2008).

The principal noted that the instructional leadership in the school involves the learning director and the department chairs. Furthermore, the principal revealed that they have a clear and cohesive leadership structure with an understanding that ultimately, their system is more effective when teacher leaders are involved. The principal stated:

Ultimately, what we want is our department chairs to be the ones to implement that system in those meetings because it’s just a whole lot more meaningful when you have department chairs on your campus who are actually academic leaders as well. (personal communication, September 16, 2008)

The high school principal revealed that he also works with the learning director and assistant principal in reviewing and analyzing student achievement data and personnel to assess areas for growth. The learning director then works with the department chairs to plan and implement change initiatives or decide the focus on teacher collaboration.

The principal asserted his leadership philosophy when working with all school staff and stakeholders as inclusive and student focused. More specifically the principal acknowledged that his administrative team is there to take care of teacher issues so they can do their best job in the classroom. The principal stated:

I think it really starts from principal. And you know one of our goals here and one of our missions for the administrative group, if you will: our goal is to remove barriers for teachers. That’s our number one goal. That’s what we tell our staff, we’re here to support you; we’re here to do



whatever we can so that you can do the best job in your classroom.  
(personal communication, September 16, 2009)

The principal asserted that that this approach allows the teachers to buy into a school-wide leadership approach and that the administrators take care of their issues and are there to support the teachers. Moreover, the principal revealed that the organization is doing great things for kids because of many staff members also taking leadership roles and doing great things. He observes that “the leadership transcends the principal and different people are doing great things, even the kids are here for the kids” (personal communication, September 16, 2008).

The superintendent and the principal asserted that the school district leaders are mainly there to assist schools with the implementation of changes initiatives. The principal revealed that the district is “a support mechanism” and affirmed that he appreciates the kind of relationship they have with the district because they allow for flexibility in how they use their resources. The principal acknowledged that the district has traditionally supported different school based initiatives by freeing up resources and providing the expertise. The principal captured the essence of the district’s leadership through the following words:

So, the district supports us by freeing up some resources to get a group of teachers to re-write the curriculum and they support us yearlong with lead teachers at our own campus, with stipends. So they’re really there to support us in identifying our areas of potential growth and then freeing up resources and support services so that we can improve in those areas.  
(personal communication, September 16, 2008)

The principal revealed that the district provided leadership to support a school initiative to increase Geometry scores on the California Standards Tests. The district

leadership coordinated a leadership team comprised of teacher leaders and experts from across the district. In addition, the district paid for the teacher release days and provided a stipend for teachers to collaborate and make some recommendations around curriculum and instruction for Geometry classes. In sum, there is a productive relationship between district and site based leadership teams that focus on student learning.

### *District C Leadership*

The superintendent's leadership around instruction strongly emphasizes a results-oriented approach to student achievement and strategically allocating resources to support the school-based instructional focus. More specifically, the superintendent noted that through his leadership efforts around the "Focus on Results" program, the school principals were able to strategically allocate resources to support the instructional focus of the schools. The superintendent asserted:

One of the things that I would tell you is helping principals target their existing resources so that they are focused and not scattered that that has been the primary...that is the biggest reason why I believe that we have made consistent improvement in Academic Performance Index Scores ever since I have been here. What dollars that do exist are not just passed out in a helter-skelter manner; but they have a specific direction that is based on the instructional focus of that school. (personal communication, November 13, 2008)

Similarly, the principal and the school board member acknowledged that one of the best practices implemented under the leadership of the superintendent within the district is the "Focus on Results" program. The superintendent described the program as follows:

One of the things that I have put into place three years ago, this is the fourth year that a program that is referred to as Focus on Results and what it does is it has each school in the district target a specific area for

improvement. As part of that, I expect the principals to direct their allocations to support that primary area of improvement. For example, if it is reading comprehension, how are you directing your resources to support reading comprehension? If it is writing, how are you directing your resources to address that area? (personal communication, November 13, 2008)

Finally, the superintendent further acknowledged that ever since he assumed his current position, he has strongly emphasized to principals, district administrators, and school board members to allocate resources in a way that support an instructional focus and the direction and mission of the school district. The superintendent asserted “you are just trying to constantly keep them on that mission” (personal communication, November 13, 2008).

The superintendent strongly believes in using position control to monitor and make sure that all limited resources are used effectively. The superintendent revealed that he was the assistant superintendent of the Business department and has extensive experience in working with dollars. As such, he learned how to work with the few existing dollars and learned how to make sure that the district maintains a healthy budget. Most importantly, the superintendent asserted:

One of the things that you learn early in your career is, if you don't have a good assistant superintendent of business, especially one who doesn't always tell you the truth you can go south really quick. That person is really my number one right hand person. I keep him very near and dear to me is my assistant superintendent of business. (personal communication, November 13, 2008)

The high school principal from District C described a distinctive school leadership structure that is inclusive, systematic and guides the school in moving forward with change initiatives in curriculum and instruction. The school principal revealed that

under her leadership, she developed a process and leadership structure to facilitate school-wide collaborative efforts and dialogues focused on improving student achievement through the Focus on Results framework.

The high school principal asserted that the department chairs play a key role in moving forward with the school-wide vision of student achievement. She further added that the department chairs are teacher leaders that work with subject specific issues and guide the collaboration and discussions in their respective Professional Learning Communities. In addition, the instructional leadership team who regularly met with the principal dialogued on instructional practices and issues related to the Focus on Results Framework. Moreover, the principal noted that the department chairs and instructional team members met with her as the Instructional Cabinet. The chairs and members of the instructional team meet as the instructional cabinet team to make recommendations to the principal and discuss issues that impact the comprehensive educational programs at the school site.

The high school principal from District C asserted that this leadership structure and process involving different stakeholders allows for more participation and perspectives and facilitated progress towards a school-wide vision of student achievement. In addition, the principal noted that the ideas, action plans and leadership from the department chairs lead to more buy in from the teachers and staff. The principal further acknowledged that the leadership structure has been a significant help in getting everybody moving in the same direction to support the Focus on Results program. The principal noted:

So those regular dialogues were really powerful in terms of setting the school vision and getting buy in from the department chairs because they're the ones who are elected by their department to lead them. And so, as long as they understood where we are moving, there would be no problem in getting a hundred people moving in that direction. (personal communication, November 23, 2008)

Another important structure that the principal reported as an effective strategy was to assign all the members of the instructional cabinet a common 6<sup>th</sup> preparatory period. The principal noted that this master schedule strategy allowed the instructional cabinet team to support teachers and have regular dialogues around best practices in curriculum and instruction. In addition, this allowed all members of the team to walk through classrooms and observe best practices in the classrooms. In this way, the members dialogued about instructional practices and next steps in supporting teachers through professional development opportunities.

The district office provides leadership and expertise in curriculum and instruction. More specifically the district leadership coordinates subject specific collaboration opportunities for teachers across the district. Through this district wide collaboration, teachers from different schools get to collaborate within their own specific subject areas. In addition, the teachers build district wide knowledge around common curricular issues. For example, teachers dialogue on the essential standards for each subject area. Most importantly, teachers collaborate on how to assess student mastery of the essential standards. The principal emphasized that their approach was to build knowledge and use the expertise from the teachers through the district and take the conversations back to the school site for the next steps.

## Summary

This chapter presented the findings that emerged from a descriptive case study focusing on school and district level factors linked to student achievement in three successful school districts. The themes included in this section addressed all three research questions and were presented in the following order: (1) collaboration, (2) resource allocation, (3) leadership, and (4) best practices. The findings were primarily based on rich qualitative data from a total of 12 interviews with district administrators and school board members. In addition, extensive financial and resource allocation documents for all three successful school districts were reviewed including the Single Plan for Student Achievement, Interim Reports, Strategic Plans, and District Financial Profiles found in Ed Data Website. Chapter five presents an in depth discussion focusing on the results and the implications for practice and future research.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### *Introduction*

The final chapter begins with a summary of the study including the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and methodology. The next section of the chapter discusses the research findings in relationship to the literature focusing on the following four themes: (1) collaboration, (2) leadership, (3) best practices, and (4) resource allocation. The last section of the chapter presents important and warranted conclusions organized around the three major research questions that guided this multi case qualitative study.

### *Summary of Study*

#### *Problem Statement*

Student achievement is the core mission of public education. Human and financial resources are essential to fulfilling this mission. As a publicly funded institution, public schools have finite and restricted resources that must be used strategically and efficiently to attain the highest student achievement levels. In order to advance our understanding of resource allocation practices and their impact on student achievement, the issue addressed in this study is determining what district and site resource allocation processes and practices are associated with high levels of student achievement.

#### *Purpose Statement and Research Questions*

The purpose of this study was to examine school and district level resource allocation practices and processes that were linked to higher levels of student achievement in successful high schools and their respective districts. In addition, this study sought to explore how successful high schools used multiple measures of student achievement data to allocate human and fiscal resources. Finally, this study explored best practices as reported by high school administrators, superintendents, and school board members. The following questions guided the study:

- 1) How do successful schools and districts in which they are located allocate human and fiscal resources?
- 2) To what extent are decisions regarding resource allocation linked to student achievement data?
- 3) What practices do educators feel are linked to school success?

#### *Review of the methodology*

To address the research questions, this study employed an exploratory case study design (Yin, 2003). The multiple case study design allowed for the exploration of complex and uninterrupted phenomena in the context of three successful high schools and their respective districts. Prior findings from the research on adequacy studies and successful schools narrowed down the focus that was examined on school and district level factors in successful high schools.

A major strength from this case study design is the thick and rich data collection techniques. The researcher conducted a total of 12 semi-structured interviews that yielded over 180 pages of rich data for analysis and interpretation. The researcher



interviewed three administrators and one school board member from each successful district. The three administrators interviewed included the Superintendent, the Chief Business Officer, and a principal leading a successful high school. All participants had extensive experience in the field of education as school and district administrators and school board members. The researcher employed research-based data analysis techniques and strategies to gain deeper insights of the complex phenomena under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Most importantly, the researcher carried out a disciplined and multi step iterative process that included analytical techniques such as memoing, coding, and pattern matching.

### *Findings Related to the Literature*

#### *Collaboration*

A culture of collaboration focusing on the relationship between instructional practices and student results is one of the single most important factors in successful high schools. This study confirmed the findings from previous research suggesting a strong relationship between teacher collaboration focusing student results and high student achievement levels for all. Public schools that were beating the odds have dynamic principals who built and sustained a culture of collaboration (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007, Rumberger & Gandara, 2006). Similarly, this study found that all three high school principals created and sustained a culture of collaboration emphasizing student results with strong leadership from teachers and other instructional staff. Most importantly, the leadership and support from the district administration played a key role in the success of the collaboration efforts at the school site level.

It is evident that successful high schools and K-12 public schools that are beating the odds capitalize on collaboration structures and processes to support the continuous growth of all staff which positively impacts student achievement. Recent groundbreaking studies found that teacher collaboration that is built during the instructional day significantly impacts professional growth (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007). This study found that all three successful high schools had distinctive collaboration structures and models based on the Professional Learning Communities model where teachers shared best instructional practices. In this way, teachers had the opportunity to learn from one another and also reflect on instructional practices in relationship to student results that facilitate teacher professional growth. For example, the high school principal from District B revealed that through the collaboration process, teachers shared their expertise in certain areas and also allowed them to be on the same page.

In order for teacher collaboration to have a positive impact on student achievement, it should have a clear instructional focus and linked to a school wide effort and goals, and clearly supported through high levels of teacher leadership. Previous research strongly suggests that teacher collaboration is deliberate, systematic and supports a shared vision of student achievement that all constituents embrace and protect (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007). This study also found that the three successful high schools had collaboration structures and processes that centered on an instructional focus or school-wide goal.

Evidence of this finding can be seen in all three successful high schools in this study. For instance, the high school principal from District C revealed that their school-wide efforts focused on improving all students' critical thinking skills as measured by

writing samples and the California Standards Test scores. In this way, the principal guided and facilitated school-wide discussions on how each department would support the instructional focus and how they would assess the effectiveness of their instructional strategies. As part of this effort, the principal involved and relied on teacher leaders to move all teachers in the same direction to support the school's instructional focus.

Another important element of effective collaboration is the role that teacher leadership plays in sustaining school-wide improvement efforts and goals and use of the collaboration time. The research on effective schools clearly suggests a strong relationship between student results and teacher leadership in guiding and leading teacher collaboration efforts. This study found that teacher leaders facilitated collaboration efforts and used their leadership skills to lead and guide their departments, teams and instructional programs with a focus on increased student achievement. For instance, the principal from District B asserted that teacher leadership was the main reason why their PLC model was successfully implemented and yielded positive results. Moreover, the principal acknowledged that it was much better when lead teachers implemented the system of collaboration because there is more buy in from the rest of the teachers. In sum, teacher leadership is crucial to implementing and sustaining a structure and process of effective collaboration with the support of administration.

A third component of effective collaboration in effective schools is ongoing communication and a feedback process involving teacher leaders and administrators. Although previous research clearly emphasizes the importance of collaboration to student achievement in successful schools, there is little evidence of how collaboration takes place in the context of high performing high schools. In contrast, this study investigated

and found evidence from all three successful high schools of collaboration practices that are linked to student achievement.

It appears that principals guide and support teacher leaders to implement the collaboration model. In turn, teacher leaders sustain the collaboration effort in their own departments. Teacher leaders report to administration to provide the feedback and also make recommendations as to where to go next in their efforts in improving student achievement. This type of communication and collaboration effort between administration and teacher leaders is what makes it possible to achieve cohesiveness in an organization as diverse as a high school and support a school-wide vision of student achievement. For instance, a high school principal from District A meets regularly with his assistant principals who meet regularly with their assigned team leaders to analyze student achievement data and discuss progress towards their goals. In this way, the principal provides guidance and direction to the assistant principals and to the team leaders. The principal recognized that through this process, lead teachers work with their teams to implement the system and this allows greater buy in from everyone.

The collaboration between schools and district enhances the quality of work and brings in additional resources including personnel expertise, instructional support and additional dollars to support student achievement. Previous research highlights the importance of the district's involvement in supporting school sites (Rumberger & Gandara, 2006; Perez et al., 2007). Similarly, this study found that one effective practice is for the district administration to be involved as a support mechanism to advance and provide expertise in the areas of focus at the school sites. This study advances the body

of knowledge in how district and school administration work together to provide support in improving student achievement.

This study found that all three high school principals acknowledged how their districts provide the expertise and support to their school site in an effort to advance their school goals and initiatives. For example, the high school principal from District B acknowledged that he appreciates the kind of working relationship the school has with the district. He further added that the district office is there whenever they are needed the support. Furthermore, the principal related how the district office supported different high schools in revamping their Geometry curriculum. The district office secured the funding to support the Geometry and offered a stipend to teacher experts who facilitated the process of rewriting the curriculum. In addition, the district provided the necessary professional development opportunities to support the initiative. This corroborates with prior research that indicates that the decision-making is at the school site level and the district office is there to support and validate the school site leadership.

Successful districts operate as learning organizations and promote continuous growth through district wide collaboration days. Prior research on successful schools established the importance of the district in being involved with professional growth of staff (Parrish et al., 2006). This study found a deeper level of practices that support the findings from prior research. For example, all three school districts scheduled district wide collaboration practices where teachers from different schools have the opportunity to dialogue and collaborate on district wide initiatives focusing on curriculum and instruction. The high school principal from District C revealed that through the district wide dialogues, the teachers had the opportunity to build knowledge on issues and gain

deeper perspectives. Most importantly, successful school districts achieve cohesiveness as an organization and operate as a learning organization moving in one direction through school based initiatives.

### Leadership

The research on successful schools consistently indicates that a critical factor related to higher achievement levels is a clear leadership structure at all levels of the organization with a strong emphasis on instructional leadership (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). In addition, the research suggests that successful schools have a collaborative relationship with the district administration that is based on accountability, high expectations, and focused on student achievement (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007). This study found that all three successful high schools and respective districts have principals who are instructional leaders that have a collaborative relationship with the district office instructional services department. For instance, the high school principals reported that the district administration supported site based educational initiatives and changes in instruction and that the instructional and education services departments helped in mobilizing existent resources to support school leadership teams. In addition, this study found that the superintendent's leadership is critical in establishing high expectations and accountability structures throughout the school district. Most importantly, this study found that the three successful districts had a common element: clear leadership structures where teachers, classified staff, administrators and teacher leaders are involved in the decision-making process under the leadership of a superintendent.

### *School Level Leadership*

The research on successful schools indicates that principals hold high expectations for student achievement emphasizing mastery of the content standards. Furthermore, the principals ensure that all students learn to high levels and offer support through interventions and different educational programs (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007, Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). Most importantly, successful principals have high expectations for the teaching and learning process and provide the necessary guidance and support through professional development opportunities and ongoing leadership training for all staff. Similarly, this study found that all three high school principals held high expectations for teacher leaders, staff and student achievement. It is clear that principals in successful schools lead and sustain a school-wide culture of high expectations, accountability, ongoing support, and a strong emphasis on student results.

For example, the high school principal from District A noted that:

You always check the bar, and you come at it with a passion. We believe in what we're doing. The principal needs to be just always out there in front, setting the tone, believing in it and saying we need to be here, not because the state of California says it. That's because these kids need us so much. (personal communication, December 9, 2008)

A high school principal from District B asserted that the message they send to their students is that they are held to the highest behavioral, social, and academic standards to prepare them for the real world. The principal further added that in this way, the students feel that they can compete with any other student in the nation.

Another major research finding of successful schools is that principals deliberately create leadership structures and processes to involve teachers and other staff in the decision making process focusing on instruction (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al.,

2007). The distributive leadership model is the most common form of delegating leadership found in the research of successful schools. Parrish et al. (2006) contends that successful principals delegate and distribute leadership to teacher leaders focusing on instruction and there are clear lines of leadership responsibilities. Similarly, this study found that all three high school principals had a clear structure and process for involving teacher leaders and assistant principals in making decisions through the distributive leadership model. One high school principal asserted “another significant piece of why we are improving is distributive leadership. It is at every level, there’s ownership in the team leaders” (personal communication, December 12, 2008). Similarly a high school principal from District B confirmed that “when teachers are involved in the decision making process, it is much more effective in moving teachers in the same direction” (personal communication, November 23, 2008). In sum, this study found that all three high school principals reported a distributed leadership approach to involve teacher leaders and assistant principals in providing guidance and direction to collaborative efforts aimed at improving student achievement efforts.

As noted previously, this study found that the three high school principals reported school level leadership practices that appear linked to prior research and theory emphasizing a “distributed leadership” perspective (Spillane, 2005). Spillane (2005) suggests that distributive leadership is about leadership practice as opposed to leadership roles, functions and structure. In addition, Spillane (2005) affirms that leadership practice is the product of the interaction of leaders, followers and their situations, which include structures, routines and tools. In application of Spillane’s “distributed leadership” perspective, this study found that the high school principals reported that a



critical component of their leadership approach was the high levels of interactions between teacher leaders, teachers, and assistant principals and principals that focused on student results and a common vision of student achievement. In addition, this study found that student achievement data and structured collaboration were important tools or means to facilitate leadership practice that appeared linked to high levels of student achievement (Spillane, 2005).

Another common element found in the three high schools is that all three high school principals have processes and structures for involving teacher leaders and assistant principals in the decision making process. For example, all three high school principals involved their assistant principals and teacher leaders to co-lead in their respective departments. Within this leadership structure and hierarchy there is shared understanding of clear lines of leadership responsibilities and expectations. The principals provide latitude in how instructional leaders plan and implement instructional changes. The principal expects improvement in student results. In sum, the principal's guidance and emphasis on student results provides the tone and direction for the team leaders and the staff who collaborate to bring the results to fruition.

### *Teacher Leadership*

The research shows that teacher leadership is linked to higher student achievement in effective schools serving minority students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Perez et al., 2007, Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). Parrish et al. (2006) found that teacher leaders are decision makers, experts, collaborators and move things forward in the area of curriculum and instruction. One quality of teacher leaders is that they see themselves as lifelong learners and are highly collaborative (Parrish et al., 2006).

This study found that teacher leaders are decision makers who are responsible for overseeing professional development activities and supporting teachers in the area of teaching and learning. For instance, a high school principal from District A noted that their team leaders are “decision makers” who work on instructional leadership including analyzing data, facilitating discussions around results during collaboration time and recommending professional development opportunities. Similarly, a high school principal from District B asserted that teachers are strong academic leaders who support their colleagues through team and individual mentoring. Finally a high school principal from District C declared that it is most effective when teacher leaders have regular dialogues with their colleagues and lead through high levels of teacher involvement. In contrast to the previous research, this study found that there are alternative leadership models for teachers to participate aside from the traditional department chairs positions. These alternative teacher leadership models and structures have an impact on student results and are used as a leverage point in moving things forward. For example, a high school principal from District A noted that teacher leadership from the different subject councils provide the foundation for building knowledge around curricular issues and thus helps in moving projects forward at the school site level. In addition, one high school principal from District B affirmed that his school successfully planned and implemented a curriculum change in the area of Geometry and consequently, experienced higher student results. The leadership from the teachers involved through district wide subject councils used their expertise to guide changes in the teaching and learning process in different high schools. Finally, the success of providing alternative additional leadership structures is largely dependent on the support from the district administration and

leadership. The teacher leadership from these efforts has proven to have a positive impact on student achievement.

### *District Leadership*

The leadership from the district administration is an integral part of student success in successful schools (Gandara & Rumberger, 2006; Perez et al., 2007). The research suggests that there is a relationship between the school sites and district administration that can be characterized as close and collaborative (Perez et al., 2007). This study found that these successful school districts have a leadership structure that may be described as supportive, flexible, collaborative, and that emphasizes accountability from all stakeholders and school principals. These qualities would be in alignment with the literature noted above.

One level of district support that impacts student achievement in successful schools is providing professional development opportunities for teachers and other classified staff (Parrish et al., 2006; Perez et al., 2007). Although previous research has established the importance of the district's involvement in coordinating professional development, it has not articulated the planning and implementation process that involves using student achievement data as a critical step to support school sites. This study found that the district administration coordinates and facilitates the professional development opportunities while collaborating with various school based leadership teams to design the content and focus of the professional development activities that will impact student achievement. For example, a high school principal from District A affirmed that his school improved the achievement for second language learners through the professional development provided to the teachers. Most importantly the principal

asserted that the content and design of the professional development mainly stemmed from the recommendations that the teachers made through their analysis of student results.

### *Superintendent Leadership in Successful School Districts*

Perhaps the most unexplored area in the research of successful schools and adequacy studies is the relationship between the superintendents' leadership and student achievement. As noted previously, the research findings vaguely focus on the "district leadership" without paying special attention to the superintendent's leadership. This study successfully accessed and secured time with the superintendents from three high performing school districts. Through extensive and systematic data analysis from the interviews and review of district documents, this study found that the leadership and use of authority by the superintendents are linked to school level leadership.

One behavior noted in the data analysis is the superintendents from high performing school districts hold teachers and principals accountable for student achievement. The superintendents effectively use various indicators of progress to measure the effectiveness of the numerous instructional programs that serve as many as 32,000 students enrolled in K-12. For example, the most common indicator is the student results on the California Standards Tests and California High School Exit Exam. To accomplish this task, the superintendents hold principals accountable for the achievement of all student subgroups through ongoing dialogues that are focused on student results. For example, the superintendent from District A expects all principals to develop two school-wide goals around student achievement each year. In addition, the superintendent meets with the principals individually three times a year to collect evidence of progress

towards the school wide goals and discuss how the district leadership can support the principals in increasing student achievement. The superintendent from District C expects all school principals to focus on one instructional area each year and target human and financial resources to support this area. He expects principals to implement support programs for students to meet state and district benchmarks. In sum, it appears that superintendents set high expectations for student achievement and hold staff accountable for student results while supporting their efforts in improving student achievement through ongoing mentoring and guidance.

Another conclusion from this study is that superintendents have the ability to bring together the expectations, values, beliefs, and ideas from different interest groups through a cohesive vision and mission of student achievement that the stakeholders can embrace and protect. The superintendent from District A lead and facilitated the development of a mission statement through multiple levels of community, staff and parent involvement that became the cornerstone of all major decisions around resource allocations. The superintendent affirmed that major decisions on school budget were aligned to the core values of the mission statement. Similarly, the superintendent from District C brought different stakeholders together, including teachers, classified employees such as custodians and clerks, school and district administrators and community members, as the Strategic Planning Committee. The most important outcome of the collaboration was a clear plan for student success that provided direction for all school based leadership teams to increase student achievement.

The superintendents strategically involve administrators, teachers, classified staff, parents and other community members in realigning human and fiscal resources during

massive budget cuts and continue to lead the organization to sustained school improvement efforts that are linked to high student achievement. It appears that superintendents effectively deal with fiscal uncertainty and ambiguity through ongoing dialogues with teachers, administrators, classified staff, parents and other stakeholders but most importantly with school principals and the school governing board. For example, the superintendent from District A communicates with almost every teacher, administrator and classified employee within the organization through formal presentations and podcasts that he makes available in his district website. The superintendent from District A noted:

I created this PowerPoint and all these recommendations of how we would make reductions district wide and I went to every department at the district office. I went to transportation, maintenance operations, and facilities. I met with everyone in this building; I went to every school site and met with every teacher, got my PowerPoint, talked about the impact of the budget, talked about my recommendations, my rationale and was just available for people to ask questions and make any comments, so I tried to be really inclusive. I went to PTA meetings at every single school site and just let everybody know what I was thinking and took their input and then final recommendations were made in cabinet and then I made them to the school board. (personal communication, November 25, 2008)

Similarly the superintendent from District C involved the school principals in the process of making staff reductions and recommendations to the school board. The superintendent further described that during this tenure he has eliminated many staffing positions through the following approach:

Ever since I have been here, I have been a district of declining enrollment; for the last five years, it has been nothing but reductions. When it comes down to reductions, what I traditionally have done is I believe that the principals are the key factor in making those decisions. I set up a committee and allow principals to help me prioritize recommendations for reductions. Through that process, the board is usually very comfortable

with where we usually end. That may be reduction in staffing at the district office and may be reduction of maintenance and operational people; it could be all kinds of things. One of the things that we have said to them and it has been a priority of the board is as we've made reductions, the board has said let's keep those reductions as far away from classroom as possible. They send a general tone and then I work with that. (personal communication, 2008)

In sum, an important quality from the superintendent's leadership is transparency when making decisions on staffing and also realigning resources to sustain initiatives in improving student achievement.

It appears that the three superintendents skillfully collaborate with school leadership teams to set high expectations for student achievement and at the same time provide the necessary support and flexibility. The high levels of student achievement in successful school districts are linked to the flexibility to use categorical and general funds for staffing. Perhaps the most effective leadership skill from the superintendent is the ability to support school principals in setting high expectations, hold schools accountable for student results and providing spending flexibility. The superintendents give latitude to school principals to allocate funding and staff schools in the way that will most effectively address their students' needs. One superintendent noted that the reason why the school district improved student achievement is because of the tremendous amount of flexibility that schools sites have when using their resources including staffing decisions and use of categorical funding. In sum, flexibility with high accountability is linked to higher student achievement in successful schools.

*School Board Leadership*

Perhaps the most unexplored area in the literature on successful school districts is the relationship between the school board leadership and student achievement. The limited research on successful schools focuses on school level factors that impact student achievement. In addition, the literature indicates that successful schools have a clear relationship with the district. Most surprising is that there is little research that speaks to the working relationship between school board members and the superintendent and how their relationship impacts student achievement throughout the district. This study examined this area and found that superintendents collaborate with school board members through different mechanisms. This study found that superintendents deliberately put systems in place to facilitate productive dialogues between administrators, teachers and school board members.

School boards in California public schools traditionally adopt policies and procedures that affect the daily operations of the entire organization. Furthermore, typical school boards adopt the general budget and other recommendations from the superintendent's office and other departments including human resources, finance and student services. In contrast this study found that school board members are collaborators and to some degree participate in the decision making process in areas including the budget, curriculum and instruction, facilities and human resources.

One important conclusion from this study is that there is a healthy and productive relationship between school board members and the superintendent that is based on trust and ranges from being informative to collaborative. Most importantly, there is a strong link between the school boards active involvement in different decision making



committees and higher student achievement. District B school board's involvement in different subcommittees exemplify this innovative approach.

The school board member's participation and collaboration on different committees results in deeper levels of understanding on different issues and increases the dialogues between different leadership teams including principals and district administrators. Two of the school board members from District B collaborate and participate in the Budget Standards Committee where major decisions affecting the general budget take place. In addition, two additional school board members participate in the curriculum subcommittee where issues on curriculum are explored and solved. One school board member acknowledges that this collaborative approach allows for school board members to build knowledge and bring back informed recommendations to the other school board members. Most importantly, their active involvement allows for ongoing dialogues with district and school administrators where relationships based on trust are developed which results in higher student achievement.

### School and District Level Best Practices

#### *Professional Development*

Successful schools and districts plan and implement professional development activities focusing on content and performance standards (Gandara & Rumberger, 2006; Parrish et al., 2006). This study found that ongoing professional development activities focusing on standards based curriculum and instructional strategies to ensure mastery of content standards is most effective in improving student achievement. Furthermore, it appears that best practices for professional development activities in successful high schools focus on identifying essential or power standards in the core academic areas. In

addition, another best practice involves training on instructional strategies that ensure mastery of the content standards. Most importantly, successful schools monitor the effectiveness of instructional strategies through ongoing student assessment and follow an iterative process that involves analyzing student achievement data to inform instructional strategies.

A high school principal from District A noted that professional development opportunities start with a comprehensive analysis of student achievement data to identify areas of growth. All constituents in the department provide input and make recommendations to the school principal. Then the principal coordinates with the district office to bring expertise to support the area for growth and provide the training at the school site. Most importantly, teachers and administrators monitor the effectiveness of the strategies obtained in the professional development through regular peer to peer observations and assessment of student learning. This is an iterative process of learning, applying and assessing the impact of instructional strategies on student achievement that has significantly increase the capacity and achievement in a high school from District A.

Successful schools and district use a data driven and systematic process for identifying professional development needs that impact student learning. Parrish et al. (2006) and Gandara and Rumberger (2006) found that successful schools collaborate with district leadership to plan and implement professional development activities. This study found that school site leadership teams use multiple sources of student achievement data to identify areas of professional growth and plan appropriate training to support those areas and involve the district in providing the expertise and additional resources if needed.

Successful school districts have different support systems and mechanisms to provide professional development for all staff (Perez et al., 2007). This study found that school districts build cultures of continuous improvement through a wide variety of professional development activities for staff that are built during and beyond the instructional day. For instance a high school principal from District A noted that their teachers have structured collaboration time every day where teachers share their expertise in different areas and learn from one another. Furthermore, teachers also have additional collaboration time during release days. In addition, the department of curriculum and instruction offers summer academies for teachers who want to develop additional skills sets focusing on instructional strategies. Thirdly, the teachers have the opportunity to grow professionally through subject councils through ongoing discussions of curricular issues related to different subject areas.

### *Student Interventions*

Successful schools provide students with academic and behavioral interventions during the instructional day that target specific knowledge and skills (Gandara & Rumberger, 2006). This study found that successful high schools use student achievement data to systematically identify students who are not meeting grade level standards in English Language Arts. For example, a high school from District A identified second language learners who were not meeting grade level standards in English Language Arts and required them to take an additional support class that targeted reading skills and academic language. Similarly, a high school from District B required students who were reading below grade level to take an additional reading class during their instructional day. Finally, a high school from District C required 9<sup>th</sup> grade students

who were failing a core class to take an advisory class and provided them with a mentor. In sum, successful high schools use student achievement data to identify students for interventions programs and are directly connected to the general educational program and are during the instructional day.

### Resource Allocations and Personnel

#### *Positions that Impact Student achievement*

Successful school districts strategically allocate funding from categorical programs and the general fund to create school and district level staff positions that impact student achievement. In addition, it appears that successful school districts and high schools conduct a thorough analysis of personnel and student achievement data to determine the level of scope and type of services needed to support students in meeting district and state targets. This study found that the following school and district level positions provided educational services that were linked to higher student achievement levels: (1) high school counselors, (2) data specialist, (3) intervention specialist, (4) director of secondary education.

Previous research on successful schools revealed that creating positions for instructional coaches are linked high levels of student achievement (Perez et al., 2007). These positions are used to support teachers in instructional strategies and curriculum development. In contrast, this study found that successful school districts allocated additional funding to buy additional counseling time to support high school students. One school board member and the superintendent from District B acknowledged that adding additional counselor time increased the level and scope of services for students and parents. For example, the counselors played a critical role in identifying students

who were not meeting district benchmarks and offering appropriate academic support through additional instructional time and support classes. Another service that was made possible through additional counseling time was providing guidance and a clear high school plans for success for students through parent involvement. In sum, school level positions that focus on targeting students for academic support appear to be linked to higher levels of student achievement.

In summary, the findings from this study corroborate previous findings from successful schools research examining factors that appear linked to higher student achievement (Perez et al., 2007). A refined and enhanced model was developed by the current researcher to reflect findings from this study as illustrated in Figure 5.1. The refined model reflects new knowledge gleaned from the careful examination of school and district level factors which administrators and school board members from three successful school districts in California reported as best practices linked to high levels of student achievement.

The enhanced model integrates research-based frameworks that guided this qualitative study and key findings from the investigation of the three successful high schools (Perez et al., 2007; Gandara & Rumberger, 2006; Parrish et al., 2006). Of particular importance to the enhanced model is the application of Spillane's (2005) distributive leadership framework to school and district level factors that appear linked to high student achievement levels. It appears that school level factors including curriculum and instruction, professional development, collaboration and the other factors illustrated in Figure 5.1 are a result of the ebb and flow that results from what Spillane (2005) refers to as leadership practice. Most importantly, it is the sum and the continuous interaction

of all the factors that are a product of the distributive leadership that is characteristic of all three successful high schools and respective districts.

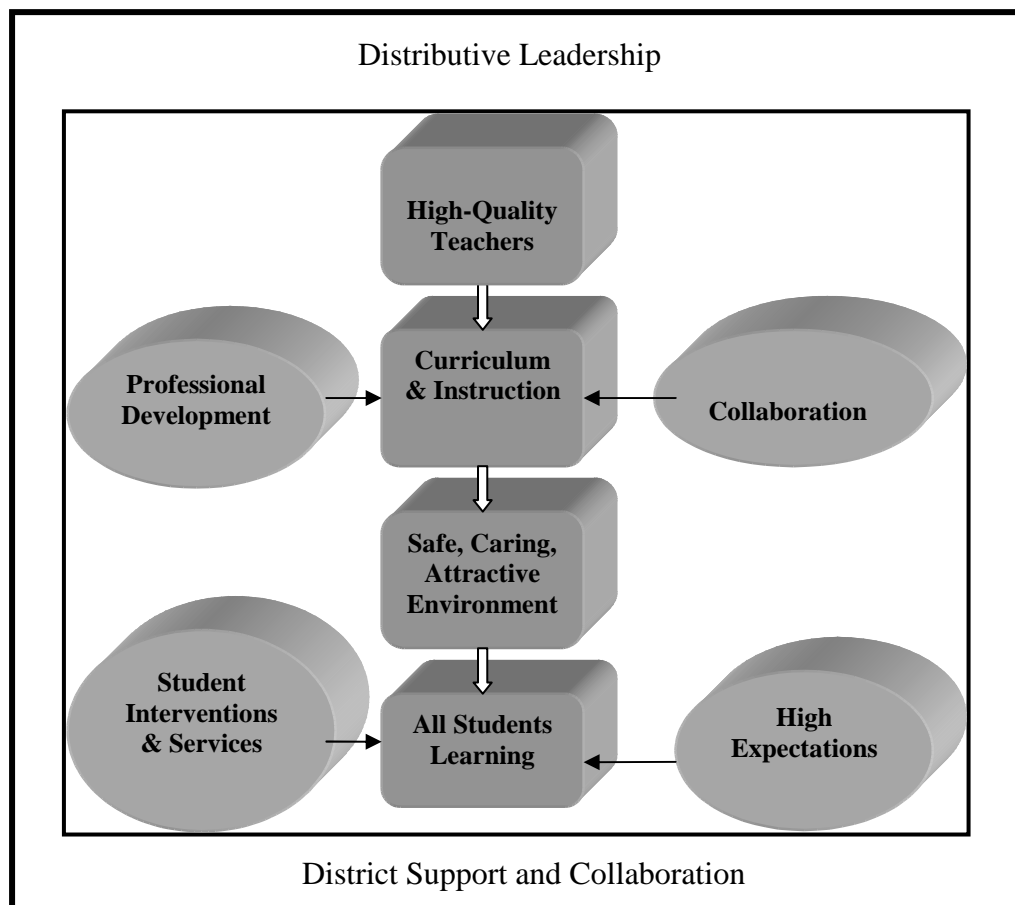


Figure 5.1: Enhanced Conceptual Framework: Successful School Districts

## Conclusions

1. *How do successful high schools and school districts in which they are located allocate human and fiscal resources?*

### *Collaboration*

The three successful school districts have school and district collaborative structures and processes in place throughout the organization to involve staff and other stakeholders in discussions around student achievement data. The ongoing collaboration

involves parents, teachers, administrators, community members and school board members and focuses on improving student achievement. All stakeholders involved in collaborative efforts analyze student achievement data to make informed decisions on how to allocate human and fiscal resources to maximize student achievement. Finally, all the collaborative efforts from the district and school site leadership teams are aligned to support a shared vision of student achievement. Therefore, it is necessary for district and school administrators to put in place collaboration structures and processes with a strong emphasis on student results.

#### *Systematic Collaboration Focused on Results*

Ongoing and systematic teacher collaboration that is built during the instructional day is the single most important factor in improving student achievement in successful high schools. Teacher collaboration that focuses on analyzing multiple sources of student achievement data, sharing best instructional practices, reflecting on the relationship between student results and instructional strategies has the most effect on student achievement. Collaboration practices and models that are based on the “Professional Learning Communities” (PLC) are closely linked to higher achievement levels for all students (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In addition, it is necessary to build teacher collaboration during the instructional day. This means that representatives in the collective bargaining units should bear in mind that the stipulations and language on the teacher contract must be stated in a way that would allow high school administrators some flexibility to allocate instructional minutes and teacher collaboration time during the instructional day.

#### *Collaborative Processes and Structures*

Successful high schools have clear collaborative processes and structures in place with clearly defined leadership responsibilities. All three high school principals shared leadership responsibilities to department chairs to implement a collaboration system that focuses on student results. In addition, all three high school principals involved assistant principals and teacher leaders in co leading the different departments. Furthermore, the high school principals provide guidance and mentoring to support teacher leaders in using collaboration time to accomplish each of the department goals. Administrators including principals and assistant principals are hands on with their assigned department and are a resource and support to teacher leaders. In addition, each department needs to have measurable student achievement targets and goals that is aligned and supports a cohesive and school-wide instructional focus. One implication is that improving student achievement can be accomplished through ongoing teacher collaboration where the principal involves teacher leaders and assistant principals in co-leading collaborative efforts in different instructional areas that yield the desired student results and outcomes.

#### *District Collaboration*

All three successful school districts have a close and collaborative working relationship between school-based and district leadership teams that is based on trust and strong accountability for student achievement. It appears that the district administration validates and honors site based decision-making authority over school-wide plans to improve student achievement. The district is a support mechanism to school leadership teams. For instance, school districts provide professional development opportunities to support areas that schools identify through analysis of student achievement data. In addition, school districts support school sites with guidance and expertise in curriculum



and instruction for all core subject areas. Finally, the three school districts provide for additional human and financial resources to school principals who request additional resources to carry out improvements or action plans that involve sound educational practices that impact student achievement. One important implication is that high school leadership teams involving teacher leaders and administrators can establish a collaborative relationship with the district office to improve student achievement. Furthermore, the collaboration relationship needs to be centered on student achievement and discussions need to focus on how the district can mobilize existent resources to improve student results.

#### *Collaboration with Governing Board*

A positive and collaborative relationship between the school governing board and the superintendent is essential in providing effective leadership and a cohesive vision and mission focused on student achievement. In addition, the school board members clearly understand and support the educational system that the superintendent leads and supervises through ongoing and communication through different venues including advisory committees. Most importantly, when school board members participate in different committees and collaborate with administrators, teachers, parents and community members, they have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the issues critical in student achievement and are active participants in the decision making process. In this way, board members make informed decisions about educational programs that impact student achievement. One implication from this finding is that the leadership from the school board and their active participation in decision-making committees can enhance the relationship between the superintendent and the school

board. Moreover, school board members can make important contributions to the organizations through their active involvement in different decision-making committees. This in turn can improve student achievement.

2. *To what extent are resource allocation decisions linked to student achievement data?*

All three successful school districts use multiple measures of student achievement to determine the areas of growth and to develop educational programs to support student achievement. At the high school level, where most of the general fund is spent on staffing, all three high school principals involve teacher leaders and assistant principals in collecting and analyzing data from standardized test and district benchmarks to determine the level and scope of services needed to bring students to proficient levels in the area of English Language Arts and mathematics. If school districts wish to effectively support students who are not meeting state or district benchmarks, it is important to allocate funding from the general fund or categorical monies to staff leadership positions that will bring about positive changes in student achievement. For example, the superintendent from District A noted that an important position and resource to all schools within the district is the Director of Secondary education. This position, if filled with a highly qualified individual who possesses expertise in professional development, is an important resource to all school leadership teams that can support site based professional development activities that will have an impact on student achievement. A high school principal from District A noted “the single most important factor in student achievement is teacher collaboration” (personal communication, December 9, 2008). The Director of

Secondary Education plays a key role in supporting the team collaboration efforts at the school site level that appear to be linked to high levels of student achievement

All three successful school districts in this study have a state of the art technology infrastructure, software applications, and personnel with technical expertise in data collection and reporting to support school sites and principals. One implication is that school districts must provide adequate funding for the technological infrastructure, software applications, and for professional development to support teachers in their efforts in using student achievement data to inform classroom instructional practices. This type of support is the technological backbone that is needed in order to make sure the data system is functional and accessible to all school leadership teams. Hence, the position of data specialist and appropriate technology personnel is critical because it will allow for the timely reporting of student achievement data and other services to school site. This position is important in supporting a culture of strong collaboration around student results.

This study found three successful high schools strategically identified students who are not making adequate progress and provide different interventions that are built during the instructional day and provide additional support through after school educational programs. If high school leadership teams want to provide effective interventions to support students in meeting state and district academic benchmarks, it is necessary to use different measures of student achievement to target students. In addition, it is also important to use achievement data to personalize interventions for students and to target specific skills and dispositions that will help them become successful in the regular educational program. Finally, it is important for school

administrators to identify students who are struggling and require them to be part of support classes. Most importantly, principals and district administrators need to collaborate around how to use categorical and general funding to support student interventions.

*What practices do educators feel are linked to school success?*

### *Leadership*

All three successful school districts have clear leadership processes, structures and practices at all levels of the organization and involve teachers and staff in the decision making process focusing on instructional leadership. There are certain characteristics that distinguish the leadership in the three successful school districts. First, the high school principals and superintendents hold high expectations for student achievement. At the same time, the leadership in successful school districts provides high levels of student support to address diverse educational needs. Another important characteristic of the leadership in the three successful high schools is that there is strong accountability for student results. Most importantly, the leadership in these successful organizations starts with the superintendent who leads and involves teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, through different committees and strategies.

### *School Level Leadership*

There are several school level leadership practices that are linked to higher levels of student achievement. At the school level, the leadership starts with the principal who has high expectations for students, staff, and the teaching and learning process. The high school principal is highly visible, sets the tone for the staff and is always in the

forefront leading through a shared decision making approach that is transparent to all stakeholders. Principals hold teachers and staff accountable for student achievement and are “always checking the bar” for student achievement. They offer support, guidance, and mentor teachers on leadership skills. In addition, principals need to have tough dialogues with staff members. Student achievement for all is the standard and one of the values that stem from the principal leadership. Finally, it appears that the three high school principals in successful high schools strategically distribute leadership authority to teacher leaders and assistant principals that focus on instructional decisions through a distributed leadership approach.

### *Teacher Leadership*

Another school level factor that appears to be linked to student achievement is teacher leadership. All three high school principals described teacher leaders as decision makers who are collaborative, share their expertise with colleagues, and see themselves as lifelong learners. In addition, teacher leaders support and mentor their colleagues collectively and individually through ongoing conversations focused on the relationship between student results and instructional practices. As stated previously, all three high school principals reported that teacher collaboration is a common practice that is linked to student achievement. Teacher leaders lead their colleagues in collaborative efforts focusing on student results. Teacher leaders need to focus the conversations on the relationship between student results and instructional strategies to improve student achievement. Finally, it is important that teacher leaders participate in training and leadership opportunities to develop and refine their leadership skills that will help them move their departments in the right direction to support student achievement. In an era of

strong accountability for student results, teacher leaders need to be more than information conduits for their departments. Teacher leaders need to be decision makers who support their colleagues and influence other teachers to move forward with the initiatives that impact student achievement. Ultimately, teacher leaders need to support the vision and instructional focus of the school and the principal.

### *Superintendent's Leadership*

The support and leadership from the superintendent is paramount to student achievement. In all three successful school districts, the superintendent skillfully and strategically leads through high levels of staff, parent and community involvement. In addition, the superintendent sets the tone for high expectations for student achievement. Furthermore, superintendents hold staff and school principals accountable for student achievement through ongoing dialogues where the focus is on student results. In addition to having high expectations for the teaching and learning process, the superintendents also provide latitude for how site leadership teams use their categorical resources and general fund for staffing. All three superintendents gave high school principals great amount of latitude in making resource allocation decisions. Therefore, it is important for superintendents to skillfully include the beliefs, values and priorities of the entire community into a cohesive mission and vision statement of student achievement that all stakeholders can embrace and protect.

### *Professional Development*

This study confirmed what prior research identified as best practices for professional development activities in successful school districts. First, professional development activities for teachers focus on curriculum development and instructional

strategies. Secondly, teacher leaders and administrators identify subject specific professional development needs through a disciplined process that involves analyzing student achievement data from multiple sources and collecting information on classroom practices and linking a professional development plan to the school-wide vision of student achievement. In addition, school based leadership teams collaborate with the district administration to plan and implement professional development activities that support each schools school-wide instructional focus. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the most effective professional development is that which is embedded in the instructional day through professional learning communities where teachers have ongoing dialogues around instructional practices in relation to student results.

#### *Flexibility with Accountability*

It appears that all three superintendents support an approach that embraces flexibility with strong accountability. This study found that all three superintendents give tremendous latitude to high school principals to work with site based leadership teams to allocate human and fiscal resources in a way that best meets their students' needs and support school-wide efforts in improving student achievement. As such, the high school principals have the flexibility to involve staff in making important decisions such as allocating general fund resources, categorical funding, and staffing positions to support a school-wide effort to improve student achievement. At the same time the flexibility in such critical decisions must also include accountability from the superintendent.

As will be discussed in more detail in the leadership section of this chapter, the superintendents play a key role in ensuring that there are district and school level accountability systems in place to monitor student achievement frequently. An effective

accountability system may involve ongoing dialogues between the superintendent and each school principal where student progress is discussed and the principals provide evidence that shows progress towards school-wide goals. During these dialogues, the superintendent has the opportunity to provide guidance to principals but also opens up the possibility for a discussion on how additional or current human and fiscal resources can support student achievement at each school site. Most importantly, this type of accountability allows for a positive relationship between the superintendent and the principal that is based on high expectations for student achievement through an approach that includes flexibility with accountability.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This study found that the principals in all three successful high schools involved teacher leaders and assistant principals in co-leading the different instructional areas and educational programs. Future research focusing on teacher and assistant principal leadership in successful high schools through qualitative data collection methods including real time observations of collaboration efforts in the uninterrupted contexts will enrich the current body of knowledge. In addition, qualitative data methods that produce rich data will likely enrich the concept of co-leadership in successful high schools. In addition, future research studies that examine teacher leadership through the lens of the teacher leaders and those teachers who follow will enhance the body of knowledge and deepen our understanding of the processes that teachers and other administrators are part of that brings the desired student results to fruition.

This study found that one of the superintendents provided opportunities for school board members to actively participate in different committees that focused on different



areas that impact student achievement including curriculum and instruction, human resources, facilities and resource allocation. This study limited the data collection to one school board member from each successful school district. Future research focusing on the superintendent's leadership in relationship to the school board's involvement and leadership through qualitative data collection methods and extensive review of district documents will most likely confirm the results from this study. Hence, future research focusing on strategies that the superintendent uses to involve all school board members in decision making committees will enrich and deepen our understanding of how school board members make contributions to student achievement.

#### *Insights of the Researcher*

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds can achieve high levels of success through high expectations, academic support, and targeted interventions during the instructional day. Invest in professional development to support teachers, administrators and other staff appears to make the difference in student achievement in the three successful high schools and respective districts. Highly qualified teachers and administrators are the greatest asset in the three successful organizations.

What matters most in successful high schools and their respective districts is how human and fiscal resources are allocated. Adding additional resources is not the complete answer to under performing schools. What matters is how school level resources including personnel and other fiscal resources are aligned to support a cohesive educational program and a shared vision of student achievement. Most importantly, what matters is how stakeholders including teachers, administrators, school board members

and other staff are involved in the decision making process to best allocate the existent resources to have the most impact on student achievement.

One of the greatest resources that successful high schools and districts have is the leadership from the dynamic principals and superintendents that embrace and value high expectations and strong accountability. The leaders in these positions guide, lead, support and inspire staff to do the best job in the classroom and in their roles that support student achievement. The leadership that they bring is characterized as transparent, high expectations for student achievement and for staff, accountability with flexibility in resource allocation and a strong emphasis on professional development. Finally, it is deliberate and strategic that these leaders do to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the decision making process to best allocate and fund programs and personnel that will have most impact on student achievement.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Protocol for High School Principal

**School district:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **School Background (2 minutes)**

1. Can you tell me about your school?

*Probe:*

- How would you describe the students, parents, and community and other stakeholders at your school?
- Is there any form of selectivity at the school? (i.e., pre-testing, parent interviews?).

#### **Respondent Background (2 minutes)**

2. Can you tell me a bit about your professional background? For instance, how did you come to be a principal at this school and what are your major responsibilities?

*Probe:*

- How many years have you been a principal in total?
- How many years have you been a principal in this school?
- Do you have teaching experience? years? which subject(s), what grade(s)?
- Educational Background

#### **Strategies Implemented (15 minutes)**

3. Your current statewide API rank is \_\_\_\_\_, your similar school API rank is \_\_\_\_\_, and your English Learner API rank is \_\_\_\_\_. These ranks indicate that the students at your school are performing at high level. Could you describe the primary strategy implemented or interventions that have influenced these results?

If primary strategy is related with:

#### **Curriculum and Instruction, probe:**

- Does your school have a common curriculum? What curricula are used in language arts and mathematics? What are the names of the curriculum packages?
- Do you think that this particular curriculum has influenced your school's high performance, or just the fact that the curriculum is used uniformly?

- What are teachers doing differently now that they were before your implemented changes to the curriculum/instruction? What are students learning now that they were not learning before you implemented this model?
- Have you had professional development accompany this curriculum?  
**Additional instructional time for students** (i.e., extended day program, extended year, summer school, Saturday school)
  - What is the additional time used for?
  - Who provides additional instruction?
  - Which students are targeted for this additional time? Is it available for every student who wants the service? What percentage of your students receives this service? How does this additional instructional time lead to improved student learning? What are students learning now that they were not learning before?

**Increased School and Staff Capacity, probe:**

**Instructional coaches/support** (i.e., literacy coaches, peer coaches, reading specialists, resource teachers)

- what is the role of the instructional coaches/support?
- Which students work with the instructional coaches? How often?
- What have teachers started doing differently now that the instructional coaches are at your school?

**Professional Development:** Could you tell me who has attended/received professional development at your school?

- What types of professional development have you attended?
- Your teachers?
- About how much time have your teachers spent in PD this year?
- What was the focus on PD?
- What percentage of your teachers participated?
- Is this teacher time paid by the district?
- How has this contributed to their professional growth?
- What is the role of the district office in PD?

**Teacher collegiality/collaboration** (teacher meetings/collaborative work, instructional planning)

- Do teacher meet on a regular basis to plan instruction together? If yes how often?
- Could you tell me about the nature of these meetings? How would you describe their work during meetings? What might be some activities during this time together?
- How has this level o teacher collaboration led to improved student outcomes?

- Does teacher collaboration have any implications for the cost of school operations?

**Systematic Assessment and Data-Based Decision-making**, probe:

**Attention to monitoring student outcomes** (i.e., CST, API, CAHSEE, AYP)

- In what form do you receive student achievement data?
- Individually for all students?
- Aggregated summary?
- By skill/content
- By student subgroup
- How do you use the assessment data? To evaluate progress? To inform parents? To identify struggling students? to design interventions for struggling students?
- Do you use assessment data to identify teachers who need instructional improvement?
- How has the use of these data contributed to improving student learning?
- Has your school or district expended additional funds or resources to implement your assessment and monitoring program?

**District Support**, probe:

District Support (i.e., implementation of required curriculum, professional development, resources, release time, teacher assignments, district level accountability, and district standards).

- How might you describe the districts support critical to school success?
- What types of support have you received from the district?
- What other district personnel is directly involved in school improvement efforts at your school?

**Parental/Community Involvement**, probe:

- What programs are in place to involve parents or the community in student learning?
- Has your school been successful in involving a diverse group of parents?
- How do you think the increased parent or community involvement has contributed to improved student learning?

**Other**, probe:

- How do you see this factor has contributed to your school's success? What specifically about this was important to your success?
- Are your teachers doing something differently now than they were before?
- Are your students doing anything different outside of school?

**Challenges (5 min)**

4. I am also interested in learning what you feel are the greatest challenges to increasing the academic performance of the students in your school. I recognize there are likely multiple challenges. But if you had to limit, what are the top 3 challenges your school faces?
- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which of the three factors would you say has been the greatest challenge at your school?
6. How are you addressing this challenge?

**Leadership (3 min)**

7. Can you describe the leadership at your school/district over the past 5 years?
- Are there other leaders beside yourself in the school?
  - How has leadership been consistent over the past five years?
  - Has there been any special leadership training?
8. How important has leadership been to the academic results show for your school over the past 5 years?

**Funding (3 min)**

9. Approximately, what percentage of your revenue comes from fundraising, donations, grants, and non-government funds?
- How do you use these funds/resources?
  - What were you able to do with the funds that you were unable to do before?
  - How important has these supplemental funds been to your current academic performance level?

**Teachers and Support Staff (5 min)**

10. What degree of control do you have over who is teaching at your school?
- Probe:*
- Can you select teachers?

- Can you remove teachers?
- Do you have informal ways of selecting or removing teachers?
- What is the district role in hiring and removing teachers?
- What is the role of the unions in hiring and removing teachers?

11. How many teachers are at your school?

12. Has there been a high level of teacher turnover at your school/district in the past year?

**Probe:**

- On average, how many teachers leave your school every year?
- What are the reasons they left?
- How has the level of turnover among your staff affected your students' performance?

13. How important has teacher quality been to the current academic performance of your school?

14. How important have this additional staff been to your school's performance?

15. Are there other positions that you would like to have at your school, but you do not currently have? Why?

### **Professional Development**

16. Could you tell me who has attended professional development at your school?

**Probes:**

**If principal/district administrator:**

- What types of professional development have you attended? (i.e., university courses, principal network, attending ACSA principal institute, completing AB 75 principal training).
- About how much time have you spent in PD this past year?
- How has this contributed to your professional growth?

**If teachers:**

- About how much time have your teachers spent in PD this year?
- What was the focus on PD?
- What percentage of your teachers participated?
- Is this teacher time paid by the district?
- How has this contributed to their professional growth?

**District Support (3 min)**

17. In what specific ways, has your district improved the academic performance of your school?
18. What other things could your district do that would assist your school?
19. Do you think the district vision for your school aligns with your school vision?



## Appendix B: Protocol for Chief Business Officer

**School district:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **School District Background**

1. Can you tell me about your school district?

*Probe:*

- How would you describe the students, parents, and community and other stakeholders at your district?

### **Respondent Background**

13. Can you tell me a about your professional background? For instance, how did you come to be a chief business officer at this district and what are your major responsibilities?

*Probe:*

- How many years have you been a CBO in total?
- How many years have you been a CBO in this school district?
- Position held before becoming a CBO?
- Degrees, majors and credentials?

### **Personnel Involved in Decision Making**

14. Who is involved in the decision making around resource allocation decisions?

*Probe:*

- school board involved?
- superintendent involved?
- other district leaders involved?

### **Revenues**

15. What are the different sources of revenue for your school district?

16. To what extent are these revenues linked to spending requirements?

17. To what extent does your district have control over increasing revenue sources?

*Probe:*

*Does your district receive:*

- funding from private foundations (Packard, Gates)
- local businesses?
- local education fund or foundations?

### **Training**

7. Tell me about the training for administrators involved in fiscal decision making.

*Probe:*

*Do district administrators receive:*

- training on school district budgeting and finance?

### **Financial Management and Practices**

8. Please describe how general purpose resources are allocated to the majority of school sites in your district.

*Probe:*

- does the district give the school a budget to work with for personnel and non-personnel costs? Site decision?
- does the district determine the number of teachers, administrators, and support staff a school has and gives the school a budget for non-personnel costs and the sites decide how to spend those funds?

9. Describe the actions steps that are taken to manage the district budget?

10. Tell me about resource allocation practices or processes that you feel made a positive impact on student achievement?

11. In what ways might you say that collecting information on educational costs and student achievement may inform decisions for allocating fiscal resources?

12. How would you describe the link between district priorities, financial planning, and spending decisions?

13. To what extent is your district's ongoing financial decision-making linked to a strategic plan for student achievement?

*Probe:*

*Does your district:*

- follow a multiyear strategic plan that includes annual goals and measurable objectives?
- links financial plans to priority goals and objectives for student achievement?
- consider goals/objectives when choosing to implement an educational program?

14. To what extent do district and school board policies drive resource allocation practices at the district level? School?

15. How is each resource allocation decision made in your district:

- a) number of teachers?
- b) assignment of teachers to a school?
- c) number of administrators?
- d) number of professional support staff? (counselors, nurses)
- e) type of professional support staff?
- f) number of classified staff?
- g) type of classified staff?
- h) professional development for teachers?
- i) purchase of textbooks and instructional materials?

16. With regard to how resources are allocated at school sites in your district, is there anything you want to add?

## Appendix C: Protocol for Superintendent

**School district:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **School District Background**

1. Can you tell me about your school district?

*Probe:*

- How would you describe the students, parents, and community and other stakeholders at your district?

### **Respondent Background**

18. Can you tell me a about your professional background?

*Probe:*

- How many years have you been a superintendent in total?
- How many years have you been a superintendent in this school district?
- Position held before becoming a superintendent?
- Degrees, majors and credentials?

### **Personnel Involved in Decision Making**

19. Who is involved in the decision making around resource allocation decisions?

*Probe:*

- school board involved?
- superintendent involved?
- other district leaders involved?
- site administrators involved?

### **Training**

4. Tell me about the training for administrators involved in fiscal decision making.

*Probe:*

*Do district administrators receive:*

- training on school district budgeting and finance?

### **Financial Management and Practices**

5. Please describe how general purpose resources are allocated to the majority of school sites in your district.

*Probe:*

- does the district give the school a budget to work with for personnel and non-personnel costs? Site decision?
- does the district determine the number of teachers, administrators, and support staff a school has and gives the school a budget for non-personnel costs and the sites decide how to spend those funds?

6. Describe the actions steps that are taken to manage the district budget?
7. Tell me about resource allocation practices or processes that you feel made a positive impact on student achievement?
8. In what ways might you say that collecting information on educational costs and student achievement may inform decisions for allocating fiscal resources?
9. How would you describe the link between district priorities, financial planning, and spending decisions?
10. To what extent is your district's ongoing financial decision-making linked to a strategic plan for student achievement?

*Probe:*

*Does your district:*

- follow a multiyear strategic plan that includes annual goals and measurable objectives?
- links financial plans to priority goals and objectives for student achievement?
- consider goals/objectives when choosing to implement an educational program?

11. To what extent do district and school board policies drive resource allocation practices at the district level? School?
12. How is each resource allocation decision made in your district:
- a. number of teachers?
  - b. assignment of teachers to a school?

- c. number of administrators?
- d. number of professional support staff? (counselors, nurses)
- e. type of professional support staff?
- f. number of classified staff?
- g. type of classified staff?
- h. professional development for teachers?
- i. purchase of textbooks and instructional materials?

13. With regard to how resources are allocated at school sites in your district, is there anything you want to add?

## Appendix D: Protocol for School Board Member

**School district:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **School District Background**

1. Can you tell me about your school district?

*Probe:*

- How would you describe the students, parents, and community and other stakeholders at your district?

### **Respondent Background**

20. Can you tell me a about your professional background?

*Probe:*

- How many years have you been a superintendent in total?
- How many years have you been a school board member in this school district?
- Degrees, majors and credentials?

### **Personnel Involved in Decision Making**

21. Who is involved in the decision making around resource allocation decisions?

*Probe:*

- school board involved?
- superintendent involved?
- other district leaders involved?
- site administrators involved?

### **Training**

4. Tell me about the training for school board members involved in fiscal decision making.

*Probe:*

*Do district administrators and school board members receive:*

- training on school district budgeting and finance?

## **Financial Management and Practices**

5. Please describe how general purpose monies are allocated to the majority of school sites in your district.

*Probe:*

- does the district give the school a budget to work with for personnel and non-personnel costs? Site decision?
- does the district determine the number of teachers, administrators, and support staff a school has and gives the school a budget for non-personnel costs and the sites decide how to spend those funds?

6. Describe the actions steps that are taken to manage the district budget?

14. Tell me about resource allocation practices or processes that you feel made a positive impact on student achievement?

15. In what ways might you say that collecting information on educational costs and student achievement may inform decisions for allocating fiscal resources?

16. How would you describe the link between district priorities, financial planning, and spending decisions?

17. To what extent is your district's ongoing financial decision-making linked to a strategic plan for student achievement?

*Probe:*

*Does your district:*

- follow a multiyear strategic plan that includes annual goals and measurable objectives?
- links financial plans to priority goals and objectives for student achievement?
- consider goals/objectives when choosing to implement an educational program?

18. To what extent do district and school board policies drive resource allocation practices at the district level? School?

19. How is each resource allocation decision made in your district:

- a. number of teachers?
- b. assignment of teachers to a school?
- c. number of administrators?
- d. number of professional support staff? (counselors, nurses)



- e. type of professional support staff?
- f. number of classified staff?
- g. type of classified staff?
- h. professional development for teachers?
- i. purchase of textbooks and instructional materials?

20. With regard to how resources are allocated at school sites in your district, is there anything you want to add?

## Appendix E: Informed Consent

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Isaac Estrada, a graduate student in the Joint Educational Doctorate program at California State University San Marcos is conducting an investigation on adequacy and resource allocation practices in successful high schools and districts. You are invited to participate in this investigation because your school and district have been identified to be successful in meeting the educational needs of your diverse student population. **There will be twelve participants in this study.** The objective of this study can be summarized through the following research questions:

1. How do successful schools and districts in which they are located allocate human and fiscal resources?
2. To what extent are decisions regarding resource allocation linked to student achievement data?
3. What school practices do educators feel are linked to school success?

The interview will be over the phone and will last **one hour**. With your permission, the interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. The tape recordings can be erased upon your request. **Your information will be destroyed in six months.** You will receive a tentative appointment time in approximately two weeks. You will also have the right to terminate the interview at any time without any consequences to you. Your participation is voluntary.

There are minimal risks associated with the current investigation. The researcher will take necessary steps to ensure that the risks are carefully addressed in order to minimize the risk of potential loss of confidentiality. Your interview recording and transcription will be kept confidential. Your information will be stored in a password-protected computer available exclusively to the researcher. Your information will be saved on the computer using pseudo names and codes familiar only to the researcher. There will not be a link between your name, role or school name to the information.

**Your information will be destroyed in six months upon the completion of this study.**

Please be advised that the Cal State San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the investigation records as part of their auditing program. These reviews focus on the researcher and the study and do not examine the content of your responses from the interviews. The IRB committee reviews research studies to ensure that the rights of the participants are safeguarded.

If you have any questions regarding this study or procedures that are part of the phone interviews you can contact me at 858.213.5403 or iestrada@ucsd.edu. **You may also call the UCSD Human Research Protections Program at (858) 455-5050 to inquire about your rights as a research subject or to report research related problems.”**

I agree to participate in this research study.

I agree to be audio taped

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 Participant Name

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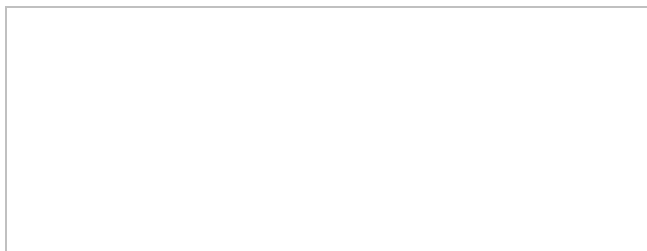
 Date

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Participant Signature

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Researcher's Signature

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, positioned to the right of the 'Researcher's Signature' label. It is intended for the researcher to provide their signature.

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